

THOUGHTS ON DANIEL AND THE REVELATION

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[Note: Periodically, inquiry is made as to Mrs. E. G. White's attitude toward Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, some asking if somewhere she has stated or at least implied that it is an inspired book. The following statement presenting E. G. White utterances regarding the volume in question and setting forth the history of the book was prepared at the request of the editor of the Ministry and after careful reading by several of the most experienced leaders in our cause was published in the January 1945 issue of that journal. It is issued in this present form to meet the continuing demand for information on the points it treats.--A. L. White]

There is abundant evidence that the book Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation was considered by Mrs. White as a timely and important volume, containing the message needed by the world, and she bespoke for it a wide distribution. Here are several characteristic statements:

"The light given was that Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, The Great Controversy, and Patriarchs and Prophets would make their way. They contain the very message the people must have, the special light God had given His people. The angels of God would prepare the way for these books in the hearts of the people."--E. G. White Letter 43, 1899. (Published in Colporteur Ministry, pp 123-4.)

"I consider that that book [Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation] should go everywhere. It has its place and will do a grand, good work."--E. G. White Letter 25a, 1889.

"Instruction has been given me that the important books containing the light that God has given regarding Satan's apostasy in heaven should be given a wide circulation just now; for through them the truth will reach many minds. Patriarchs and Prophets, Daniel and the Revelation, and The Great Controversy, are needed now as never before. They should be widely circulated because the truths they emphasize will open many blind eyes."--Review and Herald, Feb. 16, 1905. (Republished in Colporteur Ministry, p. 123.)

Granting the force of such clear endorsement of the book, it is true that nowhere in Mrs. White's writings, published or unpublished, do we find reference to an angel standing by the side of Uriah Smith while he wrote. And certainly we find no indication that Mrs. White ever considered Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation to be an inspired book, thus inerrant in all its expositions. The basis for a somewhat widely accepted belief to the contrary is a statement made

long after the incident referred to, by one lone early worker, based upon his memory at the time. Here is the statement:

"Many years ago, when the late Elder Uriah Smith was writing Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, while Elder James White and Ellen G. White were at my house in Enosburg, Vermont, they received by mail a roll of printed proof sheets on Thoughts on Revelation that Brother Smith had sent to them. Brother White read portions of these to the company, and expressed much pleasure and satisfaction because they were so concisely and clearly written. Then Sister White stated what she had been shown, as follows:

"'The Lord is inspiring Brother Smith--leading his mind by His Spirit, and an angel is guiding his hand in writing these Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation.' I was present when these words were spoken."
(Signed) "A. C. Bourdeau."

Memory of One Witness Insufficient

With all due regard to the sincerity and integrity of the one who made this statement, which some years ago was placed in circulation in printed form, it should be pointed out that in matters of such importance the memory of one witness alone is not sufficient evidence. Moreover, it is demonstrable that in some of the details of the incident, his memory proved faulty. For instance, Uriah Smith's writings on these prophetic books appeared originally in two sections, Thoughts on Revelation being printed first, and Thoughts on Daniel later. At the time Thoughts on Revelation was brought out, Elder and Mrs. White were living in Greenville, Michigan, where Elder White received and commented on the new book. (Review and Herald, July 16, 1867.) As it was a few weeks later that they were in Enosburg, Vermont, it must have been the finished book, not the proof sheets, that formed the basis of the conversation referred to. Moreover, Elder Smith at this time had not even announced his intention to write on Daniel. Therefore, Mrs. White could not have used the exact words attributed to her--"An angel is guiding his hand in writing these Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation." Is such inaccuracies as these two are found in Brother Bourdeau's statement, the question naturally arises as to whether we ought to count too heavily on the complete accuracy of other minute details of the reminiscent incident.

Further, even though she spoke commendably of the volume, there are statements penned by Mrs. White which have a negative bearing on the inspiration of Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation. Speaking, in the nineties, of Elder Smith's books, one of the leaders in our colporteur work asked Mrs. White, "'You believe they are inspired, do you not?'" Indicative of her recognition of the folly of the question, she replied, "'You may answer that question, I shall not.'"--E. G. White Letter 15, 1895. At another time she was asked a similar question. Here is the question and the answer:

"'Sister White, do you think we must understand the truth for ourselves? Why can we not take the truths that others have gathered together and believe them because they have investigated the subjects, and then we shall be free to go on without the taxing of the powers of the mind in the investigation of all these subjects? Do you not think that these men who have brought out the truth in the past were inspired of God?'"

[Answer.] "'I dare not say they were not led of God, for Christ leads into all truth; but when it comes to inspiration in the fullest sense of the word, I answer, No. I believe that God has given them a work to do, but if they are not fully consecrated to God at all times, they will weave self and their peculiar traits of character into what they are doing, and will put their mold upon the work.'"--E. G. White, Review & Herald, March 25, 1890.

Two decades later, in writing regarding an interpretation of prophecy given in Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, over which there had arisen some controversy, Mrs. White spoke against "magnifying the importance of the difference in the views that are held," and further said:

"In some of our important books that have been in print for years, and which have brought many to a knowledge of the truth, there may be found matters of minor importance that call for careful study and correction. Let such matters be considered by those regularly appointed to have the oversight of our publications. Let not these brethren, nor our canvassers, nor our ministers magnify these matters in such a way as to lessen the influence of these good soul-saving books."--E. G. White Manuscript 11, 1910. (Published in Selected Messages, book 1, page 165.)

And at another time she wrote:

"There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that all our expositions of Scripture are without an error. The fact that certain doctrines have been

held as truth for many years by our people, is not a proof that our ideas are infallible. Age will not make error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation."--Review and Herald, Dec. 20, 1892.

There stood out clearly, however, in the memory of several workers, the oral expression of Mrs. White that she had seen an angel standing by the side of Elder Uriah Smith as he wrote. While there is no documentary confirmation of this, such would not be inconsistent with utterances of a similar character regarding the work of noble men of God. Thus she wrote of Luther: "Angels of heaven were by his side, and rays of light from the throne of God revealed the treasures of truth to his understanding."--The Great Controversy, p. 122.

And of William Miller, she said: "God sent His angel to move upon the heart of a farmer who had not believed the Bible, to lead him to search the prophecies. Angels of God repeatedly visited that chosen one, to guide his mind and open to his understanding prophecies which had ever been dark to God's people."--Early Writings, p. 229.

However, these expressions have never conveyed the thought of inerrancy in all the positions taken and the various teachings of these men who were mightily used of God. Nor would it be reasonable to assume that words which may have been spoken by Mrs. White as to the presence of an angel, as Uriah Smith wrote, would indicate that he was inspired in his writing, and that he was therefore inerrant in all that he set forth.

Historical Development of the Book

The present well-known volume, Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation, was developed through the decades until it reached its present form. For many years, as mentioned earlier, there were two books, first Thoughts on Revelation and later Thoughts on Daniel.

James White in 1862 caught the vision of a complete exposition on Revelation as he attended "a large and flourishing Bible class conducted by Brother Uriah Smith" in connection with the Battle Creek Sabbath school. Chapter by chapter

they had studied Revelation and "passed through the entire book, . . . all coming to the same conclusion on almost every point," and they were "confident that they had found a better harmony than they had before seen, and clearer light on some portions of the book."--Review and Herald, June 3, 1862. Delighted with the results of their group study, the class decided to go through the book again, "taking one chapter for each lesson."--Ibid.

Here, thought James White, was an opportunity to develop helpful matter for Seventh-day Adventists generally, and he announced his intention from week to week to report the results of the investigation in the Review "by way of a few thoughts on one chapter each week." The co-ordination of the plans for study and writing are indicated by the James White comment that "should we be called away for a few weeks, the class propose to leave the book of Revelation, in our absence, for some other portion of the Scriptures, until we return." And he voiced his confident hope in his closing words: "Judging from past investigation of this book by the brethren and sisters of the Bible class, we hope in expressing our views to express theirs also, yet we choose to be alone responsible for what we may say."--Ibid.

Then follows the first installment--a three-column article reviewing the important points stressed in the study of May 17, appearing under the title "Thoughts on Revelation." Chapter one of Revelation was dealt with in this initial article of the series. First a few verses are quoted, and these are followed with appropriate comment and explanation--a form of treatment which was to become very familiar in the following decades.

The next five consecutive numbers of the Review carried articles dealing with the book, chapter by chapter, until as James White left for a trip, he inserted a two-line note: "'Thoughts on the Revelation' will not again appear till our return from the northern tour."--Ibid., July 15, 1862.

After a lapse of two months the articles were resumed in the issue of September 9, with a presentation of Revelation 7. Then James White abruptly closed his work on the series with a brief article headed "Chapters VIII and IX," but commenting only on the first five verses of Revelation 8, covering the seventh seal and introducing the seven trumpets. Then the article was cut short by James White's explanation that for lack of time to prepare an "exposition of the trumpets" he must be excused for passing over them and recommending "as the best light at present," the pamphlet entitled The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets, listed as for sale at the Review office. The pamphlet referred to was a sixty-eight page reprint of Josiah Litch's explanation of the seven trumpets, published by the Review and Herald office in 1859, previously appearing as article reprints. Five weeks later Elder White admitted the futility of his attempting to go on with the work, and announced that, since he was away from home much of the time, "Brother Smith has consented to conclude the book, commencing with Chapter X."--Ibid., October 21, 1862.

In the same style, but with more extended comment, Uriah Smith then picked up the work and treated Revelation 10 to 22, presenting an article in each number of the Review, save one, and closing the series on February 3, 1863, in issue Number 10 of Volume 21.

Thoughts on Revelation Printed First

Two years passed before the readers of the Review were informed of the intention of its editor, Uriah Smith, to prepare the manuscript for a book--Thoughts on the Revelation. In speaking of this, he set forth his purpose to build on the series of articles written by Elder White and himself, and called for suggestions from the people. Here is his statement:

"We have commenced to revise, and in a great measure rewrite, the 'Thoughts on Revelation,' published in Review, Volumes XX and XXI. We shall devote what time we can to this work, besides preparing matter for the Review, otherwise than writing. If any brethren have any suggestions to make on any part of the book, we hope to receive them at once."--Ibid., July 18, 1865.

From time to time during 1865 and 1866, brief notes informed Seventh-day Adventists that Elder Smith was devoting what time he could to the promised work, but it was not until April, 1867, that the copy was put in the hands of the printer, and the completed book was listed for sale on June 13. As the finished volume was received by James White he reached for his pen, wrote a few words of commendation, and then stated:

"These thoughts are not the fruit of one brain. In the time of the end the Revelation was to be unsealed and opened. And from the open book, light has been shining. William Miller saw much. Others since have seen more. . . . This . . . is a book of thoughts, clothed in the author's happy style, plain, yet critical and practical, coming down to the spiritual wants of the common people, yet elevated and dignified. This standard work should be in the library of every believer."--Ibid., July 16, 1867.

Before the second edition was printed, Elder Smith revised the work, and in its new form several printings appeared.

Thoughts on Daniel Brought Forth

In 1872, five years after Thoughts on the Revelation was printed, a companion volume, Thoughts on Daniel, was issued and announced for sale on December 31, 1872. This, too, quite largely represented the joint study of able Bible students. After passing through several editions as single volumes, the two companion books in 1881 appeared as a combined work, Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation.

Elder Smith prepared his manuscripts as a scholarly writer would, setting forth denominational views on the great lines of clearly understood prophecy presented in Daniel and Revelation. But when he undertook the verse-by-verse exposition of these two books, he ran into many texts of Scripture which dealt with matters regarding which we as a people had not given much if any study, and in such cases he often set forth the views of the best commentators available, and used freely both the lines of argument and the words of Josiah Litch, George Storrs, and others. Elder Smith demonstrated remarkably good judgment in the selection of matter from these writers.

It was but natural that as time advanced, some points became more clear and some errors which had been embodied in his earlier work were seen. This led the author from time to time to make a number of corrections and adjustments in his former statements. Of one such revision, W. C. White wrote in 1910:

"In 1886, 1887, and 1888 there was considerable controversy over some of the expositions in Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation. There was quite a group of men, including myself, who became convinced that there were some errors in this most excellent book that ought to be corrected. Elder Uriah Smith defended very ably the positions taken in the book, but he was a very kind and reasonable man, and was willing to make corrections when errors were made plain.

"Some of Elder Smith's friends and advisers, however, took a very strong position gainst making any corrections in Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation. They argued that the book was the result of long, faithful study, that it had received the criticism and approval of the pioneers in our cause; that it had been widely sold and used as an authority by our younger preachers everywhere; that Sister White said that the angel of the Lord stood by Elder Smith as he wrote the book, and that to make changes now would be a confession of weakness and error which would detract from the influence of all our publications and all our preachers; that to make changes would make our ministers ashamed; that we could not longer look the world in the face and say that we had a truth which we could stand by through all the years without vacillation.

"To this, some of our brethren answered that it was much better to be correct than to be positive; that it was not necessary that we should claim infallibility in our publications in order to secure the respect of the people, and in order that the Spirit of God should witness to the principles which they contain.

"Some of our ministers and some of our book men argued that if corrections were made, our canvassers would lose confidence in the book, that its sale would be greatly diminished.

"But finally a number of corrections were made, if I remember correctly about thirty, and the evil results which had been anticipated were never experienced. The sale of the book went on, and those who felt that if the book was corrected an injury would be done to our cause, were also able, after the corrections were made, to give it their support of influence."--W. C. White Letter to A. F. Harrison, June 26, 1910.

For reasons similar to the foregoing, Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation has recently undergone a most careful revision, and as it now comes from the presses we believe it is destined to have a very wide distribution, continuing

to fill the important place in our literature which Ellen White said that it should have:

"Especially should the book Daniel and Revelation be brought before people as the very book for this time. This book contains the message which all need to read and understand. Translated into many different languages, it will be a power to enlighten the world. . . . The Lord has shown me that this book will do a good work in enlightening those who become interested in the truth for this time. Those who embrace the truth now, who have not shared in the experiences of those who entered the work in the early history of the message, should study the instruction given in Daniel and the Revelation, becoming familiar with the truth it presents. . . .

"The interest in Daniel and the Revelation is to continue as long as probationary time shall last. God uses the author of this book as a channel through which to communicate light to direct minds to the truth. Shall we not appreciate this light, which points us to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, our King?"--E. G. White Manuscript 174, 1899.

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