

ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE

VARIATION AND
FREQUENCY OF
THE ELLEN G.
WHITE VISIONS

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**Variation and Frequency
of the Ellen G. White
Visions**

Ellen G. White

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About the Author

Ellen G. White (1827-1915) is considered the most widely translated American author, her works having been published in more than 160 languages. She wrote more than 100,000 pages on a wide variety of spiritual and practical topics. Guided by the Holy Spirit, she exalted Jesus and pointed to the Scriptures as the basis of one's faith.

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Certain documents issued by the White Estate have declared that Ellen White was favored through the seventy years of her ministry with approximately two thousand visions. Perhaps it would be illuminating to disclose the basis for arriving at this figure. First of all, we should define the term “vision” as used in this connection:

Vision—That experience, without reference to circumstances, but mysterious in its nature, through which God communicates to the prophet revealing His will, presenting the events of history, forecasting future events, disclosing the experiences of individuals, even disclosing their inner thoughts, revealing the welfare of individuals, groups and the church of God, et cetera.

No precise procedure can be enumerated for such experiences. In Bible times, and ours, the circumstances of the visions varied greatly in duration, timing or the means by which the prophet was usually, but not necessarily always, removed from his conscious state ([Daniel 8:18](#)) as in the visions accompanied by physical phenomena ([Daniel 10:5-10; 16-19; Numbers 24:3, 4, 16](#)) and prophetic dreams which might be termed “night visions” or “visions of the night.” ([Daniel 7:1, 2, 7, 13](#))

In such circumstances, the mind of the prophet, as illustrated in the experience of Daniel and John, was illuminated as he, often seeming to be present, witnessed the transpiring of events and conversing, in which case his description might be accompanied by such words or phrases as “I saw,” or “I saw and behold,” ([Revelation 7:2, 7, 13](#)) or “I turned to see,” ([Revelation 1:12](#))

“I looked and behold,” ([Revelation 4:1](#)) and simply, “I saw,” ([Revelation 5:1](#); [6:2](#); [9:1](#); [21:1](#), et cetera); “I beheld and heard,” ([Revelation 5:1](#)); “I heard a voice.” ([Revelation 10:4](#)) At times he overheard illuminating conversation, “I heard one saint speaking and another saint said.” ([Daniel 8:13](#))

Included also would be those occasions when special illumination was given under various and sundry circumstances, but in which in each case the prophet sensed that God was communicating with him in other than the usual way of obtaining knowledge.

Now back to the estimate of the number of visions given to Ellen White. This estimate was made by Arthur White, who through his lifetime connection with the work of the White Estate led him to assume that visions of one kind or another were given to her on an average of one in two weeks. James White, in 1868, after describing what took place in visions given to Ellen White, thus referring to the visions accompanied by physical phenomena, declared: [2]

She has probably had, during the past twenty-three years, between one and two hundred visions. These have been given under almost every variety of circumstances, yet maintaining a wonderful similarity.—*Life Incidents* p. 272.

This would mean an average of a vision once in six weeks. In these years the visions accompanied by physical phenomena which could last from a few minutes to two hours or more were very comprehensive in nature. In the later years when visions were usually given to her in the hours of the night, they were much less comprehensive in their nature and quite frequent. There were times when two or three visions or more were given to her in one week. Taking all the circumstances into account, it seems reasonable that an estimate reached on the basis of an average of a vision given once in two weeks throughout her lifetime is conservative. None-the-less, it must be kept in mind that this is but an estimate, and set forth as such.

Variation in the Visions

When the facts are all known, it is very clear that no one set of circumstances can be set forth as describing just what took place in connection with the giving of the visions. There are several quite well known eyewitness accounts of what usually took place in connection with the visions accompanied by physical phenomena. James White published a statement on this point in 1868:

[3]

1. She is utterly unconscious of everything transpiring around her, as has been proved by the most rigid tests, but views herself as removed from this world, and in the presence of heavenly beings.

2. She does not breathe. During the entire period of her continuance in vision, which has at different times ranged from fifteen minutes to three hours, there is no breath, as has been repeatedly proved by pressing upon the chest, and by closing the mouth and nostrils.

3. Immediately on entering vision, her muscles become rigid, and joints fixed, so far as any external force can influence them. At the same time, her movements and gestures, which are frequent, are free and graceful, and cannot be hindered nor controlled by the strongest person.

4. On coming out of vision, whether in the daytime or a well-lighted room at night, all is total darkness. Her power to distinguish even the most brilliant objects, held within a few inches of the eyes, returns but gradually.—*Life Incidents* p. 272, (to the Remnant, p. 6)

Statements might be brought forward by a number of witnesses as W. C. White, Martha Byington-Amadon, J. N. Loughborough, et cetera, each covering essentially the same ground. The three just named, each mention's that as she went into vision there was

an animated exclamation of “Glory,” or “Glory to God,”—at times repeated. Of this, Martha Amadon wrote:

Her first word in vision was “Glory,” sounding at first close by, and then dying away in the distance, seemingly far away.—*Messenger to the Remnant* p. 6.

But there were exceptions and at times there was no such exclamation as the vision commenced. Several interesting accounts may be found in *Messenger to the Remnant* pp. 6, 7, 22, 23.

Elder George I. Butler, long-time President of the General Conference, in 1874 presents another contemporary report of the visions accompanied by physical phenomena, published in the *Review and Herald* in an article entitled “Visions and Prophecy”

[4]

For nearly thirty years past, these visions have been given with greater or less frequency, and have been witnessed by many, oftentimes by unbelievers as well as those believing them. They generally, but not always, occur in the midst of earnest seasons of religious interest while the Spirit of God is specially present, if those can tell who are in attendance.

The time Mrs. White is in this condition has varied from fifteen minutes to one hundred and eighty. During this time the heart and pulse continue to beat, the eyes are always wide open, and seem to be gazing at some far distant object, and are never fixed on any person or thing in the room. They are always directed upward. They exhibit a pleasant expression. There is no ghastly look or any resemblance of fainting.

While she is in vision, her breathing entirely ceases. No breath ever escapes her nostrils or lips when in this condition. This has been proved by many witnesses, among them physicians of skill, and themselves unbelievers in the visions, on some occasions being appointed by a public congregation for the purpose. It has been proved many times by tightly holding the nostrils and mouth with the hand, and by putting a looking glass

before them so close that any escape of moisture of breath would be detected. In this condition she often speaks words and short sentences, yet not the slightest breath escapes.

When she goes into this condition, there is no appearance of swooning or faintness, her face retains its natural color, and the blood circulates as usual. Often she loses her strength temporarily and reclines or sits; but at other times she stands up. She moves her arms gracefully, and often her face is lighted up with radiance as though the glory of heaven rested upon her. She is utterly unconscious of everything going on around her while she is in vision, having no knowledge whatever of what is said and done in her presence....

When she comes out of this condition she speaks and writes from time to time what she has seen while in vision; and the supernatural character of these visions is seen even more clearly in what she thus reveals than in her appearance and condition while in vision, for many things have thus been related which it was impossible for her to know in any other way....

These things can be proved by any amount of testimony, and we confidently affirm that they are of such a character that they could not be accomplished by deception.—G. I. Butler in [The Review and Herald, June 9, 1874](#).

- [5] The physical phenomena which provided tangible and convincing evidence to the early believers at a time when the fruitage of Ellen White's work was less abundant than what may be observed today, filled a more important place then than now. Ellen White rarely spoke of it, perhaps because she was totally unconscious to what was taking place. One reference made in 1906 is significant:

Sometimes while I was in vision my friends would approach me and exclaim, "Why, she does not breathe!" Placing a mirror before my lips, they found that no moisture gathered on the glass. It was while there was

no sign of any breathing, that I kept talking of the things that were being presented before me. These messages were thus given to substantiate the faith of all, that in these last days we might have confidence in the Spirit of Prophecy.—[The Review and Herald, June 14, 1906.](#)

The Visions of the Night

All acquainted with Ellen White's writings—and with increasing force the matter is brought home through the account of her experience in the Ellen G. White biography—are aware of the large place the visions of the night took in her work. Such expressions as, “In the visions of the night some things were clearly presented to me;” or “In the night seasons the Lord gave me instruction,” indicate that her experiences parallel those of Daniel who “had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed.” ([Daniel 7:1](#)) And so Ellen White, down through the years and especially in the last thirty years of her life, received instruction from the Lord in “night visions.” Her work was well established and there was little need of evidence given in connection with the visions themselves. Often she used interchangeably the terms “dreams” and “visions of the night.” Sometimes she seems to distinguish one from the other as she did in 1885 in the words: “A communication comes to me from the Lord, either in a dream or a vision of the night.” [Testimonies for the Church 5:685](#). In either case, she attributed it to the Lord. In 1868, she had written:

Dreams from the Lord are classed in the Word of God with visions, and are as truly the fruits of the spirit of prophecy as visions. Such dreams, taking into the account the persons who have them, and the circumstances under which they are given, contain their own proofs of their genuineness.—[Testimonies for the Church 5:658](#).

Answering an inquiry from W. C. White, she one time declared that “the same angel stands by her side instructing her in the visions of the night, as stands beside her instructing her in the visions of the day.”

Visions During Public Prayer

It was not too uncommon for Ellen White to be given a vision while praying, both in private and in public. Such expressions as the following may be noted:

While engaged in earnest prayer, I was lost to everything around me; the room was filled with light, and I was bearing a message to an assembly that seemed to be the General Conference.—[Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers](#), 461.

On Friday evening, February 15, 1901, while engaged with the family in prayer at the opening of the Sabbath, and reaching out for light as to whether she should accept Dr. Kellogg's invitation to stay in his home while attending the General Conference Session of 1901, a vision was given to her. She described it:

I was asking the Lord where I should go and what I should do.... Well, while I was praying and was sending up my petition, there was, as has been a hundred times or more, a soft light circling around in the room, and a fragrance like the fragrance of flowers, of a beautiful scent of flowers.—*Ms* 43a, 1901.

She heard a voice, "Respect the courtesy of My servant, John Kellogg."—[Letter 33](#), 1901.

Did others praying with her that Friday evening see the light and notice the fragrance? As she recounted the experience at the Session, she said, "Though none of the family saw what I saw, or heard what I heard, yet they felt the influence of the Spirit, and were weeping and praising God."—[The General Conference Bulletin](#), 204, 1901. (EGW Biography, vol. 5, pp. 53-54.) [7]

W. C. White, speaking at the Advanced Bible School in 1936, described a pause in a public prayer at the Minnesota Camp Meeting

being offered by Ellen White in which a comprehensive vision was given to her.

Father and mother were carrying a heavy burden in behalf of the ministry who had been working in that State. On Sunday morning they undertook to conduct a revival service. Father spoke for a few minutes, but with little freedom. Then after mother had spoken briefly, they asked the congregation to kneel in prayer. Father offered a labored, sorrowful prayer, then mother began to implore for light and freedom. After she had prayed for about two minutes she stopped. There was silence long enough to count to forty or fifty, about half a minute.

I was kneeling with the congregation, and I turned to see what was the occasion for the silence. Just then she burst forth in prayer. Her voice was melodious, and triumphant, and the remainder of her prayer greatly moved the people present.

During the period of silence, a revelation was given her regarding conditions in the Minnesota Conference, also conditions regarding the work in Battle Creek, also regarding other matters of general interest in the cause. Following the camp meeting, father and mother found retirement at the home of one of our brethren. Mother wrote diligently for about two weeks., in recording what had been shown to her during the half minute of pause in her prayer.—W. C. White in Lecture at Advanced Bible School, 1936 (White Publications Document File No. 696.)

Vision While Totally Conscious

While in Sydney, Australia for a few days in 1896 a very unique experience came to Ellen White in which a vision was given to her while fully conscious. It involved her dealings with one of her literary assistants, Fannie Bolton. Ellen White wrote of the experience:

Friday, March 19, I arose early, about half—past three o'clock in the morning. While writing upon the fifteenth chapter of John, suddenly a wonderful peace came upon me. The whole room seemed to be filled with the atmosphere of heaven. A holy, sacred presence seemed to be in my room. I laid down my pen and was in a waiting attitude to see what the Spirit would say unto me. I saw no person. I heard no audible voice, but a heavenly Watcher seemed close beside me; I felt that I was in the presence of Jesus.

[8]

The sweet peace and light which seemed to be in my room, it is impossible for me to explain or describe. A sacred, holy atmosphere surrounded me, and there was presented to my mind and understanding matters of intense interest and importance. A line of action was laid out before me as if the unseen Presence was speaking with me. The matter I had been writing upon seemed to be lost to my mind and another matter distinctly opened before me. A great awe seemed to be upon me as matters were imprinted upon my mind.

The question was, "What have you done with the request of Fannie Bolton? You have not erred in disconnecting with her. This was the right thing for you to do, and this would bring to her mind conviction and remorse which she must have. She has been tempted, deceived, and almost destroyed. Notwithstanding her perversity

of spirit, I have thoughts of mercy and compassion for her....

“Take this poor deluded soul by the hand, surround her with a favorable influence if possible. If she separates now from you, Satan’s net is prepared for her feet.... I am her Redeemer. I will restore her if she will not exalt and honor and glorify herself. If she goes from you now, there is a chain of circumstances which will bring her into difficulties which will be for her ruin.”...

I shall act accordingly. I have taken Fannie to my home here at Sunnyside.... I shall do all I can to help her heavenward.—Ms 12c, 1896.

Thus we find that, as recorded in [Hebrews 1:1](#) concerning visions given to His prophets, whether of old or to Ellen White, God “at sundry times and in diverse manners spake.”

Washington, D. C.

April 5, 1982