

Do we need the Spirit of Prophecy to interpret Scriptures?

Introduction

Never has the gift of the prophets, the Spirit of Prophecy (SOP) been under relentless attack as it is today. The Seventh-day Adventists Church orthodox find themselves crying, away, away, away with this gift for we have all the light to take us through the pearly gates. The heated war is raging on between the extreme right and left, with the former overstretching it to supersede the Bible and the latter muzzling it through declarations that “the Bible and the Bible alone”. The Church members find themselves divided as to, to what extent do they acknowledge the authoritativeness of the SOP and what role does it play in interpreting Bible prophecies. Some call it the lesser light, whilst others regard the writings with the supreme weight as the Bible; the laity is left to choose what appeals to their taste as there is no clear clerical standpoint. Some weeks ago, I had to face the reality of a chaotic Sabbath School Quarterly lesson discussion, when a discussion leader exclaimed that, like William Miller who was able to arrive at 2300-day prophecy using the Bible alone, we too need no SOP to interpret scriptures. To the proponents of “the Bible and Bible alone” sweet melodious music fell into their ears, however, when we microscopically look at this statement, it makes one to wonder if we still consider this gift of prophecy as one of our Church’s foundational pillars.

Overview

This paper discusses whether we need the SOP to interpret Bible prophecies or not, what is the SOP, for how long has it been in operation, what does the olden phrase, “the Bible and Bible alone” mean and what authority does SOP has versus the Bible. To begin with—

What is the SOP- “...no vision people perish”?

It is true that “where there is no vision, the people perish”, however, this verse has a deeper spiritually meaning than the usual.

“Prov. 29:18 -- "Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."

“At the outset of our study let us ascertain to what extent this scripture has been fulfilled. In the days of Moses, you remember, **the Egyptians had no vision, but the Hebrews did have a vision and a prophet to interpret the vision.** With this gift among them when they came against the Red Sea the Hebrews were preserved, but the Egyptians perished. "The wise man," you see, was not guessing when he said "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

“Suppose, though, the people should have a vision, but no interpreter for the vision. What then? Let us see: You recall that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a night vision but had no interpreter, no, not one among all his wise men in the kingdom. Consequently, as they were unable to interpret his vision (Dan. Chapter 2), it was decreed that they should

be put to death, and they would have perished if Daniel, God's man, had not been in the land to interpret the king's vision.

“Pharaoh, too, had a vision but no interpreter. And if Joseph had not been in the land of Egypt to interpret the king's vision, the Egyptians and the whole ancient world would have perished during the seven years of famine. What the Bible says, is one hundred percent true, you see.

“Now let me ask you a simple question. If the people without a vision and without a interpreter perish, how are they then to get the vision and the interpreter? Saint Peter gives the clue: **2 Pet. 1:19, 20** -- "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation."

“Here we are told that prophecy, a vision, is the acid test by which to judge purported Bible Truth; that is, if the thing is not in prophecy, if there is no vision of it found in the writings of the prophets, then, there is no truth in it. Yes, the visions of the prophets are to be our visions if we must be preserved. Prophecy, though, he contends is of no more private interpretation than were Nebuchadnezzar's and Pharaoh's visions, that the wise men of any people are not able to interpret the concealed prophecies of God. Why?-- **2 Pet. 1:21** -- "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

“This is exactly why prophecy cannot be privately interpreted, not without the Spirit Who dictated the prophecies to holy men of old. **So, then, the prophecies are not interpreted by the will of men, but by the Spirit of Truth, "the Spirit of Prophecy," the same Spirit that dictated the prophecies.** This, you see, is not my idea. It is the plain language of /the Bible. But perhaps there is still doubt in your minds, and if so we would do well to give the Bible another test.”ⁱ

“Affirmatively stated, all Scripture, not merely a part of It, is inspired. Negatively stated, none of It is privately interpreted, for the reason that It did not come of men but of God; that is, as the **Spirit of God dictated to men the Scriptures, so the Spirit of God must interpret the Scriptures to men**, that no man privately (without Inspiration) is capable of disclosing the sealed prophecies or interpreting any part of them or even capable of understanding their importance after they are interpreted except it be by the gift of the Spirit of Truth "None of the wicked," therefore, "shall understand; but the wise shall understand." Dan. 12:10.”ⁱⁱ

So, what is the **Spirit of Prophecy(SOP)**? It is the Holy Ghost operating through a human instrumentality to either bring or interpret a message. And this gift has been in operation from the Old Testament era, in the days of Enoch, Noah, Moses, Samuel, and it is still with us today. The comprehension of the aforementioned point has a huge bearing on how one views Ellen White's writings today.

John, the last apostle, calls the SOP the “testimony of Jesus Christ” (read Revelation 1:1-3, 9; 12:17 & 19:10), this is nothing other than the work of the Holy Ghost through a human channel.

SOP and William Miller

It will be seen that William Miller’s work attest that he was moved by the SOP to unlock the prophecy of Daniel. But the main question is, was Miller going to arrive to the truth if he *disregarded* the writings of the prophets before him?

Daniel 12:4—“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, [even] to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.

“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. The commencement of the chain of truth was given to him, and he was led on to search for link after link, until he looked with wonder and admiration upon the Word of God. He saw there a perfect chain of truth. That Word which he had regarded as uninspired now opened before his vision in its beauty and glory. He saw that one portion of Scripture explains another, and when one passage was closed to his understanding, he found in another part of the Word that which explained it. He regarded the sacred Word of God with joy and with the deepest respect and awe.”ⁱⁱⁱ

First and foremost, W. Miller was inspired to interpret the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, and no one can only ascribe his work to “Bible diligence” but the gift of the prophets was upon him, leading him step by step until he reached the truth about the 2300 days prophecy. He also utilised every relevant writing of the prophets who were before him. It is however disturbing and surprising, to see how many S.D.A.s want to interpret Bible prophecies without utilising every relevant writing/s of the prophets including Ellen G. White’s; both ministry and laity has fallen victim to this delusion. The barometer which God has given us to measure or interpret Bible prophecy is, “To the **law** and to the **testimony**: if they speak not according to this **word**, it is because there is no light in them.” [Isaiah 8:20.]. The Bible and SOP is the measuring stick for every Bible interpretation and we can arrive at any true interpretation through fully utilising these two inspired sources.

“Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”—Amos 3:7. Again, the Bible records in 2 Chronicles 36:15 “And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till [there was] no remedy.” The king of the two tribed-nation had this to say in 2 Chronicles 20:20, “And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear

me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.”

Clear it is that when God wants to reveal any hidden message or uninterpreted message in His word, a prophet will be sent. The work of Bible prophecy interpretation is given to the prophets alone (read 2 Peter 1:19-21), ours is to take from the writings of the prophets. We cannot today put aside the writings of Ellen G. White and expect to arrive at any correct Bible prophecy interpretation, this is just like what the Jews did, claiming to accept all the prophets yet they rejected their present day one (Jesus).

A deadly trap which Adventists find themselves in, is to want every soul to be an interpreter of Bible prophecies. This has led to unprecedented confusion from both ministry and laity. This erases our distinction from other protestants or Pentecostal churches.

The role of the SOP in establishment of the S.D.A. Church doctrines.

“The Visions Confirmed Conclusions From Bible Study.—”In the early days of the message, when our numbers were few, we studied diligently to understand the meaning of many Scriptures. At times it seemed as if no explanation could be given. My mind seemed to be locked to an understanding of the Word; but when our brethren who had assembled for study came to a point where they could go no farther, and had recourse to earnest prayer, the Spirit of God would rest upon me, and I would be taken off in vision, and be instructed in regard to the relation of Scripture to Scripture. These experiences were repeated over and over again. Thus many truths of the third angel's message were established, point by point.”^{iv}

Further reading, Evangelism p. 260.3, Gospel Workers, p. 300, Faith I Live By, p. 295.

Does SOP supersede the Bible?

The Spirit which inspired Moses to write the Pentateuch is the same which inspired Zephaniah or Micah or Paul or Ellen G. White to pen all their writings. The difference is, Ellen White writings come after the Bible had been written. Does that make her writings inferior? What do we say about the greatest prophet John the Baptist, is he lesser since he never penned anything? What difference is there from the Spirit which inspired Moses, Paul from that of Ellen G. White? Was it not the same God working to instruct His church/es on earth?

“The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, “Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” 1 John 4:1. And Isaiah declares, “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” Isaiah 8:20.”^v

It will be noted that all New Testament prophets were interpretative whilst the Old Testament were filling the storehouse so to speak. Ellen White's work was interpretative just like Paul and any other New Testament prophet, for we read "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John."—Matthew 11:13.

The SOP a distinguishing pillar

One may say, "Yes, I believe in the Spirit of Prophecy, but not as you do." Yet if what he believes to be the Spirit of Prophecy does not lead him to "keep the commandments of God" and to know that the testimony of Jesus Christ is the ever-active Spirit of Prophecy (Rev. 12:17; 19:10), then he had better forsake that and accept this, for "he that saith I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John 2:4. Likewise says the Lord: "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2:10. "Blessed are they that do His commandments that they...may enter in through the gates into the city." Rev. 22:14.

If, moreover, what such a one believes to be the Spirit of Prophecy is truly it, then it should have revealed the truths herein unfolded. Thus what he accepts rather than what we accept as the Spirit of Prophecy would have been confirmed and exalted.

Not long ago a certain minister said: "My conception of the Spirit of Prophecy is different from yours; the prophecies in the Bible are my Spirit of Prophecy." Now so he must say if the Spirit of Prophecy were not ever-active. But if the Spirit of Prophecy begins and ends with the Bible, then all Christians have the Spirit of Prophecy. If this is so, though, why does the Revelation make a distinction between Christians who have the Spirit of Prophecy and those who do not? This minister's idea is, to say the least, illogical, for it puts Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 in the realm of the meaningless.^{vi}

Without SOP there is no difference between SDA and other nominal churches and this will annul it from being the last day true church. It is either we fully accept and embrace it or we renounce our Adventism.

"The Bible and the Bible alone"

It will be noted that this phrase was used to uphold the Bible which every soul is called to look upon as the standard of Christ, however, this does not in any sense suggest that we should disregard the writings of the last day prophets. If they were not so important God would have not dared wasted His time to instruct His messenger to write and the Bible will not point to her.

"As we looked upon our press, working off papers containing the light of truth for the present time, we could but think how much greater difficulties than we had met had been encountered in former times by the advocates of Bible truth. Every movement had to be made in secrecy, or their work would be destroyed and their lives imperiled. Now the way seems to be prepared for the truth to go forth as a lamp that burneth. The Bible standard

is raised, and the same words that fell from the lips of the early reformers, are being repeated. The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the foundation of our faith.”^{vii}

Conclusion

“Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe [in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.” The need of SOP for Bible interpretation is inevitable as it has been from the old days for “And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.” —Hosea 12:13. If ancient Israel was preserved through a prophet to gain possession of the earthly Canaan, modern Israel is surely in need of one to reach the heavenly Canaan. We would like to hear your views and comments, please contact us through the details below.

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ⁱ Timely Greetings, Vol. 2, No. 24, page 15

ⁱⁱ Timely Greetings, Vol. 1, No. 14, page 16.

ⁱⁱⁱ Early Writings, page 229 paragraph 1.

^{iv} Selected Messages Book 3, page 38.2.

^v Great Controversy, 88 edition, p. e.1.

^{vi} Tract 6, page 46.

^{vii} Review and Herald, October 13, 1885 par. 4