
AMERICAN VISIONARIES AND THEIR APPROACHES TO THE PAST

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When writing about Joseph Smith, observers almost reflexively invoke the term “incomparable.”¹ The Latter-day Saint prophet can indeed make comparison difficult. This may be particularly true of his engagement with antiquity. Joseph Smith’s forays into the ancient world, from Abrahamic papyri to American Mulekites, often appear so distinctive or peculiar as to resist analogy. But even the inimitable can be profitably compared; sometimes the more radical the differences, the more illuminating the comparison. And Joseph Smith does have some interesting analogues in his pursuit of the past. The Mormon prophet, after all, was not the only American religious leader of the nineteenth century to claim modern-day revelation nor to recover sacred stories of earlier epochs. This essay looks at three American figures of the era—Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and Ellen White—and examines their

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respective approaches to the past. Incomparable in many ways, their juxtaposition does reveal important implications arising from their recoveries of sacred history.

This trio shared much in common. All three were born in northern New England in the first third of the nineteenth century. All three faced financial insecurity and physical malady early in life. All three found themselves dissatisfied in the mainstream Protestant churches with which their families were affiliated. All three declared revelatory experiences that set them on a path to exceptionally powerful forms of religious leadership. Perhaps most distinctively, all three produced sacred texts that their followers came to see as inspired directly by God. And—of greatest historical importance—all three established churches that continue to have an important presence on the American religious landscape and around the globe. Their burning sense of mission, the irritations they caused the guardians of Christian orthodoxy, and the loyalty they inspired among their disciples can look strikingly similar across all three biographies.² And yet, when it comes to their approaches to the past, the three look very different. Those distinctions form the focus of this essay, and there may be reason to believe that this triangulated comparison of nineteenth-century American visionaries will shed some light on the distinguishing qualities and consequences of Joseph Smith's particular angle on the ancient world.

Though White and Eddy consciously avoided the title of “prophet,” to a great extent all three figures understood themselves to be following in the tradition of the Bible's revelatory figures.³ This tradition is critical for an understanding of their differences, as the biblical precedents for how God's emissaries handle sacred history can be rather complex and ambiguous. That prophetic figures feel any draw toward the past may strike some as incongruous, given that the terms *prophet* and *prophecy* carry overwhelmingly dominant connotations of prediction and anticipation. That

is, it may seem that the proper subject of prophetic declaration should be the future. Prophets are to warn, foresee, and foretell. They look forward. Indeed, it may have been precisely this narrowly prognosticating conception of prophethood that prompted Ellen White to refuse repeatedly to apply the term to herself.⁴ When asked why she never claimed the title *prophet*, she offered two reasons: First, such self-appellation risked the appearance and reality of damnable arrogance, and second, “because my work includes much more than the word ‘prophet’ signifies.” She preferred the more comprehensive term “messenger.”⁵ Yet, however they chose to describe themselves, Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and Ellen White had powerful reasons to look forward; they declared the approach of future events, specifically the millennial reign of the Christ. They all believed they stood either on the eve or in the early hours of a new, culminating epoch in the human story. With such dramatic occurrences emerging in the present and looming in the near future, it seems fair to ask why any of them would invest energy or attention in retrospection. What has the past to do with an impending end to history? That question and its possible answers may make more sense when situated in the intensely biblical culture from which these American visionaries derived both inspirations and identity.

The Biblical Janus and American Exemplars

That the Bible’s believers have frequently viewed their own world through the scripture’s types and tropes is a well-established fact. William Tyndale believed the devout could “read the stories of the bible . . . and see every thing practised before thine eyes; for according to those ensamples shall it go with thee and all men until the world’s end.”⁶ The famed Puritan rebel Anne Hutchinson exemplified the ways in which prophetic figures might structure their own ministries around the images of their scriptural predecessors.⁷ Revolutionary-era Americans recurrently sought to bring meaning

to their experience by setting it in the idiom of ancient scripture.⁸ Notwithstanding new forms of historical criticism, the Bible remained as overwhelmingly present for many nineteenth-century Americans as it had been for previous generations. “In antebellum Protestant America,” George Marsden has observed, “there was no higher court of appeal.”⁹ A cursory review of the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and Ellen White demonstrates how deeply imbued they were with the structures and substance of the King James Version. Although their conservative critics then and now have seen their claims to extra-biblical revelation as an irreverent departure from true scriptural fidelity, their early ministries necessarily rested on a culture whose assumptions about religious knowledge and authority were devotedly intertwined with the prophetic models of ancient Israel and the primitive church.

Lessons in typology came early to this trio. Mary Baker Eddy’s first recollection of revelation stemmed from a series of events in her early childhood when she heard a disembodied voice repeatedly call to her. Unable to find the source of the sound, young Mary would go to her puzzled mother seeking explanation. On one such occasion, while spending time with a cousin, who also heard the voice, Mary realized she had a second witness to its reality and again went to her mother for answers. Encountering two testimonies, Abigail Baker took her daughter’s experience with the utmost seriousness, carefully questioning the cousin to determine whether it had really occurred as Mary reported it. Convinced that it had, Abigail sat Mary down with the Bible and read aloud from Samuel 3 about the prophetic call of the young temple apprentice. Abigail then told Mary that if she heard the voice again she must answer the way the child-prophet had in the scriptures: “Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth.” Abigail Baker accepted and taught her daughter what so many early Americans took for granted: that there were ancient patterns available to help moderns recognize and make sense of their

own spiritual encounters. She elegantly assumed the role of Eli to Mary's Samuel.¹⁰

The Baker women were hardly alone in understanding the value of situating modern prophetic experiences in an anciently familiar framework. During Ellen White's teenage years, when she faced withering criticism from all sides for her claims to divine vision—to the extent that she even began to doubt the validity of her own experience—God responded to her hesitation by first striking her dumb and then bringing her clarity through a new vision in which, she recorded, “a card was held up before me, on which were written in letters of gold” the references to fifty “texts of Scripture.” These passages provided parallels between her current situation and the narratives and doctrines of the Bible, giving her the assurance she needed to confidently claim her role as a modern revelator.¹¹ When White's husband, James, wrote a preface to her account of these experiences, he argued that her true ministry in the midst of countless antebellum spiritual frauds should be understood in the light of Moses' battles with Pharaoh's court magicians.¹² Looking back at the visionary encounters and obligations of his own adolescence, Joseph Smith likewise plumbed their meanings by seeing them in the light of scriptural precedent: “I felt much like Paul,” Joseph Smith wrote, “when he made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice.”¹³ In the effort both to comprehend and to legitimize their sense of mission, these antebellum Americans found meaning in the experiences of the ancients.

If the ancient scripture thus provided the manual for learning how to be God's messenger, what lessons did it have to offer about the oracle's proper engagement with the past? The Bible's instructions on this matter were multifaceted. On one hand, by its very nature, historical scripture seemed to indicate that prophets have a special responsibility to history. The scriptures are accounts of the

past. To interpret them, to apply them, to imitate them is—in some sense—to do history. But sometimes the biblical message about the revelator’s proper relationship to the past is even more expansive and explicit. The first book of the Bible, as modern Christians had it, consists of a historical work attributed to Moses. Moses’ identity as a historian—both as chronicler of current events and recoverer of bygone stories—is conspicuously apparent; at least it was to various early modern observers. Historian Zur Shalev has commented that the early French Protestant Samuel Bochart rested his defense of literal readings of scripture on the belief that “Moses was a careful historian, who sifted through oral and written sources, and could by inspiration identify the truthful sections in each.” In the antebellum United States, New York’s *Weekly Herald* referred casually to “the great historian, Moses” and during the Civil War the *Boston Recorder* declared that “as a historian, Moses has left on record an imperishable monument of his greatness.” The *Lectures on Faith*, early Mormon theological statements of which Joseph Smith was a primary author, addressed “Moses, the historian.” Ellen White herself called Moses the “Alpha of Bible history.”¹⁴ If, as he so often appears to, Moses served as the archetypically prophetic exemplar for antebellum Americans, the lesson of the Bible seemed rather clear: God’s messengers have built upon and bequeathed a clear sense of sacred history. There could be no Exodus without Genesis.

Beyond Moses’ massive biblical presence as a sacred historian, other prophets of the Hebrew scriptures offered additional evidence for the value of history. The general nostalgia of a book like Lamentations, which pleads with Jehovah to “renew our days as of old,” reinforces the sense that there is religious benefit to be had by remembering the past.¹⁵ But, for all that, the Hebrew scriptures are far from unidirectional in their temporal orientation. Indeed, Isaiah’s and Daniel’s careers are as recognizable by their emphases on messianic and millennial futures as Moses’ was for its contemplations

of what had gone before. Jeremiah may have longed for a return to a purer past, but he also foresaw an impending Babylonian onslaught—and there was a vital link between the two. This chronological complexity compels the Hebrew scriptures' readers to search both up and down the continuum of sacred time, a continuum that may be more loop than straight line, as essential divine truths are to be found in the recovered past and the prophesied future. As promised, the God of the Bible is found in the forward and the aft. The concluding verses of Malachi—that fulcrum on which the Protestant Bible balances between its two testaments—reinforce this sense of simultaneous beckoning to the future and to the past: the hearts of the children must turn to the their fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to their children.¹⁶

This bidirectional orientation gets replicated in the New Testament, but with an obvious revision. Here the past plays a significantly reduced role as a sometimes unrivaled future takes center stage. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus appears to question both the reliability and the authority of scriptural history. Repeatedly he prefaces his teachings with a statement that comes strikingly close to rendering the ancient record as obsolete hearsay: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time. . . . But I say unto you.”¹⁷ Jesus certainly could and did cite the Hebrew scriptures in defense of his doctrines, but in terms of a general temporal alignment, he pushed his listeners to think more about the present and the future rather than to glory or wallow in Israel’s past. That forward-facing position gets thoroughly reinforced in the writings of Paul, who spent most of his apostolic career attempting to break the hold that an old law retained on his contemporaries. But in the epistles, too, the prophets’ proper temporal orientation remains complex and bidirectional. Letters to the Romans and to the Hebrews work diligently to loosen the grip of the old covenant, but they use hoary stories and ancient figures to do so. Even the millennial prophecies

of John may be more chronologically complex than they seem at first blush. The work of Mircea Eliade has famously suggested that the seemingly futuristic preoccupations of millenarianism actually reflect a yearning to return to primordial purity. For such millenarians, the future is the past.¹⁸

The complex chronological legacy that the Bible bestowed on its believers appeared in the temporal orientations of Bible-loving early Americans, notably among the Protestant dissenters who in the seventeenth century settled the New England region that Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and Ellen White all claimed as their birthplace. This complexity was such that even modern scholars have had difficulty in aptly capturing or conveying the intricacies of its character. In the 1980s and early 1990s a historiographical squabble flared up among the students of early America. Were the Puritans forward-leaning millennialists, obsessed with looking ahead to the culminating events of the future? This position has been associated with the literary scholar Sacvan Bercovitch.¹⁹ Or were they, as Theodore Dwight Bozeman insisted, nostalgic primitivists, longingly looking back to a lost age of biblical purity?²⁰ While the debate superficially seemed to create stark positions in which the Puritans fixated either on what was to come or on what had been, upon careful review the better scholarship proved more nuanced than such a dichotomy would suggest. In reality, Bozeman carefully explains a primitivistic interest in the future, and Bercovitch affords some space to conceptions of a sacred past. A later work lumped in with the futurists, Avihu Zakai's *Exile and Kingdom*, actually devotes significant space to Puritans' interest in history.²¹ Even Bercovitch describes the jeremiad's eponymous prophetic exemplar as a figure who plays both a "historian of horologicals and a chronometer of the future."²² The relevant point is that, whether understood simplistically or in its fully textured form, the end result of this debate deepened our awareness of the bidirectional nature of early American engagements with time. Bozeman

notes that the Puritan writer Thomas Brightman encouraged all Christian theologians to emulate the symbolic beasts in Revelation, who were “full of eyes both before and behind.”²³

The historian Harry Stout quickly pushed the conversation toward that recognition. “In the final analysis,” Stout wrote, “all the views [of the historians involved in the debate] may be ‘right’ depending on the angle of vision. In fact, the Puritans were *both* conservative and revolutionary, *both* traditional and modern, and *both* backward looking and forward looking.”²⁴ The Puritan founders seemed to internalize the Bible’s contrapuntal messages about time. Though their intellectual predilections are famously well documented, and therefore debated with particular energy by historians, Puritans were hardly the last American figures to respond to a complex biblical text that simultaneously pulled them into a study of the past while exciting their interest in a millennial future. From Revolutionary millenarians to Transcendentalist romantics, Americans of the early national and antebellum era fulfilled a religious obligation to search up and down the divine spectrum of time.²⁵ A famous chart circulated by Millerite adventists announced the coming of the millennial future by providing information about the prophetic past.²⁶ Thus Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and Ellen White not only had a biblical mandate to search into both a forthcoming millennium and an ancient legacy, but they had among their American forebears and contemporaries a longstanding tradition of doing just that. A question that remains, then, is what did they do with these patterns and precedents?

Mary Baker Eddy and the (Im)matter of History

All three of the figures considered here were devoted to the sacred past captured in canonical scripture and believed in the historical truth of the Bible’s essential narratives. And they all looked forward to millennial developments. In that sense, they each embraced the



Portrait of Mary Baker Eddy. Public domain.

bidirectional temporality of the biblical tradition. A distinction emerges, however, when considering the extent to which they used their revelatory powers to recover historical information beyond the canonized scriptural text. Ellen White and Joseph Smith did that extensively; Mary Baker Eddy, with one possible unpublished exception, did not.²⁷ Eddy was least interested in enlarging the material

record of the past. In this sense, she was more Paul than Moses. To consider the reasons why her religious leadership—in contrast to that of her two visionary contemporaries—did not include extensive writing of distant history may help us appreciate some of the reasons why the others' did.

Certainly Eddy did not neglect the past altogether. Like Paul, she recurrently found illustration for eternal truths in sacred history. She wrote, for instance, about the persecutions faced by the early Christian Saints. "Martyrs are the human links which connect one stage with another in the history of religion," she declared.²⁸ And to say that her temporal orientation trended away from the past should not imply skepticism toward her constant expressions of devotion to the Bible as a historical record and an ancient repository of sacred truth. Rather, Eddy's historical references played a supporting role to her primarily ahistorical, spiritualized focus. For instance, where for Joseph Smith one's genealogy was an absolutely central feature of the faith, for the much more ambivalent Eddy such historical concerns amounted to "Ancestral Shadows," a potential distraction from the more spiritual matters at hand. They might be useful to establish the authority of her ministry—she was once excited, for instance, by the thought that she could trace her family history back to King David—but beyond that their value was severely limited.²⁹

At the time of her death, her personal library included a number of works of history or historical fiction with such titles as *The History of Christianity . . . from the Earliest Period to Present Time*, *Archaeological Writings of the Sanhedrin and Talmuds of the Jews*, *Roman Antiquities and Ancient Mythology*, *A View of the Hebrews*, and *Some Heretics of Yesterday*. Several of the historical works in her personal collections have marks by her hand; these markings are hardly extensive, but they do demonstrate that the books did more than simply sit on her shelf. For instance, in her copy of J. Paterson Smyth's *How We Got Our Bible*, she notes passages relating to the

rise of Christian Greece, the death of William Tyndale, and the hypocrisy of the Anglican episcopacy.³⁰ Among the striking features of the marks in her collection, however, is how frequently they reflect a greater interest in general principle than in hard historical fact, an emphasis on living spirit over dead letter. Even when reading about the past, the point is often that truth transcends history. Her copy of De Pressensé's *Early Years of Christianity* contains a marked passage that critiques the religious extremes of abandoning all "ancient forms" on one hand and clinging desperately to them on the other, with critical emphasis on the latter. She highlighted the following: "Such a cleaving to the past is, in truth, an aspiration after something beyond, an appeal for a new religious life."³¹ Preoccupations with past forms may simply result from frustrated hopes for a better future.

One need not search very long in Eddy's own writings to find statements that seem to discount the value of material-historical information.³² In perhaps her most famous statement on the topic of history, she silenced a man making a show of his "ample fund of historical knowledge" with the following: "I do not find my authority for Christian Science in history, but in revelation. If there had never existed such a person as the Galilean Prophet, it would make no difference to me. I should still know that God's spiritual ideal is the only real man in His image and likeness."³³ Eddy made that statement in 1906, near the end of her long life, and there is reason to believe that the sentiment it reflects had deepened over the course of her career. Notably, her earliest study for what would become her magnum opus—*Science and Health*—appeared in a document familiarly known among Adventists as the "Genesis Manuscript," which includes a verse-by-verse rewriting of the first book of the Bible that spiritualizes the story and in that exegetical sense expands on the scriptural narrative; tellingly, that portion of the study was never published, and the resulting work in *Science and Health* retains the spiritual principles while largely jettisoning the

narrative structures.³⁴ In another instance, in a passage concerning the American Civil War, the first edition of her brief autobiography reads, “this bit of material history is but the record of dreams, not of real existence, and the dream has no place in Christian Science.” In a later edition she rendered the same passage more absolutely: “our material, mortal history is but the record of dreams, not of man’s real existence, and the dream has no place in the Science of being.”³⁵ Her own life seemed to exemplify the ways in which present divine truth could overshadow information from the past: She had studied ancient languages with her brother early in life, but after her “discovery of Christian Science,” she determined that “most of the knowledge I had gleaned from schoolbooks vanished like a dream.”³⁶

Though the language in these passages rings with remarkable force, such statements can acquire undue interpretive weight if considered in isolation. At many points throughout the extensive corpus of her writing it does seem to matter deeply to her that Jesus had really lived. She endlessly celebrated his life as the ultimate “demonstration” of pure divine science. He was, to her, “the Master.” While not a biblical literalist, she did believe in the historicity of the Bible’s historical narratives.³⁷ And she clearly found important examples of truth in the records of the past. In *Science and Health* she repeatedly referenced the victories of previous epochs: “all history,” she wrote, “illustrates the might of Mind.”³⁸ In many of her statements, history repeats itself in a negative sense, but in *Science and Health* the repetition is positive: “The advent of [correct] understanding is what is meant by the descent of the Holy Ghost,—that influx of divine Science which so illuminated the Pentecostal Day and is now repeating its ancient history.”³⁹ In that text, she dipped into the past to consider the “material mythology” of the Phoenicians, the Moabites, the Hindus and the Greeks; she also grappled with the etymology of the term *man*.⁴⁰ She clearly saw history shedding some light on the patterns of the present. In a statement recorded by Irving Tomlinson,

a close associate who interviewed Eddy repeatedly for a prospective biography that never came to fruition, she explained that her discovery of Christian Science did not sweep away the lessons learned from her own history. “It was not a case of instantaneous conversion in which, I could say, ‘now the past is nothing, begin entirely anew.’”⁴¹ As when the young Mary Baker listened to her mother’s reading and application of Samuel’s call, Mrs. Eddy clearly saw episodes in history—both her own and that of the ancients—as important background for her modern revelatory experience. To those who believed she represented a recovery of a past religious purity, she celebrated the life and ministry of Jesus, and she honored the Christian Saints of bygone days. She certainly did not say, “now the past is nothing.”

Yet still, unlike Joseph Smith or Ellen White, she left no published volumes of revealed historical data. She printed no new narratives of antiquity. In considering the reasons for this distinctive absence of revelatory recoveries of distant histories in her ministry, some possibilities present themselves. For one, she had a particular take on the Millennium. Where premillennialists such as Joseph Smith and Ellen White believed the apocalypse was soon to commence, Eddy saw the Millennium as constantly ongoing, with her rediscovery of Christian Science fulfilling the prophecies of a Second Appearing and ushering in a period of particular improvement. Eddy perceived that she lived in the midst of a millennial process that would yet include numerous striking events, both glorious and terrible, and thus looked to the future in much the same way that all millennialists do.⁴² However, where premillennial Adventists like William Miller had extensively used the events of history to establish the accurate dating of a Second Coming which they perceived was yet to come, Eddy’s analysis of history played a secondary role to her use of contemporary happenings to establish the reality of a process that she believed was already under way. She argued that from the appearance of *Science and Health* in 1875—a year, she noted, that

some earlier scriptural exegetes had identified as that of the Christ's Second Appearing—"the United States official statistics show the annual death-rate to have gradually diminished. Likewise the religious sentiment has increased; creeds and dogmas have been sifted, and a greater love of the Scriptures manifested." She declared that "the Science of Christianity has dawned upon human thought to appear full-orbed in millennial glory." But, she cautioned, "we walk here below, and wait for the full appearing of Christ till the long night is past and the morning dawns on eternal day."⁴³ For one who had already seen the Second Appearing occur, but also looked forward to its full unfolding, the eye was primarily oriented to the present and the future, while the distant past understandably exercised a relatively weak pull. Her apocalypse was now. "The hour is come. . . !"⁴⁴

Eddy's own writing, however, demonstrates that something even more fundamental than millennialism lay at the root of her historical disinclinations. For Eddy, the appearance of matter reflected the mind's erroneous resistance to the full flow of God's truth. The art of revelation involved a process of peeling back that materialist error and submitting to the eternal light of the spiritual reality behind it. To focus too intently on the material record of sin and death, she believed, may favor the erroneous perceptions of the material senses. "All forms of error support the false conclusions," she charged, ". . . that material history is as real and living as spiritual history."⁴⁵ Eddy's task in her engagement with the Bible was to precisely and scientifically articulate the timeless principles that informed its historical narratives of healing.⁴⁶ History was the chaff; the science of healing the germ. Like the "Genesis Manuscript," the glossary of terms that she appended to later editions of *Science and Health* exemplify the desire to see through the material past and into the eternal now, and accordingly her entries on characters of the Bible are often more interested in the spiritual truths they represented than with the historical lives they lived. With remarkable consistency, she applied that

principle even to the details of her own life. In her brief autobiography, she wrote, “Mere historic incidents and personal events are frivolous and of no moment unless they illustrate the ethics of Truth. To this end, but only to this end, such narrations may be admissible and advisable; but if spiritual conclusions are separated from the premises, the *nexus* is lost, and the argument, with its rightful conclusions, becomes correspondingly obscure.” And then, in a later edition she added, “The human history needs to be revised, and the material record expunged.”⁴⁷ The historical revision Eddy sought involved the expunging, not the expansion, of the material record.

Ellen White and the Quest for Completeness

Where Eddy—consistent with her overall vision—sought to see through rather than elaborate on the material record of the past, Ellen White made the recovery and retelling of sacred history a central feature of her remarkably prolific publishing career. In terms of her prophetic approach to the past, White has a compelling claim to be the American Moses. In her Conflict of the Ages book series, a five-volume set, White offered nothing less than an inspired history of the whole span of sacred time. God granted to Ellen White “the scenes of the past and the future” and, though she certainly kept one eye squarely on an impending Millennium, a commitment to sacred history recurs throughout her ministry. As with many other premillennialists, White—like the Millerites among whom she came of age—believed that a clear understanding of the past events would prove the imminence of Christ’s return. In the most prominent volume of the Conflict series, *The Great Controversy*, White set her own historical work in sharp relief by including among the sins for which she condemned the Roman Catholic Church its suppression of historical records. To suppress history was to resist divine truth. After all, the great spiritual battles between Christ and Satan were “inseparably interwoven with human history,” she declared.⁴⁸

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Portrait of Ellen G. White. Courtesy of the Ellen G. White Estate, Inc.

Eddy and White both believed in the centrality of their millennial roles. Yet they held very different views of the Second Coming's character. White saw the Millennium as a literal material phenomenon rather than the pure spiritual enlightenment envisioned by Eddy. She also saw the actual, physical return of Jesus Christ as the key moment in that eschatological sequence. Thus White considered previous events as tangible and essential steps in a sequential historical development foreordained by God. She may have afforded humans more historical agency than a consistent Calvinist might have, but she still saw God as the overruling playwright of the great human drama.⁴⁹ He controlled the timing; human understanding of that timing was a matter of historical awareness. Furthermore, as with the Puritans, White believed that the biblical authors had known the divine truth in clear fulness, and thus the Millennium would be related more to a vindication of lost religious purities than to an unprecedentedly progressive revelation of ever more precisely formulated truth. Eddy believed the world's best days yet lay ahead of it in a way that White did not. With different conceptions of the future, White and Eddy had differing relationships to the past.

Still, like Eddy, White saw the past as valuable primarily for what it said about the future. She was preoccupied with an imminent culmination. By her own remit, she intended "not so much . . . to present new truths concerning the struggles of former times, as to bring out facts and principles which have a bearing upon coming events."⁵⁰ And, also like Eddy, she believed history to be largely meaningless when disconnected from the spiritual realities that lay behind it. She declared, "We need to study the working out of God's purpose in the history of nations and in the revelation of things to come, that we may estimate at their true value things seen and things unseen; that we may learn what is the true aim of life; that, viewing the things of time in the light of eternity, we may put them to their truest and noblest use."⁵¹ Certainly none of the prophets considered here would

qualify as modern humanistic historians, holding the human story to be of value in and of itself, independent of the spiritual drama it reflected. History must be studied through the lens of faith, White held, otherwise false impressions—such as humanity’s hubristic assumption of its own complete historical agency—would obscure the true plot. Through the word of God, White believed, “the curtain is drawn aside, and we behold, behind, above, and through all the play and counterplay of human interests and power and passions, the agencies of the all-merciful One, silently, patiently working out the counsels of His own will.”⁵²

Yet, while White shared some of Eddy’s ambivalence about the secular study of history, one can still detect in White’s work a more insistent engagement with the historical record than appears in Christian Science. In a statement on proper Adventist education, White clarified her opinion on the study of the past. She did not have much interest in secular history for its own sake, but she insisted that “there is a study of history that is not to be condemned.” After all, she reasoned, “sacred history was one of the studies in the school of the prophets. In the record of His dealings with the nations were traced the footsteps of Jehovah. So to-day we are to consider the dealings of God with the nations of the earth. We are to see in history the fulfillment of prophecy.”⁵³ Even angels, for White, “have shown an intimate acquaintance with human history.”⁵⁴

Inheriting a strong sense of sacred time from her early commitment to the Millerite view of history, her contemplation of the past included the conviction that each epoch sequentially linked to the next in the fulfillment of God’s foreordained plan for the earth. “The history which the great I AM has marked out in His Word, uniting link after link in the prophetic chain, from eternity in the past to eternity in the future, tells us where we are to-day in the procession of the ages, and what may be expected in the time to come.”⁵⁵ Much more than Eddy, White considered the tangible things of history to

be a valuable subject of inquiry for understanding the divine mind and human obligation. One must understand the material record of the past to understand one's place in the millennial process. Once again, for White the value of the seen was inextricably bound up in its relation with the unseen, yet it is for that nonetheless real and important. The Bible thus served as the ultimate *historical* textbook. "The most comprehensive and the most instructive history which men possess," she called it.⁵⁶

Her emphasis on comprehensiveness is particularly striking, because ultimately, for White, even the Bible as history proved not quite comprehensive enough. The divine narrative chronicled in the Bible, she observed, continued on beyond the closing words of the New Testament. Someone needed to document the fact that "after the close of the canon of Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue its work."⁵⁷ Indeed, sacred time had continued to flow right up into the present United States, sometimes to be evidenced in the unlikelyst of stories. Discussing the spread of the Seventh-day Adventist work into the southern United States, she asserted, "Those who study the history of the Israelites should also consider the history of the slaves in America. . . . The cries of these neglected people have come up before God."⁵⁸ The Bible served as the pattern for all history, but it did not exhaust God's historical narrative.

This notion, that God's sacred history spills out beyond the canonical covers of the Bible, informed her most momentous statement about the significance of the past: her decision in the late 1850s to write *The Great Controversy*, an account of God's earthly drama from the primordial fall of Satan up through the Millennium. In the preface to a later edition of that work, White referred to the great precedent of prophets as recoverers and chroniclers of history, describing the authors of the Bible as pursuing their work "during the long period of sixteen hundred years—from Moses, the historian of creation and the law, to John, the recorder of the most sublime

truths of the gospel.” In that volume she continued their task of telling the history of God’s involvement in the world, beginning where the authors of scripture had left off, with the destruction of Jerusalem.⁵⁹ The history of those post-canonical developments had to be written by someone with the same spiritual credentials as those who wrote the previous four thousand years of God’s battle for the souls of men. It had to be written with inspiration. The resulting book—published in editions of increasing detail between 1858 and 1911—ultimately followed the divine drama through the era of the patristic church, the Middle Ages, a lengthy examination of the Reformation, and on into the settlement of America, the Second Great Awakening, and finally to Christ’s millennial triumph over Satan. In short, White provided the segments of sacred history that the canonical Bible most conspicuously neglected. In documenting the epic struggles of true Christians after the close of the New Testament era, she followed in a well-worn groove left by Reformed and Lutheran historians,⁶⁰ but her claim to direct revelation gave her effort to continue the writing of sacred history a particular sense of continuity with the penmen of ancient scripture. She was more Moses than Mosheim.

The composition of this history, along with its repeated revision and republication, raises some interesting questions about Ellen White’s conceptions of prophetic revelation. She clearly saw the process of inspiration as an ongoing negotiation between God’s perfect word and its faulty human receptors. In her history she wrote, “The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands. . . . The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human.”⁶¹ This concept reinforced her practice of progressively adding human scholarship into subsequent editions of her inspired history. That evolution also underscores an impulse toward increasing thoroughness. The combination of historical scholarship and divine enlightenment led to

an ever fuller and richer narrative. This was one way in which she displayed a constant movement toward comprehensiveness, recognizing that inspiration and scholarship needed to cooperate toward that end.

Despite the potential awkwardness of its effort to merge the inspired and the scholarly, there is an inescapable elegance to what White progressively accomplished with *The Great Controversy*. Throughout the nineteenth century, Americans had become increasingly attuned to the temporal distance that separated them from the biblical epoch. Why, it would have been natural to ask, had God not inspired a divine rendering of the last two millennia in the way he had provided for the previous dispensations?⁶² *The Great Controversy*, especially in its later editions, laid that question to rest. It filled the most glaring gap in prophetic time. By doing so it brought completeness and closure, an unbroken chain of historical narrative from beginning to end. *The Great Controversy* certainly did not claim to cover all of human history, but it did fill in those chapters that allowed the divine story to stretch without interruption from Genesis to Millennium. With this volume, her followers could situate themselves in history with confidence, their vision uninterrupted and unobscured in either direction along the chronological continuum.

But White was not merely interested in the post-biblical gap. She also backfilled her historical narrative until she had herself written the the full stretch of God's earthly history from start to finish. As *The Great Controversy* expanded, it led to a total of five volumes of sacred chronology. In these she elaborated on the history of the biblical times as well as writing the story of post-biblical times. The result was the Conflict of the Ages series, which begins with Satan's fall from heaven, chronicles the Creation, and continues forward from there. In writing this sacred history of the world, White filled in details on subjects that the biblical narrative dispenses with rapidly.

Chapters on Enoch and Seth, Nadib and Abihu, and the childhood of Jesus serve as exemplary cases in point. In this effort to provide a richer and more detailed version of biblical history, White shared much with the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith. But in her determination to be comprehensive and complete, she conveyed a very different message about the nature of historical truth and the divine process of disclosure.⁶³

Joseph Smith and the Fragments of Antiquity

While each of the figures considered here is, in her or his own way, peerless, the characteristics of their visionary personae do overlap. Joseph Smith, for instance, shared Ellen White's premillennialism and her impulse to bring the epochs of sacred time into a coherent whole, but he also resembled Mary Baker Eddy in his confidence that the modern work he had performed represented a distinctive accomplishment of divine purpose against which the past epochs paled.⁶⁴ With White he believed in matter; with both of his female counterparts he believed in the centrality of his own role in God's millennial plan. Sharply attuned to the magnitude of what they were doing, Mary Baker Eddy, Joseph Smith, and Ellen White all wrote and commissioned histories of the movements they founded, in part as a way to retain control of their own stories in the teeth of intense criticism. "I have been induced to write this history," Joseph Smith explained, "to disabuse the public mind."⁶⁵ Eddy and White could have said the same thing. For all their commonalities, however, their approaches to the past remained distinct. And Joseph Smith's may have been the most idiosyncratic of them all. He neither minimized the importance of material history nor provided a comprehensive survey of sacred time. Whereas Eddy oriented her movement primarily forward, upward, and away from matter, and White provided a seamless portrait of the past, Joseph Smith offered fragmentary material witnesses from antiquity.

Joseph Smith's mission began with an ancient history, a fact that further distinguishes his career from those of his prophetic cohort. Ellen White did not engage the distant past in a serious or sustained way until a full decade into her ministry. Mary Baker Eddy's concern for history never really achieved significant traction in the overall sweep of her divine science. By contrast, the Book of Mormon offered a thousand-year chronicle of an ancient people before Joseph Smith's church had even been formally founded. Though it eventually came to mean more to Mormons as a work of religious significance than as a volume of historical data, the early Saints—including Joseph Smith himself—initially seemed to think the book's primary value lay more in what it said about the past than in what it had to say about eternity.⁶⁶ The antiquarian dimensions of Joseph Smith's movement thus emerged as a foundational theme in Mormonism from its very beginning, but the movement's engagement with the past was of a particular character.

At one level, the Book of Mormon follows the Mosaic pattern of prophets writing history. Its ancient eponymous chronicler, Mormon, fills a role strikingly similar to the one assumed by Ellen White in using a combination of archival research and revelatory authority to construct a comprehensive history of his people. The book itself, and the centrality of its place in Mormon culture, reaffirms the old message of Moses that prophetic ministries should build on and bequeath a clear sense of the sacred past. The record that Mormon and Moroni preserved for Joseph Smith's eventual discovery explains that there were two kinds of history kept on metal plates by the prophetic chroniclers of this ancient people: one that focused on spiritual matters and one that paid more attention to secular issues of political concern. The Book of Mormon, as ultimately published, consciously drew from both of these sources, suggesting that secular and sacred history were both of lasting value in revealing the work of God. As historian Richard L. Bushman has pointed out, even *within*

each set of plates, and even given their contrasting emphases, the nature of the records differs from the Bible's practice of segregating its historical and prophetic books; in the Book of Mormon, "history and prophecy are interwoven, sermons and visions mingling with narrative."⁶⁷ The very structure of the book thus indicates that secular and sacred historical knowledge can be of complementary benefit. That sense was reinforced in Joseph Smith's later revelations. In 1833, Jehovah spoke through Joseph Smith to instruct the elders of the Church "to obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion."⁶⁸ Mormon's record likewise conveyed the clear message that laws and politics and theology and ministry are all worth recovering from the shadows of the past.

Such particularities notwithstanding, the Book of Mormon fits rather clearly into the mold of inspired comprehensive history provided by Moses and followed by White. As the book describes itself in an extended version of Isaiah's biblical prophecies, "in the book shall be a revelation from God, from the beginning of the world to the ending thereof."⁶⁹ Yet one of the more curious aspects of Joseph Smith's prophetic career is that he *himself* never fully followed Mormon's example. Unlike Moses, or Ellen White, or Mormon, Joseph Smith never created a comprehensive history of any epoch prior to his own period. And his primary role was one of translator rather than historian. In his forays into the ancient world—whether the Book of Mormon, or the Book of Abraham, or his inspired translation of the Bible—he was ever the vehicle for other men's histories, always the receiver, the transcriber, the transmitter of knowledge about the ancient world, not the producer. He simply gave his modern readers the records as he encountered them, translated but otherwise unaffected. When publishing the records of antiquity, he typically did not compile, condense, comment, select, or do any of

the other things that make a historian a historian. He was neither Moses nor Mosheim.

Subsequent analyses of Joseph Smith's role in bringing forth the Book of Mormon have held that, even if one accepts the believing position that Joseph Smith did indeed translate an ancient record rather than simply invent a pseudepigraphon, he must have been very present in that process. That is, the stamp of *his* perspective and *his* culture and *his* language left indelible imprints on the stories he recovered from the ancient world.⁷⁰ Be that as it may, the evidence suggests that neither he nor his contemporaries were particularly cognizant of this inevitable scribal presence, an issue of which a post-modern intellectual atmosphere has made today's scholars much more aware than most antebellum Americans would have been. As far as Joseph Smith claimed and his followers believed, he simply conveyed what he was given. This professed practice of absenting himself from the historical process is all the more striking given what we know about Joseph Smith's personality. He never seems to have shied away from center stage. He showed little compunction about recognizing the importance of his own role in God's restoration of truth.⁷¹ By both disposition and calling, he appeared to thrive in the spotlight. He and his followers believed that his opinion and perspective were to be deeply valued. His voice could be equivalent to the voice of God. And yet, when providing ancient documents, he typically silences himself in the process of historical recovery. Even the preface to the Book of Mormon is written by an ancient historian, Moroni, not Joseph Smith as his modern translator. And even in Joseph Smith's translation of the Bible, where he seemed as interested in providing what he felt the Bible should have said as he was in simply getting back to what the Bible had said, it is still Moses and Isaiah and Paul who did the speaking, not Joseph Smith as commentator or historian.⁷² He provides documents, not synthesis.

In this sense, he represents a remarkable contrast to the image we have of Ellen White, who was somewhat more demurring in her prophetic persona but whose voice was much more consciously present in her recovery of history. In a cultural setting where women were more likely to be recognized as supernatural mediums of past voices than as scholars of ancient history, and men were supposed to assert rather than empty their work of their own presence, Ellen White's and Joseph Smith's approaches to the past seem to invert that gendered model. White did her own research, wrote in her own voice; the books were *hers*. Joseph Smith, by comparison, was the medium for other men's records. That Joseph Smith's personal absence in the production of ancient history ran counter to his own personal inclinations is suggested in his recurring effort to educate himself in the skills—particularly the philological faculties—necessary to pursue more-traditional forms of scholarly inquiry into ancient sources, the sorts of inquiry in which his role as scholarly historian would necessarily have been more present and influential in the actual words on the page. These efforts did not result in the linguistic mastery he hoped for. Apparently he hungered to be more present in the process of historical recovery, but his struggles to do so had notably awkward and ultimately abortive results.⁷³ What has lived on for Latter-day Saints are Abraham's words, not Joseph Smith's Egyptian grammar.

This personal absence—whether compelled or voluntary—is not the only example of the ways in which Joseph Smith's engagement with antiquity ran counter to what we know about his prophetic inclinations. In a striking recent essay, the scholar of Mormonism Philip Barlow argues compellingly that Joseph Smith's driving theological intent was to “mend a fractured reality.” Whatever the subsequent Church has done with Joseph Smith's theological legacy and whatever divisiveness Mormonism may have caused in practice, in Barlow's view Joseph Smith's entire career can be understood as an

effort to bring union and cohesion to a mortal existence that had been fissured by varied lines of division. His “restoration” sought to bridge the chasms that humanity had dug across numerous areas of human experience, such as those between body and spirit, between intellect and faith, among the world’s languages and among Christianity’s denominations. He applied this same impulse to “the fabric of time” and “through his teachings and the temple ritual he fashioned, he addressed [t]emporal fractures, forging kinship with past and future.”⁷⁴ Given the obsessive nature of this endeavor, one would be forgiven for assuming that Joseph Smith’s approach to antiquity would look something more like Ellen White’s: one vantage, one narrative, one voice stitching the eras into one cohesive story. For a man who seemed to yearn hungrily to bring coherence to a disjointed human existence, and who appeared to enjoy being the center around which such a healing process proceeded, the more predictable historical project would likely have been to provide a new comprehensive survey that brought the entirety of sacred history into a seamless story in his voice.

But, instead of offering this sort of expansive survey, Joseph Smith translated just a few pieces of what would remain a very incomplete whole. Like the philological skills that seemed just out of reach, thus preventing him from fulfilling a deeply seated hope for scholarly presence, the comprehensive history of the world that the Book of Mormon tantalizingly promised remained sealed from him. The book’s rather odd concluding date, AD 400, identifies it as a fragment among fragments. The fact that his authorial presence is ostensibly absent from these historical fragments—that he offered no concerted effort at synthesis—conveys the sense that the grandeur of God’s earthly drama would only fully be conveyed through the chorus of many historical voices, not its distillation into one. His was a prophethood of primary sources. The Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham offer two important chunks of sacred history,

but they are temporally and geographically bound and remain in the voices of their original authors. In White's approach, sacred history appears through a continuous statement offered in the expression of a single narrator. Joseph Smith, by contrast, began a process by which sacred history would be recovered by finding the limited stories of a global multitude of storytellers. Just as Moses stopped short of the promised land, Joseph Smith's hope for historical comprehensiveness would have to be fulfilled by others.

Even had he not been martyred at a relatively young age, Joseph Smith could not have hoped to accomplish personally the recovery of all the historical sources that his very first publication claimed were out there. The God of the Book of Mormon declares:

I command all men, both in the east and in the west, and in the north, and in the south, and in the islands of the sea, that they shall write the words which I speak unto them; for out of the books which shall be written I will judge the world, every man according to their works, according to that which is written.

For behold, I shall speak unto the Jews and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the Nephites and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto the other tribes of the house of Israel, which I have led away, and they shall write it; and I shall also speak unto all nations of the earth and they shall write it.

And it shall come to pass that the Jews shall have the words of the Nephites, and the Nephites shall have the words of the Jews; and the Nephites and the Jews shall have the words of the lost tribes of Israel; and the lost tribes of Israel shall have the words of the Nephites and the Jews.⁷⁵

That is a lot of books. By the time the process runs its course, when the inspired words from "all the nations of the earth" have come to light and spread around the world, Joseph Smith's goal of "mending a fractured reality" would presumably have been

obtained. Then the whole sacred history of the earth could be told. But in the Book of Mormon version, both in what the book says and in what it is, this history seems destined to come without a master narrator. The Book of Mormon suggests that had humanity been more righteous, they might have received such a comprehensive history; but until they achieve such a state, they must by the sweat of their brow piece together the shards of the divine story. As Joseph Smith presented it, the global story must consist of the voices of each nation, the stories of each place, in their own words, not in the voice of a single synthesizing, summarizing historian. The scale of such a process is immense. And the process remained far from complete at the time of Joseph Smith's death. Indeed, it remains hardly less so today.

Ellen White's five-volume *Conflict of the Ages* series provides a sort of satisfying closure to the historical project. It has a beginning, an end, and a great deal of prophetic clarity in between. One prophetic voice brings cohesion to the whole. In its own way, Mary Baker Eddy's approach to history also brought a form of closure by turning away from ancient errors and focusing intently on the future spread of truth and transhistorical mind. Both transcend the fragmentary nature of the historical project. Joseph Smith, however, offers no such completion. His recovery of ancient scriptures instead extends the project, placing the end almost beyond sight. Rather than bringing completion to the question of history, it opens up the possibility—indeed, it prophesies the inevitability—of a global chorus of ancient voices yet to be heard. One of Joseph Smith's associates recalled that Joseph Smith was initially more excited to receive the interpreters—the “Urim and Thummim”—from the angel Moroni than he was to receive the golden plates he was to translate with them, suggesting perhaps that from early on Joseph Smith felt that the discovery of the Book of Mormon represented the beginning of inquiry rather than the end.⁷⁶

Conclusion

A symposium such as this, designed to grapple with the specific questions of Joseph Smith's approach to antiquity, may seem an unlikely place for a comparative study of nineteenth-century American prophets. The questions of Egyptology and archaeology and DNA studies of ancient peoples—the sorts of issues that drive so much of the scholarly concern with Joseph Smith—are completely irrelevant for the likes of Ellen White and Mary Baker Eddy. Indeed, no one engaged the ancient world quite the way Joseph Smith did. To whom should he be compared? But even here we might see that studying a historical figure—including a famously inimitable character—in isolation can blind us to important nuances of his history. The fact is that Joseph Smith was not the only American claimant to revelatory powers in the nineteenth century, and that all of those who made such a claim also had a particular way of engaging the past, of placing their work on a divine chronology and of helping their followers position themselves on that timeline. By engaging all of them, we comprehend each of them more fully.

The conception of Joseph Smith that emerges from juxtaposition with two of his most important revelatory contemporaries encourages some basic conclusions on which a discussion of Joseph Smith's approach to antiquity might profitably rest. He insisted on orienting his followers' thoughts both forward and backward along the chronological continuum, allowing (by either choice or necessity) the peoples of other epochs to speak for themselves in bringing a fuller understanding to moderns. And in doing so he conveyed a message about both the power and the limits of historical knowledge. In Joseph Smith's vision, the past would not only provide a clearer view of a millennial future—an idea that Anglo-American millenarian historians had been promoting for hundreds of years—but he also held that, through the pending discovery of new records and sources, the future would shed more light on the past. The past

would progressively unfold to the eyes of the faithful. As one of Joseph's earliest angelical visions declared, God's designs could only come about when "the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers."⁷⁷ Joseph Smith's Millennium would arrive, in part, through historical, cross-cultural, trans-epochal discovery. And yet the portrait of the past he himself provided remained radically, conspicuously incomplete. His fragments of antiquity may be, in that sense, ultimately a call to continued and dogged inquiry. And that must be of the utmost relevance for a scholarly gathering like this.

Notes

1. Leon R. Hartshorn, "The Incomparable Joseph Smith," *Ensign*, January 1972, 14–19. Not always applied directly to him, sometimes the term *incomparable* is invoked for the elements of Joseph Smith's ministry, including the ancient documents with which he worked. William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith, Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998), 182; *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 1, 550–51; Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 84.
2. For excellent biographical treatments of these three figures, consider Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 3 vols. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966, 1971, 1977); Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005); Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008).
3. Of Mary Baker Eddy, the Christian Science historian Stephen Gottschalk has argued that the "language that she used clearly indicates her self-identification as a prophet." See Gottschalk, *Rolling Away the Stone: Mary Baker Eddy's Challenge to Materialism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 415. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, eds., *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 2013), 1058, makes a

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helpful distinction between the “biblical *denotation*” of a prophet’s role—which she accepted—and the “popular *connotation*” of the prophetic title—which she resisted.

4. Fortin and Moon, *White Encyclopedia*, 1057.
5. For these quotations, see Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White: Messenger to the Remnant* (Ellen G. White Publications, 1956), 125.
6. William Tyndale, *Doctrinal Treatises and Introductions to Different Portions of the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Henry Walter (Cambridge: 1848), 404.
7. See Michael G. Ditmore, “A Prophetess in Her Own Country: An Exegesis of Anne Hutchinson’s ‘Immediate Revelation,’” *William & Mary Quarterly* (April 2000): 349–92.
8. See John Leacock, *The First Book of the American Chronicles of the Times, 1774–1775*, ed. Carla Mulford (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1987); Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1992), 10.
9. George Marsden, “Everyone One’s Own Interpreter?: The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 79.
10. Mary Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (Boston: W. G. Nixon, 1891), 16–18. For an excellent discussion of Eddy’s tendency to self-identify with biblical figures, see Amy Black Voorhees, *Writing Revelation: Mary Baker Eddy and Her Early Editions of Science and Health, 1875–1891* (PhD Diss., UC Santa Barbara, 2013), 42–43. For other early American examples of typological conflations of contemporary events with the narratives of ancient scripture, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); and Albert J. Raboteau, “African-Americans, Exodus and the American Israel,” in *African-American Christianity: Essays in History*, ed. Paul E. Johnson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 1–17.
11. Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vols. 1 and 2 (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1945), 59.

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12. James White, "Preface," in Ellen White, *A Sketch of the Christian Experience and Views of Ellen G. White* (Saratoga Springs, NY: 1851), 2.
13. Joseph Smith—History 1:24.
14. Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 172; "The Emigration to California," *Weekly Herald*, January 27, 1849, 26; "Moses a Great Man," *Boston Recorder*, January 22, 1864, 13, American Historical Newspapers, readex.com; *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 11; Ellen White, *The Desire of the Ages* (Oakland, CA: 1898), 796.
15. Lamentations 5:21.
16. See Malachi 4:4–6.
17. Matthew 5:27, 34.
18. Mircea Eliade, "Cosmic and Eschatological Renewal," in *The Two and the One*, trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Harper, 1969), 125–59.
19. Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978).
20. Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
21. Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
22. Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 31.
23. Bozeman, *Ancient Lives*, 248; Revelation 4:6.
24. Harry S. Stout, "Review: *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* by Theodore Dwight Bozeman," *Journal of Religion* (July 1990): 458.
25. Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1750–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jordan T. Watkins, "'Let Every Writer Be Placed in His Own Age': Slavery, Sacred Texts, and the Antebellum Confrontation with History" (PhD Diss., University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2014).
26. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 44–45, 82–83.

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27. The possible exception is Eddy's unpublished examination of Genesis, a forerunner to *Science and Health*, wherein she provides a spiritualized rendering of the Genesis narratives. This may simply be an exegetical exercise, and thus not properly an effort to expand the scriptural history. This document is housed at the Mary Baker Eddy Library as "The Bible in Its Spiritual Meaning," A09000.1 and A09000.2. It is also colloquially known as the "Genesis Manuscript."
28. Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The Writings of Mary Baker Eddy, 2000), 37. Citing *Science and Health* can be a complex matter, since the book went through various editions and revisions over the course of Eddy's life. For numerous reasons, including the mere matter of accessibility, I have made the decision to cite the latest edition issued by the Church of Christ, Scientist, which reflects the final text prepared at the time of Eddy's death in 1910 and published in 1911.
29. Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy*, 114–21.
30. I am deeply grateful to the staff of the Mary Baker Eddy Library, especially Michael Davis, for making these volumes from Mrs. Eddy's personal library available to me and helping me understand them in context. See the finding aid *Mary Baker Eddy's Library Books* for helpful information on her marking of the books. J. Paterson Smyth, *How We Got Our Bible* (Philadelphia: J Pott and Co., 1899).
31. E. De Pressensé, *The Early Years of Christianity* (New York: Carlton and Lanahan, 1870), 101–2. Eddy's copy available at MBE library. The volume is inscribed to someone other than Eddy, but the MBE library considers it to have been marked by her.
32. Sometimes Eddy's devaluing of history comes in a very personal context. For instance, in a letter to Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a figure of great importance in Eddy's philosophical development in the years leading up to the discovery of Christian Science, Eddy wrote: "I mean not again to look mournfully into the past, but wisely to improve the present, and go forth to meet the future with a woman's courage." Mary Baker Eddy to Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, January 12, 1863, item V03343 at the Mary Baker Eddy Library.

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33. Mary Baker Eddy, "Mrs. Eddy's Activity Shown," *Christian Science Journal* (December 1906), 568.
34. The "Genesis Manuscript," A09000.1 and A09000.2.
35. Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (1891), 27–28; Mary Baker Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (Boston: First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1920), 21.
36. Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (1891), 19.
37. On her exegetical merging of "literal and moral readings," see Voorhees, *Writing Revelation*, 45.
38. Eddy, *Science and Health*, 225; see also 387.
39. Eddy, *Science and Health*, 43.
40. Eddy, *Science and Health*, 524–25.
41. "Conversation," April 1, 1902, Articles and Manuscript Collection, Mary Baker Eddy Library, A11448.
42. An excellent analysis of Eddy's millennialism can be found in Voorhees, *Writing Revelation*, 84–93.
43. Stephen Gottschalk, *The Emergence of Christian Science in American Religious Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), xx–xxi; Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (1920), 70; Mary Baker Eddy, "Message to the Mother Church 1900," in *Prose Works* (Boston: First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1925), 6–7; Mary Baker Eddy, *The First Church of Christ Scientist and Miscellany* (Boston: First Church of Christ, Scientist, 1913), 239–40, 264–65.
44. Eddy, *Miscellany*, 125.
45. Eddy, *Science and Health*, 204, 471.
46. Gottschalk, *Emergence of Christian Science*, 24.
47. Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (1891), 28; Eddy, *Retrospection and Introspection* (1920), 22.
48. Ellen White, *The Great Controversy between Christ and Satan During the Christian Dispensation* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1888), preface, 61, 511.
49. Ellen White, *The Faith I Live By* (1958; Washington, DC: Ellen G. White Publications, 2000), 166.

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50. White, *Great Controversy*, preface.
51. White, *The Faith I Live By*, 166.
52. White, *The Faith I Live By*, 166.
53. Ellen White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1905), 441–42.
54. White, *Great Controversy*, 632.
55. White, *The Faith I Live By*, 166.
56. Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church, No. 31* (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald; Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1882), 21.
57. White, *Great Controversy*, preface.
58. Ellen White, *The Southern Work* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2004), 42.
59. White, *Great Controversy*, preface; see also Ellen White, *Spiritual Gifts*, 2 vols. (Battle Creek, MI: 1858), “The Great Controversy.” The first edition of the *Great Controversy* starts with the fall of Satan and elaborates on New Testament narratives before rapidly addressing the post-primitive narrative. Later editions of the book began with the destruction of Jerusalem and spent much more time on the post-biblical period.
60. See Zakai, *Kingdom and Exile*, 12–55.
61. White, *Great Controversy*, preface.
62. David Holland, *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 104–14.
63. The full set of the Conflict series is helpfully made available online at <http://www.whiteestate.org/books/books.asp>.
64. See, for instance, Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., ed. Brigham H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 6:408.
65. Joseph Smith—History 1:1.
66. Terryl L. Givens, *By The Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89–91.
67. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 85.

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68. Doctrine and Covenants 93:53.
69. 2 Nephi 27:7.
70. For a skeptical version of this model, see Dan Vogel, "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 21–52; for a more devout approach, see Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 1987): 66–123.
71. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 173.
72. Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 32.
73. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 292–93.
74. Philip L. Barlow, "To Mend a Fractured Reality: Joseph Smith's Project," *Journal of Mormon History* (Summer 2012): 43–44.
75. 2 Nephi 29:11–13.
76. Joseph Knight, cited in Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *Saints without Halos: The Human Side of Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1981), 6.
77. Doctrine and Covenants 2:2.