

MRS. "E. G. WHITE AND THE REVISED VERSION"of 1881 - 1885 and 1901E.G. White Research Center  
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A full decade before plans were laid for a revision of the King James version of the Scriptures, Ellen G. White wrote in such a way as to lay the foundation for an open-minded approach to various versions and translations of the Bible. As a part of the Great Controversy vision of March 14, 1858, she was given a view of the preservation of the Bible, which she presented in the chapter, "Death not Eternal Life in Misery." (Early Writings, pp. 218-222). This early statement is very important:

"Then I saw that God knew that Satan would try every art to destroy man; therefore He had caused His word to be written out, and had made His purposes in regard to the human race so plain that the weakest need not err. After having given His word to man, He had carefully preserved it from destruction by Satan or his angels, or by any of his agents or representatives. While other books might be destroyed, this was to be immortal. And near the close of time, when the delusions of Satan should increase, it was to be so multiplied that all who desired might have a copy, and, if they would, might arm themselves against the deceptions and lying wonders of Satan.

"I saw that God had especially guarded the Bible; yet when copies of it were few, learned men had in some instances changed the words, thinking that they were making it more plain, when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain, by causing it to lean to their established views, which were governed by tradition. But I saw that the Word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion linking into and explaining another. True seekers for truth need not err; for not only is the Word of God plain and simple in declaring the way of life, but the Holy Spirit is given as a guide in understanding the way to life therein revealed."--Early Writings, pp. 220, 221. (Sp. Gifts, I, pp. 116, 117.) [Italics supplied].

Nowhere in the E. G. White writings, published or unpublished, do we find direct comment on or instruction concerning the use of the revised versions. As to Mrs. White's attitude toward the English revision of the 1880's, her son, Elder W. C. White, reports:

"Before the revised version was published, there leaked out from the committee, statements regarding changes which they intended to make. Some of these I brought to Mother's attention, and she gave me very surprising information regarding these Scriptures. This led me to believe that the revision, when it came to hand, would be a matter of great service to us." --W. C. White in Document File, No. 579 (1931).

And it is significant that almost immediately after the appearance of the English revised version, Mrs. White made use of it in her books, as she also did the American revision when it was available in 1901. It is also significant that four major statements from Mrs. White's pen concerning the Bible and the Bible writers were penned during this decade of the appearance of the revised versions of the New and Old Testaments.

The revision of the New Testament was published in 1881, the revision of the Old Testament in 1885. It is of interest to note that during the decade of the revision, a number of articles appeared in the Review and Herald, in a rather casual way, keeping before Seventh-day Adventists what was involved in the

revision--the progress of the work, its reception, its relationship to the Authorized version and its value to us. Most of the articles were reprints from other journals:

1. March 11, 1880 (p. 167), "Advance Reports of the Work of Revision."
2. Feb. 8, 1881 (p. 87), "Different Versions of the Bible" - A historical review.
3. June 14, 1881 (p. 377), "The Revised Greek Testament" - A discussion of the Greek texts used in the revision of the New Testament.
4. June 28, 1881 (p. 9), "The New Version" - An editorial, probably by Uriah Smith, representing a favorable reaction to the new version.
5. March 20, 1883 (p. 186) "The New Version vs. the 'Old'" - Answer to a question by W. H. Littlejohn, with favorable reaction.
6. October 21, 1884 (p. 666) "The Revision of the Old Testament Ready for the Press" - a good discussion of the work done.
7. Feb. 8, 1887 (p. 83) "The Revised Version" - A recommendation from Elder F. D. Starr.
8. June 11, 1889 (p. 384) "Revising the Scriptures" - A discussion by L. A. Smith of work undertaken by the Baptists to get a satisfactory translation of texts on baptism.

Beyond this point there is little or nothing in the columns of the Review on the question of revisions of the Scriptures.

Comments by Ellen G. White  
Statements Made in 1886--"Objections to the Bible"

Human minds vary. The minds of different education and thought receive different impressions of the same words, and it is difficult for one mind to give to one of a different temperament, education, and habits of thought by language exactly the same idea as that which is clear and distinct in his own mind. Yet to honest men, right-minded men, he can be so simple and plain as to convey his meaning for all practical purposes. . . .

The writers of the Bible had to express their ideas in human language. It was written by human men. These men were inspired of the Holy Spirit. Because of the imperfections of human understanding of language, or the perversity of the human mind, ingenious in evading truth, many read and understand the Bible to please themselves. It is not that the difficulty is in the Bible. Opposing politicians argue points of law in the statute book, and take opposite views in their application and in these laws. . . .

The Bible is Not Given to Us in Grand Superhuman Language.

Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes. . . .

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in

words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.--Selected Messages, Book 1, pp. 19-21.

The 1888 Introduction to Great Controversy

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all "given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16); yet they<sup>are</sup> expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

The ten commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14.

Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. . . .

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was intrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.

In His Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, Revised Version.--Great Controversy, author's "Introduction," pp. v-vii. (Written at Healdsburg, California, May, 1888.)

The Late 1888 Statement--"The Inspiration of the Word of God"

This Holy Book has withstood the assaults of Satan, who has united with evil men to make everything of divine character shrouded in clouds and darkness. But the Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape,--a chart or guidebook to the human family to show them the way to heaven. . . .

Some look to us gravely and say, "Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?" This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability, would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine, and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.

God committed the preparation of His divinely inspired Word to finite man. This Word, arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world, bequeathed to them, that by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven. . . .

I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible. Men arise who think they find something to criticize in God's Word. They lay it bare before others as evidence of superior wisdom. These men are, many of them, smart men, learned men, they have eloquence and talent, the whole lifework <sup>[of whom]</sup> is to unsettle minds in regard to the inspiration of the Scriptures. They influence many to see as they do. And the same work is passed on from one to another just as Satan designed it should be, until we may see the full meaning of the words of Christ, "When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"

Men should let God take care of His own Book, His living oracles, as He has done for ages. They begin to question some parts of revelation, and pick flaws in the apparent inconsistencies of this statement and that statement. Beginning at Genesis, they give up that which they deem questionable, and their minds lead on, for Satan will lead to any length they may follow in their criticism, and they see something to doubt in the whole Scriptures. Their faculties of criticism become sharpened by exercise, and they can rest on nothing with a certainty. You try to reason with these men, but your time is lost. They will exercise their power of ridicule even upon the Bible. They even become mockers, and they would be astonished if you put it to them in that light.

Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost. The ingenuity of men has been exercised for ages to measure the Word of God by their finite minds and limited comprehension. If the Lord, the Author of the living oracles, would throw back the curtain and reveal His wisdom and His glory before them, they would shrink into nothingness and exclaim as did Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." Isa. 6:5.--E. G. White, Manuscript 16, 1888. (Written at Minneapolis, Minn., Fall of 1888). [Italics supplied].  
Printed in Selected Messages, Book 1, pp. 16-18.

#### The 1889 Statement--"The Mysteries of the Bible"

All who come to the Bible with a teachable and prayerful spirit, to study its utterances as the Word of God, will receive divine enlightenment. There are many things apparently difficult or obscure which God will make plain and simple to those who thus seek an understanding of them. . . .

Many feel that a responsibility rests upon them to explain every seeming difficulty in the Bible in order to meet the cavils of skeptics and infidels. But in trying to explain that which they but imperfectly understand, they are in danger of confusing the minds of others in reference to points that are clear and easy to be understood. This is not our work. Nor should we lament that these difficulties exist, but accept them as permitted by the wisdom of God. It is our duty to receive His Word, which is plain on every point essential to the salvation of the soul, and practice its principles in our life, teaching them to others both by precept and example. . . .

My brethren, let the Word of God stand just as it is. Let not human wisdom presume to lessen the force of one statement of the Scriptures.--Testimonies, Vol. 5, pp. 704-706, 711. [Italics supplied].

Later Comments--1899 and 1901

God had faithful witnesses, to whom He committed the truth, and who preserved the Word of God. The manuscripts of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures have been preserved through the ages by a miracle of God.--Letter 32, 1899.

The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory.--Letter 121, 1901. [Italics supplied]. [Selected Messages, Book 1, p. 22]

Mrs. White's Use of the Revised Versions

As noted earlier, Mrs. White occasionally used the Revised Version rendering and the marginal reading of texts in nearly all her books published after 1885, the year of the appearance of the complete English Revised Version.

In The Great Controversy, published in 1888, seven texts from the newly issued revision were employed, and she also used the marginal rendering of eight other texts. The proportion of Revised Version and marginal rendering of texts is very small when we consider that there are more than 850 scriptures quoted in Great Controversy, or a little better than an average of one scripture text to a page; whereas there is approximately one Revised Version rendering and one marginal rendering for each one hundred pages.

In 1901 the American Revised Version came from the press, and from that time forward we find that Mrs. White occasionally employed both the English Revised and the American Revised versions.

In 1911, when Great Controversy was reset, Mrs. White retained six of the seven texts previously quoted from the English <sup>Revised</sup> Version. For the other text she substituted the American Revised rendering. The eight marginal renderings were used as in the earlier edition.

In the publication of Ministry of Healing (1905) Mrs. White employed eight texts from the English Revised Version, fifty-five from the American Revised Version, two from Leeser, and four from Noyes, in addition to seven marginal renderings.

Other volumes in which Revised Version texts frequently appear, are: Patriarchs and Prophets (1890); Steps to Christ (1892); Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing (1896); Desire of Ages (1898); Education (1903); and Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, (1904).

The E. G. White books using but few Revised Version or marginal renderings are: Christ's Object Lessons (1900); Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 7 (1902); Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 9 (1909); Acts of the Apostles (1911); Counsels to Teachers (1913); Gospel Workers (1915); and Prophets and Kings (1916).

Patriarchs and Prophets (1890) contains also two renderings from the Bernard translation, and at least one from the Boothroyd Version.

We therefore find scriptures of revised rendering in all five of the Conflict of the Ages series. As might be expected, those volumes which enter into an exposition of Bible truth dealing with points of doctrine or the teachings of Christ contain more texts quoted from the revised versions than do volumes of counsel to the church and those presenting largely historical description.

As to Mrs. White's attitude toward the 1885 revision and the American Revised Version, and as to her own use of these in preaching and writing, her son, W. C. White, who was closely associated with her in her public ministry and in the preparation and publication of her books, wrote in 1931:

"I do not know of anything in the E. G. White writings, nor can I remember of anything in Sister White's conversations, that would intimate that she felt that there was any evil in the use of the Revised Version. . . .

"When the first revision was published, I purchased a good copy and gave it to Mother. She referred to it occasionally, but never used it in her preaching. Later on as manuscripts were prepared for her new books and for revised editions of books already in print, Sister White's attention was called from time to time by myself and Sister Marian Davis, to the fact that she was using texts which were much more clearly translated in the Revised Version. Sister White studied each one carefully, and in some cases she instructed us to use the Revised Version. In other cases she instructed us to adhere to the Authorized Version.

"When Testimonies for the Church, Volume Eight, was printed and it seemed desirable to make some lengthy quotations from the Psalms, it was pointed out to Sister White that the Revised Version of these Psalms was preferable, and that by using the form of blank verse the passages were more readable. Sister White gave the matter deliberate consideration, and instructed us to use the Revised Version. When you study these passages you will find that in a number of places where the Revised Version is largely used, the Authorized Version is used where translation seems to be better.

"We cannot find in Sister White's writings, nor do I find in my memory, any condemnation of the American Revised Version of the Holy Scriptures. Sister White's reasons for not using the A. R. V. in the pulpit are as follows:

"There are many persons in the congregation who remember the words of the texts we might use as they are presented in the Authorized Version, and to read from the Revised Version would introduce perplexing questions in their minds as to why the wording of the text had been changed by the revisers and as to why it was being used by the speaker. She did not advise me in a positive way not to use the A. R. V., but she intimated to me quite clearly that it would be better not to do so, as the use of the different wording brought perplexity to the older members of the congregation."--E. G. White Publications Document File, No. 579.

Mrs. White's true position on this question is clearly indicated in the fact that she consistently quoted from various versions of the Scriptures from the time they were available to the close of her ministry, when she saw an advantage to using them because they better expressed the thought.

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Ellen G. White Publications  
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