

Part 6

The Spirit of Prophecy

Chapter 16

Ellen White on Rev 4

The holy places of the sanctuary in heaven are represented by the two apartments in the sanctuary on earth. As in vision the apostle John was granted a view of the temple of God in heaven, he beheld there "seven lamps of fire burning before the throne." Revelation 4:5. He saw an angel "having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne." Revelation 8:3. Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven; and he saw there the "seven lamps of fire" and "the golden altar," represented by the golden candlestick and the altar of incense in the sanctuary on earth. Again, "the temple of God was opened" (Revelation 11: 19), and he looked within the inner veil, upon the holy of holies. Here he beheld "the ark of His testament," represented by the sacred chest constructed by Moses to contain the Saw of God.

Thus those who were studying the subject found indisputable proof of the existence of a sanctuary in heaven. Moses made the earthly sanctuary after a pattern which was shown him. Paul teaches that that pattern was the true sanctuary which is in heaven. And John testifies that he saw it in heaven.⁷²

*H*ere Ellen White appears to say that in Rev 4 everything John saw was in the first apartment but the second apartment in Rev 11, that the one chapter has its setting in John's day and the other in our own, that the events of Rev 4 pertain to the daily service while those of Rev 11 pertain to the yearly service or day of atonement. Does she say this?

What she says is that the lamps of Rev 4 and golden altar of Rev 8 are in the first apartment. None would disagree. She also says that opening God's temple in Rev 11 means opening the second apartment of that temple. Again there is nothing controversial here. Her point is that there is a real temple in heaven and that it has two apartments. More specifically she says, "Here the prophet was permitted to behold the first apartment of the sanctuary in heaven."⁷³

⁷² Ellen White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1950), pp. 414-15.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

What Ellen White does not say can be important too.⁷⁴ What she does not say is that when John sees these things God's throne is located in the first apartment. We know that at certain times in history the throne truly is in the first apartment, because when Christ begins His second apartment ministry both the Father and the Son undergo a change of location. "I saw the Father rise from the throne, and in a flaming chariot go into the holy of holies within the veil, and sit down."⁷⁵ Then the Son joins Him there. So the throne of God is in the first apartment prior to 1844. That is not the question. At issue is whether the throne is in the first apartment in Rev 4.⁷⁶

Ellen White's intent in the first paragraph quoted above is clarified in the second, i.e. that there is a temple in heaven and that it has two apartments. To support this claim she quotes passages that describe objects which only be found in the one place (the lampstands) or the other (the ark of the testimony). Beyond this she does not go. More specifically, she does not state or imply that Rev 11 gives us our first glimpse of second apartment events in the book of Revelation. Let us leave the matter where she left it.

⁷⁴ "She was blessed with an encyclopedic knowledge of the Scriptures and her use of them was so comprehensive that it is of potential interest to know which passages she does not quote extensively. The purpose for doing such a study would not be to learn more about her concept of inspiration. Her concept of Bible inspiration is that it was inspired. But there are certain passages (notably Dan 11 and Rev 7-8) that she leaves more or less alone in her published writings. If there is a reason for this, I assume it was a good reason. One possible explanation is that there was more to learn about these passages and that the time had not yet come to take a strong position on them" (Frank W. Hardy, "Ellen White's Use of Bible Versions Other Than King James," *Historicism Supplement/M* 90, p. 2). I have no special agenda in saying this or any special interpretation of the neglected chapters, but I do believe that if God had a reason for saying what He did through Ellen White He also had a reason for omitting what He did not say. All of the Spirit of Prophecy is significant and not just the parts we wish to emphasize.

⁷⁵ Ellen White, *Early Writings*, p. 55.

⁷⁶ In regard to the throne Ellen White says, "In the temple in heaven, the dwelling place of God, His throne is established in righteousness and judgment. In the most holy place is His law, the great rule of right by which all mankind are tested. The ark that enshrines the tables of the law is covered with the mercy seat, before which Christ pleads His blood in the sinner's behalf. Thus is represented the union of justice and mercy in the plan of human redemption" (*Great Controversy*, p. 415). If what she describes on p. 414 has the same timeframe as what she describes on p. 415, then placing the throne in the first apartment within that timeframe will have a number of unacceptable implications. The law is in a place separate from the ark, or the ark is an object different from God's throne and Christ pleads our cases in a location other than where the Father is. But why should He not stand before the Father? None of this makes any sense. The only assumption that will allow us to keep all these factors together is that the throne is in the second apartment - within the timeframe of Great Controversy, pp. 414-15.

Chapter 17

Ellen White on Rev 5

Ellen White quotes the two hymns of praise found in Rev 5:12-13 on a number of occasions. The twenty-four elders sing in vs. 12 and "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and on the sea, and all that is in them" sing in vs. 13. One or both of these hymns are quoted in the last paragraphs of *The Desire of Ages*, *The Acts of the Apostles*, and *The Great Controversy*. All end with a reference to these hymns.

Timeframe of the First Advent

We begin with the reference to Rev 5:12-13 that is found at the end of *The Desire of Ages*.

There is the throne, and around it the rainbow of promise. There are cherubim and seraphim. The commanders of the angel hosts, the sons of God, the representatives of the unfallen worlds, are assembled. The heavenly council before which Lucifer had accused God and His Son, the representatives of those sinless realms over which Satan had thought to establish his dominion, all are there to welcome the Redeemer. They are eager to celebrate His triumph and to glorify their King.

But He waves them back. Not yet; He cannot now receive the coronet of glory and the royal robe. He enters into the presence of His Father. He points to His wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet; He lifts His hands, bearing the print of nails. He points to the tokens of His triumph; He presents to God the wave sheaf, those raised with Him as representatives of that great multitude who shall come forth from the grave at His second coming. He approaches the Father, . . .

The voice of God is heard proclaiming that justice is satisfied. Satan is vanquished. Christ's toiling, struggling ones on earth are "accepted in the beloved." Eph. 1:6. . . .

With joy unutterable, rulers and principalities and powers acknowledge the supremacy of the Prince of life. The angel host prostrate themselves before Him, while the glad shout fills all the courts of heaven, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." Rev. 5:12.

Songs of triumph mingle with the music from angel harps, till heaven seems to overflow with joy and praise. Love has conquered. The lost is found. Heaven rings with voices in lofty strains proclaiming, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be

unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." Rev. 5:13.⁷⁷

I quote this passage at length because it is so important to the present argument. There can be no question that here Ellen White is applying Rev 5:12-13 to the time of the first advent. So that settles it. No further discussion is necessary. Rev 4-5 does not describe a judgment that takes place in our day. Or is this what she says?

Timeframe of the Second Advent

Exactly what does Ellen White say and not say about Rev 5:12-13? First of all, to learn what she says about the present passage we will have to read more quotations than this. What she says here does truly refer to the scene depicted in Rev 4-5 and she explicitly applies what it describes to events that took place in the first century A.D. two thousand years ago. But this is not her only use of the passage.

The Acts of the Apostles

Recall that The Acts of the Apostles also ends with a reference to this same scene from Rev 5.⁷⁸

We may have a vision of the future, the blessedness of heaven. In the Bible are revealed visions of the future glory, scenes pictured by the hand of God, and these are dear to His church. By faith we may stand on the threshold of the eternal city, and hear the gracious welcome given to those who in this life co-operate with Christ, regarding it as an honor to suffer for His sake. As the words are spoken, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, "they cast their crowns at the feet of the Redeemer, Exclaiming, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. . . . Honor, and glory, and power, but unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." Matthew 25:34; Revelation 5:12, 13.⁷⁹

Here the hymns of praise in Rev 5:12-13 are placed in the timeframe of the second advent on the lips, not of angels, but of human beings redeemed from the earth. Immediately afterward Ellen White quotes Rev 7:9-10. This is a fascinating bit of commentary. In *Testimonies for the Church* (vol. 8, p. 44) and *The Ministry of Healing* (pp. 506-7) she again draws a connection between the hymns of praise in Rev 5:12-13 and Rev 7:9-10. And in *The Great Controversy* (pp. 648-49) she quotes Rev 5:12-13 in the context of Rev 7:14-17. Both passages from Rev 7 have to do with the multitude that no one can count, brought to view between the sixth and seventh seals in the timeframe of the second coming.

⁷⁷ Desire of Ages, pp. 834-35.

⁷⁸ [Remove] *****

⁷⁹ Acts of the Apostles, pp. 601-2.

The Great Controversy

No one who has read it can ever forget the magnificent peroration with which Ellen White ends *The Great Controversy*.

The great controversy is ended. Sin and sinners are no more. The entire universe is clean. One pulse of harmony and gladness beats through the vast creation. From Him who created all, flow life and light and gladness, throughout the realms of illimitable space. From the minutest atom to the greatest world, all things, animate and inanimate, in their unshadowed beauty and perfect joy, declare that God is love.⁸⁰

Notice, however, that the paragraph just before this one is Rev 5:13. The timeframe for *Great Controversy*, p. 678 is not the first coming but the second, and Ellen White draws on the hymn of praise in Rev 5:13 in bringing her account of the conflict to a close. So we must account for *Desire of Ages* pp. 834-35, it is true, but there are other statements to consider along with it.⁸¹ Here is one from *Patriarchs and Prophets*.

At that time the wicked will all be destroyed. They will become "as though they had not been." Obadiah 16. And every voice in the whole universe will unite in joyful phase to God. Says the revelator, "Every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever." Revelation 5:13.⁸²

And another from *Desire of Ages*.

John, in the Revelation, looking toward to the eternal state, hears a universal anthem of praise undisturbed by one note of discord. Every creature in heaven and earth was heard ascribing glory to God, Revelation 5:13.⁸³

This list is not comprehensive, but of the passages I have been able to find only one applies the hymns of praise in Rev 5:12-13 to the timeframe of the first advent. All the others apply it later.

Discussion

If we could return briefly to the passage quoted first - the one from *Desire of Ages*, pp. 834-35 - please notice a fact we had overlooked before. At the beginning of the quotation Ellen White states,

There is the throne, and around it the rainbow of promise. There are cherubim and seraphim. The commanders of the angel hosts, the sons of God, the representatives of the unfallen worlds, are assembled. The heavenly council before

⁸⁰ *Great Controversy*, p. 678.

⁸¹ In addition to those quoted below consider *Desire of Ages*, p. 131; *Great Controversy*, pp. 647, 671; *Selected Messages*, 1:289; *Testimonies*, 2:215; and *The SDA Bible Commentary*, 6:1093.

⁸² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 541.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

which Lucifer had accused God and His Son, the representatives of those sinless realms over which Satan had thought to establish his dominion, - all are there to welcome the Redeemer. They are eager to celebrate His triumph and to glorify their King.⁸⁴

What was that about the "heavenly council"? The heavenly council is that body which performs the investigative judgment at the end of the age, is it not? So if we appeal to the above quotation in an effort to place Rev 4-5 in the first century, would doing that demonstrate too much? Did the judgment begin in A.D. 31 after all, as our detractors would have it? The answer is no, but let us make sure before going on that we understand why.

Other sessions of the court

In his book entitled, *Selected Studies on Prophetic Interpretation*,⁸⁵ William H. Shea discusses twenty-eight passages from the Old Testament that portray a judgment motif or that show God issuing judgments in some way. Some of these are given from the earthly tabernacle in the wilderness, others from the earthly temple in Jerusalem, and still others from the heavenly temple in heaven. Here is one example: "From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet - when you, O God, rose up to Judge, to save all the afflicted of the land" (Ps 76:8-9). And there are many other similar passages.

The Adventist concept of the pre-advent investigative judgment has held that God's judgment of His people is currently being conducted in His heavenly sanctuary. In OT times, whether judgment came from the earthly tabernacle, the earthly temple, or the heavenly temple, it came from a sanctuary God actively used at that time. Thus God's past judgment activity from His sanctuary provides a background for, and a biblical link to, what Adventists have had to say about that type of activity by God in the present.

These biblical parallels for the investigative judgment currently being conducted in the heavenly temple indicate that this modern counterpart is only unique in its scope and extent, it is not unique in kind or quality per se. Adventists have been somewhat shortsighted on this subject, thinking that an investigative judgment at this time is completely and utterly unique and without parallel.⁸⁶

The heavenly council has met any number of times and we catch hints of this in a number of Old Testament passages. It evidently met to welcome Jesus at His ascension. That, once more, is what Ellen White says.

The heavenly council before which Lucifer had accused God and His Son, the representatives of those sinless realms over which Satan had thought to establish his dominion, - all are there to welcome the Redeemer. They are eager to celebrate His triumph and to glorify their King.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Desire of Ages*, p. 834.

⁸⁵ *Daniel & Revelation Committee Series*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1982), pp. 1-24.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸⁷ *Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

In regard to the above session of the heavenly council let me make two points. First, an obvious parallel to this scene is found in Job 1 ("One day the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, . . ." [1:6 margin]) and 2 ("On another day the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, . . ." [2:1 margin]).

Notice that Job 1 and 2 have different sessions of the heavenly court in view. The one was "One day," while the others was "On another day." These are different days and different sessions. Notice also that these two different sessions occurred close enough together that Job was alive during both of them. This does not mean that the court convenes often, but it does mean that the session at which it performs the investigative judgment is not entirely unique. From time to time, as circumstances might warrant, the court meets. And according to Ellen White this court or "heavenly council" met to welcome Christ after His ascension.

Rev 5:12-13 and the heavenly court

In linking Christ's ascension to Rev 5, Ellen White also links Rev 5 to the heavenly council. And by applying Rev 5:12-13 to both the first coming and the second she shows that her understanding of the passage is not limited to either timeframe exclusively. It is not the case that when the angels praised Christ in the language of Rev 5 at His ascension they refuse to say those same words again at any later time. Indeed, when Christ takes us to heaven at the second coming it will be our privilege to join the angels in praising Him in the language of Rev 5. Ellen White says this repeatedly.⁸⁸

Having come this far, could the words of Rev 5:12-13 be said at any time in between the two advents at some other session of the heavenly court? Would such words be appropriate, for example, in the context of the judgment? What words would be more appropriate there?

A second point I would like to make is that, just as the heavenly council met centuries ago to welcome Christ, in the judgment that same body is given a similar task. One function of the judgment is to prepare a guest list for the marriage supper of the Lamb. When it is finished all the saints of earth will be welcomed after the second coming with as much joy as Jesus was after the first, because we are His friends. If correct, this concept places the judgment in a different light. Making up a guest list for the marriage supper? Is this the same judgment we have studied all these years? It seems unlikely. But have we understood the judgment in all its varied ramifications until we include this aspect of it?

Ellen White does not disallow or weaken the interpretation of Rev 4-5 proposed here by anything she says in *Desire of Ages* or by anything she says elsewhere. What the Spirit of God revealed through Ellen White is not at variance with what that same Spirit revealed through John. The same cohesive and reasonable model emerges coequally from both sources.

⁸⁸ See *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 601-2; *Desire of Ages*, p. 131; *Great Controversy*, pp. 545,648,671,678; *Ministry of Healing*, p. 506; *Selected Messages*, 1:289; *Testimonies*, 8:44.

Chapter 18

Ellen White on Rev 6

Ellen White has some fascinating comments about the "book" (or "books," or "scroll") that is sealed with seven seals. Just as the biblical evidence is mixed, so the Spirit of Prophecy is mixed, and in precisely the same manner. On the one hand she says people's decisions are recorded in the "scroll" or "book":

Thus the Jewish leaders made their choice. Their decision was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, the book which no man could open. In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah.⁸⁹

So one thing we must say about the scroll is that it is a historical document written as the events occur. It tells what people have done and is unsealed for review at a later time. In another place, however, she states that prophetic material is included and even whole books of Scripture:

All that God has in prophetic history specified to be fulfilled in the past has been, and all that is yet to come in its order will be. Daniel, God's prophet, stands in his place, John stands in his place. In the Revelation the Lion of the tribe of Judah has opened to the students of prophecy the book of Daniel, and thus is Daniel standing in his place. He bears his testimony, that which the Lord revealed to him in vision of the great and solemn events which we must know as we stand on the very threshold of their fulfillment.⁹⁰

In this case the scroll is prophetic and more specifically it is associated with the book of Daniel. Notice that her context for saying this is that Daniel stands in his place, he bears his testimony. This is what she was referring to in the case where the "book" is a historical record. As such it bears testimony to what has been done. In the same passage she goes on to say:

In history and prophecy the Word of God portrays the long continued conflict between truth and error. That conflict is yet in progress. Those things which have been, will be repeated. Old controversies will be revived, and new theories will be continually arising. But God's people, who in their belief and fulfillment of prophecy have acted a part in the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages, know where they stand. They have an experience that is more precious than fine gold.

⁸⁹ Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1941), p. 294.

⁹⁰ Idem, *Selected Messages* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958), 2:109.

They are to stand firm as a rock, holding the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end.⁹¹

Here, instead of confining herself to Daniel alone, Ellen White brings in the "history and prophecy" of the entire body of Scripture. This is entirely consistent with everything I have said above. In the judgment God does not do His work by half measures. He brings together all the evidence that would have any bearing on a given case. He reviews in exhaustive detail the entire context for each life wherever and whenever that person might have been lived. Thus in Revelation we have a record of major events that would occur and that would come in review before God over the last twenty centuries of earth's history.

In the earlier books of the New Testament we have, in addition, a record of Christ's life and the response of those heard either Him or His chosen apostles. But the judgment is not confined to so relatively narrow a timeframe. In the Old Testament we have a record of how people responded to God, and how He led or tried to lead them, that extends through all the earlier centuries back to creation. Every particle of this will be brought forward and entered as evidence in the judgment. Not one bit of it will be left out.

What Daniel wrote is a part of that record. So the book of Daniel will become an exhibit for the court. What about the Jewish leaders' decision to crucify Christ? Nothing is left out, or glossed over, or omitted.

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb4:12-13)

The "scroll" unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah includes all aspects of the evidence presented in the judgment. And this in turn is one part of what it means that the scroll was sealed with seven seals, a figure signifying completeness. The point that I wish to emphasize here is that this "book" includes a record of the decisions people have made. Such a record cannot be complete, or ready to seal, until the actions recorded there have been performed. There is prophecy and also history in the "scroll" - a history that will not be reviewed until the judgment.

⁹¹ Ibid.