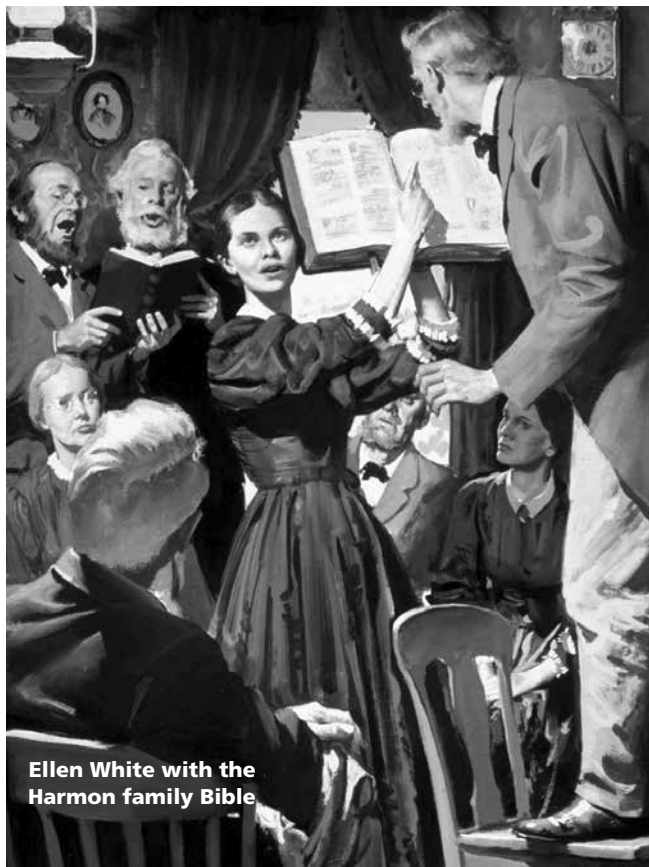
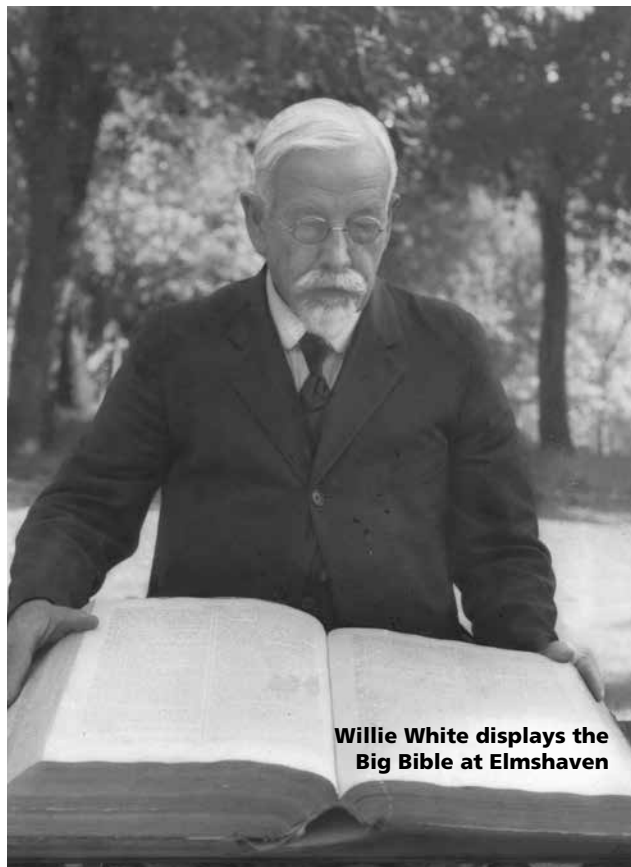


“It Was Not Taught Me by Man” | BY DONALD E. CASEBOLT



Ellen White with the Harmon family Bible



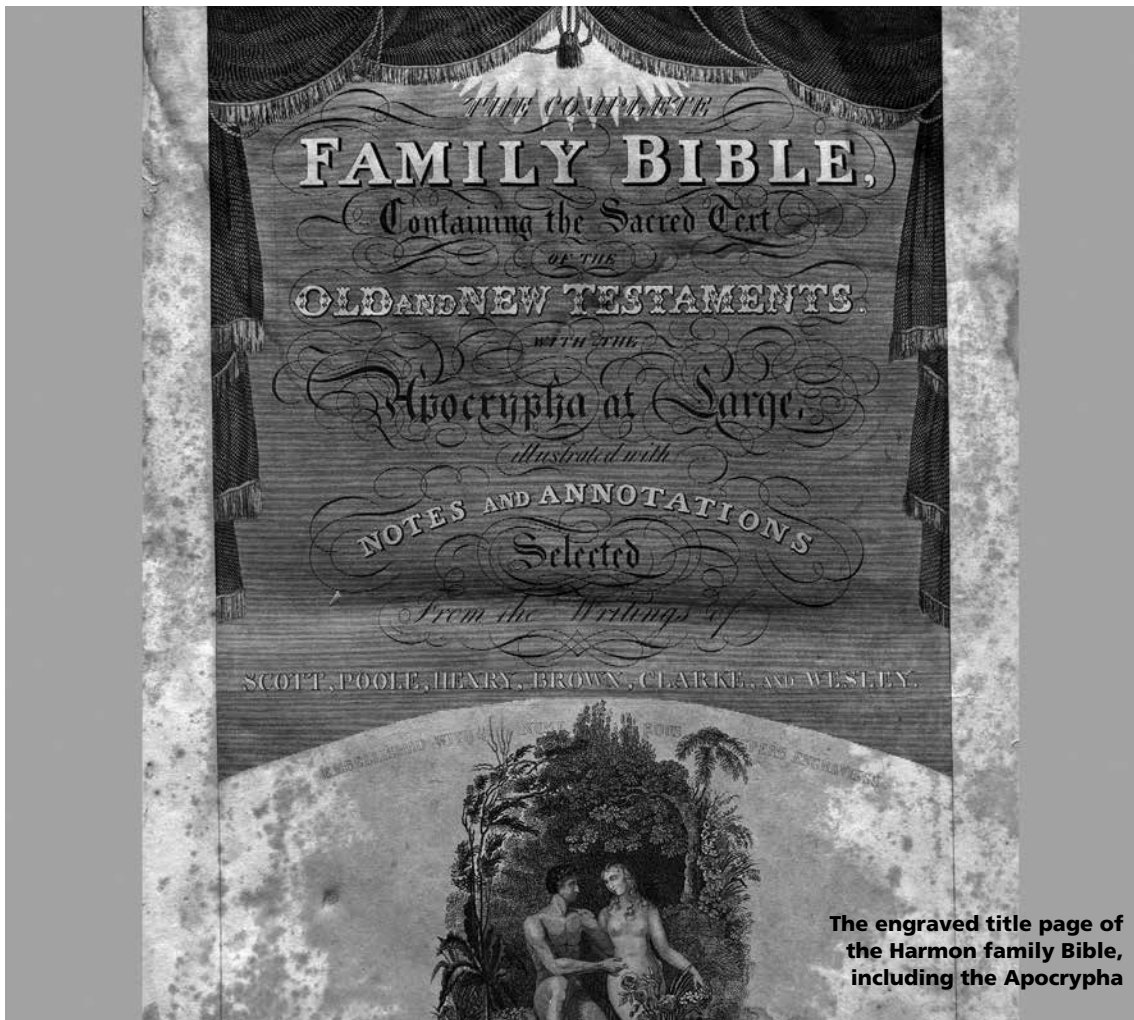
Willie White displays the Big Bible at Elmshaven

IMAGE SOURCE: WHITE ESTATE

In the Harmon family’s 1822 version of the King James Bible, teenage Ellen Harmon read the pseudepigraphal¹ book of 2 Esdras. It was a book of special significance to the early Millerites, because it contained prophecies about the end of the world. It was suffused with the question of Daniel 8:14—“How Long” is the “little horn” going to be allowed to desecrate the Sanctuary and host? When is the hour of judgment? For example, in vision three, (2 Esdras 8:63), one reads, “Question nine: Despite signs already given, what will be the *time of judgment*?”²

Multiple verses from 2 Esdras color Ellen Harmon’s descriptions of heaven in her first vision in 1844, and her Sabbath vision. In 1847, the newly married James White,

having read the same pseudepigraphal and Apocryphal books, and familiar with Ellen Harmon’s reading and writing habits, annotated seventy-seven “scripture” references when he republished these two visions.³ From this we learn that Ellen Harmon’s incorporation of outside historical and theological material did not begin late in her career with Protestant historians, as one might gather from reading revisionist Seventh-day Adventist historians such as Donald McAdams,⁴ William Peterson, and Walter Rae.⁵ Ellen Harmon’s incorporation of material she claimed was “not taught me by man” began with her first vision in December 1844, continued throughout her career,⁶ and exploded in her expansive use of Protestant historians and theologians in her *Desire of Ages* and *Great*



The engraved title page of the Harmon family Bible, including the Apocrypha

Controversy works.⁷ Why and how could this be?

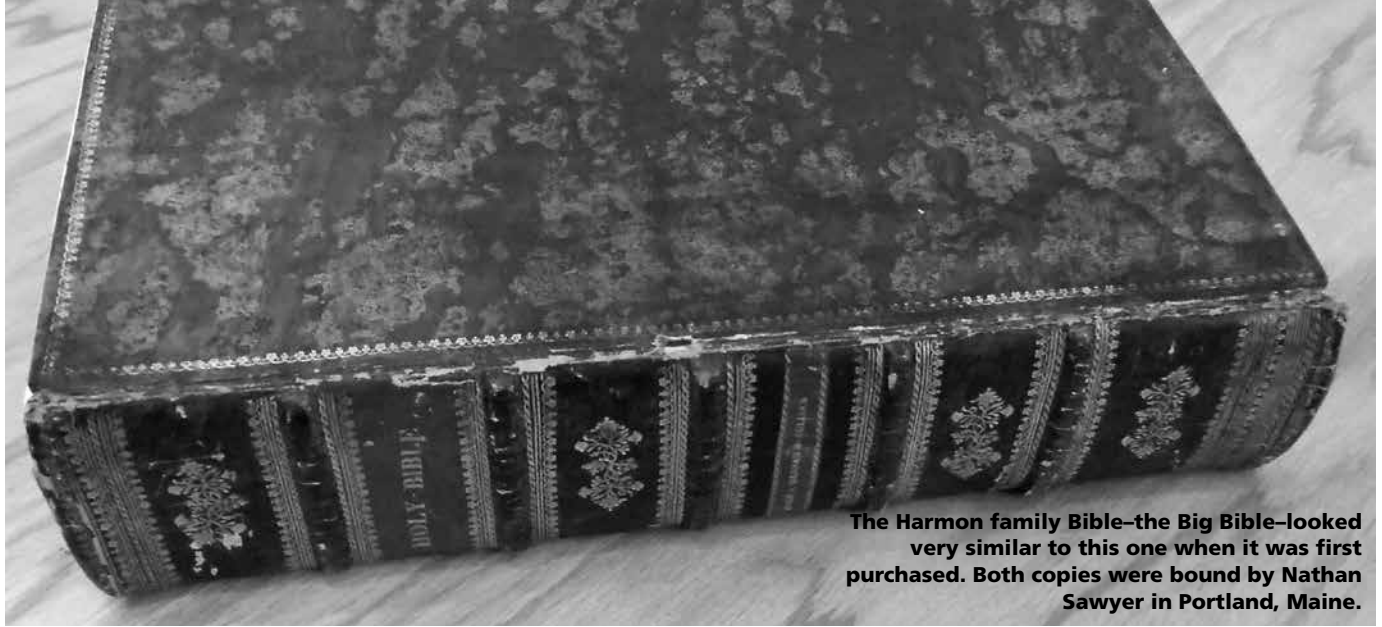
Not long after the publication of her visions by James in May of 1847, Ellen wrote to Joseph Bates, and concluded her explanations about her Midnight Cry vision of December 1844 and the Bridegroom vision of February 1845, saying, “I know the light I received came from God, it was not taught me by man. I knew not how to write so that others could read it till God gave me my visions.”⁸

James White, in his May 30, 1847, *A Word to the “Little Flock,”* like Ellen White, had been adamant that the information from Ellen White’s visions was not via “previous teaching or study,” i.e., merely mortal; it came without human mediation directly from God. He felt certain that she did not “obtain the sentiments’ of her visions ‘from previous teaching or study.’”⁹ Yet Joseph Bates, even after seeing Ellen Harmon in a visionary trance several times, in which supernatural,

miraculous phenomena were displayed, remained convinced that the factual content of her visions was determined by “themes in which she is most deeply interested,” from which she obtained “sentiments [which], in the main, are obtained from previous teaching, or study.” Here James is quoting from Joseph Bates’ original evaluation of Ellen Harmon:

I cannot endorse sister Ellen’s visions as being of divine inspiration, as you [James White] and she think them to be; yet I do not suspect the least shade of dishonesty in either of you in this matter. . . . I admit the possibility of my being mistaken. I think that what she and you regard as visions from the Lord, are only religious reveries, in which her imagination runs without control upon themes in which she is most deeply interested. While so absorbed in these reveries, she is lost

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The Harmon family Bible—the Big Bible—looked very similar to this one when it was first purchased. Both copies were bound by Nathan Sawyer in Portland, Maine.

Second Esdras had been in the Vulgate Bible, the Latin translation of the Bible by Saint Jerome, for hundreds of years, when the translators of the King James Bible translated it.

*to every thing around her. . . . Religion is her theme, and her reveries are religious. In either case, the sentiments, in the main, are obtained from previous teaching, or study. I do not by any means think her visions are like some from the devil.*¹⁰

Despite Ellen Harmon's self-perception, Joseph Bates' contrary view of her was correct. In her first vision, she paraphrased from 2 Esdras, to describe the heavenly geography that she "saw." Second Esdras had been in the Vulgate Bible, the Latin translation of the Bible by Saint Jerome, for hundreds of years, when the translators of the King James Bible translated it. An English version of 2 Esdras (sometimes entitled 4 Esdras in the Vulgate) was included in the 1611 KJV. This practice lasted for over two hundred years, including its inclusion in the 1822 version of Ellen Harmon's family Bible.

Neither James White, Ellen Harmon, nor many other ex-Millerites made a rigorous distinction between canonical books, pseudepigraphal books, and Apocryphal books. In fact, just as they concluded that Daniel and Revelation contained predictions concerning 508; 538; 1798; August 11, 1840;¹¹ 1843; October 22, 1844; the Papacy; and the USA, Adventist enthusiasts of 2 Esdras used it to predict specific American political events, with much the same success.¹² Over the years there has been some confusion in the nomenclature of these three genres of books. Thus, for purposes of

this essay, Old Testament canonical books are defined as those currently accepted in the Old Testament (OT) Protestant Bible; the Apocryphal books are defined as deutero-canonical books accepted in the OT Catholic Bible (in addition to those in the Protestant OT); the pseudepigraphal books are defined as those which are in the canons of other Christian churches but not in either the Protestant or Catholic canons. The main pseudepigraphal book that we will be referring to is 2 Esdras, which had been in many Vulgate manuscripts of the Bible, but was ruled non-biblical after the Council of Trent by Pope Clement VIII in the sixteenth century.

Ellen Harmon was a voracious reader of her family's KJV and eager to prove that her 1844 vision was biblically supported. Her audience requested evidence that what she "saw" was consistent with the Bible. Originally, she preached about her vision orally. But she was keen for the wider dissemination and publicity that publication would provide. Thus, shortly after their marriage in August of 1846, when Ellen White tasked James White with re-issuing her visions, he explained, "By the request of friends, it [her first vision] is republished in this little work, with *scripture* references, for the benefit of the little flock."¹³ His operational definition of "scripture" included both Apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings. James merely observed and documented Ellen Harmon's pseudepigraphal and Apocryphal

sources. Thus, he provided seventy-seven cross-references, approximately ten percent of which were from pseudepigraphal or apocryphal writings.¹⁴ Ronald Graybill located a seventy-eighth instance that James White missed.¹⁵ James White's guileless inclusion of these writings might have been unsophisticated, but it simply did not occur to him [or Ellen] to differentiate. They shared this common definition of "scripture" in dialogue with her readers. Her reading of the "scripture" included 2 Esdras, Wisdom of Solomon, and multiple other uninspired, non-canonical books printed in the Harmon family Bible.¹⁶ Just as Ellen Harmon had studied and been suffused with the "sentiments" of Matthew, Ezekiel, John, Isaiah, Luke, and Revelation, she had studied and been submersed in the apocalyptic "sentiments" of 2 Esdras. One only needs to compare Ellen White's "scripture"-jammed first vision with the writings of S.S. Snow, Joshua Himes, and Eli Jacobs,¹⁷ to see how much it had become normative practice to make a Second Coming argument largely consisting of uninterrupted column-inches of scriptural quotations and citations.

In 2002, Denis Fortin wrote a scholarly analysis of Ellen White's use of 2 Esdras and the Wisdom of Solomon for the *Adventist Review*.¹⁸ He analyzed the seven "scripture" references documented by James White and concluded that there are "clear similarities in wording in three cases; the other four references are more elusive."¹⁹

Let us examine one case of the four which Fortin characterized as demonstrating "clear similarities in wording."²⁰

Ellen Harmon's First Vision	2 Esdras 2:19
<p>About the Temple were "seven other mountains; on which grew roses and lilies, and I saw the little ones climb, or if they chose, use their little wings and fly to the top of the mountains, and pluck the never fading flowers."</p>	<p>"Fountains flowing with milk and honey, and seven mighty mountains, whereupon there grow roses and lilies, whereby I will fill thy children with joy.</p>

Thus, Ellen is seeing in her vision a unique combination of three items she'd previously read in 2 Esdras: (seven mountains; roses and lilies; and little ones/children). She combines these three themes in a tender evocation of little children plucking the roses and lilies. In addition, she adds elements from William Foy's vision to 2 Esdras. Foy saw "an innumerable multitude," of little beings, the "size of children ten years of age";²¹ while Ellen Harmon as well saw "an innumerable company of little ones" who may "use their little wings and fly to the top of the mountains, and pluck the never fading flowers."²²

The seven mountains that Esdras and Ellen Harmon saw occurred in other apocalyptic literature. Enoch²³ was the pseudepigraphal author whom Ellen Harmon reported seeing on another planet. Ostensibly, Enoch also saw seven mountains in his visions of the heavens. In 1 Enoch 18:6–10, Enoch sees seven mountains made of specific precious stones: "But the middle one [of which] reached up to heaven, like the throne of God, of alabaster, and the summit of the throne of sapphire." Another element that Ellen Harmon's first vision, 2 Esdras, and 1 Enoch all have in common is that, in the immediate context of these seven mountains, all three seers describe various types of lovely trees near the seven mountains, as well as the Tree of Life. Second Esdras 2:18–19 states, "I have sanctified and prepared for you twelve trees loaded with different fruits."²⁴ In 1 Enoch 24:1–2²⁵ (below) there is another example of the significance of the "midst" with reference to the seven mountains. The throne of God or the Temple of God, the Shekinah presence, is in Enoch and in Harmon located in "the midst of seven mountains."

1. I went from thence to another place, and saw a mountain of fire flashing both by day and night. I proceeded towards it; and perceived seven splendid mountains, which were all different from each other.
2. Their stones were brilliant and beautiful; all were brilliant and splendid to behold; and beautiful was their surface. Three mountains were towards the east, and strengthened by being placed one upon another; and three were towards the south, strengthened in a similar manner. There were likewise deep valleys, which did not approach each other. And the seventh mountain was in the midst of them. In length they all

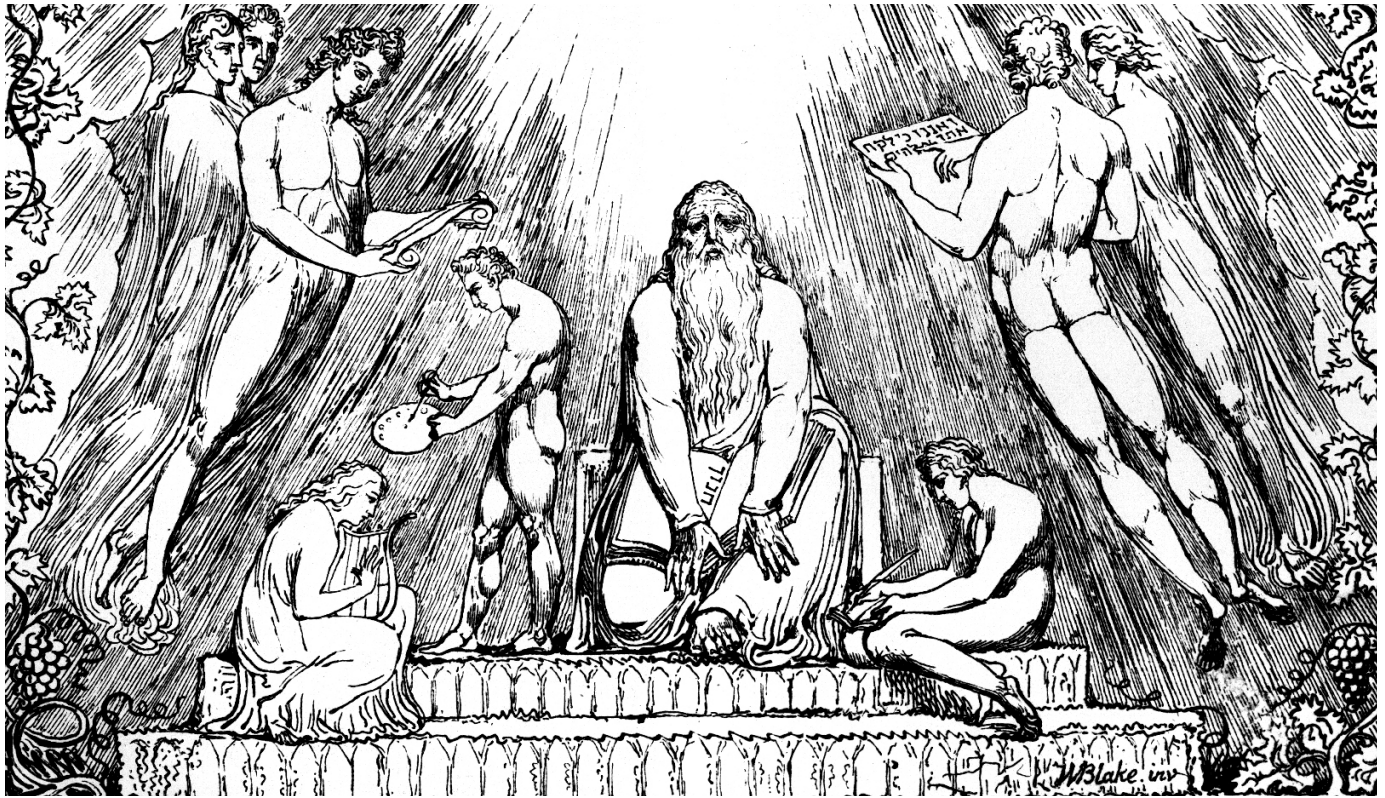


IMAGE SOURCE: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Blake_Enoch_Lithograph_1807.jpg

William Blake's depiction of Enoch

resembled the seat of a throne, and *odoriferous trees* surrounded them [emphasis added].

The fact that Ellen Harmon first immersed herself in pseudepigraphal writings, and then incorporated them into a description of what she saw in heaven, is illustrative of the naïve conception which most people have of “the Bible.” When people hear the expression, “the Bible says,” they naturally have their own Bible in mind. Therefore, it comes as a surprise that there presently exist at least ten contradictory definitions of “the Bible.” And this does not count numerous other historical definitions in multiple geographic areas of the world. For the Old Testament (OT) alone, the accessible and convenient Wikipedia article on the Canon has a spread-sheet comparison of ten different versions of the OT.²⁶ Given this welter of witnesses, how does one determine which is the “real” or “genuine” version of the Bible?

In practice, as just illustrated by the case of Ellen Harmon, an individual’s determination as to which of these ten contradictory versions of the OT is genuine is mainly an accident of geography, birth, tradition, and what one’s parents believed. In short, the individual virtually never makes a conscious, informed determination as to what he

believes is authentic, divinely inspired, canonical scripture. He absorbs it unconsciously from his sociological community. This was why Ellen Harmon, James White, and many other shut-door Adventists presumed that certain pseudepigraphal and Apocryphal books contained authoritative, divine revelation.

As Fortin states, James White had “a high view of the reliability of this book” [2 Esdras]; indeed, he equated its author with Ezekiel and John the Revelator.²⁷ White says, for example, speaking of God’s apocalyptic wrath, that “Ezekiel *saw it* in the men with ‘slaughter-weapons,’ . . . John *saw it* in the ‘seven last plagues’; while Esdras *saw it* in the famine, pestilence, and the sword.” Thus, James White believed equally in the *inspiration and historicity* of Ezekiel, John, and Esdras. “*The Bible* [James’ term, emphasis added] contains many descriptions of this soon expected day of wrath.”²⁸ Exactly. Like James White believed that Ellen Harmon saw heavenly visions, he believed Esdras saw events of the last days as did Ellen! And “the wise” should pay heed.

Both Ellen Harmon, Joseph Bates, and many other proto-Adventists shared James White’s evaluation of 2 Esdras. Joseph Bates, the “real Founder” of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,²⁹ was merely the most influential. He

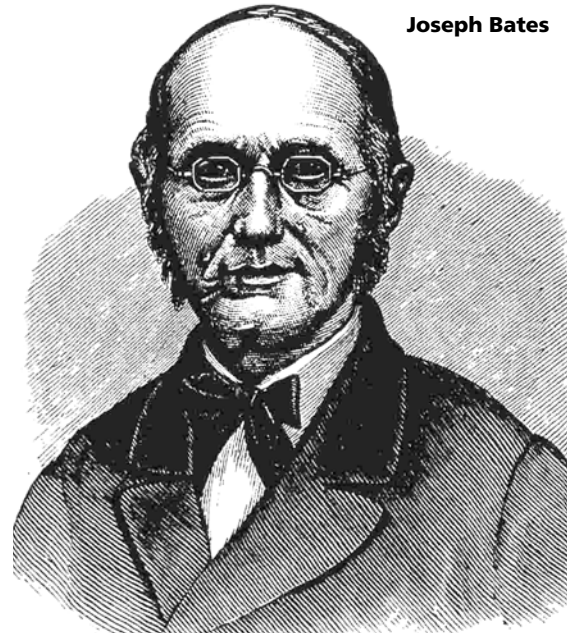
quoted it in several of his writings. In 1849, he asserted that 2 Esdras contained “very important truths for those that keep God’s law and commandments, they will probably benefit no other.” He then quoted 2 Esdras 8:37–38, where the visionary is supposedly instructed by God to “write all these things that thou hast seen in a book, and hide them; And teach them to the *wise* of the people.”³⁰

Ellen White echoed Bates in a vision she had on January 26, 1850, while visiting in Oswego, New York. In it she says,

I then saw the Word of God, pure and unadulterated, and that we must answer for the way we received the truth proclaimed from that Word. I saw that it had been a hammer to break the flinty heart in pieces, and a fire to consume the dross and tin, that the heart might be pure and holy. I saw that the Apocrypha was the hidden book, and that the wise of these last days should understand it.³¹

It is evident that Ellen White considered the book of 2 Esdras a source of important information for “the wise” of “these last days.” Thus, she refers to it at least six times in her first vision. It is ironic that, decades later, A. Graham Maxwell, a famous Adventist theologian, asserted that pseudepigraphal books were “*obviously inferior* [emphasis added] and unworthy of a place among the writings of the great Hebrew prophets.” He imputes to the term “hidden” a pejorative meaning which he says means that the persons applying this label intended it as a “disparaging term implying that they [pseudepigraphal writings] deserved to be withdrawn from circulation as spurious or heretical.”³²

Joseph Bates



Clearly, Ellen White, James White, Joseph Bates, and the intended audience for James White’s *A Word to the ‘Little Flock,’* emphatically did not believe that 2 Esdras was “obviously inferior,” “spurious or heretical.” To the contrary, pseudepigraphal and Apocryphal writings were often considered more prestigious, filled with esoteric significance that only the “wise virgins” of 1844 could understand. Thus, Ellen Harmon’s amalgamation of 2 Esdras into her “I saw” material is a fitting introduction into the Canon Debate.³³

In addition to parallels between 2 Esdras and Ellen Harmon’s December 1844 vision illustrated above, there are similarities between a William Foy vision and Ellen Harmon’s December 1844 vision that are acknowledged by White Estate officials.³⁴ Furthermore, this close paraphrase is surrounded with many other more diffuse similarities.³⁵

Books	Western tradition				Eastern Orthodox tradition			Oriental Orthodox tradition				Assyrian Eastern tradition
	Protestant [O 1]	Lutheran	Anglican	Roman Catholic	Greek Orthodox	Slavonic Orthodox	Georgian Orthodox	Armenian Apostolic [O 2]	Syriac Orthodox	Coptic Orthodox	Orthodox Tewahedo [O 3]	Assyrian Church of the East
2 Esdras 3–14 (4 Ezra) [O 7]	No – inc. in some eds.	No	No 2 Esdras (Apocrypha)	No 4 Esdras (inc. in some mss.)	No (Greek ms. lost) [O 8]	No 3 Esdras (appendix)	Yes (?) 3 Ezra	Yes 3 Ezra [O 6]	No (?) – inc. in some mss.	No – inc. in some mss.	Yes Ezra Sutu'el	No (?) – inc. in some mss.
2 Esdras 1–2; 15–16 (5 and 6 Ezra) [O 7]	No – inc. in some eds.	No	No (part of 2 Esdras apocryphon)	No (part of 4 Esdras)	No (Greek ms.) [O 9]	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Wikipedia chart showing the varying canonical status of 2 Esdras

This demonstrates that Ellen Harmon's assimilation of ancient pseudepigraphal and Apocryphal material into her "I saw" visions is not unique. Foy's vision shares with 2 Esdras and the Wisdom of Solomon a special status in a peculiar genre of material from which Ellen White derived her views and information. Ellen White conferred upon 2 Esdras, the Apocrypha in general, and William Foy in particular, genuine prophetic status. The White Estate has recently rehabilitated Foy and elevated him to the status of a genuine, "unknown" prophet who never forsook his prophetic calling, as had been asserted for over a century.³⁶ Given that he predated Ellen Harmon, that she states she frequently went in a sleigh to hear him, that she had in her possession his published vision and believed that he had been given a divine message which she inherited, the most likely explanation for the parallel below is that Ellen Harmon was dependent on Foy, in addition to 2 Esdras and Wisdom of Solomon.

as the 1,260 day/year persecution of the "pure" church; the historical account of how the Papacy transformed Sabbath to Sunday; and the Papacy's persecution of Sabbath keepers who had purportedly always existed. It is understandable why Joseph Bates described the visions as reveries. But she was insistent that what she wrote came from God. The visions were so dramatic to her. She was seeing heaven and all these things. But she struggled with how to write it. Could they both be right? ■



In the late 1970's, while he was a doctoral student at the University of Chicago,

Donald E. Casebolt wrote two articles for *Spectrum* on Ellen White. Then he

changed career paths, becoming a Nurse Practitioner with an MSN degree as family NP. Since retirement he has examined the Millerite journals of the 1840's to study the relationship between Ellen White and contemporary sources.

Footnotes:

1. The ascription of fictional names of authors to works. The actual author of a "falsely attributed" pseudepigraphal book impersonated some famous figure like Ezra, Enoch, or Moses and used this assumed identity to "author" a document hundreds of years after said figure died.

2. Jacob M. Myers, *I & II Esdras: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 126, 108–111. Emphasis added.

3. James S. White, *A Word to the "Little Flock"* (Brunswick, Maine: James White, 1847).

4. Donald R. McAdams, "Shifting Views of Inspiration: Ellen G. White Studies in the 1970s," *Spectrum* 10:4 (1980): 27–41.

5. Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, California: M&R Publications, 1982).

6. E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 1858.

7. Fred Veltman, "The Desire of Ages Project: The Conclusions." *Ministry Magazine* (1990): 11–15; "The Desire of Ages Project: The Data" *Ministry Magazine* (1990): 4–7.

8. Ellen G. White, "Manuscript Releases," *Letter to Joseph Bates*, Vol. 5. (Hagerstown, Maryland: EG White Estate, July 13, 1847), 95–98.

9. J. White, *Little Flock*, 28.

William Foy's Vision	Ellen Harmon's Vision
<p>With a lovely voice, the guide then spoke to me and said: "Those that eat of the fruit of this tree, return to earth no more."</p> <p>[Foy's guide is also Jesus in the form of a "mighty angel" at whose feet a countless multitude of saints and angels worship.]</p>	<p>I asked Jesus to let me eat of the fruit. He said not now: "Those who eat of the fruit of this land, go back to earth no more." [These words in both Foy & Harmon are at the end of their visions; Foy then finds himself "in this lonely vale of tears," Ellen returns to "things of earth look so dreary."]</p>

Ellen White also incorporated other material that she had been taught in her *first visions*: multiple and distinctive Millerite doctrines, such

10. Ibid., Emphasis added.
11. Eric Anderson, "The Millerite Use of Prophecy: A Case Study of a 'Striking Fulfilment,'" in Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987), 78–91.
12. Ronald D. Graybill, "Under the Triple Eagle: Early Adventist Use of the Apocrypha," *Adventist Heritage* 2:1 (1987): 27–31.
13. White, *Little Flock*, 13. Emphasis added.
14. Ibid., 19–26.
15. Graybill, "Under the Triple Eagle," 31
16. Denis Fortin, "Sixty-six Books or Eighty-one? Did Ellen White Recommend the Apocrypha?" *Adventist Review* (2002): 8–13.
17. S. S. Snow, "Behold, The Bridegroom Cometh; Go Ye Out to Meet Him," *The True Midnight Cry* (August 22, 1844); Joshua V. Himes, "The Advent Herald," *Advent Herald and Signs of the Times Reporter* (October 30, 1844): 8; Eli Jacobs, "The Advent Believers," *Western Midnight Cry!!!* (November 29, 1844): 1–2.
18. See <http://archives.adventistreview.org/2002-1513/story2.html> for a readily accessible version. Readers are strongly encouraged to scrutinize this prior to continuing.
19. Fortin, "Sixty-six Books"
20. Ibid.
21. William E. Foy, *The Christian Experience of William E. Foy: Together with the two visions he received Jan. and Feb. 1842*, with Introduction by J. N. Loughborough, (Portland, Maine: John and Charles Pearson, 2011), 21.
22. J. White, *Little Flock*, 23.
23. Some might even make an argument that Jude's use of Enoch legitimated it as authentic revelation. The footnote below is the source of the following explanation: "The Book of Enoch is considered to have been written by Enoch, the seventh from Adam. It is considered an apocryphal book as well as a part of the pseudepigrapha (literally means "falsely ascribed" is a collection of works supposedly written by a biblical character), although it is not a part of the canonical Apocrypha. Ten fragments of the Book of Enoch have been found at Qumran in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The book was believed to have been composed by Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah. It is generally believed that the Apostles and the writers of the New Testament were fully aware of the Book of Enoch, also called 1 Enoch. In fact, it is directly quoted in the Bible: Jude 1:14–15 "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, {15} To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."
24. Myers, *I & II Esdras*, 145.
25. <http://book-of-enoah.com/chapter-24/>.
26. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_canon.
27. Fortin, "Sixty-six Books"
28. White, *Little Flock*, 4. Emphasis added.
29. George Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review & Herald Publishing, 2004).
30. Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God* (New Bedford, Massachusetts: Benjamin Lindsey, 1849), 65. Emphasis added.
31. See Fortin, "Sixty-six Books" for original citation.
32. Graham Maxwell, "Can The Bible Be Trusted " *Signs of the Times* (1978): 18–19.
33. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders, Eds., *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002); Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007).
34. Tim Poirier, "Black Forerunner to Ellen White: William E. Foy," *Spectrum* 17:5 (1987).
35. Delbert W. Baker, *The Unknown Prophet: Before Ellen White, God used William Ellis Foy* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1987).
36. Ibid.; Benjamin Baker, "'They lived near the bridge where we went over,'" *Spectrum* 42:2 (2014): 45–51.

