

Messenger of Truth

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Messenger of Truth was the first periodical published against the Sabbatarian Adventists (later Seventh-day Adventists). It contained mostly allegations against Ellen White's visionary claims and fraud charges against James White and his work at the Review and Herald Publishing Association. It was published by the Messenger Party, an offshoot that emerged from the Sabbatarian group in 1853. The periodical's criticism of the Sabbatarians prompted them to examine their position toward Ellen White and develop a more biblically based foundation for their belief in the modern manifestation of the prophetic gift.

Origins of the Paper

The Messenger Party controversy originated in Jackson, Michigan. Led by two Adventist ministers, H. S. Case and C. P. Russell, the rebellion resulted from a controversy over the validity of the prophetic gift of Ellen White.

While visiting the church in Jackson, Ellen White received two visions concerning a disputed situation. Case and Russell ultimately disagreed with Ellen White and condemned her visions as false and unreliable. Consequently, in June 1853, they formed the Messenger Party and started to publicize their ideas in the *Messenger of Truth*.

Objections Against Sabbatarian Adventism

The three extant issues of the periodical reveal several charges that the Messengers brought against Ellen White's visions and her prophetic claims. First, they claimed that the Sabbatarians had another rule of faith and practice in addition to the Bible—Ellen White's visions.

Second, they argued that the gift of prophecy ended with the "end of the apostles' day."⁴ Based on the prophecies of Joel 2 and Acts 2, the Sabbatarians reasoned for the modern manifestation of the gift of prophecy just before the second coming of Christ. While the Messengers agreed that they were living in the last days, they asserted that the gift of prophecy ended with the death of the apostles.

A third objection had to do with the "remnant" concept in relation to Ellen White's prophetic gift. The Sabbatarians claimed, based on Revelation 12:17, to be the true remnant people of God because they kept "the commandments of God" and had the "testimony of Jesus" (referring to Ellen White's testimonies).² For the

Messengers, however, the spirit of prophecy was the spirit of Christ that the true remnant had to represent and had nothing to do with the prophetic gift.³

A fourth objection given by the Messengers was that the Sabbatarians made Ellen White's prophetic gift a "test of fellowship" and a "rule of action."⁴ The Sabbatarians disagreed with these and other charges and began developing a more systematic defense of their belief in the prophetic gift.

Outcomes

One outcome of the attacks in the *Messenger of Truth* was that the Sabbatarians became very conscientious regarding the relationship between the Bible and Ellen White's prophetic claims. James White had placed the following on record in 1851:

*"The gifts of the Spirit should all have their proper places. The Bible is an everlasting rock. It is our rule of faith and practice. . . . Every Christian is therefore in duty bound to take the Bible as a perfect rule of faith and duty. He should pray fervently to be aided by the Holy Spirit in searching the Scriptures for the whole truth, and for his whole duty. He is not at liberty to turn from them to learn his duty through any of the gifts. We say that the very moment he does, he places the gifts in a wrong place, and takes an extremely dangerous position."*⁵

Sabbatarian believers affirmed the fact that they had never claimed equality between the Bible and the gifts of the Spirit. They had different functions.

Another outcome was the development of much broader, biblically-grounded arguments defending belief in the prophetic gift. In addition to Joel 2 and Acts 2, the Sabbatarians began using a wider variety of biblical texts such as Acts 9 and 10, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and Matthew 28:18–20 in arguing for the perpetuity of spiritual gifts (including the gift of prophecy) and their "last days" manifestations.⁶ They also saw the prophetic gift as a necessary characteristic of the end-time people of God based on Revelation 12:17 and 19:10.⁷

A third outcome was the Sabbatarians' examination of the relationship between the gift of prophecy and the "test of fellowship" question within their group. Contrary to the claims of the Messengers, the majority of Adventists, including Ellen White, believed that the acceptance of her prophetic gift was *not* a test of fellowship. Their position was that the Bible was their only rule of faith and action.

A fourth outcome was the beginning of a greater emphasis on publication of Ellen White's writings and introducing them to new Sabbatarian believers. An example is the start of publishing her "testimonies" individually in a small booklet format in 1855. The work of making White's writings widely available has continued to be a part of Seventh-day Adventism since that time.

The arguments found in the *Messenger of Truth* are still used by those who oppose Ellen White's prophetic claims today. The periodical seems to have existed until about 1857, when it ceased publication for lack of financial support. Today the only three original issues of the periodical known to exist are located at the State

Library of Pennsylvania.⁸

SOURCES

Arnold, David. "The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God's Appointment for Its Purification and Unity." *ARH*, June 26, 1855.

Cottrell, R. F. "Spiritual Gifts." *ARH*, February 25, 1858.

Messenger of Truth. October 19, November 2, and November 30, 1854. State Library of Pennsylvania.

[White, James]. "Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts." *ARH*, February 18 and 25, 1862.

White, James. "The Gifts of the Gospel Church." *ARH*, April 21, 1851.

———. "The Testimony of Jesus." *ARH*, December 18, 1855.

NOTES

1. R. R. Chapin, "Who Are the Remnant?" *Messenger of Truth*, October 19, 1854.
2. See, for example, James White, "The Testimony of Jesus," *Review and Herald*, December 18, 1855, 92, 93; R. F. Cottrell, "Spiritual Gifts," *Review and Herald*, February 25, 1858, 126. The Sabbatarians made a connection between Revelation 12:17 and 19:10 and claimed that the "testimony of Jesus" meant "the Spirit of prophecy."
3. Chapin, "Who are the Remnant?"
4. J. B. Bezzo, "Test of Fellowship," *Messenger of Truth*, October 19, 1854.
5. James White, "The Gifts of the Gospel Church," *ARH*, April 21, 1851, 70. (Italics supplied.)
6. See, for example, David Arnold, "The Oneness of the Church and the Means of God's Appointment for Its Purification and Unity," *ARH*, June 26, 1855, 249–251; [James White], "Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts," *Review and Herald*, February 18, 1862, 92, 93; "Perpetuity of Spiritual Gifts," 100.
7. For example, James White, "The Testimony of Jesus," and Cottrell, (see note 2).
8. The issues are dated October 19, November 2, and November 30, 1854.

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