

Chapter 6

Prophetess of War (1860-1865)

On January 12, 1861, James and Ellen White attended the dedication of a church in Parkville, Michigan. South Carolina had seceded December 20, 1860, but many Americans still believed war could be avoided. Others believed that any war would end quickly. During the Sabbath afternoon service, Ellen White addressed the assembly. After finishing her remarks, she stopped breathing for twenty minutes, carried off in vision.¹

Elder J. N. Loughborough, an Adventist pioneer and historian of early Seventh-day Adventism, attended the Parkville dedication. He penned his recollections in the March 7 and March 14, 1912, issues of the *Pacific Union Recorder*. According to Loughborough, a spiritualist physician who had boasted that he could bring Ellen White out of vision was present at the meeting. When James White invited members of the audience to examine Ellen, the doctor came forward. Upon examining her, the spiritualist blurted, "Her heart and pulse are all right, but there is not a particle of breath in the woman's body!" With that, he hastily departed.²

When the vision ended, Ellen White addressed the people again. Loughborough recalled the following warning:

"I have just been shown in vision that a number of States are going to join South Carolina in this secession, and a terrible war will be the result. In the vision I saw large armies raised by both the North and the South. I was shown the battle raging. I heard the booming of the cannon, and saw the dead and wounded falling on every side. . . . There was distress and mourning all over the land."³

The prophetess added ominously, "There are men in this house who will lose sons in that war."⁴ Years after the war, Loughborough sought out the elder who had witnessed the Parkville vision. The gentleman estimated that ten young men from the church had died during the conflict, in apparent validation of her prophecy.⁵

Her second Civil War vision took place at Roosevelt, New York, on August 3, 1861. This vision was the first witnessed by her son Willie, and in 1905, he shared the following recollections of the experience:

"The first one I witnessed as a little boy in the meetinghouse at Roosevelt, New York. Father had given a short talk. Mother had given a short talk. Father

¹White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 462-463.

²Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 464.

³Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 463. It is likely that Ellen White, living in California at the time, would have been aware of Loughborough's account, and that she approved of it. While Loughborough's accuracy has been questioned by modern church scholars, this story is likely correct.

⁴Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 463.

⁵Qtd. in Coon, Roger W. *A Gift of Light*. 2nd ed. Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1998. 29. From *Rise and Progress of Seventh-day Adventists*, 1892.

prayed, Mother prayed, and as she was praying, I heard that shout, 'Glory.' There is nothing like it—that musical, deep shout of 'Glory.' She fell backward. My father put his arm under her.

"In a little while her strength came to her. She stood up in an attitude of one seeing wonderful things in the distance, her face illuminated, sometimes bright and joyous. She would speak with that musical voice, making short comments upon what she saw. Then as she saw darkness in the world, there were sad expressions as she spoke of what she saw.

"This continued ten or fifteen minutes. Then she caught her breath, and breathed several times deeply, and then, after a little season of rest, probably five or ten minutes, during which time Father spoke to the people, she arose, and related to the congregation some of the things that had been presented to her."⁶

Ellen White had another Civil War vision on January 4, 1862. The Roosevelt vision and the January 1862 vision provided the basis for Testimony number seven, issued in 1862, and found today in the first volume of *Testimonies for the Church*, pages 253-302.⁷ In addition, Testimony number nine, printed in 1863, contains a section entitled "The Rebellion," and it is unclear whether this testimony is based on another vision, or whether it was based on the visions already cited.⁸

A positive message from her Civil War visions was her unqualified support for freeing the slaves. Ever since the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act [Acts], Ellen White had been sharply critical of the U.S. government's position on slavery, particularly regarding the handling of escaped slaves. She continued that criticism during the early years of the war:

"The escaped slaves have endured untold hardships to obtain their freedom, and as their last hope, and with the love of liberty burning in their breasts, they apply to our Government for protection; but their confidence has been treated with the utmost contempt. Many of them have been cruelly treated because they committed so great a crime as to dare to make an effort to obtain their freedom. Great men, professing to have human hearts, have seen the slaves almost naked and starving, and have abused them, and sent them back to their cruel masters and hopeless bondage, to suffer inhuman cruelty for daring to seek their liberty."⁹

⁶Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 1. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 471-472.

⁷She was shown more than just Civil War material in the Roosevelt, New York, vision of August 3, 1861.

⁸White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 355-368.

⁹White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 257. I believe there was a controversy in the North about slaves who escaped to the Union Army. Some generals held them as contraband of war, others may have returned them as private property to avoid the logistical nightmares that these slaves would bring. For her views on disobeying the Fugitive Slave Act, see *Testimonies* vol. 1, p. 202.

Because her anti-slavery feelings were so intense, and because the North failed to focus on the slavery issue, Ellen White refused to fully endorse the Union cause. When Lincoln called for national fasting and prayer in the early stages of the conflict, Mrs. White declared, "I saw that these national fasts were an insult to Jehovah. He accepts no such fasts."¹⁰ She added, "When our nation observes the fast which God has chosen, then will He accept their prayers as far as the war is concerned; but now they enter not into His ear. He turns from them, they are disgusting to Him."¹¹ Even after the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, there is no record of her support for Lincoln's administration, although James White bestowed kind words upon the government in a *Review* article.¹²

Dudley M. Canright, a former Adventist minister and close associate of Ellen White, recalled that Seventh-day Adventists refused to pray for the U.S. government during the Civil War, but Canright is certainly overstating his case.¹³ In a *Review* article in January 1865, James White encourages prayer and thanksgiving "for those in authority."¹⁴ Arthur L. White points out that SDA's joined a national fast on April 30, 1863, and set up their own fasts on August 27, 1864; February 11, 1865; and March 1-4, 1865.¹⁵

Regarding the outcome of the war itself, Ellen White was extremely vague. At times, she made it sound like the North could win ("When our nation observes the fast which God has chosen . . ."), but she often made a Northern victory seem impossible. At other times, she was simply uncertain.

"As this war was shown to me, it looked like the most singular and uncertain that has ever occurred."¹⁶

¹⁰White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 257.

¹¹White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 258.

¹²James White identified the U.S. government as "the best government under heaven" and asserted that SDA voters had supported Lincoln in the election of 1860. Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 41-42.

¹³Canright, Dudley M. *The Life of Ellen White*. From "Her Prophecies Fail."

¹⁴White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 103.

¹⁵White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 52, 103-104. SDA participation in the April 30, 1863, national fast indicates that they interpreted the Emancipation Proclamation as a sign that God would now accept prayers for the nation. A careful reading of SDA calls for fasts indicates that the overriding concern was preservation of SDA conscientious-objector status and removal of war-time impediments to the spread of the SDA message. Such prayers were preoccupied with self-preservation rather than a speedy end to the horrors of war, which may have influenced Canright's overzealous charge. In any event, Canright is doubtless correct in identifying Ellen White's anti-government and anti-national fast stance, which she never renounced, as swaying many Adventists against prayer for the government.

¹⁶White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 256.

"It seems impossible to have the war conducted successfully" ¹⁷

"This nation will yet be humbled into the dust." ¹⁸

"Had our nation remained united it would have had strength, but divided it must fall." ¹⁹

"It looked to me like an impossibility now for slavery to be done away. God alone can wrench the slave from the hand of his desperate, relentless oppressor." ²⁰

Perhaps her uncertain views can best be summarized by the following quote: "God is punishing the North, that they have so long suffered the accursed sin of slavery to exist; for in the sight of heaven it is a sin of the darkest dye. God is not with the South, and He will punish them dreadfully in the end." ²¹ In light of the foregoing quotes, she indicates that both sides will be punished, and she refrains from stating that the North will emerge victorious. ²²

In addition to being unsure as to the winner of the Civil War, Ellen White believed, on the basis of her visions, that the Civil War would likely end in an apocalyptic worldwide conflict, which would begin with a declaration of war between England and the North. The antagonism of some in the English government was well-known on both sides of the Atlantic, and the Confederate government was exerting every effort to involve Britain on its side. A naval incident pushed the two powers to the brink of war. A Union ship detained a British vessel in international waters and arrested two Confederate agents on board, infuriating the English. At this point, Ellen predicted worldwide consequences.

"Said the angel: 'Hear, O heavens, the cry of the oppressed, and reward the oppressors double according to their deeds.' This nation will yet be humbled into the dust. England is studying whether it is best to take advantage of the present weak condition of our nation, and venture to make war upon her. She is weighing the matter, and trying to sound other nations. She fears, if she should commence war abroad, that she would be weak at home, and that other nations would take advantage of her weakness. Other nations are making quiet yet active preparations for war, and are hoping that England will make war with our nation, for then they

¹⁷White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 256.

¹⁸White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 259.

¹⁹White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 260.

²⁰White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 266.

²¹White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 359.

²²Arthur L. White, grandson of Ellen White, assures readers in his monumental six-volume biography of EGW that the Lord revealed the "ultimate outcome" of the war to EGW, but this claim is certainly false. White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 34. The best her apologists can find are statements that hold out some hope for the North, sometimes in close proximity to statements making it sound like all is lost (see *Testimonies*, vol. 1, pp. 258-260). Her flip-flopping shouldn't be interpreted as nuance; rather, it is merely indicative of her lack of true inspiration.

would improve the opportunity to be revenged on her for the advantage she has taken of them in the past and the injustice done them. A portion of the queen's subjects are waiting a favorable opportunity to break their yoke; but if England thinks it will pay, she will not hesitate a moment to improve her opportunities to exercise her power and humble our nation. When England does declare war, all nations will have an interest of their own to serve, and there will be general war, general confusion. England is acquainted with the diversity of feeling among those who are seeking to quell the rebellion. She well knows the perplexed condition of our Government; she has looked with astonishment at the prosecution of this war—the slow, inefficient moves, the inactivity of our armies, and the ruinous expenses of our nation. The weakness of our Government is fully open before other nations.... Had our nation remained united it would have had strength, but divided it must fall.”²³

Even in this detailed prediction, the young prophetess hedges her bets in a most un-prophetic manner. She says, “. . . *if* England thinks it will pay, she will not hesitate” to make war on the United States. Then she follows by saying, “*When* England does declare war . . . there will be general war, general confusion.” She ends dramatically by observing that the divided United States “must fall.” Therefore, by the use of the tiny word *if*, she leaves room for her defenders to argue that God had shown her a possible outcome of the war, but that the prophecy was conditional. However, the crisis was actually rather brief. Lincoln released the two Confederates arrested on British ships, and cool heads prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic.

Another strong feature of Ellen White's Civil War visions was their apocalyptic message. She did not foresee a successful end to the war and subsequent prosperity for the United States. She envisioned world-wide bloodshed, total ruin, and the second-coming of the Lord, all triggered by the American Civil War. “God's people must take warning and discern the signs of the times. The signs of Christ's coming are too plain to be doubted . . . All heaven is astir. The scenes of earth's history are fast closing. We are amid the perils of the last days.”²⁴

A few pages later, she relates the dramatic end-time details as she saw them:

“I was shown the inhabitants of the earth in the utmost confusion. War, bloodshed, privation, want, famine, and pestilence were abroad in the land. As these things began to surround God's people, they began to press together, and to cast aside their little difficulties. Self-dignity no longer controlled them; deep humility took its place. Suffering, perplexity, and privation caused reason to resume its throne, and the passionate and unreasonable man became sane, and acted with discretion and wisdom.

“My attention was then called from the scene. There seemed to be a little time of peace. Once more the inhabitants of the earth were presented before me; and again everything was in the utmost confusion. Strife, war, and bloodshed, with famine and pestilence, raged everywhere. Other nations were engaged in this war

²³White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 259-260.

²⁴White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 260.

and confusion. War caused famine. Want and bloodshed caused pestilence. And then men's hearts failed them for fear, 'and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.'"²⁵

Despite that fact that her Civil War predictions were remarkably vague, Ellen White confidently stated, "Everything is preparing for the great day of God. Time will last a little longer until the inhabitants of the earth have filled up the cup of their iniquity, and then the wrath of God, which has so long slumbered, will awake, and this land of light will drink the cup of His unmingled wrath. The desolating power of God is upon the earth to rend and to destroy."²⁶ Given her Millerite and Shut-Door past, and given her interest in apocalyptic Bible passages, Mrs. White's certainty is quite understandable, but time would prove it most unwise.

For Adventists, whose homes and livelihoods were not impacted by the Civil War, the highest concern revolved around draft law.²⁷ Serving in the U.S. military would make Sabbath observance almost impossible, and it would involve killing other human beings. To help forestall a draft, James White raised money to entice non-Adventist enlistees to fill the quota for Battle Creek, Michigan.²⁸

As voluntary enlistments waned, Elder White foresaw the coming of a draft that would force SDA men to choose between Sabbath-keeping and their duty as citizens. He penned an editorial in the *Review* of August 12, 1862, which he entitled "The Nation." His moderate views on the draft caused consternation among some Adventists, apparently including his wife. He wrote,

"The position which our people have taken relative to the perpetuity and sacredness of the law of God contained in the Ten Commandments is not in harmony with all the requirements of war. The fourth precept of that law says, 'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy'; the sixth says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' But in the case of drafting, the government assumes the responsibility of the violation of the law of God, and it would be madness to resist. He who would resist until, in the administration of military law, he was shot down, goes too far, we think, in taking the responsibility of suicide."²⁹

Some SDA's, particularly a group of Iowans, were so vehemently opposed to Elder White's position, that they publicly proclaimed their willingness to die martyrs' deaths if drafted.³⁰ A few months later, Ellen White published a vision modifying her husband's views.

²⁵White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 268.

²⁶White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 363.

²⁷Seventh-day Adventism had not yet spread to the South, in part because of Ellen White's strong condemnation of slavery.

²⁸White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 40.

²⁹Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 41-42.

³⁰White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 356, 357.

"I was shown the excitement created among our people by the article in the *Review* headed, 'The Nation.' Some understood it in one way, and some another. The plain statements were distorted, and made to mean what the writer did not intend. He gave the best light that he then had."³¹

Ellen tried to protect her husband's feelings by spinning the criticisms as arising primarily from distortions, but she was forced to concede that he didn't have all the light needed on the subject. She continued by replacing his moderation with a hard-line stance against cooperation with military requirements:

"I was shown that God's people, who are His peculiar treasure, cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith. In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers. There would be a continual violation of conscience. . . .

"Those who love God's commandments will conform to every good law of the land. But if the requirements of the rulers are such as conflict with the laws of God, the only question to settled is: Shall we obey God, or man?"³²

It is clear that Ellen White supported draftees who would be "prepared to sacrifice life, if required," although she did rebuke the boisterous Iowans "fanatical presumption."³³ Overall, her testimony must have been a stinging rebuke to her husband. Fortunately, God would pave the way for SDA draftees to avoid the martyrdom they believed God demanded.

When a draft law was finally passed on March 3, 1863, it contained an exemption for members of religious denominations that were opposed to war. Conscientious objectors could perform humanitarian service for the wounded or for the former slaves, or they could be excused entirely by paying three hundred dollars, more than many Adventists earned in a year.³⁴

Adventists opted to pay the three hundred dollars to avoid Sabbath conflicts, leading to a drop in donations to denominational coffers. At that time, the SDA church was funded by a system they called Systematic Benevolence, which had been endorsed by a vision.³⁵ Under "Sister Betsy," as it was commonly termed, church asked members to pledge a weekly contribution based partly on property value.³⁶ Apparently, many church members began contributing their S. B. funds to reduce the burden on SDA draftees. To confront the financial difficulties, James White wrote, "Should our brethren be drafted, they should if necessary mortgage their property to raise the

³¹White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 356.

³²White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 361, 362.

³³White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 357.

³⁴White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 52, 53.

³⁵White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 190-192.

³⁶Schwarz, Richard W. *Light Bearers to the Remnant*. Boise: Pacific Press, 1979. 89.

\$300, rather than to accept means that should go into the Lord's treasury."³⁷

As the war progressed in to 1865, the General Conference Committee became increasingly nervous about the future of the Adventist Church. It appears they had forgotten that the Civil War was supposed to lead to famine and desolation, a world war, and to the imminent return of Christ.³⁸ They endorsed several days of fasting and prayer, explaining that if the war didn't end soon, "we must inevitably lose means, or lose our own members, and lose those who would embrace the truth, and lose the attention of the people." The committee continued, "We are thus brought, as it plainly appears to us, to a place where if the war continues, we must stop. We repeat it, the war must stop, or our work in spreading the truth must stop."³⁹

Upon the conclusion of the war in April 1865, Uriah Smith, editor of the *Review and Herald*, confidently declared that SDA's saw the end of the war as "a fulfillment of prophecy," but he cited no testimonies to back his claim.⁴⁰ Ellen White never attempted to explain her erroneous Civil War predictions, other than to claim in her later years that the Lord would have come long ago had the remnant church been ready.⁴¹

Evaluation

Ellen White's defenders are quick to point out the successes and possible successes of her Civil War predictions and divinely appointed analysis. They point to her correct prediction that several men present at the Parkville church dedication would lose sons in the war, and that the war would be long and bloody. Could this prove her prophetic gift?

It is important to note that Ellen White had an apocalyptic predisposition. She expected the imminent return of Christ, preceded by all the horrors outlined in the Book of Revelation. She was prescient in expecting a protracted, bloody conflict arising from secession, but she was

³⁷Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 53.

³⁸Ellen White had predicted, "God's people must take warning and discern the signs of the times. The signs of Christ's coming are too plain to be doubted . . . All heaven is astir. The scenes of earth's history are fast closing. We are amid the perils of the last days." White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 260.

³⁹Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 104.

⁴⁰Qtd. in White, Arthur L. *Ellen G. White*. Vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1985. 6 vols. 106.

⁴¹For example, she wrote in 1888, "If all who had labored unitedly in the work in 1844, had received the third angel's message and proclaimed it in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord would have wrought mightily with their efforts. . . . Years ago the inhabitants of the earth would have been warned, the closing work completed, and Christ would have come for the redemption of His people." White, Ellen G. *The Great Controversy*. 1888. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1950. 458. Under this theory, the world could have been ready for the second coming in time for her apocalyptic Civil War predictions to come true. Her reference back to the Millerite movement is ironic, though, because her shut-door teachings actually prevented her band of former Millerites from evangelizing for approximately five years after the disappointment. Therefore, her early teachings actually prevented any chance of a unified proclamation of the third angel's message.

expecting Armageddon, which set her apart from more optimistic persons. In this case, she was correct, but one must read on to discover whether she was universally correct in her prophetic utterances regarding the Civil War, as one would expect from a genuine prophet. As careful investigators seeking God's truth, we must not be overly swayed by reports of apparently supernatural manifestations during her visions, nor should we be overly impressed if she was correct in a few statements or predictions.

Another prophetic detail which her supporters promote is Ellen White's view of an angel's intervention during the First Battle of Bull Run. According to her vision, an angel waved his hand back against the Union troops, causing their sudden and panicked retreat.⁴² The cause of this retreat is still shrouded in some mystery, so when we get to heaven, we may find that God did indeed initiate the Union retreat so His larger purposes could be fulfilled.

Ellen White also may have been correct when she claimed that some Union generals were seeking advice from the spirits of dead generals.⁴³ Spiritualism was very popular at the time, so it makes sense that some generals on both sides may have been consulting spirits. Again, we will never know the extent of spiritualism's impact on the Civil War until we get to heaven.

On the basis of her visions, Mrs. White also claimed, "Information sent by our generals to Washington concerning the movement of our armies might nearly as well be telegraphed directly to the rebel forces. There are rebel sympathizers right at the heart of the Union authorities."⁴⁴ As Washington, D.C., was largely a Southern city, surrounded by slave states, it is quite reasonable to suppose that many government officials secretly supported the South. Such speculation would have been widely voiced in the North, so this revelation wouldn't have shocked anyone, and it could have been based on something she heard. Sadly for her supporters, a few possibly correct statements cannot be taken as proof of her inspiration.

A careful comparison of Mrs. White's Civil War prophecies raises troubling questions about her inspiration. Ellen White's Civil War predictions give strong evidence that she was not privy to divine insight. She was correct on a few general things, but the Bible teaches that the word of a prophet must come to pass with one hundred percent accuracy: "When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him" (Deut. 18:22). Fifty percent or seventy-five percent would not be good enough, except for modern psychics!

Although Mrs. White was correct or possibly correct in some of her Civil War material, several questions should be raised when one reads Testimonies seven and nine.⁴⁵ First, is there enough depth in her material to distinguish it from run-of-the-mill armchair analysis that she could have heard on street corners, in editorials, and at Adventist gatherings? Speculation about various treasonous activities, and possible British intervention would have been rampant at this time,

⁴²White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 266-267.

⁴³White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 364.

⁴⁴White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 367.

⁴⁵I recommend that each of you read these testimonies to get the full tone and context. I also apologize for burdening the reader with some lengthy quotes, but they are needed to preserve the context.

along with general criticisms of Lincoln and the government. Topics such as the possible influence of spiritualism would have been discussed in Adventist circles because Adventists were profoundly concerned with the rise of spiritualism.

One example of shallow armchair analysis involves the idea that England would have intervened on behalf of the North had the eradication of slavery been the primary goal. "I was shown that if the object of this war had been to exterminated slavery, then, if desired, England would have helped the North."⁴⁶ Read at face value, this statement seems to indicate that God didn't know whether the North would desire assistance, because she says the English would have given assistance "if desired." It seems far-fetched that the same England that almost went to war against the United States would have felt so strongly about ending U.S. slavery that it would have offered men, money, or materiel to fight for abolition. In any case, the United States didn't need outside help to successfully prosecute the war. It had the wherewithal to feed, clothe, and supply a vast military machine. The Union simply needed the blessing of God to help its generals make better decisions.

Ellen White also gave a shallow analysis of the Southern character. She stated, "Southern men possess a hellish spirit in this Rebellion...."⁴⁷ Such a view is overly harsh. While some Southerners had certainly been corrupted by owning slaves, many were standing firm for their beliefs in the manner of Robert E. Lee. It is impossible to imagine God issuing such a blanket condemnation, but it is quite possible to imagine that Ellen White was reflecting the views of those around her.

Another embarrassing bit of armchair analysis is her view of a steadily increasing rebellion, which she printed in 1863. "I saw that the Rebellion had been steadily increasing and that it had never been more determined than at the present moment."⁴⁸ This was certainly a most irrelevant observation—Southern determination may have been increasing, but it would be of no avail. God was on the verge of blessing the North. The Battle of Gettysburg, fought July 1-3, 1863, and the surrender of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, would seal the fate of the Confederacy. In light of history, Ellen White's supposedly inspired analysis of the Civil War seems shallow, trivial, and inaccurate.⁴⁹

We should also ask why Ellen White had so few words of encouragement for the North, given that the North would soon end slavery and enact the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution, the significance of which would not be accepted for over a hundred years. Had the abolition of slavery, equal protection, and the right to vote not been enshrined in the Constitution during Reconstruction, the civil rights movement would have faced much grèater challenges. But God in His unerring wisdom had paved the way. Unfortunately, Ellen White didn't know that God was preparing to bless the North, and she had no encouragement or useful instruction for the

⁴⁶White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 258.

⁴⁷White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 366.

⁴⁸White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 367.

⁴⁹Canright comments, "At the time, we read those revelations with great anxiety, hoping for light ahead. We were disappointed. They simply told just what everybody already knew, reflecting the sentiments of those opposed to the Government and the war." Canright, Dudley M. *The Life of Ellen White*. From "Her Prophecies Fail."

national leader as did the prophets of old. She even condemned fasting and prayer on behalf of the leaders in Washington who were facing such crucial decisions. This unwillingness runs directly counter to Paul's command to pray "for all that are in authority" (I Tim. 2:2). If Paul could pray for Nero, couldn't the early Adventists have fasted and prayed for Abraham Lincoln?⁵⁰

Another question bearing on Mrs. White's inspiration involves her stunning lack of certainty about practically every aspect of the Civil War, the greatest event of her era. She had no idea who would win, and she had no idea if slavery would ever be abolished. Her supporters can argue that God chose not to reveal those details to His prophetess, but when one looks at scripture, God has never been shy about revealing the results of wars and battles in advance. Revelations to prophets such as Deborah (Judges 4:4-24), Samuel (I Sam. 15:2, 3), Habakkuk (Hab. 1:5-10), and Micaiah (II Chron. 18:12-34).

According to Ellen White, even her angel messenger seemed unsure of the future: "Said the angel, 'How can God prosper such a people? If they would look to and trust in Him, if they would only come where He could help them, according to His own glory, He would readily do it.' She continues,

"I saw that God would not give the Northern army wholly into the hands of a rebellious people, to be utterly destroyed by their enemies. I was referred to Deuteronomy 32:26-30: 'I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men: were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, and lest they should say, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this. For they are a nation void of counsel, neither is there any understanding in them. Oh, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put two thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?'"⁵¹ (364-65)

God was about to prosper the North—how could the angel not know? Her guide was a very pessimistic angel, revealing in 1863 that God would not allow the Northern army to be utterly destroyed. Instead, the Southern army was about to be utterly destroyed, and the angel gives no hint of this outcome. The text in Deuteronomy, quoted by her angel, indicates that the North would escape, but barely. It indicates great success for the South, with the North barely hanging on because God didn't want the South to take credit for their utter victory ("Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this"). Instead, the North won dramatic victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July 1863, and the South never regained its momentum. Far from "not [giving] the Northern army wholly into the hands of a rebellious people, to be utterly destroyed by their enemies," God gave the South into the hands of the North after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. There was no prophetic awareness of the part of Ellen White that complete and utter victory was soon to be given to the North.

⁵⁰As noted previously, James White finally endorsed national fasts and prayers for the Lincoln administration after the Emancipation Proclamation of Jan. 1, 1863, but that doesn't excuse Ellen White's initial position against fasting and prayer (see *Testimonies*, vol. 1, p. 257). Christians are instructed to pray for their leaders under all circumstances, and God will hear these prayers for the sake of His people, even for governments that are most corrupt.

⁵¹White, Ellen G. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 1. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948. 9 vols. 364-365.

Finally, we must ask, is God the source of her predictions tying the Civil War to the end of the world? Since a world war did not erupt during the Civil War, and since famine and pestilence did not stalk the United States as a whole, and since the world did not end in the 1860's, her defenders must argue that these prophecies were conditional. In the Bible, conditional prophecies are either directly stated (see Deut. & Jeremiah) or strongly implied (Jonah). Since this prophecy has no directly stated conditionality, we must ask if it is implied. Jonah's prophecy had an implied conditionality because otherwise, God wouldn't have sent a warning to Nineveh. He would simply have destroyed it. Jonah understood this very well, which is why he tried to avoid going in the first place. He was afraid God would show mercy to a people whom Jonah hated and despised. The act of sending a warning of doom indicates that there is a chance to repent and avoid the promised destruction. However, Ellen White's apocalyptic prophecy is unlike Jonah's conditional prophecy because Ellen White only directed it to the "remnant" church. She didn't preach it all across the land as a warning to repent. She saw no possibility of repentance, and God never directed her to address the "heathen" of the so-called "nominal" churches. In addition, the world wasn't even close to being evangelized at that time, so it could not have been God's plan to come soon after the Civil War. Matthew 24:14 says, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

Other defenders argue that it was a common prophetic error to anticipate the soon-return of Jesus. Other prophets expected the soon-coming of Christ, but they didn't tie it to any particular event (see I Cor. 7:29). She depicted the righteous slave rising heavenward in a pre-Civil War vision, so she definitely tied the second advent to an era long-gone. "I saw the pious slave rise in triumph and victory and shake off the chains that bound him, while his wicked master was in confusion and knew not what to do...."⁵² Once the Civil War ended and the slaves were freed and the Lord still had not returned, Ellen White had a problem. She solved it by claiming that slavery would be re-introduced in the U.S. In an 1895 interview, she stated, "Slavery will again be revived in the Southern States; for the spirit of slavery still lives."⁵³

Ellen White devoted a great deal of attention to the Civil War, and a surface reading has led many Adventists to believe that her Civil War predictions and analyses are so insightful as to require divine involvement. However, careful review in light of history shows that Ellen White had no little or no insight into this great war. She had no idea regarding which side would win the war. She viewed it as a disaster for both sides and for the world at large, culminating in the return of Christ, even though the gospel had not yet been preached in all the world. She did not support the efforts of the Lincoln administration or see any value in the policies which ultimately ended slavery in the United States. She didn't even see the need to pray for the government in the early stages of the war because she wanted a more hard-line stand against slavery. The only "successes" in her Civil War writings are views that were undoubtedly expressed by many "armchair generals" of her day. Therefore, her Civil War writings can't be used to bolster her prophetic claims; instead, they are a powerful witness to the absence of divine involvement in her visions.

⁵²White, Ellen G. *Early Writings*. 35.

⁵³White, Ellen G. *Manuscript Releases*. Vol. 2. 299. (Ms 22a, 1895). W. C. White used the surrounding interview material for a booklet called *The Southern Work*. This sentence was finally released by the White Estate in 1963.