

# Masuta Cu Nisip The Sand Box

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Translation Draft 51

Revised – December 1, 2015

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### Translator's Note

The opinions, explanations, and perspectives on Ellen G. White's claimed works and visions that have been presented in this translated paper are **those of the author's alone**, and not the translator's. For the translator's perspective on Ellen G. White and the various publications released under her name, please read:

- Eduard C. Hanganu (2015, January 13). "Ellen White and Her English Composition Skills"  
*Academia.edu*. <http://www.academia.edu/>.
- Eduard C. Hanganu (2015, January 13). "Ellen G. White's Writer Skills Summarized"  
*Academia.edu*. <http://www.academia.edu/>.
- Eduard C. Hanganu (2015, January 16). "Ellen G. White and Her Ghost Writer Book Shop"  
*Academia.edu*. <http://www.academia.edu/>.

# The Sand Box

## I. Introduction

God's condescension towards mankind and His adaptation to the limited human understanding of the language of the Scriptures is a theme that deserves special attention. The examples provided in this paper are only a small part of the visionary images (biblical, or from Ellen White's visions), that make sense only if we understand their didactic role, but that would seem ridiculous and sometimes even absurd if they were interpreted in a literal sense. The language of the visions is often childlike, especially because it is intended to attract simple people—children, and those who are intelligent enough to “lower” themselves to such language level in order to receive God's profound teachings. This apparently puerile language is calculated to awaken through the imagination the deepest thoughts in those who approach the visions after they have left behind their prejudices.

## II. Prophetic Visions and Their Didactic Language

The understanding of the biblical visions is often corrupted through a literalist perception about the role of the images. The prophet is often seen as a shaman who falls into a trance after which his spirit leaves the world travelling into the supernatural from where it returns into the prophet's body bringing to his audience otherworldly news. Indeed, from a subjective perspective, the prophet could perceive his experience as a journey, which is reflected in expressions such as “the spirit lifted me up...and brought me ...” (Ez. 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5), or “caught up to the third heaven” (2 Cor. 12:1). For this reason, the physical change specific to the prophet in the vision is called “soul rapture” in some Bible translations (e.g. Acts 10: 10; 11:5; 22:17 in the Romanian *Cornilescu* Bible), although in the Greek original text the word used is *ékstasis* (stupor, bafflement, “trance”). In fact, all the events occur in the visionary's mind (Da. 4; 10, 13; 7:15; 8:2), like in a dream. There are no actual visionary journeys in space. The visionary experience, however, is so perfectly constructed, through God's power, that the subject, if he is alone, cannot distinguish the vision from the reality (“whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell” —2 Cor. 12:1).

Still, regardless of the method through which the prophet is made an eyewitness to the realities unseen by those in his presence, the essential question is whether the prophet is shown the physical reality of the heavenly and future things as if he took pictures with a video camera, or rather he is presented an appearance of the heavenly and future realities in culturally adapted scenarios with a didactic and spiritual purpose, without the intent to exactly inform us about the physical realities as are now above or will be in the future.

After the examination of an adequate number of biblical visions and of the visions of two modern non-canonical prophets, William Foy and Ellen White, I have reached the conclusion that the images described by those visionaries have, rather, a didactic role, and that God did not intend to inform us about the exact design of the heavenly realities; we do not receive through the visions real (factual) information about the urban design, topography, architecture, furniture, and the heavenly musical instruments. The images in the visions are very intelligent and esthetic constructions, with great power to influence the reader's mind, but they are but simple didactic

material with a specific spiritual message, and they should not be understood as an exact reflection of the reality. Try to answer questions such as these:

- Did the Spirit truly take Ezekiel to Jerusalem? Did He actually take Ezekiel by his hair and transport him there through the skies, or He only made him feel that way? (Ez 8:3).
- Did Ezekiel enter in fact into the room where the Hebrew princes were worshiping idols? (Ez. 8:9-11)? If he entered, how is it that they did not see him? And if the prophet was transported only spiritually there, what need did he have to go inside through the door? (Ez. 8:7-8).
- Are, indeed, the cherubim seen by Ezekiel (Ez. 1) intelligent creatures with animal shapes or rather through those symbolic images a spiritual truth was conveyed to us? If the images are an exact replica of the heavenly cherubim, how did it happen that John saw them different than Ezekiel? (Re. 4).
- Is it true that the Heavenly Christ has in his mouth a sword? (Re. 1 and 19).
- Will the Lord arrive [at his Second Coming] on a white horse with a garment stained with blood (Re. 19) or on a white cloud, adorned in brightness and with a sickle in His hand (Re 14)?
- Have there been in fact a pregnant woman (Re. 12:2) and a red dragon in heaven (Re 12:3)?
- Is there in reality a slaughtered lamb at God's throne, as John clearly saw and described him (Re. 5)?
- Do in fact the heavenly beings offer incense and play on Greek lyres (Re. 5)?
- Are there, indeed, souls of martyrs that sleep somewhere under an altar in the universe (Re. 6) and wake up from time to time to ask for revenge?
- Do the angels have, in truth, trumpets and wings? What could they do with their wings when they cross the cosmic space? And if they are spiritual beings, to what purpose would serve them some wings that flap in the air?

We could ask a similar set of questions about Ellen White's visions:

- Will the evil ones, indeed, come with swords in hands to seek for the believers in the last conflict?
- Will real chains fall off the slaves at the coming of the Lord? It is true that Ellen White saw this in a vision, just as John saw that the dragon was bound in chains in Re. 20—but those chains are certainly symbolical, just like the bottomless pit into which the dragon is cast.

- Will the redeemed be taken into heaven in cloud chariots with winged and intelligent wheels, or in chariots of fire with fire horses, as in the visions Elisha and William Foy had? The fastest and safest space ships could not insure such a journey, and much less some carriages, even of fire. Some are inclined to see in these images science fiction space crafts, but we can be sure that those who saw the visions told us exactly what they saw. Our task is to decode the spiritual message [from those visions], not to interpret the visions into modern language and convert the antique images into modern space science realities.
- Do the angels, have, in reality, gold badges with which they identify themselves at the gates of the Heavenly City? Would it not be possible for those badges to be forged by the “Mafioso” of the other angels exiled on the Earth?
- Does the tree of life have indeed two real trunks on either side of the river?

The image of the Tree of Life is developed in Ellen White’s vision, but it is derived from Re. 22:2 which, in turn, has its source in Ez. 47:12, where there are fruit trees on the either side of the river of life. In a literal translation, John’s statement is: “...on either side of the river there is *tree* of life,” just like in Ezekiel’s Hebrew, where the translators knew that the term *‘ēṣ* (tree) is a collective singular [noun] and is correctly translated through a plural (trees) into the Romanian [or English] language.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, few translations have rendered this expression in the plural, as it should have been rendered. Most translations have preferred the singular with the definite article, obviously under the influence of the scene in Genesis 3. We must notice, though, that the Divine inspiration adapted itself to the popular understanding (in Ellen White’s vision case). If the translation (even wrong) has created an image of a tree with two trunks and two roots on either bank of the river of life, the Lord used even such an insignificant mistake in order to describe a heavenly reality. He was not interested to reveal to us the exact physical reality, but only to provide us with a spiritual lesson.

This “copied” aspect of the revelation and inspiration is very interesting due to the fact that there is enough evidence that the Lord has used (= “copied”) sometimes images even from uninspired sources. It is very possible that the new paradise should have things in common with the first paradise, but because Moses does not describe the tree of life, and because the image in Revelation depends a lot on the vision in Ezekiel, the result is that this image, beyond the exact physical reality, is intended to provide spiritual lessons. These observations should prepare us to better understand the language of the so very earthly “structure” of the heavenly sanctuary that is present in biblical and extra-biblical visions.

### III. The Image of the Heavenly Sanctuary in the Biblical Visions

How does God’s heavenly temple look? Moses does not describe it. The pattern he had received on the mountain was just the blueprint of the sanctuary that was going to be built (Ex.

25:40) and not a replica of the heavenly sanctuary, just as David received a blueprint for what Solomon was going to build (1 Cr. 28:11-12). The heavenly temple is mentioned in many places in the Old Testament, but never described. When reference is made to the heavenly temple, the building is seen as the habitat (residence or palace) of the King of Kings, not as a separate and temporary structure built for the New Covenant ceremonies.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the only book that interprets explicitly some things from the Mosaic sanctuary typology, the heavenly sanctuary is also not described. It is referred to again and again, and named “the true tabernacle,” and “that tent great and more perfect.” It is also often named with the neuter plural, *τὰ ἅγια*, *ta hághia*, which defined either the Mosaic sanctuary as a whole (He. 8:2), or any of the two sacred rooms (depending on the context).

In Daniel’s visions, the heavenly sanctuary is never described. Revelation, however, has detailed visions of the sanctuary above. For instance, in a metaphor from Re. 3:12, God’s temple associated with the New Jerusalem has for interior columns the victorious Christians. In 7:15, the heavenly temple, the place of God’s throne, is compared with a tent in which God will dwell with a great multitude of the survivors of the “time of trial,” and from the context it results that this [the temple] is an eternal place. In 11:1-2, John sees God’s temple, the altar with the faithful worshippers (Israel’s inner court) and the outer court (the “gentile” court), as if this were a copy of Herod’s temple. The courts and what is essential in relation to them are described in detail, but nothing is said about the design of the temple itself. In 11:19 and 15:5 the heavenly temple or “the tent of the covenant” (cf. Nu. 17:7-8; 2 Cor. 24:6) opens, leaving to view the Ark of the Covenant. In 14:15, 17; 15:6; 16:1, 17 the heavenly temple is the center of the angels’ activities and of God’s throne associated with the altar (Re. 16:7), while the Divine Judgment is executed through agents sent from inside the temple.

Revelation, however, includes scenes that relate to the temple even in visions where the temple is not mentioned. Jesus appears in priestly garments with his chest tied in a sash like the Aaronic priests (ch. 1). Persons, objects, and scenes inside the heavenly sanctuary are also described, all in a highly symbolic language: seven lamps/the candlestick (symbol of the Holy Spirit – 4:5); the guarding cherubim (4:6 = the living creatures, like in Ezekiel) ; God’s throne (4:2-4) ; the sacrificial lamb (5:6); the incense, the liturgical music (5:8 ; 8:3-4). There is also the altar of burnt offerings where the martyrs were sacrificed like their Lord (6:9-11), while in chapter eight there are the altar of incense, the incense and the coals, an angel-priest armed with the censer, and seven angel-priests with shophars (ram horns). In Revelation chapters 14-15 the seven angel-priests appear again, this time with wrath bowls, after the sanctuary service has ceased and the work of intercession has ended (Re. 15:8).

It is worth noting that in Revelation chapter four there is no heavenly curtain between the candlestick (the seven lamps) and the throne (ark). In chapter eight, also, there is no curtain or dividing wall between the altar of incense and the Divine throne. In the earthly sanctuary, the presence of the curtain was instructive, in order to indicate the notion of separation between man and God—the forbidden access (Ex 19:12 ; Lev 16:1-2)—and also the notion of access through the atoning blood. In the New Covenant, however, we are given full spiritual access through Jesus who sits at His Father’s right hand (Heb 4:16; 10:19-22), as in the sanctuary above there is no separation between God and the heavenly citizens. In Revelation, Jesus (The Lamb) has a

strong connection with God's throne, while the cherubim and the 24 elders are around the throne. Nothing hides the Father's face from the servant angels (Mt.18 :10).

#### IV. The City-Sanctuary

When he described the interior of the City in Re. 21:22, John stated that he did not see any temple in it because God and the Lamb are the Sanctuary of the New Jerusalem, and that the city itself is "the tabernacle of God with men." (21:3). The City is described as having the shape of the perfect cube of the Most Holy Place (Re. 21:16; 1K 6:20) with 12 foundations of precious stones similar to the precious stones on the High Priest's breastplate (Re. 21:19-20; Ex. 28:17-20). God's tent is His dwelling together with the holy beings (Re. 13:6).

This complete identification of the city with the sanctuary and of the sanctuary with the city teaches us, among other things, that in God's Kingdom above now and in the future there is no distinction between "city" (civil or political space) and "temple" (religious or church space), between the secular and the sacred. Nothing is profane there. The saved ones are at the same time "priests and kings" (Re. 20:6) while their Jesus is the High Priest and the King of Kings (Ps. 110:4).

In his fundamental document written in 1834, William Miller comes very close to this theological solution:<sup>2</sup>

"After Zorobabel built the second temple, there was no word from the prophets or apostles that a third temple would ever be built ; with the exception of the one that *comes down from heaven*, a spiritual one, which is *the mother of all* (Hebrew and Non-Hebrew) and which is free [Gal 4 :26]. *When that Jerusalem is made perfect*,<sup>3</sup> then we will be cleansed and made justified." [Further, he refers to Phil 3 :20,21] (my emphasis).

Owen R. Loomis Crosier,<sup>4</sup> who in 1846 wrote the first article of Seventh-day Adventist theology on the sanctuary theme in Daniel 8 ;14, has defended the same perspective and identified the heavenly temple with the heavenly City—in spite of his inconsistencies on the topic :

"When the Savior went to Jerusalem and announced that "your **house** is left unto you **desolate**," the disciples came to Him in order to show Him the **temple's buildings** [...] But *in order to comfort and teach them*, He said, "In **My Father's house there are many abodes**." In 14 :1-3. Standing, as it were, on the dividing line **between the typical and antitypical covenants**, after He had just declared the House of the first covenant as no more valid and predicted its destruction, how natural it was afterwards to point to the disciples the **sanctuary of the new covenant**, to which their affections and interests were going to become attached, just as they had been attached to the first." (my emphasis).

Three months later, in the same year, captain Joseph Bates,<sup>5</sup> another Adventist pioneer, wrote an enthusiastic pamphlet, after reading Crosier's article. Note Bates's rhetorical apologetic :

Well, someone would say, do you mean to say that this City is at the same time the sanctuary ? If you allowed the Bible testimony to speak, you will have to believe that this is so [...].

"**Unto 2300 days, and then the sanctuary will be cleansed.**" Daniel 8:14. This is, therefore, as I understand, the same "heavenly sanctuary, the New Jerusalem, The Paradise of God." [...] O, Lord, give us the truth! [...] This is, then, "The City of Gold," spacious and glorious, "The New Jerusalem," "The

Heavenly Sanctuary,” “The Bride of the Lamb;” “The Mother of Us All,” “The Paradise of God ;” the capital of the ETERNAL kingdom, of our Lord who is coming, ready to descend “from the third heaven.”

The idea to identify the heavenly sanctuary (as God’s residence) with the City dawned on me almost 30 years ago when I was memorizing Revelation, but, although the solution was attractive and convincing, I rejected it because at that time I did not have enough experience in the interpretation of the Bible and Ellen White’s writings. Moreover, my conscience was too sensitive concerning the collective Adventist perception and the historical formulation of the inherited doctrine. The Spirit of Prophecy’s affirmations, especially, constituted for me the final word—the final authority in matters of Biblical understanding. For this reason, because our apologetics is *linked* with some of Ellen White’s statements, it is necessary to understand as well as possible what specifically did Ellen White *see* in her visions.

## V. The Heavenly Sanctuaries in Ellen White’s Visions

As the Revelation has different visions of the temple (temples?) in heaven, Ellen White’s writings present the same situation, which we, the Adventists, have not examined enough. Let’s perform, at least, this analytical exercise in the identification and the description of the sacred space in heaven:

### 1. The Postmillennial Temple Outside the City

In *Early Writings*,<sup>6</sup> Ellen White narrates her first adolescent extatic vision (Dec. 1844). The vision reveals symbolic images such as the path of the Adventists towards the heavenly City, a path lifted above the world, ever higher and narrower, with many events also seen in figurative images.

Ellen White saw the Holy City descending on the earth after the millenium, while *outside the City*, at an impressive distance, she saw the *temple* on the Mount Zion, surrounded by other seven mountains (p.19) where only the 144,000 enter. The temple is described as being supported on seven posts (pillars or interior columns?), like the Wisdom House (Pr 9:1). The posts were of “transparent gold,” encrusted with pearls, and in the temple she saw tables of stone with the names of the 144,000 engraved in gold, as a fulfillment of the promise in Re. 3:12.

The description of the temple combines images from Revelation 7 and 15. The temple in which serves “the great multitude” of the 144,000 corresponds to the image in Re 7 :15, but the fact that it is placed outside the city and that the Mount Zion appears outside the City does not correspond to the historical reality, where Jerusalem and Mount Zion were identical. Mount Zion and the unique privileges of the 144,000 appear in Re 15 :1-5, and that also justifies the promise that the redeemed will be “priests and kings.” At the same time, this scene avoids the conflict between the statement in Re. 21:22 (“in the City I saw no temple”) and the one in Re. 7:15 (“they will serve day and night in His temple”), presenting the temple as a place outside the City, on Mount Zion.

The above-mentioned vision is complex because The One who gave Ellen Harmon (White) the vision used, for the same didactic purpose, images modified from the book of



Zechariah (14:40) and also from the Pseudo-Enoch and Pseudo-Ezra books.<sup>7</sup> The vision also combines images from Isaiah 65:21-23, describing the shining abodes of the saints outside the City—silver houses supported on four pillars incusted with pearls having on the inside shelves of gold for crowns and surrounded by gardens cultivated by their owners.

Both the temple image, as also the entire vision, are not intended to inform us about the present or the future physical heavenly reality. The vision was not given in order to make known the geography of the renewed planet or the topography of the City and the temple in order for us to know how would the saints be dressed and adorned, in what dwellings they would live, or exactly what fruits they would eat. The location of the temple and its description have no other relevance than to excite our imagination with the topic of God's rewards, and to draw our attention to the study of those biblical passages to which the scenes refer.

The first detail in the vision that helped me understand that Ellen Harmon was not shown the reality as it is, was her statement about the children seen on the new earth who had red rims on the margins of their white garments. In the vision, this decoration is explained as a distinctive feature of the martyrs. These children, then, are martyr children, redeemed through the resurrection. Like the Bible, Ellen Harmon-White's visions show that the resurrection of the martyrs will take place at Jesus's Second Coming, before the millenium, while the vision of the children with the red rims refers to the time after the end of the millenium. It follows, then, that those children have a real age of at least 1000 years; how could they still be children? Does the resurrection imply a growth stagnation? Ellen White shows that, on the contrary, even the adults will grow during the millenium up to Adam's original stature (see GC 644). These details opened my eyes to realize that, at least in this vision, Ellen Harmon did not see the actual image of the new earth, but some scenes with a didactic role, designed in an impressive manner *especially for spiritual teaching*. The children were present there in order to teach us that there will also be children on the new earth and that some were or will be martyrs. Even the adults should probably learn something from this.

The same is the case with the sanctuary in this vision. It has a didactic purpose, and it is important to understand the lesson that it teaches us—not the exact physical reality—even if we have the right to visualize it as such and to theologize it using the dramatic language of the earthly sanctuary and the pictorial, symbolic language of the visions. It is, however, always necessary to be aware of the distinction between the figurative and literal language. When the Christians began to understand Jesus's eucharistic offer (“This is *My* body.. ; this is *My* blood,”) as if He had performed the transsubstantiation miracle, the Gospel ceased, and the age of holy blasphemies began. It would be exaggerated and unjust to state that the literalization of the heavenly sanctuary would also be a blasphemy or a heresy, but in any case it is a theological error, a fundamental error of Bible reading, that creates insurmountable and unnecessary hermeneutical problems.

At the date of the vision described above, the Sanctuary Doctrine was not known to Ellen White. Three Adventist leaders (the young teacher O.R.L. Crosier, the farmer Hiram Edson, and doctor Franklin B. Hahn) had begun to study the prophecy in Daniel 8:14 in the light of the typology in Lev 16, and were going to publish their study in *Day Star Extra*, on February 7,

1846. This study proved to be instructive for our pioneers, including Ellen Harmon-White, who read it and recommended it to all.

## 2. The Bipartite Heavenly Temple (with two rooms)

In February 1845, Ellen Harmon<sup>8</sup> had a vision that illustrated the Millerite experience that culminated with the time in October 1844. The center of this vision was the throne of the Father and the Son (one single throne) surrounded in brightness. Before the throne there were three kinds of worshipers: 1. The Millerite Adventists; 2. The churches out of which these came; and 3. The secular world. However, she saw them divided into two groups: some were “bowed before the throne, deeply interested,” while others “stood up disinterested and careless.” The Millerite message (“the Midnight Cry”) was represented in the vision as a light that had come from God but which few had received.

In this vision, Ellen Harmon saw the Father standing up from His throne as in the Daniel 7 image) and climbing into a chariot of fire, beyond the curtain, and sitting down in the Most Holy Place. Jesus, together with many of the worshipers also stood. He led them a certain distance towards the curtain, while they were following Him with their eyes, while the people that were present in the Holy Place were left in darkness. Before He went to the Father in the Most Holy Place, Jesus ordered those who followed Him: “Wait here—I am going to my Father *to receive the kingdom* [see Lu. 19:20; Da. 7:14]; keep your garments spotless, and in a little while I will *return from the wedding* [Lu. 12:36] and receive you to myself.”

Jesus’s entrance into the Most Holy Place is described in a language similar to the one in Da 7:9, 13. There, Ellen saw Jesus as High Priest, having at the border of his priestly garments bells and pomegranates. From there, in the Father’s name, Jesus was sending the Holy Spirit to those who had stood up with Him. There were some who had not stood up with Jesus, and continued to worship there [in the Holy Place] without being aware of the fact that He had gone to another place. These people represented the Adventist brothers (“the first day” Millerites) who had already begun to reject the message of Jesus’s special work after 1844. These were also waiting for The Spirit, but Satan, who was sitting before them, near the throne that was left now unoccupied, was attempting to play God’s part: while these were praying, he gave them his unholy spirit with “a lot of light and power,” but without the fruits of the Holy Spirit (love, joy, and peace).

The didactic purpose of the vision is easy to understand in its historical context. To what degree, however, does this vision describe physical realities in heaven? In the first place, it is obvious that the people, either worshipping or indifferent, are not physically present in the heavenly temple. Satan would have even less access there. The notion of God’s throne in the Holy Place does not match the type at all. The throne is present here only for a didactic purpose. In Da 7, Ez 1, etc., the throne and the divine chariot are the same object, while in this vision they are different, in order to impress upon the Millerites Satan’s deceptive work after 1844. In this vision, only Jesus goes behind the curtain, but in another place Ellen White saw also the believers following Him into the Most Holy Place (EW 247, 254). But how could the disinterested and careless ones enter into the Holy Place? It appears that in illustrations, parables, and visions, all impossible barriers are transcended for a didactic purpose. As in another of Ellen

White's visions about the sanctuary, Jesus is attired here in a garment with bells and pomegranates at the rim in order to suggest His Office as High Priest. This detail, however, does not fit with the simple white garments that the High Priest puts on when he enters into the Most Holy Place. The most important question is: if all these details make sense when we understand the didactic purpose of the vision, but become contradictory and even absurd when we take them in a literal sense as they have been seen, why are we insisting on the idea that the heavenly sanctuary has two physical compartments?

In *Early Writings*,<sup>9</sup> E. G. White describes a new vision received and published in 1847. The following details are significant for our research:

- Ellen White saw an angel who, flying fast, lifted her up from the Earth and took her into the heavenly city.
- In the city she saw a temple that had at its entrance a *door*, before the *first curtain*.
- She described the sanctuary as being identical with the Mosaic tabernacle, with two compartments, when she used the expressions “the first curtain,” and “the second curtain” (according to the pattern in Heb 9 :2).
- In the *Holy Place*, she saw an altar of incense, a lampstand with seven lamps, and the table of the showbread.
- In the *Most Holy Place*, she saw an ark plated with gold and protected by two cherubim (gold angels), with their wings spread and their faces looking towards the ark.
- Between the cherubim, on the lid of the heavenly ark, she saw a *gold censer*.
- Above the ark she saw an extraordinary brightness in the shape of a divine throne.
- Near the ark she saw Jesus, presenting to the Father the prayers of the believers, *together with the smoke of the incense from the censer*.
- In the ark, she saw the gold bowl with manna, Aaron's budded staff, and the stone tablets, according to the description in Heb 9.
- The tables of the Decalogue appeared overlapped, like a closed book, but she saw Jesus opening them and pointing to the ten commandments written with God's finger.
- She saw the Decalogue's commandments, four on one table, and six on the other one.
- She saw the first four commandments shining brighter than the other (six), and the fourth commandment, circled with a ring of light, shining more than all the other commandments.

- Ellen White could read the commandments, which means that she saw them written in English, and in other vision she read HOLINESS on Enoch's heavenly diadem.

She ended her description with a spiritual lesson about the importance and value of the Sabbath, both in the covenant context and also in the context of the final eschatological test, and underlined the inconsistency of the Sunday interpretations. The vision indicates, therefore, its didactic purpose. Its intent was not to inform the believers exactly how the sanctuary and its furniture looked, but had the same intent as the vision in Re.11:19 that had led the brethren J. Bates and H. Edson to the conviction of the Sabbath's actual reality even before the White family adopted the Biblical Sabbath.

At the same time, the very terrestrial details of the heavenly sanctuary were shown in order to encourage the study of the sanctuary typology, but in no case in order for us to get trapped on the image of a heavenly sanctuary in the shape of the earthly sanctuary that would only be the shadow of the shadow – no matter how glorious. If it is imperative for us to believe that there are physical compartments in the heavenly sanctuary with functions similar to the earthly ones, then why only the inner curtain is a sure physical reality in heaven? Or are they real in a physical sense - the lampstand, the altar, the ark (as in Revelation), the table with the bread loaves, the censer with the incense, the incense ritual that makes our prayers effective, the angels of solid gold at the ends of the ark's cover, Aaron's magic staff, and the manna bowl? Functional pieces, or museum pieces?

The idea of a heavenly museum does not trouble me (I would also like to take there some beloved old things!), but the sanctuary described in this vision is not a museum, but a space where liturgical work is performed. There, incense is either burned, or is not burned. The discrepancy between the didactic model seen by Ellen White and the heavenly physical reality is spectacular and eloquent. If from other visions we find out that the heavenly temple is full with the presence of live angels, in this vision no other beings are present there except Jesus and the visionary. Two angels (cherubim), indeed, are present in the Most Holy Place, but they are made of transparent gold (see Re 21:21 ; Ex 25:18). Is this truly how the heavenly reality looks? Jesus ministering in a deserted sanctuary?

It is obvious that the ark's presence in the sanctuary is instructive, even if nobody opens the box and the tablets in order to put his finger on Christianity's wound. John also saw the ark in the heavenly temple, among the thunders on Mount Sinai (Re. 11:10;15:5). Would the vision, however, intend to teach us that there exists a physical ark in heaven, with stone tablets? What would be its use? So that the gold cherubim would have what to look down on? Or rather so that the angels should know that they should not yoke their neighbor's ox or covet married women?

What are the manna bowl and Aaron's staff doing there? Manna reminds us of God's continuous miracle to strengthen the Sabbath commandment (Ex.16; Nu. 11), just like the showbread emphasizes the Sabbath (Lev. 24:8 ; 1 Cr. 9:32). Aaron's staff reminds us of Korah's rebellion against Moses and Aaron, a forecast of Antichrist's development in the Historical Church (Nu 17). On the same occasion, Aaron made atonement with the censer, separating the repentant from the unrepentant (Nu. 16:47). It is obvious that the presence of those elements in

the vision is instructive. On the other hand, however, I do not suspect their real presence in the heavenly ark.

And, in all probability, the manna and the staff did not exist even in the earthly ark. In spite of the statement in Hebrews 9:4, the Mosaic narrative shows that the vessel with the manna was placed “in front of the (ark) of the testimony” (Ex. 16:34), an expression that indicates a spiritual connection with the Decalogue, but places the bowl outside the ark, possibly even outside the Most Holy Place (Ex. 30:36 ; 40:5 ; Nu. 18:2). Also, the blossomed staff was placed “before the testimony” (Nu. 17:19, 22, 25-26), and not in the ark. The old biblical records attest that in the ark “there were only the tablets of the Testimony” (1K 8:9 ; 2 Cr 5:10).

For a long time, I could not explain that incorrect description in Hebrews 9. And that was not due to my expectation for inerrancy because for some time already I had had the understanding through my research that the inspired writers can err concerning the human aspects of the message delivery, even if the message proper is never wrong. I wonder, however, how could an ancient Hebrew writer, who probably knew enough things about the temple, make such statements, even if he had not been inspired?

It is very probable that this was a Rabbinic teaching because it has been preserved until now among the Jewish people.<sup>10</sup> The apostle’s statements about the ark’s contents were not personal inventions, but part of his rabbinical education. He did not feel the need to confront these details seriously with the Bible, while direct knowledge from priestly sources was not possible because even during the Babylonian exile there was no more an ark in the temple – as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Jeremiah (3:16). I exclude the possibility that Moses and the chroniclers could have erred in their repeated affirmations, and there is no evidence that those texts had been copied with errors. The most reasonable explanation is that, rather, the epistle’s author made a mistake about this detail when he adopted unverified information. In his hurry to transmit his evangelic message to the Judaic Christians, he considered these details unimportant: “of which we cannot now speak particularly.” (Heb 9:5ff.).<sup>11</sup>

To conclude, the fact that such details appear in Ellen White’s vision does not represent a confirmation of the information in Hebrews about the bowl with the manna and about Aaron’s staff in the above or below temples. The use of the images in Ellen White’s vision has the intent to send the believer to the study of the Letter to the Hebrews and of the Pentateuch in order to discover in the Bible the purpose of the Sanctuary and of the Decalogue.<sup>12</sup>

All the details, therefore, help us to understand that it was not intended for us to be informed concerning the physical reality of the things in heaven or on the New Earth, but that all these things have *in the first place*, if not even exclusively, a spiritual message with a didactic role. We do not deny the notion of heavenly physical reality, present or future. There must be above and before us concrete, physical realities because God did not create in the universe only spirits and fields. He created in the beginning a material paradise, and the fact that Heaven is described in a material language, even if not in an exact manner, still indicates that the Kingdom we are waiting for is not an abstract, phantomatic, or “spiritual” world, but a very concrete, although entirely supermundane, world. God Himself manifests in a physical fashion before His children in heaven, not like an invisible spirit, or like a light flow without body (Mt. 18:10 ; Re.

22:4 ; Gn. 1:27).<sup>13</sup> For this reason, even the notion of a heavenly temple or city as God's "dwelling with the people," makes sense, without the need for the details to inform the readers about the exact form of the heavenly reality.

### 3. A Symbolic Vision of the Most Holy Place

In another vision (January 5, 1849),<sup>14</sup> Ellen White was "taken off" to the Most Holy Place above, where she saw Jesus who still interceded for "Israel." The image of the "flight," and the name "Israel," draw our attention to the fact that the vision must be symbolic. Ellen White was not referring to the Jews when she was speaking this way, but was using the known language in Re 7 because the vision refers to the "sealing" topic. We are alerted from the beginning through the symbols employed that the prophetic Inspiration does not intend to describe the physical heavenly reality. The Sanctuary in this vision is, most probably, outside the City. Although she does not announce from the beginning, Ellen White states later, after she had described the scene in the sanctuary: "Then my attending angel directed me to the City again."

Ellen White sees Jesus in the Most Holy Place attired as High Priest, which is inferred from the bells and pomegranates that hang on the hem of His mantle (Ex 28 :31-34 ; 39 :25-26). Right here, however, occurs the intentional dissonance between typology and vision because in the sanctuary typology, when the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place, he would take off his pontifical garment (Lv 16 :3-4, 23-24), and would minister in a simple linen tunic, while in this vision Jesus is attired in the High Priest mantle.<sup>15</sup> If the fact that the High Priest took off the glorious garment and put on the white linen garments represents the purity of the incarnation and the humility of Jesus's sacrifice, in harmony with the typology in Hebrews 9 where the Most Holy Place is the (heavenly) sanctuary of the New Covenant while the Day of Atonement prefigures the real atonement made by Jesus at the Cross, followed by His ascension, it means that the judgment made by God at the Cross that brings us full access into the Most Holy Place is just the first application of the symbolism of the Day of Atonement, while Ellen White's vision refers to another [second] application. She states that she was taken in vision into the Most Holy Place. She does not describe the first compartment, as in the previous vision, and she does not even mention it as the passage towards the Most Holy Place. Everything is focussed on the Most Holy Place as if this were the only compartment that existed.

Jesus's work in the Most Holy Place is described in Judgment terms,<sup>16</sup> while the sealing scene in Re 7 where the 144,000 receive the seal of God (the Seventh-day Sabbath) is seen in this context of the Final Judgment, as a polarization of the believers after the heavenly test. In this vision, the emphasis is placed on the despair of those who knew the truth but abandoned God's Sabbath and trampled it under their feet.

As in other visions about the sanctuary, Ellen White is shown the significance of this vision, not in terms of a precise localization of the sanctuary and a description of its compartments, but in order to emphasize the special Adventist message: obedience to God's commandments, including the Sabbath commandment. After she refers to the Sabbath and the sealing during the Judgment that Jesus does in the sanctuary, Ellen White continues the vision with her travels to other worlds in the universe. After she describes in a few lines one of those visited worlds, she states that, at her curious question about the reason for the incomparable

happiness and brightness of that world's inhabitants (big and small), the answer was: "We lived in strict obedience to God's commandments, and did not fall into disobedience as those on the Earth." As evidence, she saw there another tree of life and also a tree of the knowledge of good and evil out of which no inhabitant had dared to eat.

The vision continued with a visit to another planet that had seven natural satellites ("moons"). Unfortunately, some of her contemporaries drew the conclusion that she had seen a planet from our solar system (Saturn, for example, was known to have seven satellites).<sup>17</sup> However, she did not make such an affirmation, and neither did she know such astronomical realities at that time. This interpretation is an example of an erroneous application of a vision because God had not given the vision in order to inform us about the spatial localization of that world, to find out that there are planets with more satellites (astronomy already knew this fact!), or in order for us to be able to identify the planet, but for a spiritual, didactic purpose. At the same time, this detail helped captain J. Bates, who had some knowledge of astronomy, to accept Ellen White's inspiration.

In her vision, EGW met Enoch on that planet, the one taken to heaven without tasting death. "The good elder" was holding in his right hand a palm branch that had on its leaves inscribed (in English, of course) the word: VICTORY. On his head, the victorious patriarch was wearing a blindingly white crown, adorned with precious stones of various colors that shined like the stars, and on each leaf of the crown it was written PURITY. The crown was closed at its back with a bow or rosette on which it was written HOLINESS.<sup>18</sup> Above the victor crown there was a crown brighter than the sun. Enoch was not living there, but was just visiting, and still he felt at home in that place.

For what reason was this scene given in the vision? In order for us to know where Enoch travels? In order to know how he is ornamented? In order to find out that English is the language of heaven? The objection might be made that Ellen White could have seen an unknown writing and the Spirit had whispered to her its significance, but she does not mention the need of a translation. She saw and wrote what she saw, which means that in the vision the words were shown to her in English, just like all the other vision details have cultural significance. And that is not surprising, because even in the biblical visions it happens the same: the heavenly beings receive Hebrew "names," in Daniel's presence (8:16;10:13), although Hebrew is only a Canaanite dialect, and cannot be more heavenly than the Babylonian or Arabic. The significance of this scene is revealed at the end of the vision: the 144,000, that is, those who receive the seal of God (who remain faithful to God, obeying also the Sabbath commandment), will have Enoch's fate. Therefore, the message of the vision is not intended to reveal to us the physical structure or architectonic of the heavenly sanctuary.

Two months later, on another Sabbath (March 24, 1849),<sup>19</sup> Ellen White was again "taken in a flight, in the Spirit," towards the City. She does not describe a vision-proper in that situation, but uses often the expression "I saw that" in order to refer either to various instructive scenes that were shown to her, or only to the direct explanations received from the angel. The purpose of the vision is, as in the previous ones, to strengthen the faith of the Adventists concerning the Sabbath, and to warn them of the danger to abandon this cause because the Millerite Adventists who had not received the Sabbath were becoming increasingly hostile, and some of the first

Sabbatarians had already abandoned the Sabbath<sup>20</sup> and were attempting to influence the rest of the Sabbatarians, who were at that time extremely few.

In this vision, Ellen White was shown, in the first place, that the topics “God’s commandments,” “the testimony of Jesus” (Re. 12:17), and “the closed door”<sup>21</sup> cannot be separated. On this occasion, she states, without describing the scene, but only narrating what she was shown or said to her—she was revealed the following:

- The priestly ministration in the Most Holy Place is associated with a special faithfulness test – obedience to *all* God’s commandments, *including the Sabbath*, because *in the Most Holy Place there is the ark of the covenant*.
- It is necessary for the truth about the commandments *and the Sabbath* to shine in the world as long as the door of access into the Most Holy Place is still open.
- The two sanctuary compartments correspond to two phases of the Advent experience (“before” and “after” 1844) and with two phases of the knowledge and responsibility towards the received truth (cf. Lk. 12:47-48).
- During Jesus’s priestly intercession in the Holy Place, the access of the believers into the Most Holy Place was not possible, but when Jesus opened the door and entered into the Most Holy Place “behind the second curtain” (Heb. 9:3), and even went “*near the ark*,” He closed the access door into the Holy Place. True faith must follow Jesus into the Most Holy Place.
- Jesus closed the door into the Holy Place, and no one can open it; He opened the door into the Most Holy Place, and no one can close it (Re. 3:7,8). Since the door was opened into the Most Holy Place, *where there is the ark*, the truth of God’s commandments began to shine, and *God is testing the believers concerning the Sabbath*.
- The Adventists who did not have this clear light, and those who went to sleep in the blessed hope without keeping the Sabbath, had not been tested by God in this matter, but the fact that the Sabbath had not been a test before 1844 does not mean that after that date things were the same.
- The enemies of the Advent-Sabbath message tried again and again to reopen the door from the Holy Place that Jesus had closed, and to close the door that He had opened in 1844, door that opens into the Most Holy Place *where there is the ark with the tablets of stone of the commandments written with God’s finger*.
- All the attacks against the Sabbath at the present time are orchestrated by Satan because now, after 1844, it is the *sealing* time, and he makes all efforts to distract the attention from the present truth. In the future, Satan will make even stronger efforts. The Occultism, that began with the spiritism in the years 1847-48, will become more and more common, in various forms, even in religious garb, in order to strengthen the false



assurances of those already deceived, and, on the other hand, in order to “make God’s people to doubt the teachings and the power of the Holy Spirit.”

- Satan will work in various ways, “but especially through the church workers who have rejected the truth and gave in to powerful deceptions in order to believe a lie and to be condemned.” God will work with power, and will allow Satan to work in the same manner. While the false shepherds preach or sing, some believers are thrown to the ground by a Satanic power about which the deceived ones believe that it is the Holy Spirit’s power. The Adventist pastors who rejected the present truth (the Sabbath, etc.) manifest the same “mesmerism,” and consider it the Holy Spirit’s power. Signs, miracles, and false reforms will multiply and will spread around. These false awakenings and religious reforms can be recognized by the absence of the soul distress that accompanies repentance from sin. This warning refers especially to the Adventists (Millerites) who have experienced the movement of 1844, but have rejected it and then have received a false spirit of awakening. The truth’s light makes responsible every conscience before God. As in Noah’s, Lot’s, and Jesus’s generations, so also in the last days (2 Thes. 2:10-12), those who reject the warning determine God to withdraw His Spirit, and to leave them to pray to the deceptions they love.
- During the time of trouble God will protect only the *sealed ones*, the ones who are decided for the truth and have a clean heart. All those who now, during the *sealing*, do not stand firm for the truth and are not established in it, but shake and slide from the truth, cannot be protected by God in the end. Satan is doing all he can to hold many in a condition of deception and uncertainty, until the *sealing* ends, and these will be left without God’s protection.

One can notice clearly that this vision of the sanctuary, also, was given in order to strengthen the faith of the Adventists in the Sabbath. It was intended strictly for Adventists, and concerned the hostility that began to appear among the Millerites against the Sabbath. It was during the year Miller died (who, under the powerful influence of his colleagues, had not accepted the Sabbath), a year after spiritualism was born (1848) and was influencing even religious leaders, a crossroads moment during which even some pioneers of the Sabbatarian Adventists (e.g. Owen R. L. Crosier, Thomas Preble, Rachel Oakes-Preston) had slipped away. The vision was given for a practical purpose, in order to save as many as possible and to strengthen their faith. It must be in this context that the vision of the two compartments in the sanctuary must be seen.

God did not intend to assure us through this vision that in heaven there are two distinct physical compartments for the new covenant ministration. And even if there were two real rooms (in the heavenly sanctuary), this fact would not be worth mentioning. The vision, however, used the image of the bipartite sanctuary in heaven for the simple reason that the Sabbatarian Adventists were imagining the sanctuary in this manner, based on the similarity with the historical sanctuary. God used this image as a didactic illustration in order to emphasize the importance of the Judgment time (the sealing) in 1844, in connection with the Sabbath commandment, and as an eschatological test. Little can be stated beyond this purpose. Did Jesus close a physical door and open another physical door? Does indeed exist in heaven a physical

ark? Of a similar importance is the discussion about the two physical compartments. The Christians do not worship and do not minister physically in the heavenly sanctuary, whether or not we imagine ourselves in the Holy Place or in the Most Holy Place.

All the discussion here about the two apartments has the same purpose as the “great gulf” or the thirst of the rich man’s ghost in the parable of Lazarus the beggar (Lk. 16). The image marks the transition from one Christian experience to another, from one church phase to another, although not from a dispensationalist perspective. God’s demands have always been the same, even when they were not known, but when the Divine judgment began, when we are in fact during the time of the “sealing,” when at His Coming Jesus desires to find a church “without spots or wrinkles,” but clean and revitalized, because the generation Jesus will find alive must also pass through the Judgment, and not only the dead ones, we can expect both a final warning and a final test of faith and faithfulness. And God has chosen the most beautiful and the easiest test: the biblical Sabbath. The same truth is emphasized in *The Great Controversy* (GC 435) where a comparison is drawn between the two sanctuaries (the one below and the one above). What is brought to the forefront every time is the observance of [the commandments] in the ark of the covenant and the discussion about the Sabbath commandment.

When she described the initial Adventist experience in relation to the heavenly sanctuary in EW 242-248, EGW reaffirmed that in 1844 Jesus stood up and closed the door to the Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary, opened a door towards the Most Holy Place, and entered there in order to cleanse the Sanctuary. This cleansing is called a “special atonement.” Ellen White was shown that during Jesus’s priestly ministration in the Most Holy Place, he would marry (would wed) with the New Jerusalem, His bride (which is the Kingdom). After His work is completed in the Most Holy Place, He will descend on the Earth as King and will take with Him his chosen ones. This explanation combines in an interesting manner the image of the Most Holy Place with the image of the Kingdom’s City, as in Re 20. This combination (identification), however, can also be found in Re. 19:6-7: the receiving of the Kingdom and the marriage are one and the same event. In Jesus’s parables, also, when the Lord returns, He comes back after He has received the kingdom (Lk. 19:12). In other words, He returns “from the wedding” (Lk 12:36).

Concerning the images seen in the vision, Ellen White stated: “I was given *illustrations* of heavenly things, and of the sanctuary, so that we were placed where light was shining on us in clear, distinct rays....” (GW 302-303). Illustrations do not mean images of the physical realities, but only images with a didactic purpose.

We will refer now to a new description of the vision of Jesus’s entrance into the Most Holy Place and of the closing of the door into the Holy Place. I do not know whether or not Ellen White was referring in that case to another vision, or to the vision from 1846.

Before He entered, Jesus attired Himself with “precious garments,” that had on their rim bells and pomegranates. Again, this image contrasts with the priestly ministration attire in Leviticus 16. In this vision, however, Ellen White notices on Jesus’s chest the Judgment breastplate also, with precious stones that have engraved names on them. She also notices the pontifical mitre. His entrance into the Most Holy Place was done in a chariot of fire, surrounded by angels. Is it still necessary to state that all these priestly adornments are useful only in the vision? Further in the vision, she was commanded to observe the two heavenly Sanctuary

compartments, and she describes exactly what she saw in the vision. She begins with the Holy Place:

The curtain, or the door, was opened, and I was allowed to enter. In the first room I saw the lampstand with seven lamps, the table with the loaves of bread placed before the Lord, the altar for incense, and the censer. All the furniture of this room seemed to be of the most pure gold and reflected the image of The One who had entered that place. The curtain that separated the two rooms had different colors and materials, with a beautiful edge on which were images worked in gold, representing angels.

The images in the vision cause some legitimate questions : Is the entrance into the Holy Place done through a curtain, or through a door? The Mosaic sanctuary had a curtain, while the Solomonic sanctuary had a door. Ellen White mentions again the furniture and the specific objects which she had described before. It is obvious that none of these has any place in heaven. This time, though, she sees a censer in the Holy Place, as opposed to what she saw in the other vision where the censer was in the Most Holy Place—again an object that indicates that we are in the image kingdom, and not in the physical reality kingdom.

There follows the description of the Most Holy Place that appears similar to the vision in 1846, with the exception that the explanations are much more detailed and everything is exactly like in the Israelite tabernacle: the ark plated with gold, with a crown and worked with skill, two cherubim with spread wings, two above Jesus and and two on the sides, “representing all the heavenly host that looks with interest on God’s law.” It is interesting that this time EGW interprets what she saw, showing that at least she understood the fact that in heaven there are no cherubim made of transparent gold, but that the vision of the cherubim that was given to her *represented* real cherubim.

Between the cherubim she notices a golden censer, in this way doubling the symbol and prompting us to ask ourselves: how many censers are in reality in heaven of we interpret the vision literally? Above the ark, she saw the incomparable light of God’s glory, that is, of God’s throne, at which she could not look, light that flowed over Jesus and “filled the temple” (cf. Is. 6:1). EGW does not indicate in this place the presence of real angels. The Sanctuary is shown to her like a model—*unpopulated*. Only the main characters are present: Jesus, the Father (invisible), and the visionary’s eyes.

Next, it was shown to her the correspondence between the two sanctuaries (the below and the above), and she saw that both had two compartments. The correspondence is *total*. Not only that the room number is the same, but also the furniture in both compartments of the earthly sanctuary looks like the furniture in the heavenly sanctuary. When one makes, however, a liturgical comparison, all changes: in the sanctuary above Jesus is the one who ministers in both rooms, with his own offering, having a priesthood that cannot be passed on:

In God’s wisdom, we were given the details of this work (in the earthly sanctuary) so that by looking at them *we might understand Jesus’s work* in the heavenly Sanctuary.

The priestly ministration in the earthly sanctuary ended when Jesus died on Calvary. Jesus’s ministration in the Most Holy Place, called “the final atonement” or the cleansing of the Sanctuary, began in 1844. This “final atonement” is described as “the last ministration for all those for whom God’s mercy still lingers, and for those who broke God’s Law out of ignorance.”

This ministration “is made both for the righteous dead and the righteous who are alive, and includes all those who died having faith in Christ, but who, because they did not have the light about God’s commandments, sinned disobeying its precepts without knowing it.”

This narrative is quite remarkable because it insists on the exact correspondence, even that of the furniture, as EGW saw them. In my understanding, there are only two options to understand that exact correspondence: either in a literal sense, or in a spiritual sense, depending on the nature of the situation. The choice of the literal option is useful in a very limited way, as help for the imagination, and also with a didactic purpose. We cannot, legitimately, be selective here, preferring the image of a bipartite heavenly sanctuary, but *without the furniture*, whose existence seems to be validated by the same vision. Ellen White saw the furniture also, and much more, and the vision insists on the correspondence between the things above and the things below. When one accepts the curtain and the two physical heavenly rooms he must also accept the lampstand, the altar, the loaves of bread, the censers, the ark and the angels of transparent gold, the garments, the breastplate, the mitre, even the bells and the pomegranates that had been seen in a few visions...

In this discussion, it is not very important how Ellen White understood what she saw. It seems that although she guessed or even understood the purely didactic significance of some images, she was not able to move beyond the literalist pattern. My perspective is that, in all probability, Ellen White drew the conclusion of a real existence of a physical sanctuary with two compartments, as the other founders of our church understood it. This, however, is not a reason to blame them. The work of a prophet is to state exactly what was shown, not to explain all she saw, except in the case that some explanations had been given to her. Often, the significance of what they saw was revealed only partially to the prophets. For this reason, we are not surprised at statements from EGW such as these:

As the earthly sanctuary had two compartments, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place, there are also two holy places in the heavenly sanctuary. The ark of God’s law, the altar of incense, and other ministration instruments from the sanctuary below, each have their correspondent in the sanctuary above.<sup>22</sup>

Her statement is appalling, but E.G. White had two serious reasons to be so literalistic. In the first place, she has seen “in truth” in the visions so many impressive things that were shown to her “in heaven.” In the second place, she had understood the Bible’s visions also, in the same manner, and she added to what she had stated above:

In holy vision, the apostle John was allowed to *enter* into heaven, and there he *saw* the lampstand and the altar of incense, and when “God’s temple was opened,” he *also saw* “the ark of His covenant.” (Revelation 4:5 ; 8:3 ; Revelation 11:19 ( my emphasis).

So, states EGW, “those who were looking for the truth found *indisputable evidence for the existence of a sanctuary in heaven*. Moses made the earthly sanctuary after a pattern that was shown to him. Paul declares that that pattern was the true sanctuary that is in heaven. John testifies that he saw it in heaven.”

We can better understand EGWs and the pioneers’ insistence about the literality of a heavenly sanctuary in the historical context of the Millerite theological and spiritual experience. For a time, this literalism contributed positively to maintain and emphasize the sanctuary

doctrine. In our day, however, to present as doctrine the literal correspondence between the two sanctuaries, even only the general bipartite model, does not encourage faith, but creates unnecessary obstacles to those who attempt to understand the purpose of this doctrine.

#### 4. The Temple as God's Real Residence

In *Patriarchs and Prophets* (1890:357), Ellen White describes the heavenly temple as a permanent and magnificent palace of the King of Kings, where “thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him” (Dan. 7:10). We emphasize that here EGW does not see the heavenly sanctuary as a special temporary structure, as a tent museum or ceremonial tent that exists somewhere in heaven, but as the real and permanent dwelling of God and His children. If in some visions she sees the sanctuary without the presence of the angels and a reduced scale, here the heavenly temple is “full of the glory of the eternal throne, where the seraphims, his bright guards, cover their faces in adoration,” a temple that “cannot be represented in its entire vastness and glory by any earthly edifice.”

She shows that “the important truths concerning the heavenly sanctuary and the great work that is accomplished there for the salvation of mankind should be known and learned through the earthly sanctuary and its ministrations.” The correspondence is, therefore, spiritual and didactic. Later, however, when she cites Heb. 9:24 that indicates a correspondence between the two sanctuaries, she continues:

As the Lord Jesus's ministration was going to be accomplished in two large phases, each of them taking place for a certain period of time and **having a special place in the Heavenly Sanctuary**, so also the typical ministration was taking place in two phases, the daily ministration and the yearly ministration ; and for each one of them was assigned a compartment in the tabernacle.

This statement seems to be identical with the statement in Matthew 12:40 in which the transmitted text attributes to Jesus the following words: “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (cf. Mt. 12:40). Maybe the poor Jonah stayed for three nights in the belly of the cetacean, as his book narrates, but Jesus, certainly, did not stay three nights [in the heart of the earth], no matter what method we use to calculate the days. Therefore, no matter how we interpret Matthew's strange and unique affirmation, it cannot be the basis for an exact comparison between type and antitype.

The incorrect understanding (in a technical sense) that we indicate in the case of the pioneers and E.G. White, happens, in a similar manner, from the exaggeration of the correspondence between the things above and the things below, leading to the specification : “**each** [phase]... **having a different place in the heavenly Sanctuary.**” Ellen White believed and repeated this paradigm because this is how she understood the biblical arguments, and because this is how she had seen it in the vision. I have demonstrated, however, that even inspired people can be incorrect or wrong in some details or perspectives that are not essential to the integrity of the message.

We probably still remember that in the first years after 1844 Ellen White believed and wrote in favor of the “closed door” (the belief that the time of grace for the salvation of the world closed in 1844), after which she renounced this idea, together with the other pioneers. In principle, the theology of the closed door was correct and is held even at the present time by the SDAs, only that 1844 is no more considered the time when the door closed. The belief is now that the door will close in the future, before Jesus’s return. Therefore, the “closed door” doctrine had not been a fundamentally wrong theology, but a theology wrongly applied. We could learn from such lessons. God’s inspired men transmitted to us accurately and in good faith the Divine message, but their “language, rhetoric, and logic” are human, and therefore imperfect, requiring the intervention of other spiritual gifts in the church for a clearer understanding.<sup>23</sup>

When she describes our Lord Jesus’s ascension to the Father,<sup>24</sup> Ellen White speaks about His entrance into the heavenly City where there is God’s throne in the middle of the hosts of numberless heavenly beings. She describes a scene of His intercession for the Church at the Father’s throne. The whole scene should have included a reference to the heavenly sanctuary (temple), as it appears in Ellen White’s visions, but, surprisingly, the temple is not mentioned here. One could claim that the described scene is that inside of the temple, but in this case she states nothing about the sanctuary, and there is no separation of the inside (of the temple), neither a suggestion concerning two compartments.

Again, this different description suggests that there is no literal bipartite structure in the heavenly City as God’s residence, but that both the City and the Temple (the palace, or sanctuary) are poetical, symbolic, and didactic descriptions of a physical heavenly reality that has not been revealed to us in an exact fashion. That is God and His people’s real dwelling, and functions as the headquarters of the universe, the capital of God’s kingdom (The New Jerusalem), the home for the angels and of the redeemed ones, as the palace (temple) of the King of Kings, and the unique and ideal place of worship (sanctuary).

These affirmations are not intended to mean that we should abandon the dramatic and typologic language of the Mosaic sanctuary, or of the things seen in the vision when we refer to the heavenly realities. If God Himself spoke in this manner to His People, this figurative language is often the best language we have available. The only problem is that this imagistic and didactic language is taken to indicate a physical reality, and in this case we arrive at useless contradictions with other inspired statements and with common sense.

## VI. Ellen White’s Statements About Those Who Oppose the Sanctuary Doctrine

The previous theological discussion might seem to some to be a spiritualization or abstractization of the heavenly realities. Often, these words written by EGW in 1905, during the Kellogg crisis (medical doctor and promoter of a kind of pantheism) are quoted:

In the future, deception of every kind is to arise, and we want solid ground for our feet. We want solid pillars for the building. Not one pin is to be removed from that which the Lord has established. The enemy will bring in false theories, such as *the doctrine that there is no sanctuary*. This is one of the points on which there will be a departing from the faith. (RH, May 25, 1905 ; CW 53) (my emphasis).

It is obvious that an impersonal God, or at least one who does not manifest Himself ever or anywhere in a personal form, visible and spatial, a pantheistic God who is the soul of the universe (as in some philosophies or religions) is not interested to dwell in a special, visible sense in a personal and unique dwelling together with His intelligent creatures. Doctor Kellogg's God lived in the nature and especially in the human body. For this reason Kellogg named the human body "the living temple,"<sup>25</sup> and a temple in heaven had no more a purpose. The cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14 was interpreted as the radical transformation of the human body through the living of the Health Reform principles. Even some prominent SDAs followed Kellogg. In order to confirm that EGW was referring to those theories that undermine the sanctuary doctrine, as was Kellogg's philosophy, or the doctrines that negate a phase or both phases of Jesus's work, her statements in 1903 are very appropriate:

"I could say much regarding the sanctuary; the ark containing the law of God; the cover of the ark, which is the mercy seat; the angels at either end of the ark; and other things connected with the heavenly sanctuary and with the great Day of Atonement. I could say much regarding the mysteries of heaven; but my lips are closed. I have no inclination to try to describe them." and "I would not dare to speak of God as you Dr. J. H. Kellogg have spoken of Him. He is high and lifted up, and His glory fills the heavens [Hab. 3:3]. The voice of the Lord is mighty; it shaketh the cedars of Lebanon [Ps 29:5]. "The Lord is in His Holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." [Hab. 2:20] 4MR 58:3<sup>26</sup>

At the same time with Kellogg's heresy, appeared A. F. Ballenger's theory about the Heavenly Sanctuary.<sup>27</sup> In contrast with Kellogg's theory, this accepted the real existence of a bipartite sanctuary in heaven. The difference was that in his [Ballenger's] interpretation the two phases were: (1) Melchizedek's ministration in the Holy Place before the Cross, and (2) Jesus's ministration in the Most Holy Place after the Cross. In some technical aspects Ballenger may have been right, but he was fundamentally wrong concerning his conclusions and the message. In this case, E.G. White also declared herself categorically against his theory:

I know that the sanctuary question stands in righteousness and truth, just as we have held it for so many years. It is the enemy that leads minds off on side-tracks. He is pleased when those who know the truth become engrossed in collecting scriptures to pile around erroneous theories, which have no foundation in truth. The scriptures thus used are misapplied; they were not given to substantiate error, but to strengthen truth. (Gospel Workers, p. 303 (1915). We are not to receive the words of those who come with a **message that contradicts the special points of our faith.** (1 SM 160-62).

From this statement some draw the conclusion that we should be satisfied to copy the understanding and the arguments of the pioneers and especially to accept blindly and literally all that Ellen White wrote on the subject. The matters could be sometimes paradoxal, but there is a fundamental and sure source that must not be abandoned or avoided in favor of any historical understanding, even if it is from Ellen White:

"We can learn much, and **should be constantly searching the Scriptures to see if these things are so** [cf. the Berean's example, Acts 17:11]. God's people are now to have their eyes fixed on the heavenly sanctuary, where the final ministration of our great High Priest in the work of the judgment is going forward,—where he is interceding for his people." RH November 27, 1883. Ev 223.1.<sup>28</sup>

Concerning the privilege and the obligation to verify personally and collectively the doctrines that we hold, Ellen White said in 1892:<sup>29</sup>

"There is no excuse for anyone in taking the position that there is no more truth to be revealed, and that **all our expositions of Scripture are without error**. The fact that **certain doctrines** have been held as truth for many years by our people is not a proof that **our ideas are infallible**. Age will not make an error into truth, and truth can afford to be fair. No true doctrine will lose anything by close investigation. CW 35.2

This reference to time is rather interesting, especially when we place it side by side with Ellen White's statements concerning Ballenger's theory about the sanctuary. In that situation, Ellen White sends [believers] to the authority of the pioneer writings, and to the authority of the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit through the visions at the time when the pioneers studied and set the foundation of the first SDA doctrines, and to the authority of time ("the past fifty years") seen as a test (1 SM 160-162). Her reaction, however, could be understood from the perspective of her own experience. She trusted that, if the Bible were correctly understood, there would be no contradiction between the multitude of texts Ballinger was referring to and the historic Adventist faith about the Sanctuary.

If, however, her letter about the Ballinger phenomenon is taken to indicate a sufficient attitude, in principle, for similar situations, we cause Ellen White to contradict herself. Ultimately, we must decide the matters on the *sola Scriptura* basis because as we have always officially affirmed as a church, and even as Ellen White has emphasized, the Bible remains the foundation of the Christian doctrine, and all the other sources, including inspired sources, must be confronted with the Scriptures.



## Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup>If Hebrew had used the plural *‘ēšīm*, the term would have meant “wood,” and not “trees.”
- <sup>2</sup>Miller, William, *Evidence...*, 1834:34. Unfortunately, Miller did not explore and exploit to the end this idea, and preferred a completely different conclusion: the sanctuary of Da 8:14 is...the earth!
- <sup>3</sup>Probably an allusion to Re. 19:7-8 ; 21:2-3, 9-10.
- <sup>4</sup>Crosier, O. R. L., “The Law of Moses,” *The Day-Star Extra*, February 7, 1846. Ellen White wrote shortly about this article and stated that she felt authorized to affirm that all believers should read Crosier’s article. Although Crosier renounced, not long after, both the Sabbath and the Sanctuary Doctrine (which he had initiated), his article became the basis for the later Adventist studies and writings [on the sanctuary].  
www.sdadefend.com/Our%20Firm%20Foundation/Crosier-sanctuary.pdf
- <sup>5</sup>Bates, Joseph, *The Opening Heavens*, May 8, 1846, pp. 15, 28. [http://sdapillars.org/joseph\\_bates\\_p.php](http://sdapillars.org/joseph_bates_p.php)
- <sup>6</sup>White, Ellen Gold, *Early Writings*, 1882:14-20.
- <sup>7</sup>See 4 Ezra 2:19, a Jewish writing from the first century B.C. where there is mention about “rivers of milk and honey and *seven powerful mountains on which grow roses and lilies.*” The same information can be found in the NRS and RSV translations, etc., in *Bible Works*, and on the [www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/BIBLE/2ES/2ES1.HTM](http://www.hope.edu/academic/religion/bandstra/BIBLE/2ES/2ES1.HTM) site. It is worth noting that in the period around the year 1844, the Adventists used the Anglican Bible that contained also the seven apocrypha. (I received part of the above information from Dr. W. Fagal at The White Estate). The seven mountains can also be encountered in Enoch’s apocryphe (1st century B.C.).
- <sup>8</sup>“To the Little Remnant Scattered Abroad,” April 6, 1846; *The Day-Star*, March 14, 1846.
- <sup>9</sup>White, Ellen Gold, *Early Writings*, 1882: 32-34.
- <sup>10</sup>See the official site of the Jewish Community in Romania, where the statement is made that “in the Most Holy Place in the First Temple there was the Ark of the Covenant that contained the Tables of the Law (the two sets – the full one, and the one broken by Moses), Aaron’s staff, and also a bowl with *manna...*” ([http://dvartora.jewish.ro/cauta\\_site.php](http://dvartora.jewish.ro/cauta_site.php) Search for <the Most Holy Place> in the site’s search engine). When I asked about the source of the posted information, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Sorin Rosen responded to me in an electronic message: “Yes, the information posted is based on Rabbinical sources and on the oral Judaic tradition. Without these, nothing in the biblical text can be correctly understood.” I will not comment on the traditionalist perspective of his response, but this rabbinical opinion is instructive in our case.
- <sup>11</sup>In support of the above statements, one can indicate another mistake the epistle’s author made in the same context: he placed the altar of incense in the Most Holy Place. He probably knew the place of the altar of incense in the Jerusalem temple, but described the temple as it was in the Old

Testament times. The erroneous information derives, probably, from a mistaken reading of the Hebrew text in 1 K 6:22 : “the altar *that belonged to the Most Holy Place*,” (cf. NIV: the altar that *belonged* to the inner sanctuary, NET: the altar *inside* the inner sanctuary), expression that, however, was translated by others in a different sense (RVA: que esteba *delante* del santuarion interior; NAS: which was *by* the inner sanctuary). The preposition לָ *la* should be understood here in the sense of *near*, or *before* (cf. Jud. 18:28, *near* Bet-Rehob ; Jer 52:17, *before* IHWH’s House; Ne. 2:8 *near* The House), although it is more commonly used in the sense of belonging, which explains the apostle’s choice, and the choice of most translators.

<sup>12</sup>As in the case with the image of the “seven mountains on which grow roses and lilies” in the vision previously described, which shows that God described to Ellen White the New Earth in a complex pictorial language introducing both descriptive biblical details and also cultural details that derive from human imagination (cf. 4 Ezra 2:19 in NRS, RSV, KJA and VUL). In this last case, the image of the seven mountains is purely decorative and in contrast with the image of the seven mountains in Re. 17:9 on which sits “Babylon,” the whore. When we notice that in the center of those seven mountains in Ellen White’s vision there is the Mount Zion dominated by a temple, the image reminds us of the biblical metaphor of Mount Zion, which is always treated poetically in the feminine gender, like every city (Is. 60:14-15). The Sion City is also placed poetically on mountains (Ps. 87:1).

<sup>13</sup>“In the beginning man was created in the likeness of God, not only in character, but in form and feature (GC 645). “I asked Him [Jesus] if His Father was a person and had a form like Himself. Said Jesus, “I am in the express *image* of My Father’s *person*.” (EW 77). The Hebrew term צֶלֶם *ṭalm* (ṭelem) used in Genesis for the notion of *form* or *image*, has always the sense of visible form. The figurative usage is extremely rare, if ever used. If in Genesis the figurative sense was also intended, this is not the word’s unique sense, because in the context of the creation of the other living things only the man, the nature’s king, is described as having the most noble appearance possible, “in God’s image.” This interpretation does not suggest that God might have a human nature, but it is a sign of His condescendence and of His ideal relationship with the created beings.

<sup>14</sup>*Present Truth*, August 1, 1849.

<sup>15</sup>It would be interesting to know if the text in Exodus 28:35 refers to the High Priest’s entrance (into the Most Holy Place) on the Day of Atonement, or to common situations when he ministered. In any case, at least when He came out, if not when he entered into the Most Holy Place, while the High Priest was in the Holy Place he was changing from the white linen garments into the High Priest garments after he had washed himself (Lev. 16:23-24). Only during the final “cleansing” ritual was he dressed in the white garments.

<sup>16</sup>EW 36: “I saw that Jesus would not leave the Most Holy Place until every case was decided either for salvation or destruction.”

<sup>17</sup>W. C. Bond and W. Lassell had already discovered the eight Saturnian satellite (Hyperion) a year before (1848), but it is probable that the pioneers had not come up to date with the

astronomic information. Their latest information in the field depended on Herschell's (1789) discoveries, about which captain J. Bates must have been knowledgeable.

<sup>18</sup>It is interesting, in this context, the language used in LXX (Septuagint) for the gold diadem of the High Priest (Ex. 28:34,36), πέταλον=leaf, petal; gold leaf.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. EW 42. It is interesting that Ellen White early visions, that had as their purpose the strengthening of the faith in the Advent message of the Sabbath, occurred on the Sabbath. In a similar fashion, the vision of John's Revelation, that contains in its central section the message concerning worship (the seal of God and the mark of the beast; God's commandments or the beast's commandment), was also given to John on "the Day of the Lord" (Re. 1:10).

<sup>20</sup>See at least the notorious cases of Crozier and Preble. I mentioned Crozier in a previous note, while the details about pastor Preble can be found at the Internet Web address [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T.\\_M.\\_Preble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T._M._Preble). Preble was the first Adventist preacher who wrote a brochure in defense of the Sabbath, converting many Millerites to the Sabbath, among whom were J. Bates and J. N. Andrews. Ellen White had reasons to warn the believers about his [Preble's] influence: "There is quite a company in this vicinity who are out in all the truth; and then there are others who are not fully established. T. M. Preble has been around here and has injured some, but our prayer to God is that He would palsy the influence that he has had, and that He would let the clear light upon His truth shine out, so as to establish the wavering." – E.G. White, Letter 4, 1851 pp. 1-2 (To Brother and Sister Dodge from Ballston Spa, N.Y.).

<sup>21</sup>The "closed door doctrine" teaches that access into the sanctuary for forgiveness and reconciliation with God, that is, "the grace door" will not be open forever. When Jesus finishes His work as High Priest, before the plagues in Re 16 will fall on the Earth and a short time before His coming, the time of test for the last generation will end, and no other opportunity will be provided. This biblical truth is present in the Bible, both in foreshadow (Gn. 7:16), and also in Jesus's clear parables (Mt. 25:10; Lk. 13:24-25), and Revelation (3:7-8 ; 15:8 ; 22:11). This doctrine is established on a clear biblical principle that is in contrast with the "cheap grace" theories (Heb. 3:13,15; 10:26-31; Re. 3:5,16). The SDAs initially believed that the grace door had closed in 1844. Ellen White herself believed this, together with her fellow believers, which shows that a prophet is neither infallible nor innerant (1 Cr. 17:2-3). In the following years, however, the conversions of some non-Adventists had forced them to revise their position. The SDAs have given up for a long time on the idea that the grace door closed in 1844, but still maintain that that door will be closed before the Second Coming of Jesus, and that the only sure opportunity for repentance is now. At Jesus's coming, and during the millenium or afterwards, absolutely no opportunity will be provided.

<sup>22</sup>*The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. IV, 1884:261.

<sup>23</sup>See E. G. White, 1 SM (*Selected Messages*, Book 1), 1958:20-22 and 7SDABC (SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7) 1957:945 that render the content of the manuscripts MS 24/1886 and Letter 121:1901 as follows: "The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. **Everything that is human is imperfect.** Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. **The Bible was given for practical**

purposes.... ,” and “The Bible is written by inspired men, but **it is not God’s mode of thought and expression**. It is that of humanity. God, as a **writer**, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has **not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric**, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.” (E. G. White had this view on the divine inspiration of the prophetic authors not only about the Bible, but about her own writings. A study of her Introduction to the book *The Great Controversy* is very instructive. Ellen White was not more inspired than the biblical authors).

<sup>24</sup>White, Ellen Gould, *The Desire of Ages*, 723-724.

<sup>25</sup><http://www.sdanet.org/atissue/white/haloviak/hal-egw1.htm>

<sup>26</sup>MR No. 213; *Manuscript Releases* Volume Four (1990), page 58; Let 253, 1903.

<sup>27</sup><http://www.ex-sda.com/cast-out.htm>.

<sup>28</sup>*Review and Herald*, November 27, 1883; *Evangelism*, 222-223.

<sup>29</sup>*Review and Herald*, December 20, 1892; CW 35.