

Evangelism (Part 4)

Happy Sabbath to all. This week we are starting a new section of the book Evangelism by Ellen G. White. As I have mentioned several times in the past, what we are doing here is reading for principle, understanding that prophecy is conditional – especially when it comes to the rise and fall of religious organizations. They are certainly conditional if they are delayed for the unbelief of the people to whom they are delivered, and so we will draw what divine wisdom we can from these writings.

This section in particular is particularly susceptible to the conditionality of Mrs. White's prophecies, as it primarily involves large cities. The section, in fact, is called "The Metropolitan Masses." The definition of what makes a "large city" is different now than it was then, and the nature of the work has certainly changed in some aspects with regard to the message and its messengers. Nevertheless, what I get from this portion of the book is a sense of urgency when we realize that the evils described here have only become more widespread, and more influential, with the passage of time.

Here is the first quote from that section:

[quote]

The spiritual darkness that covers the whole earth today, is intensified in the crowded centers of population. It is in the cities of the nations that the gospel worker finds the greatest impenitence and the greatest need....

The record of crime and iniquity in the large cities of the land is appalling. The wickedness of the wicked is almost beyond comprehension. Many cities are becoming a very Sodom in the sight of heaven. The increasing wickedness is such that multitudes are rapidly approaching a point in their personal experience beyond which it will be exceedingly difficult to reach them with a saving knowledge of the third angel's message. The enemy of souls is working in a masterful manner to gain full control of the human mind; and what God's servants do to warn and prepare men for the day of judgment, must be done quickly.

The conditions that face Christian workers in the great cities, constitute a solemn appeal for untiring effort in behalf of the millions living within the shadow of impending doom. Men will soon be forced to great decisions, and they must have opportunity to hear and to understand Bible truth, in order that they may take their stand intelligently on the right side. God is now calling upon His messengers in no uncertain terms, to warn the cities while mercy still lingers, and while multitudes are yet susceptible to the converting influence of Bible truth. [The Review and Herald, April 7, 1910]

[/quote]

We could spend a great deal of time in this study, and across many studies, discussing the wickedness of the wicked in the large cities, both in the U.S. and across the planet. We could spend a lot of time talking about how this has grown even darker since Mrs. White's day, who had never heard such an expression as "gay marriage," just to name a single example.

But what I think would be better, and certainly more encouraging, is to draw hope even from this dark picture. Consider this statement very carefully: "God is now calling upon His messengers in no uncertain

terms, to warn the cities while mercy still lingers, and while multitudes are yet susceptible to the converting influence of Bible truth.” That is actually a very hopeful statement.

Has Yahweh ceased to call His messengers? Has He said, “Stop trying to spread the good news?” Has he discontinued inspiring His people to give their all to the ministry of the Gospel? No, and obviously not. In fact, in this day we are called to make great sacrifices for the work of evangelism. In fact, in this day Yah has arranged it through technology, through the working of providence, few people can do the work that once only many could accomplish. I know that Yah is continuing to inspire us to strive, to give our all, to warn the world of the coming judgment... and the coming promises.

And why? Because this means – this is proof – that there are souls out there who need to hear it. Yah does nothing amiss. He makes no mistakes, and He is not a poor planner. What He is calling His people to do is what we need to do in order to reach those who might yet be saved. Perhaps the term “multitudes” is hard to imagine as a proper description for those who await salvation through the message of life, but perhaps not – and even so, few or many, every soul is worth the very life of Christ in the eyes of our Heavenly Father.

[quote]

Satan is busily at work in our crowded cities. His work is to be seen in the confusion, the strife and discord between labor and capital, and the hypocrisy that has come into the churches. That men may not take time to meditate, Satan leads them into a round of gayety and pleasure-seeking, of eating and drinking. He fills them with ambition to make an exhibition that will exalt self. Step by step, the world is reaching the conditions that existed in the days of Noah. Every conceivable crime is committed. The lust of the flesh, the pride of the eyes, the display of selfishness, the misuse of power, the cruelty, and the force used to cause men to unite with confederacies and unions—binding themselves up in bundles for the burning of the great fires of the last days—all these are the working of Satanic agencies. This round of crime and folly men call “life.”...

The world, who act as though there were no God, absorbed in selfish pursuits, will soon experience sudden destruction, and shall not escape. Many continue in the careless gratification of self until they become so disgusted with life that they kill themselves. Dancing and carousing, drinking and smoking, indulging their animal passions, they go as an ox to the slaughter. Satan is working with all his art and enchantments to keep men marching blindly onward until the Lord arises out of His place to punish the inhabitants of earth for their iniquities, when the earth shall disclose her blood and no more cover her slain. The whole world appears to be in the march to death. [Manuscript 139, 1903]

[/quote]

This is a sad picture indeed. It is certainly appropriate for our day. Every emotion, and instinct, and desire, that Yah designed for our pleasure, has been twisted around and perverted, so that they find no joy in the pure and holy, only in the corrupt and the harmful.

Even those who claim to be Christian, who claim to be followers of the Messiah, are following this “march to death.” The phrase “as though there were no God” we have applied to men at the very top of religious organizations that exist, in theory, to teach the principles of Heaven, but who fill themselves with iniquity instead.

Conversion is truly a miracle. It is, and must be, a complete change in the life and its desires, so that when we look back at what we also used to be, all we can do is give everlasting thanks that our hearts have been changed. But this work needs much prayer. If even the religious have resisted our message of truth, what will the worldling and the open offenders do? Well, the good news is that the Spirit is not less able to help one type over the other. Since conversion is a true death to self, followed by a true rebirth, it does not really matter much what the previous life was like before. If Christianity were an improvement over the old life, then excuses like, “This person would have to change SO much...” would have some validity. But Yah saves the willing, regardless of where they are when they call out to Him, and so we ought to make ourselves available – as Yahshua did – to the “publicans and sinners” of our day, even when the Sanhedrin turns away from our efforts to touch their hearts.

But speaking of the modern Sanhedrin...

[quote]

Men and women living in these cities are rapidly becoming more and still more entangled in their business relations. They are acting wildly in the erection of buildings whose towers reach high into the heavens. Their minds are filled with schemes and ambitious devisings. [Manuscript 154, 1902]

[/quote]

The first thing I thought of when I read this quote was the modern religious corporation. They erect buildings, and they build towers – both literal and figurative – and they strike out at any that they see as a threat to their schemes... but their ambition is like that of the most ancient Babylonians, those who built the tower to the Heavens, and we know that their fate will be the same.

The next quote describes this fate...

[quote]

I am bidden to declare the message that cities full of transgression, and sinful in the extreme, will be destroyed by earthquakes, by fire, by flood. All the world will be warned that there is a God who will display His authority as God. His unseen agencies will cause destruction, devastation, and death. All the accumulated riches will be as nothingness....

Calamities will come—calamities most awful, most unexpected; and these destructions will follow one after another. If there will be a heeding of the warnings that God has given, and if churches will repent, returning to their allegiance, then other cities may be spared for a time.

But if men who have been deceived continue in the same way in which they have been walking, disregarding the law of God and presenting falsehoods before the people, God allows them to suffer calamity, that their senses may be awakened....

The Lord will not suddenly cast off all transgressors or destroy entire nations; but He will punish cities and places where men have given themselves up to the possession of Satanic agencies. Strictly will the cities of the nations be dealt with, and yet they will not be visited in the extreme of God’s indignation, because some souls will yet break away from the delusions of the enemy, and will repent and be converted, while the mass will be treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. [Manuscript 35, 1906]

[/quote]

I find that there are a lot of interesting statements in that passage. My first thought, though, was that there really is no slowing-down of the world's march to destruction. Unbelief is now firmly enshrined in the modern man's consciousness. Calamities, no matter how awful and unexpected, will be seen as nothing more than "natural disasters," and those who proclaim these things to be warnings from Yah will be dismissed as superstitious and simple-minded.

Indeed, even if there were supernatural disasters – fire from Heaven, and seas turning to blood – there will be many who will look for, and eagerly accept, the "scientific explanation," that these are just some phenomena that we can understand, and therefore ignore. Even if we disregard the fact that "scientific" is not the opposite of "spiritual," it is clear that people of the world, by and large, would rather blind themselves than see the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

Again we see Satan's agencies at work here. There is nothing wrong with intelligence, but Satan has made unbelief one of the new virtues, and so this gift, which was designed to be used to explore the mysteries of the divine character, are now bent on finding new and inventive ways to exclude Yah from His own created universe.

But here again, in the midst of these dire warnings, the people of Yah may find encouragement and hope. We read from above, "The Lord will not suddenly cast off all transgressors or destroy entire nations; but He will punish cities..." In other words, He will give mankind as much mercy as possible before closing probation wholesale. Most people will not recognize the work of Yah in the judgments that will come upon the land. Most will, as I said before, scorn the messengers who attempt to reveal these things as the signs of the times that they really are... but there are some who will hear, who will break away and be converted. What we must do is be willing to be seen as superstitious, and willing to be seen as simple-minded, and consider our reputations as of no account in the days, which are even now, when belief in Yah and His plan of salvation is seen as a mental disorder. How foolish will the unbeliever appear in just a short time, when all true motives are revealed, and the faith becomes sight?

Here is one of the longer quotes from this section:

[quote]

While at Loma Linda, California, April 16, 1906, there passed before me a most wonderful representation. During a vision of the night, I stood on an eminence, from which I could see houses shaken like a reed in the wind. Buildings, great and small, were falling to the ground. Pleasure resorts, theaters, hotels, and the homes of the wealthy were shaken and shattered. Many lives were blotted out of existence, and the air was filled with the shrieks of the injured and the terrified.

The destroying angels of God were at work. One touch, and buildings so thoroughly constructed that men regarded them as secure against every danger, quickly became heaps of rubbish. There was no assurance of safety in any place. I did not feel in any special peril, but the awfulness of the scenes that passed before me I cannot find words to describe. It seemed that the forbearance of God was exhausted, and that the judgment day had come.

The angel that stood by my side then instructed me that but few have any conception of the wickedness existing in our world today, and especially the wickedness in the large cities. He declared that the Lord has appointed a time when He will visit transgressors in wrath for persistent disregard of His law.

Terrible as was the representation that passed before me, that which impressed itself most vividly upon my mind was the instruction given in connection with it. The angel that stood by my side declared that God's supreme rulership, and the sacredness of His law, must be revealed to those who persistently refuse to render obedience to the King of kings. Those who choose to remain disloyal must be visited in mercy with judgments, in order that, if possible, they may be aroused to a realization of the sinfulness of their course. [Testimonies For The Church 9:92, 1909]

[/quote]

The power of Yah is revealed, just a little, in this vision. The Scriptures record the angels of Yah having the power over armies and cities, able to destroy them with no effort at all. Yah is not silent (as the world considers Him) for lack of power. He is speaking to the world through us, through His appointed channel of grace.

Angels in their glory have not been chosen to share the good news with others, but if men and women will not listen to the still, small voice, these holy ones have been commissioned to speak more loudly.

Yah's sovereignty "must" be revealed, the author states, so that they may know what has been kept from them by the world, and even priests and pastors who are not after Yah's own heart. Everyone will be called to make a decision, and blessed are those who respond first to the Holy Spirit's gentler leadings. These are the ones whose characters will be nearest to Christ, and who can do the greatest good toward those who need the thundering from Sinai in order to pay attention to Heaven's warnings.

Here is yet another vision:

[quote]

Last Friday morning, just before I awoke, a very impressive scene was presented before me. I seemed to awake from sleep but was not in my home. From the windows I could behold a terrible conflagration. Great balls of fire were falling upon houses, and from these balls fiery arrows were flying in every direction. It was impossible to check the fires that were kindled, and many places were being destroyed. The terror of the people was indescribable. After a time I awoke and found myself at home. [Letter 278, 1906]

[/quote]

All these passages about Mrs. White's visions bring something to my mind. Many, even among Adventists, have difficulty in accepting the idea that the Spirit of Prophecy has never departed from Yah's true people. They look for certain signs that were created specifically for the purpose of "proving" Mrs. White's ministry based upon her particular gifts, and not designed to truly identify many of the various kinds of prophets that the Scriptures describe.

The Adventist "tests of a prophet" would not, for example, be able to acknowledge John the Baptist, whom Christ considered the greatest messenger to have a natural, human parentage. And what did John

do? He quoted the inspired writings of his day. He warned people to repent, because the Kingdom was at hand. He baptized those who listened to him, even though they had already been acknowledged as members of the “true church.” He testified against the hypocrisy of those who were supposed to be leading the lost and dying to Heaven. His straight testimony led both the religious and governmental authorities to persecute him and throw him in prison. Well, that should all sound very familiar.

But if the churches are expecting someone to arise and say, “I also saw all these scenes of destruction, but your ship will go through,” they will be hearing only that which they desire to hear. That is not how prophecy works, and the prophets of this generation are lightly regarded, when they say, “Go back to the first works. Learn the messages of the past. Understand the messengers that have already been sent to you, and then we will tell you something new.”

Our message is not anything new. We say, believe in Christ in you, the hope of glory. Have the faith and testimony of Yahshua. Overcome all sin through His infinite power. Trust in Yahweh for His protection. If you do these things, you will never fall. These have been said by Christ’s servants from the very beginning.

But if the writings of Ellen White, even from her most widely-known books like *The Desire of Ages* and *The Great Controversy*, were rightly understood by the Adventist movement, there would be no need for any calling-out. There would be no need for any painful divisions, or consciences that are so pricked they can no longer remain where they once found fellowship and comfort. But every act of unbelief has a great cost, and these scenes of destruction that we are reading about here, they are the consequence of apostasy.

[quote]

Everywhere there are men who should be out in active ministry, giving the last message of warning to a fallen world. The work that should long ago have been in active operation to win souls to Christ has not been done. The inhabitants of the ungodly cities so soon to be visited by calamities have been cruelly neglected. The time is near when large cities will be swept away, and all should be warned of these coming judgments. But who is giving to the accomplishment of this work the wholehearted service that God requires?

At the present time there is not a thousandth part being done in working the cities, that should be done, and that would be done if men and women would do their whole duty. [Manuscript 53, 1910]

O that God’s people had a sense of the impending destruction of thousands of cities, now almost given to idolatry. [The Review and Herald, September 10, 1903]

[/quote]

Yah has truly borne long with the cities being described here. And who will have the courage to say, when these destructions occur, “Give heed to Yah’s warnings?” When the flood of worldly sympathy covers up those who have not been faithful to our Father, and the number of visitors to churches temporarily rise, who will be able to recognize that these don’t really make anything better, from the perspective of eternity? True love was never so unpopular as it is now, but we are privileged to bear it.

Here is the last quote of the section:

[quote]

As I consider the conditions in the cities that are so manifestly under the power of Satan, I ask myself the question, What will be the end of these things? The wickedness in many cities is increasing. Crime and iniquity are at work on every hand. New species of idolatry are continually being introduced into society. In every nation the minds of men are turning to the invention of some new thing. Rashness of deed and confusion of mind are everywhere increasing. Surely the cities of the earth are becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah.

As a people we need to hasten the work in the cities, which has been hindered for lack of workers and means and a spirit of consecration. At this time, the people of God need to turn their hearts fully to Him; for the end of all things is at hand. They need to humble their minds, and to be attentive to the will of the Lord, working with earnest desire to do that which God has shown must be done to warn the cities of their impending doom. [The Review and Herald, January 25, 1912]

[/quote]

We, few, can do a great work. We can hasten the work in the cities. We can follow these instructions, as prophecy tells us that we will. But, as pastor shared with us in an email earlier today, we cannot wait for the Holy Spirit to drive us out of our chairs. We must be actively seeking ways to advance the Kingdom. We must be constantly praying and considering how we can reach out to those who need to hear this word. Perhaps the next person we have the opportunity to share this with will be one of those precious few who will break free from Satan's delusions.

We have a powerful, life-changing and soul-searching message to bear. There are many ways we can present it. It may not be an accepted invitation to study the Bible on every occasion, but something as simple as asking someone to sign a petition... this can do wonders in bringing to mind the principles of our Father in Heaven.

And so, while this section of Evangelism has been about the large cities, it can be applied to every community in which we live. It can be applied to the online community of which everyone here is already a part. Evangelism, rather than a sharing of doctrine, or a discussion designed to merely convince people of something, is actually, really, one of the truest expressions of love that one human being can show to another. Let us, therefore, be about this love, and about our Father's work.

Are there any questions or comments before we close?