

Fictitious Tales or Historical Treasures?

Ellen White and the Apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*

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Abstract

While Ellen White's use of the Old Testament Apocrypha in her King James Bible has been and continues to be studied deeply by scholars, her utilization of the New Testament Apocrypha has largely gone unnoticed. In this article, her familiarity and use of the various apocryphal Acts of the Apostles accounts will be investigated, examining whether she had access to the documents and to what extent their influence can be detected in her accounts of the lives of the apostles. The conclusion of this research demonstrates both that White did in fact appear to read and utilize such works in her writings (books like the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*), but also that White appears to exhibit a distinctly different attitude toward these works in comparison with the Old Testament Apocrypha and canonical Scriptures found in her Bible.

In 2021, Elder Ted Wilson presented a sermon to the delegates of the Annual Council meeting of Seventh-day Adventists. As president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, his speech carried more weight and gravitas than most. He warned, among many various concerns facing the church, that he had “even heard of an attempt to question the reliability of the 66 books of the Bible canon, suggesting we need to look at non-canonical apocryphal books to perhaps broaden our view on truth.” In response to this, he

encouraged every Adventist, including the scholars of the church, to “reject this” (Wilson 2021).¹

Such warnings unfortunately are misguided, as noted by Ron Graybill who was among the first Adventist scholars to investigate the issue of Ellen White’s relationship to the Apocrypha (Graybill 1987, 25–32). Reflecting on Elder Wilson’s remarks in his sermon, Graybill repeated Ellen White’s endorsement that “the wise of these last days should understand” the Apocrypha (see Manuscript 4, 1850) and remarked that “quite contrary to Elder Wilson’s warning, we are only following what Ellen White said that we should do... We’re not elevating it above the canonical books. We’re just trying to understand it” (Graybill 2021). In fact, Wilson’s warnings for scholars to reject studying the Apocrypha and its relationship to Adventism come a bit too late, since to date there have been twelve academic studies published since 1987 on the issue of Adventism’s history with the Apocrypha.

While the state of research within Adventism continues to grow quite large with regard to the issue of Ellen White’s connection to the Old Testament Apocrypha found within her nineteenth century King James Bible,² her connection with the New Testament Apocrypha has largely gone untouched. In fact, and perhaps quite shockingly, her statement mentioning it has almost never been repeated in the academic literature, nor has its implications about White’s interests or reading habits been explored. As I noted in a joint interview with Denis Fortin and Ronald Graybill, “No one really in the academic literature is talking about it. She was reading them. Why?” (Korpman 2021c). While her two statements (from 1849 and 1850) about the Old Testament Apocrypha were kept unpublished and out of the public eye until their eventual releases in 1985 and 2014 respectively,³ her single comment on the New Testament Apocrypha was published publicly for all Adventists to read in 1872. Yet, strangely, Arthur White never references it in relation to his own exploration of the topic and neither do any other Adventist scholars. In fact,

¹ For a response to Wilson’s comments, see Korpman 2021a.

² For a full list of all scholarly journal articles and dictionary entries dealing with this topic, see the following: Korpman 2024, 20–23; 2023, 12–17; Turner 2023, 117–142; Korpman 2022, 107–130; 2022, 1–7; 2021b, 74–93; 2020a, 30–33; 2020b, 109–146; 2018, 56–65; Casebolt 2018, 66–73; Fortin 2013, 606; 2002, 9–12; Graybill 1987, 25–32.

³ For discussion about the history of this, see Korpman 2020b, 109–113.

the first time any Adventist scholar or official appears to reference the statement is in the year 2018 (Korpman 2018, 61).

Due to this silence, a number of concerning developments have occurred. One is that some Adventist ministers, ignorant of the distinction between the Old Testament Apocrypha within Ellen White's Bible (referred to by her as "the Hidden Book") and the New Testament Apocrypha (sold as a separate collection), have attempted to use the statement about the latter to challenge Adventist scholars regarding the former.⁴ On the opposite side of the equation, a number of lay Adventists who support the Apocrypha as inspired, based on Ellen White's statements, are attempting to support their position by utilizing this latter quote from White as evidence that she didn't disapprove of the Apocrypha.⁵ Given the lack of Adventist scholarly resources on this particular issue, it is important that this hole in the research is addressed, providing readers (both scholarly and non-scholarly) an ability to reflect on the meaning of White's comments.

In her remarks on the apocryphal material, published in the early Adventist periodical *Youth Instructor*, Ellen White provides a description of the New Testament Apocrypha and her evaluation of it as a collection. Her comments reveal both that she was interested in and reading the material, but also provides her commentary on a specific apocryphal book within it.

The apocraphy [apocrypha] of the New Testament attempts to supply the silence of the Scriptures... These writers relate wonderful incidents and miracles... They relate fictitious tales, and frivolous miracles... In what marked contrast is the history of Christ, as recorded by the evan-

⁴ The most egregious example of this is Denford Ntini, who published a non-academic study online in which he mistakenly presumes that there is no difference between the New Testament Apocrypha and Old Testament Apocrypha and proceeds to claim: "Can Ellen White in one instance have highly recommended and even have quoted from the Apocrypha on doctrinal or prophetic matters if the same book grossly distorted the life of the Messiah and Savior of the world? Highly improbable." Ntini 2022. To clarify, given the title's own blatant inaccuracy, I have never made theological claims about what Adventists should believe about the canonicity of the Apocrypha in any of my published writings or interviews.

⁵ For example, see the website Answers for Adventists which has a webpage explaining the distinction between these collections.

gelist, which is beautiful in its natural simplicity, with these unmeaning stories, and fictitious tales. They are not at all in harmony with his character. They are more after the order of the novels that are written, which have no foundation in truth; but the characters delineated are of fancy creating" (White 1897, 29).

In this article, I will attempt to fill that deficit by examining Ellen White's use of the apocryphal acts of the apostles. While her broader comment from 1872 appears to relate directly to the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*,⁶ her general comments, negative as they are, still appear to reflect on the broader nature of the topic that she opened the paragraph with. It is clear that White's evaluation of "the apocraphy [apocrypha] of the New Testament" is not positive, and her opinion of the material is quite negative, describing the books as "fictitious tales," "novels," and stating that they "have no foundation in truth."

How did White get a hold of this material and what sort of books were contained within it? At her death, White's office library collection appears to have retained a copy (Johns, Poirier, and Graybill 1993) of Gebbie & Co.'s publication of William Hone's, etc. *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Hone, Jones, and Wake 1881/1882). Due to the fact that White is confirmed to be reflecting on and discussing such a collection as early as 1872, the probability exists that the book in her office library was her own. Yet, the specific copy in her collection dates later than her comments in 1872. Regardless, the contents of this collection are a helpful roadmap for what apocryphal New Testament works were available for her to read.

Included in this collection are apocryphal gospels such as the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. It also includes examples of apocryphal correspondences attributed to Paul, such as the *Letters of Paul and Seneca* and the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*, as well as the books we would call the "Apostolic Fathers," including the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *1 and 2 Clement*, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch, and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. Furthermore, and of most interest for this article, it provides an example from the apocryphal acts, specifically the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. This list provides a *minimum* of the works available for her to access, but does not remove the

⁶ The quote provided in this article has been shortened to repeat only her more generalized commentary on the overall collection, removing the parts of her comments that appeared to directly allude to the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* or other derivative apocryphal infancy legends.

possibility that she had access to or owned other broader collections of this material.

Yet, surprisingly, we not only know what books were available for her to read, but there is evidence that White was even utilizing such “fictitious tales” (as White herself called them) to provide material for her own accounts of the history of the apostles. In this article specifically, attention will be turned to the apocryphal acts of the apostles. It will be argued that Ellen White has utilized the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* within her accounts of Paul’s journeys to Iconium, as well as in her description of Paul appearing like an angel when he was brought before Nero. The results of this study will demonstrate that White appears to selectively use material from this apocryphal work. For example, while not endorsing the specific story of the female apostle Thecla, it appears that she attempted to draw historical and geographical details from the apocryphal account, to do what she claimed the New Testament Apocrypha itself did: “supply the silence of the scriptures.”

1. The Acts of Paul and Thecla

Among the apocryphal acts, the second-century account of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (part of the larger apocryphal *Acts of Paul*) holds a special place among the many legends of the apostles. In this ancient story, “she is presented as a disciple of Paul who eventually is given by him the same commission to preach which he received. She is presented therein as an evangelist, a confessor who faced martyrdom, and a model and teacher in the virginal life” (Wilson-Kastner 1979, 106). Patricia Wilson-Kastner goes on to note that:

The *Acts of Paul and Thecla* portray Thecla as finding virginity to be the most perfect evangelical life style, and the way in which one lives out the Gospel most securely. Paul’s preaching to her centered on virginity as the way for the Christian to become a “temple of God,” to be pleasing to him, and to be rewarded by him in the “day of his Son.” For this reason Thecla rejected her own fiancé and was first sent to execution; and in Alexandria she also rejected a suitor, who became the cause of her trial in the arena. Directly or indirectly, Thecla’s adherence to virginity was a cause of her near martyrdom, and was almost identical with her Christian life (Wilson-Kastner 1979, 107).

The current version of the story of Thecla's missionary activity has been shaped by a writer/editor with strong inclinations towards asceticism, depicting Thecla as a chaste virgin who rejects marriage. "Thecla was presented to Christian youth as a heroine because when she heard Paul preach she broke her engagement and lived the rest of her life unmarried" (Maxwell 1968, 2). Such attitudes were growingly popular in the second century and based on radical interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7, many such Christians looked to Thecla as an example of such an apostle. Although the written account we have received from that time has been shaped by these ideological concerns, the story itself in some form may be older. Richard Pervo notes that likely this "was a freestanding story about *Thecla*, taken up by the author [of the *Acts of Paul*]," one which was likely written, rather than oral (Pervo 2014, 87).⁷ And as A. Hillhorst notes, "the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* have not reached us undamaged," and there may have been aspects of the text that are now missing for us that were present in earlier versions of the story (Hillhorst 1996, 162).

The story of Thecla as we now have it has not been preserved as a distinct tale anymore, but forms part of the larger apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, similar to the extant *3 Corinthians* that also came to be known by its inclusion in that same broader work. Yet, scholars recognize that both works were originally separate documents that the author/redactor of the *Acts of Paul* brought together for his work. "The *Acts of Paul* appeared in the second half of the second century, between c. 160 and c. 190, probably c. 170–75" (Pervo 2014, 41). This means that Tertullian's attempt to defame Thecla's story (*On Baptism* 17.5) by claiming he found the "forger" who created the *Acts of Paul* does nothing to tell us about the author of Thecla's story which the "forger" (more accurately: the redactor) merely included. Tertullian's comments are produced below in full:

But if certain Acts of Paul, which are falsely so named, claim the example of Thecla for allowing women to teach and to baptize, let men know that in Asia the presbyter who compiled that document, thinking to add of his own to Paul's reputation, was found out, and though

⁷ Despite Pervo's reputation for his excellent scholarship on the book of Acts and the apocryphal acts literature, his scholarly reputation was deeply marred by his criminal conviction of possessing and distributing child pornography in 2001.

he professed he had done it for love of Paul, was deposed from his position (Evans 1964, 36).

In fact, Jerome appears to have presumed that the presbyter, rather than living at the time of Tertullian, wrote the *Acts of Paul* in the first century, "between A.D. 68 and A.D. 98" (Hilhorst 1996, 160). Jerome argues (*De uiris illustribus* 7) that the identity of the author was discovered by none other than the Apostle John. Jerome further argues that Luke (the author of the canonical Acts) could not have written the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* because "if they had really occurred, he implies, Luke would have recorded them [these fantastic stories] in the canonical Acts" (ibid., 159). While modern scholars won't accept this early dating speculation by Jerome, it shows how deeply respected the stories it contained were and how far into antiquity ancient readers presumed these stories dated to.

During the nineteenth century the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* was the most likely account from the apocryphal acts to be included in popular collections of New Testament Apocrypha. It is notable though, despite this, that the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* is not referenced in any Adventist periodical during Ellen White's lifetime and it was, presumably, unknown to most in Adventism. Thecla is never even referenced off-hand by writers when discussing the New Testament Apocrypha and its various works.

This notable silence, and the fact that White had access to the work, makes it more curious when one detects hints of influence in Ellen White's writings from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Included in both Hone's and Walker's compilations, the influence of this apocryphal work can be seen in several unique additional details which White furnishes to the account of Acts 14. In the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the short narrative details part of Paul's travel in Iconium, concentrating on the story of one of the female residents there, named Thecla.

The biblical account of Paul's journey to Iconium is quite sparse, simply noting that some "unbelieving Jews" managed to poison the minds of the residents of Iconium about Paul's beliefs and "an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them" (14:5). White adds significant additional details that appear to be found only in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. For example, White describes the city as "a great resort for pleasure-seekers," (White 1878, 15) a detail which matches Paul's statement in *APTh* 4:6 that "God... has sent me to reclaim them... from all

(sinful) pleasures.” See also *APTh* 3:1 and its description of “pleasure” in Iconium.

The Acts of Paul and Thecla (1820 trans.)⁸	Ellen White (1878)⁹
<p>^{4:1} Then <i>Thamyris standing before the governor’s judgment-seat</i>, spake with a loud voice in the following manner. ² <i>O governor</i>, I know not whence this man cometh;</p> <p>but he is the one who teaches that matrimony is unlawful. Command him therefore to declare before you for what reason he publishes such doctrines...</p> <p>^{5:3} They went therefore according to his direction, and there found her; and when they came out, they got <i>a mob</i> together, and went and told the governor all that happened... ⁶ When Paul was brought thither, <i>the mob</i> with more vehemence cried out, He is a magician, let him die.</p> <p>⁷ Nevertheless <i>the governor attended with pleasure upon Paul’s discourses of the holy works of Christ</i>;</p>	<p>They were filled with envy and hatred, and determined to stop the labors of the apostles at once. They <i>went to the authorities</i>,</p> <p>and represented their work in the most false and exaggerated light, <i>leading the officers to fear that the entire city was in danger of being incited to insurrection</i>. They stated that great numbers were attaching themselves to the apostles, and suggested that it was for secret and dangerous designs...</p> <p>They stirred up the worst passions of <i>the ignorant, noisy mob</i>, creating a tumult with they attributed to the efforts of the apostles...</p> <p>In consequence of these charges, the disciples were repeatedly brought before the authorities; but in every case <i>they so ably defended themselves before the people</i>, that, although the</p>

⁸ Translation taken from Hone, Jones, and Wake 1820, 103–104.

⁹ White 1878, 16–17.

<p>and, after a council called, he summoned Thecla, and said to her, Why do you not, according to the law of the Iconians, marry Thamyris? ⁸ She stood still, with her eyes fixed upon Paul; and finding she made no reply, Theoclia, her mother, cried out, saying, Let the unjust creature be burnt; let her be burnt in the midst of the theatre, for refusing Thamyris, <i>that all women may learn from her to avoid such practices.</i></p> <p>⁹ Then <i>the governor was exceeding concerned, and ordered Paul to be whipt out of the city, and Thecla to be burnt.</i></p>	<p>magistrates were prejudiced against them by the false statements they had heard, <i>they dared not condemn them.</i></p>
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This description of frenzied passions and concerns over insurrection, absent from the account in Acts 14, appears to mirror *APTh* 4:1–3 and 5:6,8 in which the wealthy Thamyris declares that Paul is teaching against marriage, the mob declares that he is a magician, and Thecla’s mother Theoclia declares that Thecla should be burned to death in order to teach women not to follow her example in becoming a Christian (for fear of a societal uprising against their husbands). The very idea of, or use of the word “mob,” finds its origin in *APTh* 5:6. In summary, the overarching theme and some details from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* are present in White’s account, even though the individual details about Thecla herself and her specific situation clearly are not

(and conspicuously, there is no reference to women at all in White's account).¹⁰ In a later chapter though, it is possible to hear a potential allusion to Thecla or those like her when she remarks that "When the Jews [of Thessalonica] saw that the apostles were successful in obtaining large congregations; that many were accepting their doctrines – among them the leading women of the city, and multitudes of Gentiles – they were filled with envy and jealousy" (White 1878, 47). While Acts 17:12 (cf. Philippians 4:2–3) reports the idea of women converting due to Paul's preaching in Berea, one can't help but think that Thecla might also be an influence.

There are possibly two reasons for White not mentioning Thecla in her narrative about Iconium, and each involve a matter of interpretation. One can either understand from *APT*h 1:1 that the story of Thecla is based on the passage in Acts 14:1–7, or one can take the reference of going from Iconium to Antioch in *APT*h 7:1 as evidence that the story is in the undiscussed part of Paul's journey in Acts 14:21. If White took the first interpretive option, then one may notice that she attempts to harmonize the extra-biblical details of *APT*h 4:1–5:9 with those of Acts 14:1–7, giving the book of Acts the ability to define which parts of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* can fit in. In other words, Ellen White does not appear to value the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in the same way that she does the canonical book of Acts, having the former subservient to the latter.

On the other hand, though, if she interpreted it the second way and believed that the author of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* had set the story's events during Acts 14:21, then White does not refer to the specific events in the apocryphal story precisely because she is discussing the events in Iconium and Antioch that occurred previous to the account of *Thecla* (which might explain why White adds the detail about violence from the mob being blamed on Paul, something that doesn't happen in *Thecla's* story). Regardless of which scenario best describes her approach to the work, it seems clear that though she didn't describe Thecla's story in her own account, she utilized the details from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* to fill out generic details about the city for the earlier

¹⁰We might also note that White adds the idea that the mob creates violence which is blamed on Paul, an element not found in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and represents an addition she herself adds.

biblical account (while neither demonstrating her acceptance or disagreement with the apocryphal account). As Ghazzal Dabiri notes,

There is little to support the historicity of Thecla herself or the events described in her tale, miracles aside. It has been suggested that Thecla’s legendary tale may be based on oral and written accounts of women or one woman, who may or may not have been named Thecla, who suffered through trials after encountering Paul and subscribing to his teachings (Dabiri 2022, 3).

Whether or not Ellen White sensed this was true back in 1878, she ended up treating the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, at best, as a historical source about an ancient city and their treatment generally of Paul. This mirrors in some ways, uncritically, the historical value given to the work today. For example, a number of scholars today pay attention to the work for its earliest description of Paul’s physical features (see for example Soon 2021, 159–178). In fact, Ellen White also appears to allude to just that aspect of the apocryphal story.

Acts of Paul and Thecla 1:7	Ellen White
<p>At length they saw a man coming (namely Paul), of a low stature, bald (or shaved) on the head, crooked thighs, handsome legs, hollowed-eyed; had a crooked nose;</p> <p>full of grace;</p> <p>for sometimes he appeared as a man, sometimes he had the <i>countenance of an angel</i>.</p>	<p>Now the proud, passionate nature of Saul has been <i>transformed by the grace</i> of Christ... (White 1883, 185).</p> <p>His [Paul’s] <i>countenance glows with the light of heaven</i>, as though reflecting the rays of the sun. Many who looked upon him in that hall of judgement [of Nero] “saw his face as it had been the face of <i>an angel</i>” (White 1883, 315).</p> <p>Paul’s <i>countenance beams with the light of heaven</i>. Many who looked upon</p>

	<p>him “saw his face as it had been the face of <i>an angel</i>.” Tears dimmed many eyes. The gospel found its way to the hearts of many who, but for Paul’s witness, would never have been led to the Saviour (White 1902, 210).</p>
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Although White quotes the description of Stephen from Acts 6:15, her application of it to Paul is a clear allusion to the description given by the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Although the reference comes from the infamous *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, a work known for its heavy reliance on its earlier forebear *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* by W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson (1869), the former work lacks any reference to Paul’s countenance or his angelic appearance, strengthening the idea that White continued to find influence from the apocryphal tale years after her earlier comments from 1878. This same description is also repeated decades later in 1902, possibly showing a continued influence.

It should finally be noted that while she utilized details from this apocryphal New Testament work, and remained silent on its specific narrative, she also contradicts it even when she utilizes parts of it. Particularly with regard to the two villains of the narrative, Paul’s companions Demas and Hermogenes, White makes an allusion to an element of their characterization even as she departs from the other specifics of their background given in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.

<p>Acts of Paul and Thecla 2:13-16, 3:1-2</p>	<p>Ellen White</p>
<p>Then Thamyris ran forth into the street, to observe who they were that went in to Paul, and came out from him; and he saw two men engaged in a very warm dispute, and said to them: Sirs, what business have you here? And who is that man within, belonging to you, who deludes the minds of men, both young men and</p>	<p>Among the assistants of Paul in his labors were many of his former companions and fellow-workers... Demas and Mark also were with him... Demas was now a faithful helper of the apostle. A few years afterward, however, in the same letter to Timothy which commends</p>

<p>virgins, persuading them, that they ought not to marry, but continue as they are? <i>I promise to give you a considerable sum, if you will give me a just account of him; for I am the chief person of this city.</i> Demas and Hermogenes replied, We can not so exactly tell who he is, but this we know, that he deprives young men of their (intended) wives, and virgins of their (intended) husbands, by teaching, there can be no future resurrection, unless ye continue in chastity, and do not defile your flesh. Then said Thamyris, Come along with me to my house and refresh yourselves. <i>So they went to a very splendid entertainment, where there was wine in abundance, and very rich provision. They were brought to a table very richly spread, and made to drink plentifully by Thamyris...</i></p>	<p>Mark's fidelity, Paul writes, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved the present world." <i>For worldly gain, Demas bartered every higher and nobler consideration. How short-sighted, how unwise the exchange! Those who possess only worldly wealth or honor are poor indeed, however much they may proudly call their own.</i> (White 1883, 282–283).</p>
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Although the biblical account only mentioned that Demas “loved the present world,” Ellen White has expanded this characterization with no less than four allusions to the idea that Demas left Paul for money and honor, the very issues raised in the characterization of Demas within the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. Does White presume the authenticity of that narrative’s portrayal of Demas forsaking Paul? That is unlikely since White places his abandonment of Paul toward the end of his life in Rome, not near the time of Iconium. Again, a number of decades later, we see in another place where an allusion to Demas’ apocryphal background creeps into White’s depiction.

<p>Acts of Paul and Thecla 1:1–2, 7–10</p>	<p>Ellen White</p>
<p>When Paul went up to Iconium, after his flight from Antioch, Demas</p>	<p>A Herod, a Demas, an Alexander stand out in marked prominence on the pages of Inspiration. Like these,</p>

and Hermogenes became his companions, who were then full of hypocrisy. But Paul, looking only at the goodness of God, did them no harm, but loved them greatly... And Paul saw Onesiphorus, and was glad. And Onesiphorus said, Hail, thou servant of the blessed God. Paul replied, The grace of God be with thee and thy family. *But Demas and Hermogenes were moved with envy, and under a show of great religion Demas said, and are not we also servants of the blessed God? Why didst thou not salute us? Onesiphorus replied, Because I have not perceived in you the fruits of righteousness; nevertheless, if ye are of that sort, ye shall be welcome to my house also... [Following this, the text reports that Demas and Hermogenes are standing outside the house, not listening to Paul preach, suggesting they have rejected him after their rebuttal by Onesiphorus].*

this class do their work under the training of the enemy. As long as their path runs smoothly and in accordance with their own particular ideas, they are well satisfied to float along; but when obstacles or trials are met, *when their personal habits or selfishness are rebuked, they turn away like the displeased disciples... Better, far better, had they never known the truth, than to have had a knowledge of it, and then turn traitor to its principles.* (White 1897).

Perhaps most interesting is a comment she makes in an article in 1899, remarking again about Demas that “those whom we have loved and trusted will leave the faith, and by their falsehoods do us harm” (White 1899, 81). The reference to “falsehoods” in connection with Demas would suggest an echo of the conversation between Demas and Thamyris, in which Demas portrays Paul as teaching doctrines that are sensationally disruptive in exchange for money. And yet, despite these agreements between White and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, there are also divergences. Though both characters are presented as having largely worked against Paul, been hypocrites, and falsely acted as friends with Paul in the apocryphal story, White writes that Hermogenes and

Demas only abandon Paul at his imprisonment during the end of his ministry at Rome, not earlier and certainly not during the events of Iconium.

2. Where Did She Find It?

An interesting question is whether she received these details from reading a formal collection of New Testament Apocrypha, like was found in her office library after her death, or from another book? The collection listed in the office library collection did in fact contain the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and as such, could have easily provided the translation she needed. However, that specific volume was likely published around 1881–1882, and her comments largely date shortly before that (1872). Did she use a previous edition of this collection of New Testament Apocrypha or did she have access to a different work containing Thecla's story?

It may be that the likeliest source for her access to the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* was Calvin Stowe, whose book Ellen White had utilized on other occasions and which provided a full translation of the first half of Thecla's story (rather than summarizing it) (Stowe 1868). This appears likely as well given the fact that there appear to be no parallels between White and the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* in the second half of the book which Stowe did not reproduce. It is also true that White's use of this apocryphal acts corresponds to the same year that she reflected on the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, which she also appears to have been indebted to Stowe for her knowledge of.¹¹ This increases the likelihood that Stowe is the origin for her access to this apocryphal work in its first five chapters.

Stowe himself acknowledged in his introduction that “extracts from the apocryphal books are also [presented] full and copious; for these books for the most part are wholly inaccessible to the public generally” (Stowe 1868, vi). Given the time frame when she gave these comments, versus her later dated copy of a formal collection of this material, it seems likely that that Stowe's attention to providing translations of stories, such as Thecla's, was likely Ellen White's first introduction to the text of this early Christian legend. Interestingly, Stowe's translation he provided of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* also

¹¹ A comparison of Stowe's descriptions and refutation of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* shows great similarities with White's own description in *Youth Instructor*.

matches the same translation given from Hone and Wake's *Apocryphal New Testament*, the same work found in White's office library.

That later collected work contained an introductory notation about the book that is useful when reflecting on why Ellen White may have employed the use of this book in her historical reconstructions. While it warned that Tertullian had claimed the work was forged, it noted that "notwithstanding this, a large part of the history was credited and looked upon as genuine among the primitive Christians," and went on to say that a number of scholars in their day "consider them as having been written in the Apostolic age; as containing nothing superstitious, or disagreeing from the opinions and belief of those times; and, in short, as a genuine and authentic history" (Hone, Jones, and Wake 1820, 99). The fact that "this is not the original book of the early Christians" is finally acknowledged at the end, citing a specific manuscript being utilized for the translation (*ibid.*, 99). Certainly, whatever feelings White had regarding the apocryphal account, she was well aware that it entailed many historical dilemmas and questions about textual transmission, all issues that would have affected which aspects she considered useful from the work to employ in her own.

3. Female Missionaries

Why might White have been drawn to quote from this document? A quote from Stowe at its introduction seems interesting in this regard. He states that "This book must be very ancient" and notes that "Tertullian says the book was first written in the interest of those that held that women had the right to preach and baptize; and it was much esteemed by the early Quakers as sustaining their views of the position of women in the church" (Hone, Jones, and Wake 1820, 318). Could the proposed early date and the fact that the work depicted an early female preacher have caught her interest? One can only imagine. One thing seems for certain, Thecla as a historical character or as an apocryphal story held little interest for early Adventists outside Ellen White, because the first time that anyone ever mentions her story in public periodicals appears to be in 1930 (Emmerson 1930, 9).

Yet, a close analysis of Ellen White's ideas about women in ministry is suggestive of this book's potential influence. She wrote in a letter, one year after utilizing the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, that "There are needed not only ministers,

but those who can act as missionaries – men and women of good understanding, of moral worth with moral backbone, who can circulate around among the people and shed light, precious light everywhere... we have so few missionaries to shed light" (White 1879). Could the character of Thecla and her missionary journeys have been on her mind, prompting the reflection? Again, she wrote that "Men and women are needed to work in the great missionary field with determined effort, praying and weeping, sow the precious seed of truth in imitation of the Redeemer, who was the Prince of missionaries" (White 1878, 193).

While White had in the past (i.e. 1867) noted generically that "Young men and women should inquire, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? How can I honor and glorify thy name upon the earth?'" (White 1867, 21), the comment in 1879 represented one of a number of times through the 1870s that she mentioned women *missionaries*. In 1871, she had wrote that "This is God's plan: that men and women... should be his missionaries, bodies of light throughout the world, to be as signs to the people – living epistles, known and read of all men" (White 1871, 82). She argued in 1875 that "would to God we had one hundred women consecrated to the work, going forth as missionaries, toiling in the harvest field" (White 1875). A year later, she wrote that "Missionaries for God are wanted, faithful men and women who will not shirk responsibility," noting that "Missionary work – introducing our publications into families, conversing, and praying with and for them – is a good work and one which will educate men and women to do pastoral labor" (White 1876, 73, 390).

Did her enthusiasm for female ministry in the 70s arise due to other considerations and this attracted her towards reading the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* carefully, or did the story of Thecla's missionary adventures inspire her to perceive women's mission work differently? Stowe's book was published in 1868, providing White with the opportunity to have begun reading Thecla's story by her earliest comments in 1871. Yet, given that her allusions to details from the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* only appear in 1878, seven years after that first comment, it is possible that her interest in Thecla's tale followed her new enthusiasm, rather than the other way around.

4. Conclusion

In summary, it appears that Ellen White utilized a translation of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* (likely the one given within Calvin Stowe's book she owned), drawing details about the city of Iconium that she utilized in her retelling of Paul's missionary journey. Likewise, the description of Paul as appearing like an angel to some was picked up by her apparently a few years later when reflecting on Paul's final trial with Nero before his death. In both of these instances, White is not beholden to the apocryphal work but utilizes it at her discretion.

C. Mervin Maxwell, writing in 1969, reflected on this book and noted:

In the impossible account of Paul and Thecla, Paul is preeminently the Apostle of Absolute Chastity. Mobs attempt to take his life not because he preaches Christ but because he condemns marriage. The beautiful Thecla is portrayed as his most important convert in Iconium, since, after hearing Paul for three days without eating or drinking, she renounced her fiancé, dressed in male attire, and followed Paul on his journey. It hardly agrees with Hebrews 13:4 which says that "marriage is honorable," or with Paul's exaltation of marriage in Ephesians 5 (Maxwell 1964, 22–23, 31).

Writing earlier in 1947, R.D. Vine noted that "Some people believe that our Bible is not complete" and that "such writings as... the Acts of Paul and Thecla, should be all added to the New Testament." In reaction to this, he remarked that "their contents are very much inferior to that of the Bible... [and] contain so much that is trivial and foolish, as to be almost completely useless" (Vine 1947, 7). Undoubtedly, Ellen White shared similar reservations about the apocryphal account. She does not appear to repeat or allude to any of the teachings of Paul contained in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and she does not embrace its message. Her comments in *The Youth Instructor* remain representative: "These writers relate wonderful incidents and miracles... They relate fictitious tales, and frivolous miracles... They are more after the order of the novels that are written, which have no foundation in truth; but the characters delineated are of fancy creating" (White 1872, 29).

Perhaps she thought of Thecla's story as one such early Christian novella. As Jeremy Barrier has noted, "there are extensive points of contact in the similarities of motif, language, themes, choice of words, expressions, etc. between the *APTh* and other ancient novels" (Barrier 2009, 7). As Barrier remarks further, "it seems safe to say that the account was not written for the purpose of the preservation of historical events, but rather to record a historical fiction relating the events of Paul and Thecla (who may have never existed)" (ibid., 10). And yet, despite Ellen White claiming they have "no foundation in truth," some books of the New Testament Apocrypha apparently did have *truths* (so to speak) which White herself utilized in her own retellings of biblical stories. The comments of Calvin Stowe on this issue are, in this regard, illuminating, for he does not condemn these books but places them into a context that was perhaps foundational for White's positive approach toward them:

Some of these books are exceedingly interesting. They are the honest endeavors of good Christian men, near the apostolic times; and the manifest difference between the apostolic writings and theirs, is just the difference between divine inspiration and the unassisted efforts of the human mind at that period and in that class of people (Stowe 1868, vi).

In the end, studying Ellen White's utilization of the New Testament Apocrypha reveals that while she held a dim and negative view of these works as fictitious tales, their suspicious character did not stop her from either having an interest in them or wishing to utilize their information at times within her own work. As Barrier cautiously notes, "I am not suggesting that there are no reliable historical elements to the story, but rather this is not the purpose that the document was written" (Barrier 2009, 11). Much like New Testament and early Christian scholars who use these documents for historical analysis, White provided an early model of seeking historical treasures from these ancient books. This should *encourage*, rather than *discourage* other Adventists from reading these works with a critical eye for historical investigation. There indeed are historical treasures within these works, even as they remain likely, at various levels, fictitious.

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Zusammenfassung

Während Ellen Whites Verwendung der alttestamentlichen Apokryphen in ihrer King-James-Bibel von Wissenschaftlern eingehend untersucht wurde und wird, ist ihre Nutzung der neutestamentlichen Apokryphen weitgehend unbeachtet geblieben. In diesem Artikel werden ihre Vertrautheit mit den verschiedenen apokryphen Berichten der Apostelgeschichte und ihre Verwendung derselben untersucht. Dabei wird geprüft, ob sie Zugang zu den Dokumenten hatte und inwieweit deren Einfluss in ihren Berichten über das Leben der Apostel zu erkennen ist. Die Schlussfolgerung dieser Untersuchung zeigt sowohl, dass White solche Werke (Bücher wie die Apostelgeschichte des Paulus und der Thekla) tatsächlich gelesen und in ihren Schriften verwendet zu haben scheint, als auch, dass White im Vergleich zu den alttestamentlichen Apokryphen und den kanonischen Schriften, die in ihrer Bibel zu finden sind, eine deutlich andere Haltung gegenüber diesen Werken einzunehmen scheint.

Résumé

Tandis que l'utilisation par Ellen White des apocryphes de l'Ancien Testament dans sa Bible du roi Jacques a été et continue à être étudié par les érudits, son utilisation des apocryphes du Nouveau Testament est passée largement inaperçue. Dans cet article sa connaissance et son utilisation des différents Actes des Apôtres apocryphes seront étudiées en examinant si elle avait accès aux documents et dans quelle mesure leur influence peut être démontrée dans ses récits de la vie des apôtres. La conclusion de cette étude démontre à la fois que White semblait en effet lire et utiliser de tels ouvrages dans ses écrits (des livres comme les Actes de Paul et Thècle), mais aussi que White semble présenter une attitude nettement différente envers ces livres par rapport aux apocryphes de l'Ancien Testament et aux écritures canoniques de sa Bible.

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