

## XII CHAPTER 56 - Blessing the Children

In her chapter on "Blessing the Children" Ellen White highlights one of the incidents on the journey of Jesus from Galilee, through Perea, to Jerusalem. The long trip which Luke alone covers is first presented in overview in chapter 53, the previous chapter in our study. One of the parables told on the journey, "The Good Samaritan," is the subject of chapter 54. The question of the Pharisees on the coming of the kingdom of God becomes the topic of chapter 55, a short work of 82 sentences based on Luke's comments in Luke 17:20ff. Chapter 56 on the children being blessed by Jesus is treated in Luke 18:15-17 and the next DA chapter on the rich young ruler corresponds to the verses immediately following in Luke 18:18-23.<sup>1</sup>

The little story on the mothers bringing their children to Jesus is lifted out of a series of incidents on a long journey and given special significance in the DA text. The earlier narratives on the life of Christ as contained in Spiritual Gifts and Spirit of Prophecy do not mention this event.

Chapter 56 appears to have been written specifically for the DA text. The previous writings of Ellen White do not contain one article on the blessing of the children. She does refer to the episode in a variety of articles on the topic of motherhood. Some of these earlier references

-----  
<sup>1</sup>Cf. Mark 10:13-16 and 17-22; Matthew 19:13-15 and Matthew 19:16-22.

## Blessing the Children

are fragmentary, consisting of a thought or two paralleling a comment now found expressed at times slightly differently in chapter 56.<sup>1</sup>

No manuscripts were found in Ellen White's handwriting for the text of this chapter. There are a few manuscripts containing references to Jesus blessing the children. The earliest manuscript reference to the blessing of the children appears on page 8 of Manuscript 1, 1867. Further comment on the topic may be found in Manuscript 12, 1895, pages 11-13, Manuscript 27, 1896, pages 2 and 3, and in Letter S-31 of 1898, pages 2 and 3.

Most of Ellen White's earlier comments on the blessing of the children are to be found in her articles published in the Health Reformer.<sup>2</sup> Sentences 61-66 of chapter 56 are first found in HR Volume 31, #7, July, 1896, sentences 8-12 of "Self-Discipline Necessary to Parents." DA27-30, and DA35,36 appear in sentences 1, 2, 50-56 of "The Mother's Duty - Christ her Strength," Health Reformer, Vol. 12, No. 8 (Aug. 1877), pp. 234, 235. The same article was republished in ST, Vol. 3, No. 46 (Nov. 29, 1877). These particular sentences were also published later in ST, Vol. 12, No. 35 (Sept. 9, 1886) and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

-----  
<sup>1</sup>Cf. 4T 141.9 (Testimony 26, 1876) with DA42,43; 4T 142.1+ with DA39,40; Gospel Workers (1892 ed.) 261.7 with DA4.

<sup>2</sup>The Health Reformer was first published in August of 1866 at The Western Health-Reform Institute, Battle Creek, Michigan. Our references are taken from Ellen G. White Health Reformer Articles, 2nd edition (Payson, Arizona: Leaves-of-Autumn Books, 1979).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. The Adventist Home (Nashville: Southern

## Blessing the Children

Sentences 7-23 of the DA text were evidently taken from "The Christian Mother a Coworker with God," ST, April 9, 1896, sentences 9-28.

We have presented the relevant portions of these earlier articles in Appendix D. By comparing the parallels one can see how the DA text has either reproduced or modified the earlier material.

The text presentation of chapter 56 differs in format from the previous chapters of this study. The Ellen White text is presented on the page facing right. Except for one sentence, no source text has been included. The one source quotation from Geikie appears following sentence 5 and is marked off by two dotted horizontal lines.<sup>1</sup>

-----  
Publishing Association, 1952), p. 204, and The Bible Echo, September 1, 1893, under "Cheering Words for Mothers."

<sup>1</sup>The dotted lines indicate that the Ellen White text has been interrupted by the insertion of a source quotation.

DA1/511 JESUS was ever a lover of children. (11)

DA2/511 He accepted their childish sympathy and their open, unaffected love. (11)

DA3/511 The grateful praise from their pure lips was music in His ears, and refreshed His spirit when oppressed by contact with crafty and hypocritical men. (11)

DA4/511 Wherever the Saviour went, the benignity of His countenance, and His gentle, kindly manner won the love and confidence of children. (11)

DA5/511 Among the Jews it was customary for children to be brought to some rabbi, that he might lay his hands upon them in blessing; but the Saviour's disciples thought His work too important to be interrupted in this way. [G/645.5] (12)

.....

645.5 A beautiful custom led parents to bring their children at an early age to the Synagogue, that they might have the prayers and blessings of the elders. "After the father of the child," says the Talmud, "had laid his hands on his child's head, he led him to the elders, one by one, and they also blessed him, and prayed that he might grow up famous in the Law, faithful in marriage, and abundant in good works." Children were thus brought, also, to any Rabbi of special holiness, and hence they had been presented already more than once before Jesus. [Geikie, LC]

.....

DA6/511 When the mothers came to Him with their little ones, the disciples looked on them with disfavor. (11)

DA7/511 They thought these children too young to be benefited by a visit to Jesus, and concluded that He would be displeased at their presence. (11)

DA8/511 But it was the disciples with whom He was displeased. (11)

DA9/511 The Saviour understood the care and burden of the mothers who were seeking to train their children according to the word of God. (I1)

DA10/511 He had heard their prayers. (I1)

DA11/511 He Himself had drawn them into His presence. (I1)

DA12/511 One mother with her child had left her home to find Jesus. (I1)

DA13/511 On the way she told a neighbor her errand, and the neighbor wanted to have Jesus bless her children. (I1)

DA14/511 Thus several mothers came together, with their little ones. (I1)

DA15/511+ Some of the children had passed beyond the years of infancy to childhood and youth. (I1)

DA16/512 When the mothers made known their desire, Jesus heard with sympathy the timid, tearful request. (I1)

DA17/512 But He waited to see how the disciples would treat them. (I1)

DA18/512 When He saw them send the mothers away, thinking to do Him a favor, He showed them their error, saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." (I1)

DA19/512 He took the children in His arms, He laid His hands upon them, and gave them the blessing for which they came. (I1)

DA20/512 The mothers were comforted. (I1)

DA21/512 They returned to their homes strengthened and blessed by the words of Christ. (I1)

DA22/512 They were encouraged to take up their burden with new cheerfulness, and to work hopefully for their children. (11)

DA23/512 The mothers of today are to receive His words with the same faith. (11)

DA24/512 Christ is as verily a personal Saviour today as when He lived a man among men. (11)

DA25/512 He is as verily the helper of mothers today as when He gathered the little ones to His arms in Judea. (11)

DA26/512 The children of our hearths are as much the purchase of His blood as were the children of long ago. (11)

DA27/512 Jesus knows the burden of every mother's heart. (11)

DA28/512 He who had a mother that struggled with poverty and privation sympathizes with every mother in her labors. (11)

DA29/512 He who made a long journey in order to relieve the anxious heart of a Canaanite woman will do as much for the mothers of today. (11)

DA30/512 He who gave back to the widow of Nain her only son, and who in His agony upon the cross remembered His own mother, is touched today by the mother's sorrow. (11)

DA31/512 In every grief and every need He will give comfort and help. (11)

DA32/512 Let mothers come to Jesus with their perplexities. (11)

DA33/512 They will find grace sufficient to aid them in the management of their children. (11)

DA34/512 The gates are open for every mother who would lay her burdens at the Saviour's feet. (11)

DA35/512 He who said, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not," still invites the mothers to lead up their little ones to be blessed by Him. (11)

DA36/512 Even the babe in its mother's arms may dwell as under the shadow of the Almighty through the faith of the praying mother. (11)

DA37/512 John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his birth. (11)

DA38/512 If we will live in communion with God, we too may expect the divine Spirit to mold our little ones, even from their earliest moments. (11)

DA39/512 In the children who were brought in contact with Him, Jesus saw the men and women who should be heirs of His grace and subjects of His kingdom, and some of whom would become martyrs for His sake. (11)

DA40/515 He knew that these children would listen to Him and accept Him as their Redeemer far more readily than would grown-up people, many of whom were the worldly-wise and hardhearted. (11)

DA41/515 In His teaching He came down to their level. (11)

DA42/515 He, the Majesty of heaven, did not disdain to answer their questions, and simplify His important lessons to meet their childish understanding. (11)

DA43/515 He planted in their minds the seeds of truth, which in after years would spring up, and bear fruit unto eternal life. (11)

DA44/515 It is still true that children are the most susceptible to the teachings of the gospel; their hearts are open to divine influences, and strong to retain the lessons received. (11)

DA45/515 The little children may be Christians, having an experience in accordance with their years. (11)

DA46/515 They need to be educated in spiritual things, and parents should give them every advantage, that they may form characters after the similitude of the character of Christ. (11)

DA47/515 Fathers and mothers should look upon their children as younger members of the Lord's family, committed to them to educate for heaven. (11)

DA48/515 The lessons that we ourselves learn from Christ we should give to our children, as the young minds can receive them, little by little opening to them the beauty of the principles of heaven. (11)

DA49/515 Thus the Christian home becomes a school, where the parents serve as underteachers, while Christ Himself is the chief instructor. (11)

DA50/515 In working for the conversion of our children, we should not look for violent emotion as the essential evidence of conviction of sin. (11)

DA51/515 Nor is it necessary to know the exact time when they are converted. (11)

DA52/515 We should teach them to bring their sins to Jesus, asking His forgiveness, and believing that He pardons and receives them as He received the children when He was personally on earth. (11)

DA53/515 As the mother teaches her children to obey her because they love her, she is teaching them the first lessons in the Christian life. (11)



DA54/515 The mother's love represents to the child the love of Christ, and the little ones who trust and obey their mother are learning to trust and obey the Saviour. (11)

DA55/515 Jesus was the pattern for children, and He was also the father's example. (11)

DA56/515 He spoke as one having authority, and His word was with power; yet in all His intercourse with rude and violent men He did not use one unkind or discourteous expression. (11)

DA57/515 The grace of Christ in the heart will impart a heaven-born dignity and sense of propriety. (11)

DA58/515 It will soften whatever is harsh, and subdue all that is coarse and unkind. (11)

DA59/515 It will lead fathers and mothers to treat their children as intelligent beings, as they themselves would like to be treated. (11)

DA60/516 Parents, in the training of your children, study the lessons that God has given in nature. (11)

DA61/516 If you would train a pink, or rose, or lily, how would you do it? (11)

DA62/516 Ask the gardener by what process he makes every branch and leaf to flourish so beautifully, and to develop in symmetry and loveliness. (11)

DA63/516 He will tell you that it was by no rude touch, no violent effort; for this would only break the delicate stems. (11)

DA64/516 It was by little attentions, often repeated. (11)

DA65/516 He moistened the soil, and protected the growing plants from the fierce blasts and from the scorching sun, and God caused them to flourish and to blossom into loveliness. (11)

DA66/516 In dealing with your children, follow the method of the gardener. (11)

DA67/516 By gentle touches, by loving ministrations, seek to fashion their characters after the pattern of the character of Christ. (11)

DA68/516 Encourage the expression of love toward God and toward one another. (11)

DA69/516 The reason why there are so many hardhearted men and women in the world is that true affection has been regarded as weakness, and has been discouraged and repressed. (11)

DA70/516 The better nature of these persons was stifled in childhood; and unless the light of divine love shall melt away their cold selfishness, their happiness will be forever ruined. (11)

DA71/516 If we wish our children to possess the tender spirit of Jesus, and the sympathy that angels manifest for us, we must encourage the generous, loving impulses of childhood. (11)

DA72/516 Teach the children to see Christ in nature. (11)

DA73/516 Take them out into the open air, under the noble trees, into the garden; and in all the wonderful works of creation teach them to see an expression of His love. (11)

DA74/516 Teach them that He made the laws which govern all living things, that He has made laws for us, and that these laws are for our happiness and joy. (11)

DA75/516+ Do not weary them with long prayers and tedious exhortations, but through nature's object lessons teach them obedience to the law of God. (11)

DA76/517 As you win their confidence in you as followers of Christ, it will be easy to teach them of the great love wherewith He has loved us. (11)

DA77/517 As you try to make plain the truths of salvation, and point the children to Christ as a personal Saviour, angels will be by your side. (11)

DA78/517 The Lord will give to fathers and mothers grace to interest their little ones in the precious story of the Babe of Bethlehem, who is indeed the hope of the world. (11)

DA79/517 When Jesus told the disciples not to forbid the children to come to Him, He was speaking to His followers in all ages,--to officers of the church, to ministers, helpers, and all Christians. (11)

DA80/517 Jesus is drawing the children, and He bids us, Suffer them to come; as if He would say, They will come if you do not hinder them. (11)

DA81/517 Let not your un-Christlike character misrepresent Jesus. (11)

DA82/517 Do not keep the little ones away from Him by your coldness and harshness. (11)

DA83/517 Never give them cause to feel that heaven will not be a pleasant place to them if you are there. (11)

DA84/517 Do not speak of religion as something that children cannot understand, or act as if they were not expected to accept Christ in their childhood. (11)

DA85/517 Do not give them the false impression that the religion of Christ is a religion of gloom, and that in coming to the Saviour they must give up all that makes life joyful. (11)

DA86/517 As the Holy Spirit moves upon the hearts of the children, co-operate with His work. (11)

DA87/517 Teach them that the Saviour is calling them, that nothing can give Him greater joy than for them to give themselves to Him in the bloom and freshness of their years. (11)

DA88/517 The Saviour regards with infinite tenderness the souls whom He has purchased with His own blood. (11)

DA89/517 They are the claim of His love. (11)

DA90/517 He looks upon them with unutterable longing. (11)

DA91/517 His heart is drawn out, not only to the best-behaved children, but to those who have by inheritance objectionable traits of character. (11)

DA92/517 Many parents do not understand how much they are responsible for these traits in their children. (11)

DA93/517 They have not the tenderness and wisdom to deal with the erring ones whom they have made what they are. (11)

DA94/517 But Jesus looks upon these children with pity. (11)

DA95/517 He traces from cause to effect. (11)

DA96/517 The Christian worker may be Christ's agent in drawing these children to the Saviour. (11)

DA97/517 By wisdom and tact he may bind them to his heart, he may give them courage and hope, and through the grace of Christ may see them transformed in character, so that of them it may be said, "Of such is the kingdom of God." (11)

## Blessing the Children

### Analysis

The 97 sentences of chapter 56 contain only one literary parallel according to our comparative study. Cunningham Geikie's work on the life of Christ probably furnished some background information on the Jewish custom of mothers bringing their children to be blessed by the rabbis. The majority of the sentences of this chapter comment on verses 15 and 16 of Luke 18. Ellen White extends the discussion beyond the limits of the two verses to give practical and spiritual counsel on the training and education of children. We have already noted under our introduction to chapter 56 that the earlier material used to develop this chapter came from various articles on the home and the Christian mother.

Hanna's narrative account of the life of Christ, a work often used by Ellen White, dedicates slightly more than two pages to this episode. His emphasis is on the displeasure of the disciples over this action of the Jewish mothers and about Jesus' statement on the nature of the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> Daniel March in Days of the Son of Man gives less than one page to report on this event. Farrar and Edersheim allow one page and John Fleetwood does not mention the story.

We can hardly expect Ellen White to have used the typical literary sources for this chapter that we find utilized elsewhere in the DA text. The sources she

---

<sup>1</sup>Luke 18:17.

## Blessing the Children

generally used did not discuss the incident to any great length and the few remarks they did make did not cover the perspectives she wanted to address. Ellen White's feminine point of view might have played a role here. She was a mother. She had written a great deal on the topic of the Christian mother and her children. She had used the story of Jesus' blessing the children in support of her position when writing in her column on the family and the home. It would be expected that when she turned the point of view around to focus on the story of Jesus, her comments would stress the elements of motherhood and the role of the child.

It is very possible that Ellen White used literary sources in the composition of this chapter. We know she used the works of other writers in her articles for the Health Reformer. She goes so far at times as to make explicit reference to her use of sources.<sup>1</sup> If she depended on the works of others for any sentences in chapter 56 it is likely her source had to do with motherhood, the raising of children, or the home. Such content would not ordinarily be found in a book covering the life of Christ. Our research was limited, however, to works on the life of Christ.

-----  
<sup>1</sup>In "Exercise for Invalids," HR, July, 1868, she refers to "Moore's Rural New-Yorker." The article on "Death In-doors," RH, April, 1871, contains a very long quote from Hall's Journal of Health. Another long selection appears in RH, May, 1871, from an article by Fanny B. Johnson on Laws of Life which Ellen White recommends for reading. For a final example we refer to the article on "Words to Christian Mothers," HR, Oct. 1871 in which she uses a number of sources but does not always identify the name of the author. This article has been reproduced in Appendix D.

## Blessing the Children

It may be shown in the future that Ellen White used sources for this chapter. Our report at this stage of the investigation has no evidence for such a claim apart from the one sentence. Accordingly, the literary dependency of one sentence in 97 is one percent and the independence of chapter 56 rates 99%. Using the evaluation rates for the one sentence of Partial Independence, the rate of dependency is .01 for all sentences and for the dependent sentence it is 1.0.

We have no need to discuss source or redaction analysis in respect to this chapter. The use of sources is so minimal as to be almost negligible. The redaction appears to be the work of Ellen White or Marian Davis in preparing the DA text. The structure of chapter 56 was not derived from the earlier articles since they were written for practical counsel on home life and motherhood.

The analysis of chapter 56 leaves us with two interesting questions for further investigation. Did Ellen White use literary sources from another genre of literature in the composition of chapter 56? We have no other chapter in our study on a topic which basically lies outside the typical narrative on the life of Christ. Are there other such chapters in the DA text? A second concern centers on Ellen White's use of sources. How do we explain Ellen White's clear admission of using the writings of others in the Health Reformer articles when elsewhere we have no such obvious reference to source materials?

## Blessing the Children

### Summary

Ellen White's comments on the incident of Jesus blessing the children do not follow the typical pattern which has emerged from our survey of the other chapters in this study. Apart from one sentence we found no use of sources and the spiritual lessons developed from the three verses of Scripture move far beyond the normal commentaries on this experience in the life of Christ. The summary questions being addressed to each chapter in this investigation do not in every instance apply. We do, nevertheless, list each point and offer whatever data are available from our analysis.

1. There are no primary or handwritten documents to support the text of chapter 56. The few manuscripts found in typewritten form treated the topic in a limited fashion but contained no literary parallels to sources or to the DA text.

2. Approximately one-third of the chapter may be found in the earlier writings of Ellen White. The DA text does seem to be an expansion over the previous coverage of the topic. Further content analysis, however, should be given to both the DA and pre-DA texts. The emphasis of Ellen White is different from that of Scripture and it may well be that Ellen White's work in the DA text is a reduction of her writings on mothers and the training and education of their children.

3. The content of the pre-DA text used the Bible



## Blessing the Children

incident to illustrate and model the principles for Christian homes and motherhood. The DA text emphasized the episode in the life of Jesus and His disciples and then applied the lessons. The earlier articles were more general in their coverage and might include the story of Jesus as one example among other biblical stories and teachings.

4. We found no significant differences in the various writings on the topic of chapter 56. This summary statement should be understood, however, with the following qualification. No careful study was given to the content of chapter 56 and the earlier writings on the topic because the thrust of Ellen White's remarks were outside the life of Christ and no source parallels were involved.

5. Chapter 56 contained one sentence exhibiting the use of a source. One sentence out of 97 results in a dependency of about one percent.

6. The literary independence of the chapter measures 99%, or 96 sentences out of the 97.

7. According to the evaluation scale being used and the rating of Partial Independence given to the one sentence where the influence of a source was apparent, the degree of dependency of the 97 sentences is .01 and for the one dependent sentence the degree of dependency is 1.0.

8. Chapter 56 exhibits only one parallel from the many lives of Christ surveyed. Obviously, we must conclude that there is no major source behind Ellen White's treatment of Jesus blessing the children.

## Blessing the Children

9. The one source parallel comes from Cunningham Geikie's Life of Christ.

10. No source parallels were found in our review of the earlier literature of Ellen White on the topic of chapter 56.

11. This question [i.e., a comparative study of the dependency of the DA text to that of the pre-DA text for this chapter] does not apply to chapter 56.

12. This question [having to do with the type of content covered with respect to the sources for this chapter] does not apply to chapter 56.

13. The redaction of the DA text is the work of Ellen White who worked on such matters in association with Marian Davis.

14. The redaction of the pre-DA text must also be credited to Ellen White. We have no evidence of the influence of sources. No doubt her editorial assistants also worked on the structure of her articles in preparing them for publication.

Chapter 56 has challenged our study on two fronts. Are we to conclude that Ellen White wrote an entire chapter independent of any literary parallels apart from the one sentence? Secondly, how can we explain Ellen White's references to sources in her articles in the Health Reformer when such documentation of borrowed materials does not appear elsewhere in her writings for the public? Is the difference in her style to be accounted for by the way in

## Blessing the Children

which the sources are employed, i.e., verbatim quotes rather than paraphrase, or are there other reasons? And in respect to the first issue, do we have other chapters in the DA where this degree of independence exists?

The answers to these questions lie beyond the scope of this study. Our survey specifically relates to the life of Christ and these questions concern Ellen White's writings on topics generally treated outside narrative accounts of the life of Christ. Further study should be given these concerns, nevertheless. The answers do have a bearing on the basic issue of Ellen White's literary practices.