

# The Story of the Spirit of Prophecy

## Understanding God's Special Gift 12

### Quenching the Light!

Revelation: That last book of the Bible, which the Apostle John had written on Patmos, had been a problem to Satan for centuries. But little did he realize that something was now happening that would make things even worse for him. For, after nineteen hundred years, God had once again bestowed the prophetic mantle of divine Inspiration on a human being.

It was December of 1844: Since she was going to die soon anyway, Ellen felt that she might as well brave the winter blasts and visit her sister Elizabeth for a few days in South Portland. They could talk together about the recent Great Disappointment of October 22, when they both had believed Jesus would come, and pray together.

Early one morning, three other young ladies stopped to visit and pray with them. They all went to a second-floor room where they praised the Lord that Ellen was still alive and discussed their concerns about the Great Disappointment which had recently occurred. Ellen was happy to be with these other friends, even though her parents were also firm believers in the Advent message. As the five knelt in prayer,—suddenly:

“While I was praying, the power of God came upon me as I had never felt it before. I was wrapped in a vision of God's glory, and seemed to be rising higher and higher from the earth, and was shown something of the travels of the Advent people to the Holy City.”—Early Writings, 13.

One question had been uppermost in the eyes of the five young ladies that morning of the first vision: Was prophecy fulfilled on October 22, or had their experience been a delusion? The vision revealed that God had led them in their past experience; indeed, the Midnight Cry was that great light which was to guide them along a path which, if they followed it faithfully, would lead them to the City of God!

Oh, what encouragement there was in this vision! And what encouragement it is for the little flock today, as we follow close in the tracks of Jesus as, through the Spirit of Prophecy writings, He opens before us the deeper meaning of Scripture.

There were other questions to be answered, but they would come as the people of God studied and additional visions were given.

Little Ellen, so very weak and frail, had been assigned a work for God which she dared not lay down. With the passing years, more and more light would come, until the brief outline given in that first vision would swell to a massive amount of wondrous truth—which, in detail, quantity, and extent, would exceed anything previously given by God through earlier prophets.

Satan feared for what the future might bring if this young girl was not hindered from carrying forward her work. He must encourage men to find every possible pretext to reject her messages. Ellen was destined to live a life filled with difficulties, yet she knew that she must cling to Jesus and keep going forward.

Ellen committed herself to obey God and tell what He gave her, regardless of all opposition and trials she might meet. Once again she had the deep peace of acceptance with God. This was more precious to her than everything else.

Her first trip in a wagon to speak in a meeting outside of Portland, Maine, where she lived, was in mid-January 1845. Too ill to sit up for the journey, she climbed into the back of a horse-drawn wagon and lay down. Friends covered her with a buffalo robe. Her sister's husband drove the wagon in freezing cold weather. They set out on the thirty-mile journey to Poland, Maine, to his home.

When she rose in front of the group, Ellen could not speak above a whisper. This continued for five minutes. Then her voice became strong and clear and she spoke for two hours.

“When my message was ended, my voice was gone until I again stood before the people, when the same singular restoration was repeated. I felt a constant assurance that I was doing the will of God, and saw marked results attending my efforts.” *Life Sketches*, 72-73.

Recognizing the True: From time to time, someone will tell me a new “prophet” has arisen. My comment is that if the person is a genuine prophet, he or she will show the evidences of one. We have a right to expect proof to be provided; for, since every word a prophet writes is important, it is of the deepest urgency that we obtain definite evidence from God that a new prophet is among us!

Here are several examples; the first occurred on June 26, 1854:

“I [D .H. Lamson] was then 17 years old. It seems to me I can almost hear those thrilling shouts of ‘G l-o-r-y!’ which she uttered. Then she sank back to the floor, not falling, but sinking gently, and was supported in the arms of an attendant.

“Two physicians came in, an old man and a young man. Brother White was anxious that they should examine Sister White closely, which they did. A looking glass was brought, and one of them held it over her mouth while she talked; but very soon they gave this up, and said, ‘She doesn’t breathe!’

Then they closely examined her sides as she spoke, to find some evidence of deep breathing, but they did not find it.

“As they closed this part of the examination, she arose to her feet, still in vision, holding a Bible high up, turning from passage to passage, quoting correctly, although the eyes were looking upward and away from the Book.

“She had a view of the seven last plagues. Then she saw the triumph of the saints, and her shouts of triumph I can seem to hear even now. To these facts I freely testify.” Elder D.H. Lamson, Hillsdale, Michigan, Feb. 8, 1893; *Great Second Advent Movement*, 207-208.

Here are the words of two other witnesses who were there that night:

“I remember the meeting when the trial was made, namely, to test what Brother White had frequently said, that Sister White did not breathe while in vision, but I cannot recall the name of the doctor who was present. . . . It must have been Dr. Fleming, as he was the doctor called sometimes for counsel. He is, however, now dead. I can say this much, that the test was made, and no sign of breath was visible on the looking glass.” Drusilla Lamson, quoted in *Great Second Advent Movement*, 208.

The following incident occurred three years later in March 1857: “We were present when Sister E.G. White had a vision in Waldron’s Hall, Hillsdale. Dr. Lord made an examination, and said, ‘Her heart beats, but there is no breath. There is life, but no action of the lungs. I cannot account for this condition.’—Mr. and Mrs. A.F. Fowler, Hillsdale, Michigan, Jan. 1, 1891; *Great Second Advent Movement*, 209.

In the above examinations, notice that, while in vision, Ellen spoke without breathing out. It is impossible to speak without exhaling, yet she would do it for over an hour. A person cannot normally stop breathing more than a few minutes without passing into unconsciousness and death.

“I was present when Sister White had the above-named vision in Waldron’s Hall, Hillsdale. In addition to the above statement, I heard the doctor say that Sister White’s condition in vision was ‘beyond his knowledge.’ He also said, ‘There is something supernatural about that.’ ”—C.S. Glover, Battle Creek, Michigan, Jan. 19, 1891; *Great Second Advent Movement*, 209.

In June 1857, the Whites had driven to Buck’s Bridge, New York, for weekend meetings. As James White spoke to a full house, Ellen was taken off into vision. In the audience that morning was a young man, 22-year-old

Daniel Bourdeau from Vermont, who would later become one of our leading evangelists. He did a test which cannot be faked!

“June 28, 1857, I saw Sister Ellen G. White in vision for the first time. I was an unbeliever in the visions; but one circumstance among others that I might mention convinced me that her visions were of God.

“To satisfy my mind as to whether she breathed or not, I first put my hand on her chest sufficiently long to know that there was no more heaving of the lungs than there would have been had she been a corpse. I then took my hand and placed it over her mouth, pinching her nostrils between my thumb and forefinger, so that it was impossible for her to exhale or inhale air, even if she had desired to do so. I held her thus with my hand about ten minutes, long enough for her to suffocate under ordinary circumstances. She was not in the least affected by this ordeal. Since witnessing this wonderful phenomenon, I have not once been inclined to doubt the divine origin of her visions.” D.T. Bourdeau, Battle Creek, Michigan, Feb. 4, 1891; Great Second Advent Movement, 208.

“One experience. . . carries us back to the early part of the year 1845, and had to do with the large Harmon family Bible weighing 18 pounds. One morning at her own home in Portland, Maine, while in vision, Ellen Harmon stepped over to a bureau upon which rested the large volume, picked it up, placed it on her left hand, and then, extending it at arm’s length, held the closed book with ease for half an hour. During the vision, in short exclamations, she referred to the value of the Word of God.

“Under ordinary circumstances she was unable to pick up this book, for she was in frail health and at that time weighed only eighty pounds. She was in no way fatigued by this experience.” Spirit of Prophecy Treasure Chest, page 23.

The only individual who has, since that time, held that same Bible outstretched in his hand over ten minutes, was a former weightlifting champion. His record was 13 minutes. This was back in the 1950s.

At the Sabbath Conferences, held in New England in 1848, major doctrinal studies were carried on by a number of faithful Christians. At these meetings, Ellen was taken off in vision, whenever the group was hopelessly locked in their discussions, and given the solution to the problem. But on one occasion that summer, they finally came to the point where it seemed personalities and views clashed so decidedly that any further advance was totally impossible. Alexander Ross, who was present at this particular meeting later related the incident on January 4, 1884. Here is his statement:

“Sister White, while in vision, arose to her feet and took the family Bible upon her left hand; the book was one of ordinary size. While holding it open, high up, without looking toward it, with her right hand she would turn from text to text, and placing her finger on the scripture, would repeat the same. I looked at many of the texts to see if she was repeating the one to which she pointed. Myself or some of the company looked at them all. In every case she not only repeated the text to which, she pointed, but she did so while her eyes were looking upward and in an opposite direction from the Bible. It was these scriptures which she repeated that overthrew the false theories. . . at Volney [New York], in August, 1848, and caused us to unite upon the truth.” Spirit of Prophecy Treasure Chest, page 122.

Identifying Basic Truths: Encountering many problems and difficulties, Ellen Harmon began traveling and speaking regularly to groups of Advent believers. Yet she kept at her task. Eventually, she met and, on August 30, 1846, married a young Advent preacher, James White. In early 1848, the decision was made by the early believers to hold several meetings and gather together these new truths that were being discovered into one body of basic doctrinal beliefs.

But there was the danger that the light already given to Ellen would be ignored, or that, in trying to clarify doctrinal details and needing guidance from heaven, they might reject the light she could give. Another danger was that their mutually conflicting positions would fracture them into separate groups.

Five meetings were held in 1848, between April and October, called the "Sabbath Conferences." The possibility of success was somewhat dubious. At one of the earlier meetings, "hardly two agreed. Each was strenuous for his views" (2 Spiritual Gifts, 97). Without the light which came from Heaven at each meeting through Ellen, the meetings would have ended in almost total failure. Here is how the Lord solved the problem very effectively:

"Many of our people do not realize how firmly the foundation of our faith has been laid. My husband, Elder Joseph Bates, Father Pierce, Elder Edson, and others who were keen, noble, and true, were among those who, after the passing of the time in 1844, searched for the truth as for hidden treasure.

"I met with them, and we studied and prayed earnestly. Often we remained together until late at night, and sometimes through the entire night, praying for light and studying the Word. Again and again these brethren came together to study the Bible, in order that they might know its meaning, and be prepared to teach it with power.

"When they came to the point in their study where they said, 'We can do nothing more,' the Spirit of the Lord would come upon me, I would be taken off in vision, and a clear explanation of the passages we had been studying would be given me, with instruction as to how we were to labor and teach effectively.

"Thus light was given that helped us to understand the scriptures in regard to Christ, His mission, and His priesthood. A line of truth extending from that time to the time when we shall enter the city of God, was made plain to me, and I gave to others the instruction that the Lord had given me.

"During this whole time I could not understand the reasoning of the brethren. My mind was locked, as it were, and I could not comprehend the meaning of the scriptures we were studying. This was one of the greatest sorrows of my life. I was in this condition of mind until all the principal points of our faith were made clear to our minds, in harmony with the Word of God.

"The brethren knew that when not in vision, I could not understand these matters, and they accepted as light direct from heaven the revelations given." 1 Selected Messages, 206-207.

They Must Be Written Down: With the exception of that one letter to the editor of Day Dawn in late 1846, we know almost nothing of Ellen's early messages, for she was not writing them down. But, in November 1848, she was told that it was urgent that they begin publishing these truths which were being given to her.

"After coming out of vision, I said to my husband: 'I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world.'" Life Sketches, 125.

James was also deeply impressed that this must be done; but, by the following spring, he had given up in discouragement. They had arrived at a major turning point in the giving of the Advent Message. Her messages must be put into print.

One day in July, James brought home from the printers a thousand copies of the first edition of his Present Truth, a small 8-page paper. Two more issues were published and mailed. But Satan was busy. He attacked them with sickness, financial problems and difficulties of every kind. By November 1850, James gave up. The publishing work would end.

"The friends of the cause were few in numbers and poor in worldly wealth, and we were still compelled to struggle with poverty and great discouragement. Excessive labor, care, and anxiety, a lack of proper and nourishing food, and exposure to cold in our long winter journeys, were too much for my husband, and he sank under the burden. He became so weak that he could scarcely walk to the printing office.

"Our faith was tried to the utmost. We had willingly endured privation, toil, and suffering; yet our motives were misinterpreted, and we were regarded with distrust and jealousy. Few of those for whose good we had suffered,

seemed to appreciate our efforts. We were too much troubled to sleep or rest. The hours in which we should have been refreshed with sleep, were often spent in answering long communications occasioned by envy; and many hours while others were sleeping we spent in agonizing tears and mourning before the Lord.

“At length my husband said: ‘Wife, it is of no use to try to struggle on any longer. These things are crushing me, and will soon carry me to the grave. I cannot go any farther. I have written a note for the paper stating that I shall publish no more.’ As he stepped out of the door to carry it to the printing office, I fainted. He came back and prayed for me; his prayer was answered, and I was relieved.

“The next morning, while at family prayer, I was taken off in vision, and was shown concerning these matters. I saw that my husband must not give up the paper; for such a step was just what Satan was trying to drive him to take, and he was working through agents to do this. I was shown that we must continue to publish.” 1 Testimonies, 89, 90.

Quenching The Light: Since it was obvious that the printing work was going to continue, then Satan decided to eliminate the printing of any articles written by Ellen White; they must be kept from Advent believers and from the world! Here is how this came about:

In the late 1840s, because there were sermons to small groups, but almost no distribution of printed materials, the work did not grow. The public did not know about these seventh-day second-advent believers. Recalling the experience, we are told:

“It was then next to impossible to obtain access to unbelievers. The disappointment in 1844 had confused the minds of many, and they would not listen to any explanation of the matter.” EGW, Review, November 20, 1883.

But, with the beginning of the publishing work, the situation changed. People were becoming more willing to consider our beliefs.

“Now the door is open almost everywhere to present the truth, and many are prepared to read the publications who have formerly had no interest to investigate.” J W, Review, Aug. 19, 1851.

Satan immediately tried a desperate tactic to blot out the Spirit of Prophecy writings before they could eventually be printed into books.

“With brighter prospects for a large work among unbelievers, the general denominational literature was shaped to meet the new conditions. The most noticeable adjustment in this line was made to avert prejudice, and for this reason, all reference to the visions and the Spirit of Prophecy was left out of the regular issues of the church paper. This action was explained by Elder White in an Extra of the Review and Herald.” Ellen G. White, Messenger to the Remnant, 51.

This Extra included a number of statements by Ellen; and, in it, James said that he would publish one about every two weeks. But the rest of the time, nothing by her would appear in print.

“As many are prejudiced against visions, we think best at present not to insert anything of the kind in the regular paper. We will therefore publish the visions by themselves for the benefit of those who believe that God can fulfill His word and give visions ‘in the last days.’” J W, Advent Review Extra, July 21, 1851.

But he did not fulfill that promise. For the next four (!) years, the Review printed almost nothing about, or by, Ellen White. It was James who led out in this decision; and it is believed that Satan tempted him to be ashamed of her influence, since he was her husband. As do many today, he had accepted the temptation to broaden the circulation of his paper and gain the approval of the great men in other denominations. Although imagining that he had good reasons for his decision, he was deceived. How many are compromising in a similar manner today?

At any rate, the devil triumphed for a time. During those 63 months, only five articles by her were published; and they were in the form of appeals, making no reference to revelations. Prior to that time, her articles

appeared frequently in the Review. Three times during those four years, James wrote articles, saying that “the Bible only” is the total basis of our faith.

There is an important lesson here for us: If the Advent people were willing to let the Spirit of Prophecy writings be set aside, God would let them do it! This is a solemn warning to us today! Are we cherishing those precious books? Are we sharing them as widely as possible? When we knowingly separate ourselves from a divine source of light, when we know it is there, we start down a path that will ultimately separate us from God.

Because of these actions by James White, the Spirit was gradually being withdrawn. If the people were content to no longer receive the messages, God would no longer send them.

The Believers Repent: In December 1855, a general church meeting was convened to discuss a number of problems. One was the general decline of spirituality in the churches. Recognition was made of the fact that the silencing of the Spirit of Prophecy counsel was a major cause. Those in attendance agreed that this situation must immediately be changed. (“Gifts,” was the word used back then for what we now call “the Spirit of Prophecy.”)

Here is their official decision: “Confession: In view of the present low state of the precious cause of our blessed Master, we fell to humble ourselves before God, and confess our unfaithfulness and departure from the way of the Lord, whereby the spirit of holiness has been grieved, our own souls burdened, and an occasion given to the enemy of all righteousness to rejoice over the decline of faith and spirituality amongst the scattered flock . . .

“Gifts: Nor have we appreciated the glorious privilege of claiming the gifts which our blessed Master has vouchsafed to His people; and we greatly fear that we have grieved the Spirit by neglecting the blessings already conferred upon the church.

“We refer to the visions which God has promised to the remnant ‘in the last days.’ . . .

“An attitude displeasing to God: While we hold these views [the messages given through Ellen White] as emanating from the divine mind, we would confess the inconsistency (which we believe has been displeasing to God) of professedly regarding them as messages from God, and really putting them on a level with the inventions of men. We fear that this has resulted from an unwillingness to bear the reproach of Christ (which is indeed greater riches than the treasures of earth), and a desire to conciliate the feelings of our opponents; but the Word and our own experience have taught us that God is not honored, nor His cause advanced, by such a course. While we regard them as coming from God, and entirely harmonizing with His written Word, we must acknowledge ourselves under obligation to abide by their teachings, and be corrected by their admonitions. To say that they are of God, and yet we will not be tested by them, is to say that God’s will is not a test of rule for Christians, which is inconsistent and absurd.” From the “Report of Conference,” as printed in the Review, December 4, 1855.

Another decision made at that conference was to gather a quantity of her written statements, letters, and articles and print them in a small booklet, entitled Testimonies. This was the beginning of what would eventually become the nine-volume Testimonies for the Church. Satan had been defeated again!

On the first page of that first little booklet, Testimonies, was a transcript of a vision given to Ellen shortly before the conference. Here are the first two sentences of it: “November 20, 1855, while in prayer, the Spirit of the Lord came suddenly and powerfully upon me, and I was taken off in vision. I saw that the Spirit of the Lord has been dying away from the church.” 1 Testimonies, 113.

Looking back on what had happened as a result of the four-year refusal of the church to publish her appeals, she wrote: “The visions have been of late less and less frequent, and my testimony for God’s children has been gone. I have thought that my work in God’s cause was done, and that I had no further duty to do, but to save my own soul, and carefully attend to my little family.” Letter, January 10, 1856.

By late 1855, she considered her work for the church to have ended! What a happy day that was for the devil! The second revelation had been stopped before it could mature into a full-blown powerhouse of additional light! But fortunately, the brethren recognized their mistake before it was too late, and overrode James' decision. If they had not repented and made changes, we today would not have the Spirit of Prophecy writings!

Something to think about: From 1855 to 1915 when she died, and a few decades beyond, a full-length article by Ellen White appeared each week in the Review. But, for over 25 years now, about the only articles by Ellen White in our general church paper, Adventist Review, have consisted of one article a year in the annual Week of Prayer issue. And none appear in union papers, the youth journals, or any other denominational periodicals. Does this tell you something about the condition of the church today? Is the "Spirit of the Lord" once again "dying away from the church?" Do we now have a better understanding of the cause?

How often does a pastor quote the Spirit of Prophecy in Prayer Meeting? How often in the church service? How often is it quoted in any of the Sabbath School classes, or any of the youth meetings, camp meetings, or worker's retreats? Is Satan once again winning the battle to remove Heaven's light from us?

Why is Satan so anxious to have us hide the light that Heaven has given us? Why does he make us ashamed to openly share these treasures with the world? These quotes make clear the reasons.

"As the end draws near and the work of giving the last warning to the world extends, it becomes more important for those who accept present truth to have a clear understanding of the nature and influence of the testimonies, which God in His providence has linked with the work of the third angel's message from its very rise." 5 Testimonies 654 (1889).

"Men may get up scheme after scheme and the enemy will seek to seduce souls from the truth, but all who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White and has given her a message will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days." 3 Selected Messages 83, 84 (1906).

What if the leading brethren had not made that decision in December 1855? How many Spirit of Prophecy books would we have today? Would we have Great Controversy, Desire of Ages, Ministry of Healing, and so many others?

Ellen White an Inspired Interpreter of the Bible:

"The truths given us after the passing of the time in 1844 are just as certain and unchangeable as when the Lord gave them to us in answer to our urgent prayers. The visions that the Lord has given me are so remarkable that we know that what we have accepted is the truth. This was demonstrated by the Holy Spirit. Light, precious light from God, established the main points of our faith as we hold them today. And these truths are to be kept before the mind. We must arouse from the position of lukewarmness, from being neither cold nor hot. We need increased faith and more earnest trust in God. We must not be satisfied to remain where we are. We must advance step by step, from light to greater light.

"The Lord will certainly do great things for us if we will hunger and thirst after righteousness. We are the purchased property of Jesus Christ. We must not lose our devotion, our consecration. We are in conflict with the errors and delusions that have to be swept away from the minds of those who have not acted upon the light they already have. Bible truth is our only safety. I know and understand that we are to be established in the faith, in the light of the truth given us in our early experience. At that time one error after another pressed in upon us, and ministers and doctors brought in new doctrines. We would search the Scriptures with much prayer and the Holy Spirit would bring the truth to our minds. Sometimes whole nights would be devoted to searching the Scriptures and earnestly asking God for guidance. Companies of earnest, devoted men and women assembled for this purpose. The power of God would come upon me and I was enabled clearly to define what is truth and what is error.

“As the points of our faith were thus established, our feet were placed upon a solid foundation. We accepted the truth point by point under the demonstration of the Holy Spirit. I would be taken off in vision and explanations would be given me. I was given illustrations of heavenly things and of the sanctuary, so that we were placed where light was shining on us in clear, distinct rays. All these truths are immortalized in my writings. The Lord never denies His Word. Men may get up scheme after scheme, and the enemy will seek to seduce souls from the truth, but all who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White, and has given her a message, will be safe from the many delusions that will come in in these last days. Manuscript Releases 760 22, 23.

While in vision, Ellen White was given solutions to immediate problems, knowledge of recent events, as well as views of things that ranged far into the future. “As inquiries are frequently made as to my state in vision, and after I come out, I would say that when the Lord sees fit to give a vision, I am taken into the presence of Jesus and angels, and am entirely lost to earthly things. I can see no farther than the angel directs me. My attention is often directed to scenes transpiring upon earth. At times I am carried far ahead into the future and shown what is to take place. Then again I am shown things as they have occurred in the past. After I come out of vision I do not at once remember all that I have seen, and the matter is not so clear before me until I write, then the scene rises before me as was presented in vision, and I can write with freedom. Sometimes the things which I have seen are hid from me after I come out of vision, and I cannot call them to mind until I am brought before a company where that vision applies, then the things which I have seen come to my mind with force.” Spiritual Gifts, Volume 2, pages 292-293. 1860.

What about new prophets today?

“There will be those who will claim to have visions. When God gives you clear evidence that the vision is from Him, you may accept it, but do not accept it on any other evidence, for people are going to be led more and more astray in foreign countries and in America.” —2 Selected Messages 72 (1905).

What are the clear evidences? We have already looked at what these evidences are; but prominent among them are two factors:

- (1) The person will be taken into vision in public meetings, in view of many people.
- (2) While in vision (and some of them rather lengthy), he or she will not breathe.

Repeatedly, both evidences occurred during the 1840s and 1850s. That was enough time for the believers to recognize that she was a true prophet. In later years, public visions were not so much needed.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, a French woman who never left her native home, claimed to be a prophet to the Advent people. No one ever saw her in vision. Yet, incredibly, a number of individuals accepted her claims, in spite of obvious errors which she taught.

Who is inspiring these false prophets? Another one arises every year or two. Their messages help explain their origin: They tell us something we like to hear, such as that Jesus is coming back soon. But they never reprove the great number of sins which are increasing in our denomination! Satan is not in the business of calling sin by its right name, for it is worldliness and iniquity which keeps so many of our people in his camp.

Mark this: God will not send us another genuine prophet, without providing us with evidence, during many public meetings, of no breathing for an extended period of time. Nowhere in the Spirit of Prophecy were we ever told that there would be another prophet. We now have all the light needed to give the final message and prepare our lives for heaven.