

## **The Story of Great Controversy And the Spirit of Prophecy**

### **04. They Must Be Written! How the Prophetic Gift was almost Lost!**

With the exception of that one letter to the editor of Day Dawn in late 1846, we know almost nothing of Ellen's earliest messages, for she was not writing them down. But, in November 1848, she was told that it was urgent that they begin publishing these truths which were being given to her.

"After coming out of vision, I said to my husband: 'I have a message for you. You must begin to print a little paper and send it out to the people. Let it be small at first; but as the people read, they will send you means with which to print, and it will be a success from the first. From this small beginning it was shown to me to be like streams of light that went clear round the world.'" Life Sketches, 125.

James was also deeply impressed that this must be done; but, by the following spring, he had given up in discouragement. They had arrived at a major turning point in the giving of the Advent Message. Her messages must be put into print. "While we were in Connecticut in the summer of 1849, my husband was deeply impressed that the time had come for him to write and publish the present truth. He was greatly encouraged and blessed as he decided to do this. But again he would be in doubt and perplexity, as he had no money. There were those who had means, but they chose to keep it. He at length gave up in discouragement, and decided to look for a field of grass to cut for hay and so earn some money.

"As he left the house, a burden was rolled upon me, and I fainted. Prayer was offered for me, and I was blessed, and taken off in vision. I saw that the Lord had blessed and strengthened my husband to labor in the field one year before; that he had made a right disposition of the means he there earned; and that he would have a hundredfold in this life, and, if faithful, a rich reward in the kingdom of God; but that the Lord would not now give him strength to labor in the field, for He had another work for him to do, and that if he ventured into the field, he would be cut down by sickness; but that he must write, write, write, and walk out by faith. He immediately began to write, and when he came to some difficult passage, we would unite in prayer to God for an understanding of the true meaning of His word." Life Sketches, 124-125.

One day in July, James brought home from the printers a thousand copies of the first edition of his Present Truth, a small 8-page paper. Two more issues were published and mailed. But Satan was busy. He attacked them with sickness, financial problems, and difficulties of every kind. By November 1850, James gave up. The publishing work would end.

"The friends of the cause were few in numbers and poor in worldly wealth, and we were still compelled to struggle with poverty and great discouragement. Excessive labor, care, and anxiety, a lack of proper, nourishing food, and exposure to cold in our long winter journeys, were too much for my husband, and he sank under the burden. He became so weak that he could scarcely walk to the printing office.

"Our faith was tried to the utmost. We had willingly endured privation, toil, and suffering; yet our motives were misinterpreted, and we were regarded with distrust and jealousy. Few of those for whose good we had suffered, seemed to appreciate our efforts. We were too much troubled to sleep or rest. The hours in which we should have been refreshed with sleep, were often spent in answering long communications occasioned by envy; and many hours while others were sleeping we spent in agonizing tears and mourning before the Lord.

"At length my husband said: 'Wife, it is of no use to try to struggle on any longer. These things are crushing me, and will soon carry me to the grave. I cannot go any farther. I have written a note for the paper stating that I shall publish no more.' As he stepped out of the door to carry it to the printing office, I fainted. He came back and prayed for me; his prayer was answered, and I was relieved.

"The next morning, while at family prayer, I was taken off in vision, and was shown concerning these matters. I saw that my husband must not give up the paper; for such a step was just what Satan was trying to drive him

to take, and he was working through agents to do this. I was shown that we must continue to publish.” 1 Testimonies, 89, 90.

**Quenching The Light:** Since it was obvious that the printing work was going to continue, Satan determined to eliminate the printing of any articles by Ellen White. They must be kept from Advent believers and from the world! Here is how this came about:

In the late 1840s, because there were sermons to small groups, but almost no distribution of printed materials, the work did not grow. The public did not know about these seventh-day, second-advent believers. Recalling the experience, we are told:

“It was then next to impossible to obtain access to unbelievers. The disappointment in 1844 had confused the minds of many, and they would not listen to any explanation of the matter.” EGW, Review, November 20, 1883. But, with the beginning of the publishing work, the situation changed. People were becoming more willing to consider our beliefs.

“Now the door is open almost everywhere to present the truth, and many are prepared to read the publications who have formerly had no interest to investigate.” JW, Review, Aug. 19, 1851.

Satan immediately tried a desperate tactic to blot out the Spirit of Prophecy writings before they could eventually be printed into books.

“With brighter prospects for a large work among unbelievers, the general denominational literature was shaped to meet the new conditions. The most noticeable adjustment in this line was made to avert prejudice, and for this reason, all reference to the visions and the Spirit of Prophecy was left out of the regular issues of the church paper. This action was explained by Elder White in an Extra of the Review and Herald.” Ellen G. White, Messenger to the Remnant, 51.

This Extra included a number of statements by Ellen; and, in it, James said that he would publish one about every two weeks. But the rest of the time, nothing by her would appear in print.

“As many are prejudiced against visions, we think best at present not to insert anything of the kind in the regular paper. We will therefore publish the visions by themselves for the benefit of those who believe that God can fulfill His word and give visions ‘in the last days.’ ” JW, Advent Review Extra, July 21, 1851.

But he did not keep that promise. For the next four (!) years, the Review printed almost nothing about or by Ellen White. It was James who led out in this decision; and it is believed that Satan tempted him to be ashamed of her influence, since he was her husband. As do many today, he had accepted the temptation to broaden the circulation of his paper and gain the approval of the great men in other denominations. Although imagining that he had good reasons for his decision, he was deceived.

At any rate, the devil triumphed for a time. During those 63 months, only five articles by her were published; and they were in the form of appeals, making no reference to revelations. Prior to that time, her articles appeared frequently in the Review. Three times during those four years, James wrote articles, saying that “the Bible only” is the total basis of our faith.

There is an important lesson here for us: If the Advent people were willing to let the Spirit of Prophecy writings be set aside, God would let them do it! This is a solemn warning to us today! Are we cherishing those precious books? Are we sharing them as widely as possible? When we knowingly separate ourselves from a divine source of light, when we know it is there, we start down a path that will ultimately separate us from God. The Spirit was gradually being withdrawn. If the people were content to no longer receive the messages, God would no longer send them.

**The Believers Repent:** In December 1855, a general church meeting was convened to discuss a number of problems. One was the general decline of spirituality in the churches. Recognition was made of the fact that

the silencing of the Spirit of Prophecy counsel was a major cause. Those in attendance agreed that this situation must immediately be changed. (The word, “gifts,” was the word used back then to describe what we now call “the Spirit of Prophecy.”)

Here is their official decision: “Confession: In view of the present low state of the precious cause of our blessed Master, we feel to humble ourselves before God, and confess our unfaithfulness and departure from the way of the Lord, whereby the spirit of holiness has been grieved, our own souls burdened, and an occasion given to the enemy of all righteousness to rejoice over the decline of faith and spirituality amongst the scattered flock . . . “Gifts: Nor have we appreciated the glorious privilege of claiming the gifts which our blessed Master has vouchsafed to His people; and we greatly fear that we have grieved the Spirit by neglecting the blessings already conferred upon the church . . . “We refer to the visions which God has promised to the remnant ‘in the last days.’ . .

**“An attitude displeasing to God:** While we hold these views [the messages given through Ellen White] as emanating [coming] from the divine mind, we would confess the inconsistency (which we believe has been displeasing to God) of professedly regarding them as messages from God, and really putting them on a level with the inventions of men. We fear that this has resulted from an unwillingness to bear the reproach of Christ (which is indeed greater riches than the treasures of earth), and a desire to conciliate the feelings of our opponents; but the Word and our own experience have taught us that God is not honored, nor His cause advanced, by such a course. While we regard them as coming from God, and entirely harmonizing with His written Word, we must acknowledge ourselves under obligation to abide by their teachings, and be corrected by their admonitions. To say that they are of God, and yet we will not be tested by them, is to say that God’s will is not a test of rule for Christians, which is inconsistent and absurd.” From the “Report of Conference,” as printed in the Review, December 4, 1855.

Another decision made at that conference was to gather a quantity of her written statements, letters, and articles—and print them in a small booklet, entitled Testimonies. This was the beginning of what would eventually become the nine-volume Testimonies for the Church. Satan had been defeated again!

On the first page of that first little booklet, Testimonies, was a transcript of a vision given to Ellen shortly before the conference. Here are the first two sentences of it: “November 20, 1855, while in prayer, the Spirit of the Lord came suddenly and powerfully upon me, and I was taken off in vision. I saw that the Spirit of the Lord has been dying away from the church.” 1 Testimonies, 113.

Looking back on what had happened as a result of the four-year refusal of the church to publish her appeals, she wrote: “The visions have been of late less and less frequent, and my testimony for God’s children has been gone. I have thought that my work in God’s cause was done, and that I had no further duty to do, but to save my own soul, and carefully attend to my little family.” Letter, January 10, 1856.

By late 1855, she considered her work for the church to have ended! What a happy day that was for the devil! The second revelation had been stopped before it could mature into a full-blown powerhouse of additional light! But fortunately, the brethren recognized their mistake before it was too late, and overrode James’ decision. If they had not repented and made changes, we today would not have the Spirit of Prophecy writings!

Something to think about: From 1855 to 1915 when she died, and a few decades beyond, a full-length article by Ellen White appeared each week in the Review. It was only a little over two years (27 months) after that important “confession” was approved by the committee in December 1855, when it was decided to begin a vigorous program of publishing Ellen White’s writings, that she received the amazing Great Controversy Vision. What if the leading brethren had not made that decision in December 1855? We would not have the precious Spirit of Prophecy books today. No Great Controversy, Desire of Ages, Ministry of Healing, and so many others. The God of heaven has not changed. We must individually beware of grieving away His Spirit.