

Should We Read Uriah Smith?

Many of us have been told in the past that we should be careful about reading Uriah Smith because he had major errors. But is this true? Did Uriah Smith's books on Daniel and Revelation contain major errors that we should carefully avoid becoming tangled in?

It is true that Ellen White rebuked him for his rejection of the message in 1888. But he wrote his books on prophecy before that time and in the 1880's the two books, *Thoughts on Daniel* and *Thoughts on Revelation*, were bound together into one volume. Ellen White had a very high regard for this book and nowhere does she imply that there are major errors in it. But her statements about it indicate quite the contrary.

“In The Desire of Ages, Patriarchs and Prophets, The Great Controversy, and in Daniel and the Revelation, there is precious instruction. **These books must be regarded as of special importance, and every effort should be made to get them before the people.** – Letter 229, 1903.” *Colporteur Ministry* page 123.

“**I consider that that book [Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation] should go everywhere.** It has its place and will do a grand, good work.” – E. G. WHITE Letter 253, 1889.

When urged that there should be changes made to the book, in particular dealing with the “daily” issue, she did not support the idea of any big changes being made.

“In some of our important books that have been in print for years, and which have brought many to a knowledge of the truth, there may be found matters of *minor importance that call for careful study and correction*. Let such matters be considered by those regularly appointed to have the oversight of our publications. ***Let not these brethren, nor our canvassers, nor our ministers magnify these matters in such a way as to lessen the influence of these good soul-saving books.***” – E. G. WHITE MS. 11, 1910. (Published in *Preach the Word*, p. 7.) *Ellen G. White Biography, Vol. 6, page 258.*

The concept that we have all been introduced to, that there are major errors in Smith's book, and that we should be careful about reading it, goes directly contrary to this inspired statement.

“The less that is done unnecessarily to change our publications, the better it will be.” MS 11, 1910, *Ellen G. White Biography, Vol. 6, page 258.*

“Satan is working that the history of the Jewish nation may be repeated in the experience of those who claim to believe present truth... The very same Satan is at work to undermine the faith of the people of God at this time. There are persons ready to catch up every new idea. The prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation are misinterpreted. These persons do not consider that the truth has been set forth at the appointed time by the very men whom God was leading to do this special work. These men followed on step by step in the very fulfillment of prophecy, and those who have not had a personal experience in this work, are to take the Word of God and believe on ‘their word’ who have been led by the Lord in the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels’ messages. **These messages, received and acted upon, are doing their work to prepare a people to stand in the great day of God.**” *Selected Messages Book 2, page 111.*

“The Lord has shown me that this book will do a good work in enlightening those who become interested in the truth for this time. Those who embrace the truth now, who have not shared in the experiences of those who entered the work in the early history of the message, should study the instruction given in Daniel and the Revelation, becoming familiar with the truth it presents... **The great, essential questions which God would have presented to the people are found in Daniel and the Revelation. There is found solid, eternal truth for this time. Everyone needs the light and information it contains...** It is painful to think of the many cheap theories picked up and presented to the people by ignorant, unprepared teachers. Those who present their human tests and the nonsensical ideas they have concocted in their own minds, show the character of the goods in their treasure house. They have laid in store shoddy material. Their great desire is to make a sensation. The truth for this

time has been brought out in many books. Let those who have been dealing in cheap sentiments and foolish tests, cease this work and study Daniel and the Revelation. They will then have something to talk about that will help the mind. As they receive the knowledge contained in this book, they will have in the treasure house of the mind a store from which they can continually draw as they communicate to others the great essential truths of God's Word. **The interest in Daniel and the Revelation is to continue as long as probationary time shall last. God used the author of this book as a channel through which to communicate light to direct minds to the truth.** Shall we not appreciate this light, which points us to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, our King?...Ms 174, 1899." *Manuscript Releases, Vol. 1, page 61-65*

There is a story told by elder Bourdeau about Ellen White's reaction when she first saw the book.

"Many years ago, when the late Elder Uriah Smith was writing *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*, while Elder James White and Ellen G. White were at my house in Enosburg, Vermont, they received by mail a roll of printed proof sheets on *Thoughts on Revelation* that Brother Smith had sent to them. Brother White read portions of these to the company, and expressed much pleasure and satisfaction because they were so concisely and clearly written. Then Sister White stated what she had been shown, as follows :

"*'The Lord is inspiring Brother Smith – leading his mind by His Spirit, and an angel is guiding his hand in writing these Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation.'* I was present when these words were spoken. (Signed) 'A. C. BOURDEAU.'" *Ministry Magazine, January 1945.*

The details of this story may not have been completely accurate, as it was a memory written many years after the event, but it does follow in the tenor of the other statements of inspiration.

The idea that this book was authored solely by Smith and that it is his book is a misconception of how the book came into being. Smith edited it, but the ideas were not all his own. Arthur White tells us:

"The present well-known volume, *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*, was developed through the decades until it reached its present form. For many years, as mentioned earlier, there were two books, first *Thoughts on Revelation* and later *Thoughts on Daniel*.

"James White in 1862 caught the vision of a complete exposition on Revelation as he attended 'a large and flourishing Bible class conducted by Brother Uriah Smith' in connection with the Battle Creek Sabbath school. Chapter by chapter they had studied Revelation and 'passed through the entire book, ... all coming to the same conclusion on almost every point,' and they were 'confident that they had found a better harmony than they had before seen, and clearer light on some portions of the book.' – *Review and Herald*, June 3, 1862.

"Delighted with the results of their group study, the class decided to go through the book again, 'taking one chapter for each lesson.' – *Ibid.*

"Here, thought James White, was an opportunity to develop helpful matter for Seventh-day Adventists generally, and he announced his intention from week to week to report the results of the investigation in the *Review* 'by way of a few thoughts on one chapter each week.' The co-ordination of the plans for study and writing are indicated by the James White comment that 'should we be called away for a few weeks, the class propose to leave the book of Revelation, in our absence, for some other portion of the Scriptures, until we return.' And he voiced his confident hope in his closing words: 'Judging from past investigation of this book by the brethren and sisters of the Bible class, we hope in expressing our views to express theirs also, yet we choose to be alone responsible for what we may say.' – *Ibid.*

"Then follows the first installment – a three-column article reviewing the important points stressed in the study of May 17, appearing under the title 'Thoughts on Revelation.' Chapter one of Revelation was dealt with in this initial article of the series. First a few verses are quoted, and these are followed with appropriate comment and explanation – a form of treatment which was to become very familiar in the following decades.

"The next five consecutive numbers of the *Review* carried articles dealing with the book, chapter by

chapter, until as James White left for a trip, he inserted a two-line note: “Thoughts on the Revelation’ will not again appear till our return from the northern tour.’ – *Ibid.*, July 15, 1862.

“After a lapse of two months the articles were resumed in the issue of September 9, with a presentation of Revelation 7. Then James White abruptly closed his work on the series with a brief article headed ‘Chapters VIII and IX,’ but commenting only on the first five verses of Revelation 8, covering the seventh seal and introducing the seven trumpets. Then the article was cut short by James White’s explanation that for lack of time to prepare an ‘exposition of the trumpets’ he must be excused for passing over them and recommending ‘as the best light at present,’ the pamphlet entitled *The Sounding of the Seven Trumpets*, listed as for sale at the Review office. The pamphlet referred to was a sixty-eight-page reprint of Josiah Litch’s explanation of the seven trumpets, published by the Review and Herald office in 1859, previously appearing as article reprints. Five weeks later Elder White admitted the futility of his attempting to go on with the work, and announced that, since he was away from home much of the time, ‘Brother Smith has consented to conclude the book, commencing with Chapter X.’ – *Ibid.*, Oct. 21, 1862.

“In the same style, but with more extended comment, Uriah Smith then picked up the work and treated Revelation 10 to 22, presenting an article in each number of the *Review*, save one, and closing the series on February 3, 1863, in issue Number 10 of Volume 21.

“Two years passed before the readers of the *Review* were informed of the intention of its editor, Uriah Smith, to prepare the manuscript for a book – *Thoughts on the Revelation*. In speaking of this, he set forth his purpose to build on the series of articles written by Elder White and himself, and called for suggestions from the people. Here is his statement:

“ ‘We have commenced to revise, and in a great measure rewrite, the ‘Thoughts on Revelation,’ published in *Review*, Volumes XX and XXI. We shall devote what time we can to this work, besides preparing matter for the *Review*, otherwise than writing. If any brethren have any suggestions to make on any part of the book, we hope to receive them at once.’ – *Ibid.*, July 18, 1865.

“From time to time during 1865 and 1866, brief notes informed Seventh-day Adventists that Elder Smith was devoting what time he could to the promised work, but it was not until April, 1867, that the copy was put in the hands of the printer, and the completed book was listed for sale on June 13. As the finished volume was received by James White he reached for his pen, wrote a few words of commendation, and then stated:

‘ ‘These thoughts are not the fruit of one brain. In the time of the end the Revelation was to be unsealed and opened. And from, the open book, light has been shining. William Miller saw much. Others since have seen more... This ... is a book of thoughts, clothed in the author’s happy style, plain, yet critical and practical, coming down to the spiritual wants of the common people, yet elevated and dignified. This standard work should be in the library of every believer.’ – *Ibid.*, July 16, 1867.

“Before the second edition was printed, Elder Smith revised the work, and in its new form several printings appeared.

“In 1872, five years after *Thoughts on the Revelation* was printed, a companion volume, *Thoughts on Daniel*, was issued and announced for sale on December 31, 1872. This, too, quite largely represented the joint study of able Bible students. After passing through several editions as single volumes, the two companion books in 1881 appeared as a combined work, *Thoughts on Daniel and the Revelation*.

“Elder Smith prepared his manuscripts as a scholarly writer would, setting forth denominational views on the great lines of clearly understood prophecy presented in Daniel and Revelation. But when he undertook the verse-by-verse exposition of these two books, he ran into many texts of Scripture which dealt with matters regarding which we as a people had not given much if any study, and in such cases he often set forth the views of the best commentators available, and used freely both the lines of argument and the words of Josiah Litch, George Storrs, and others. Elder Smith demonstrated remarkably good judgment in the selection of matter from these writers.” *Arthur White*, “*Thoughts on*

Daniel and the Revelation,” Ministry Magazine, January, 1945.

According to the evidence this work, *Daniel and Revelation* was not Smith’s alone, but was actually the work of a large number of the pioneers. So to say that “Smith taught major errors in his book” is really to say that the pioneers of the SDA church also held and taught major errors. This concept of the book containing “major errors” is directly contrary to inspiration.

“Those who are preparing to enter the ministry, who desire to become successful students of the prophecies, will find Daniel and the Revelation an invaluable help. They need to understand this book. It speaks of past, present, and future, laying out the path so plainly that none need err therein. Those who will diligently study this book will have no relish for the cheap sentiments presented by those who have a burning desire to get out something new and strange to present to the flock of God. The rebuke of God is upon all such teachers. They need that one teach them what is meant by godliness and truth. **The great, essential questions which God would have presented to the people are found in Daniel and the Revelation. There is found solid, eternal truth for this time. Everyone needs the light and information it contains.**” *Manuscript Releases, Vol. 1, page 61.*

“The students in our schools should carefully study Daniel and the Revelation, so that they shall not be left in darkness, and the day of Christ overtake them as a thief in the night. **I speak of this book because it is a means of educating those who need to understand the truth of the Word. This book should be highly appreciated.** It covers much of the ground we have been over in our experience. If the youth will study this book and learn for themselves what is truth, they will be saved from many perils.” *Manuscript Releases, Vol. 1, page 63.*

“Especially should the book Daniel and the Revelation be brought before people as the very book for this time. **This book contains the message which all need to read and understand.** Translated into many different languages, it will be a power to enlighten the world.” *Manuscript Releases, Vol. 1 page 60.*