

The Story of Great Controversy And the Spirit of Prophecy 05. ATTACKED!

How Satan tried to stop Great Controversy!

During the weekend of March 13 and 14, 1858, James and Ellen White attended meetings at Lovett's Grove (now Bowling Green), Ohio, USA. On Sunday afternoon, the 14th, a funeral service was conducted by James in the schoolhouse, where the Sabbath meetings had been held. When he had finished speaking, Ellen arose and began to speak words of comfort to the mourners. While thus speaking, she was taken off in vision for two hours. Realize that the true prophet of God does not breathe while in vision! This is something no human or devil can copy!

While she was in vision the congregation remained in the building, the Lord through divine revelation opened before her many important matters. She afterward said that she was shown "the great controversy of the ages between Christ and Satan" (Life Sketches, 162). Ominously, in that vision she was also told this: "I was instructed to write it out. I was shown that while I should have to contend with the powers of darkness, for Satan would make strong efforts to hinder me, yet I must put my trust in God, and angels would not leave me in the conflict." Ibid.

This was something new! Ellen was told that Satan was going to do something extraordinary to keep her from writing out what she saw that day. What was so important about that vision? Why did it frighten Satan so much? The answer is simple enough: She was given an overview of "the great controversy of the ages between Christ and Satan" (Life Sketches, 162). Satan does not want mankind to have the clearest understanding, available in the last 19 centuries on that subject.

We will let Ellen explain what happened next: "Two days afterward, while journeying on the cars to Jackson, Mich., we arranged our plans for writing and publishing, immediately on our return home . . . On the arrival of the train at Jackson, we went to Brother Palmer's. We had been in the house but a short time, when, as I was conversing with Sister Palmer, my tongue refused to utter what I wished to say, and seemed large and numb. A strange, cold sensation struck my heart, passed over my head, and down my right side.

"For a time I was insensible, but was aroused by the voice of earnest prayer. I tried to use my left limbs, but they were perfectly useless. For a short time I did not expect to live. It was my third shock of paralysis; and although within fifty miles of home, I did not expect to see my children again. I called to mind the triumphant season I had enjoyed at Lovett's Grove, and thought it was my last testimony, and felt reconciled to die.

"Still the earnest prayers of my friends were ascending to heaven for me, and soon a prickling sensation was felt in my limbs, and I praised the Lord that I could use them a little. The Lord heard and answered the faithful prayers of His children, and the power of Satan was broken. That night I suffered much, but the next day I was sufficiently strengthened to return home.

"For several weeks I could not feel the pressure of the hand or the coldest water poured upon my head. In rising to walk, I often staggered, and sometimes fell to the floor. In this afflicted condition I began to write on the great controversy. At first I could write but one page a day, and then rest three

days; but as I progressed, my strength increased. The numbness in my head did not seem to becloud my mind, and before I closed that work, the effect of the shock had entirely left me.

“At the time of the conference at Battle Creek, in June 1858, I was shown in vision that in the sudden attack at Jackson, Satan intended to take my life, in order to hinder the work I was about to write; but angels of God were sent to my rescue. I also saw, among other things, that I should be blessed with better health than before the attack.” *Life Sketches*, 162-163.

Why did the Lord permit this to happen? There can be only one reason! Throughout her life, God protected Ellen White. But, in this one instance He momentarily did not protect her—but He even warned her. The answer is this: First, the information given to Ellen White on this one topic was more important than any other she ever received! Second, the Lord wanted us to realize and appreciate that fact, and value the overarching truths especially found in Great Controversy.

What was in that vision? A little over two months later, in the morning and evening of Sunday, May 23, part of the vision was told to four hundred believers assembled in Battle Creek for the May 21-24 general conference. James provides insights into what she said: “During the forenoon, Sister White related a portion of the views she has had concerning the fall of Satan, the plan of salvation, and the great controversy between Christ and His angels, and Satan and his angels. It abounded in startling facts and vivid descriptions. And when the course of the narration had brought us down to the days of the first advent, the humiliation, the suffering, and finally the crucifixion of the Saviour, especially then did not only the silent tear but even the audible sobs of many in the congregation announce their hearts were touched by the sufferings of the Son of God for rebellious man.

“When we view the great controversy as now going forward—its field the world, its subject man—we see not how anyone can long hesitate upon which side to enroll himself. And at least the justice of that sentence is very apparent, which condemns those who will persist to the end on the side of the power of darkness, to the same ruin which overwhelms the first rebel and his worthy sympathizers.” *JW*, Review, May 27, 1858.

That evening, she continued on till nearly 10 p.m. Deeply moved, the audience gave testimonies until nearly 11 p.m. [Wouldn't that meeting have been amazing to hear!]

That provides us with a glimpse of, what is called, “the great controversy vision.” It actually included a sweeping view of the entire controversy from the fall of Satan on down to the final end of sin and sinners. Special emphasis was on the life and death of Christ, as it related to solving this moral crisis which the entire universe was watching, as well as events reaching to our time in history and beyond.

A month later, in June, the new book was “in the press,” which meant that some of the copy had already arrived at the publishing house and was being set with lead type. By mid-August she finished the last of the small book and it was published in September as a 219-page book, The title page gave an expanded title: “The Great Controversy between Christ and His Angels and Satan and His Angels.” The volume, being small, could only touch on certain areas of the lengthy conflict.

Ongoing Delays. An important question is why did Ellen not write the entire Great Controversy Story, plus the important lessons from it, in 1858? Spanning a period of decades, Satan hindered this from occurring. Someone might also ask why Ellen did not write it out ten years earlier in 1848? Ellen mentions that she had received a very brief view of the great controversy in 1848: “In the vision at

Lovett's Grove, most of the matter which I had seen ten years before, concerning the great controversy of the ages between Christ and Satan, was repeated, and I was instructed to write it out."—Life Sketches, 162.

Why did she not write much about it back then? We have already learned that, with the exception of that one letter to the editor of Day Dawn in late 1846, nothing she was writing was being published at that time. It was not until November 1848 (probably shortly after that 1848 "view of the great controversy,") that Ellen was told of the urgency to begin their own printing operation (LS 125, quoted earlier).

We learned that two years later, in November 1850, James was ready to give up trying to keep writing and printing. It was a vision given to Ellen that kept him going. So hardly anything had been printed by the second year after 1848. Then, on July 21, 1851, James stopped publishing anything by Ellen, until 1855!

Satan was busy at his work of hindering the distribution of the Spirit of Prophecy writings. Oh, that we might be as busy at our work of reading them and giving them to everyone! It was only a little over two years (27 months) after the crucial committee "confession" in December 1855 (when, for the first time, Advent believers agreed to begin publishing quantities of her writings) that Ellen White received the "Great Controversy Vision."

In the years that followed, Ellen planned to greatly enlarge on that basic vision given at Lovett's Grove in 1858. But once again, Satan was at work. Desperate to keep it from being written, he brought one hindrance after another.

We are now going to learn why it took 26 years before the last book of Ellen's initial expansion of that 1858 vision was in print. We will also discover that it was 30 years before the complete, full-size edition of Great Controversy came off the presses—and then only after a bitter and protracted quarrel with the Review staff, which did not want to print it!

Ellen's bookwork was of the highest importance, and Satan knew it. He desperately devised plans to slow, and even stop, their production. The messages in those books needed to be scattered like the leaves of autumn, both in America and overseas. She could not be in every place at once, but her books could. She might eventually die, but her books would be powerful witnesses till the end of time, unless God's people could be kept from circulating them.

One method Satan repeatedly used to impede the bookwork was to produce sickness in the White home which she would have to care for. James, who had a tendency to overwork, was a special focus of attention. In a letter written to John Byington in 1864, Ellen said that she had been shown that Satan wanted to attack James physically in order to retard their work (Letter 14, 1864).

Having returned from holding meetings in a distant town, as the couple was walking for early morning exercise on Wednesday, August 16, 1865, it happened: James' face suddenly flushed and his right arm (that did the writing) dropped to his side, helpless. He attempted to raise it, but was unable to do so. Staggering, he almost fell. Unable to speak, Ellen helped him to a nearby home. Indistinctly James uttered the word, 'Pray,' and repeated it. Ellen described the scene: "We dropped to our knees and cried to God, who had ever been to us a present help in time of trouble. He soon uttered words of praise and gratitude to God, that he could use his arm. His hand was partially restored, but not fully."

EGW, Review, February 20, 1866.

Physicians had no idea what to do and gave no encouragement for his survival. Two days later, James was carried on a couch to his own home. Satan's next plan was to keep James in such an ongoing crippled state, that caring for him would occupy all of Ellen's time. That would be better than having him die.

James recovered with agonizing slowness. Ellen's full time was occupied in caring for him and getting him to exercise. She would get him out of the house, and help him rake and load hay and do other chores. One winter day, he refused to take his usual walk because the snow was deep. So Ellen borrowed a pair of boots from a neighbor and then walked a quarter of a mile and back. Leading James to the door, she showed him her boot tracks. James replied that, if a woman could do it, he would also, and took his walk with Ellen that morning (2SM 307).

As the winter of 1866-1867 approached, James stayed at home more. He wanted to see no one. Ellen had to work hard to get him to talk to people and use his mind. As if this were not enough, by March of 1867, the believers in Battle Creek began turning against the Whites! James felt like abandoning the church entirely, and Ellen felt it her duty to help him recover his strength, but this new crisis only added to their problems.

"I came home to Battle Creek like a weary child who needed comforting words and encouragement. It is painful for me here to state that we were received with great coldness by our brethren, from whom, three months before, I had parted in perfect union, excepting on the point of our leaving home." 1 Testimonies, 579.

Satan was jubilant. At this rate, the complete Great Controversy would never be written! Arthur White describes the situation: "Little by little they discovered the reason for the cool reception was the evil reports that for some time had been bandied about Battle Creek and written to those at a distance. Part of the problem rested in Ellen White's refusal to take the counsel of friends and church leaders in Battle Creek that would have dissuaded her from taking her husband to Wright in December. Also, people had misunderstood the attempt of James and Ellen White to be financially independent of church members' support. This desire had led them to sell some of their furniture, and pull up their rag carpets and sell them, to gain means to go on. . . Topping this off was the word that, in certain of the churches in Michigan, it was being reported 'that the Battle Creek church had not the slightest confidence in Sister White's testimony, that is, her oral testimonies, because her life contradicted them.' "—A.L. White, *The Progressive Years*, 170.

Another source of difficulty was the objections some had to Ellen's call for them to change to a vegetarian diet and in the fashions worn by the women church members (Review, January 15, 1867), following her June 6, 1863, Health Reform Vision.

By 1868, when the first Adventist camp meetings began to be held, James had pretty much recovered and was once again prepared to take up work in the church. But, by this time, Ellen was flooded with responsibilities, both in answering letters of inquiry and speaking at meetings. In addition, James continued to experience physical problems from overwork. (His fourth stroke occurred on the morning of April 22, 1873.)

Several smaller books were gradually written, but still nothing large. Both Ellen and James increasingly

felt under pressure from all their responsibilities. James, with good reason, felt that his associates at the publishing office let him carry far more than his part of the load. Ellen found that a great variety of difficulties continually needed her attention. Finally, she realized that they would have to leave Battle Creek and move to the West Coast, if she was to have time to prepare the needed books.

By the early 1880s, she had produced no large book, and the very important Great Controversy had not yet been written. (The 1858 book by that name was only an overview of a few events from Lucifer to the end of sin.)

By the late 1870s, Satan had introduced strong division among some of the leaders against James White. Elders Butler and Haskell were mutually opposed to James. Dr. J. H. Kellogg also had strong antipathy for him. The following dramatic letter reveals the depth of the antagonism:

“I saw in my dream yourself [probably Kellogg] and Elder Butler in conversation with him. You made statements to him which he seemed to grasp with avidity, and close his hand over something in it. I then saw him go to his room, and there upon the floor was a pile of stones systematically laid up, stone upon stone. He placed the additional stones on the pile and counted them up. Every stone had a name, some report gathered up, and every stone was numbered.

“The young man [an angel] who often instructs me came and looked upon the pile of stones with grief and indignation, and inquired what he had and what he purposed to do with them. The doctor looked up with a sharp, gratified laugh. ‘These are the mistakes of Elder White. I am going to stone him with them, stone him to death.’ ” Manuscript 2, 1880. Amid such an atmosphere in Battle Creek, it would be extremely difficult for Ellen to write Great Controversy! Satan was rubbing his hands with glee.

Told to leave: Ellen had been warned by God that she and James must leave Battle Creek and head West if the bookwork was to continue. Through late June and into July, James and Ellen White continued their ministry in Battle Creek. James was still editor-in-chief at the Review. Often they went to the grove near their home for seasons of prayer. Ellen later recalled one occasion: “While walking to the usual place for prayer, he stopped abruptly; his face was very pale, and he said, ‘A deep solemnity is upon my spirit. I am not discouraged, but I feel that some change is about to take place in affairs that concern myself and you. What if you should not live? Oh, this cannot be! God has a work for you to do! . . . It continues so long that I feel much anxiety as to the result. I feel a sense of danger, and with it comes an unutterable longing for the special blessing of God, an assurance that all my sins are washed away by the blood of Christ. I confess my errors, and ask your forgiveness for any word or act that has caused you sorrow. There must be nothing to hinder our prayers. Everything must be right between us, and between ourselves and God.’ ”—Manuscript 6, 1881.

Ellen had been urging James to leave Battle Creek and journey with her to the West Coast, and there continue their writing work. Recognizing the problem and the urgency of preparing her books, he agreed to leave with her that summer.

“The spring and early summer of 1881 we spent together at our home in Battle Creek. My husband hoped to arrange his business so that we could go to the Pacific coast and devote ourselves to writing. He felt that we had made a mistake in allowing the apparent wants of the cause and the entreaties of our brethren to urge us into active labor in preaching when we should have been writing. My husband desired to present more fully the glorious subject of redemption, and I had long contemplated the preparation of important books. “We both felt that while our mental powers were unimpaired we

should complete these works,—that it was a duty which we owed to ourselves and to the cause of God to rest from the heat of battle, and give to our people the precious light of truth which God had opened to our minds.”—Life Sketches, 247-248.

Decision to remain: But then, not long afterward, James said with deep feeling that he dared not resign as head of the publishing work. He realized who would take it over if he left. In a later Memorium, we find the following recollection of his words to her. ‘Where are the men to do this work? Where are those who will have an unselfish interest in our institutions, and who will stand for the right, unaffected by any influence with which they may come in contact?’

“ ‘My life has been given to the upbuilding of these institutions. It seems like death to leave them. They are as my children, and I cannot separate my interest from them. These institutions are the Lord’s instrumentalities to do a specific work. Satan seeks to hinder and defeat every means by which the Lord is working for the salvation of men. If the great adversary can mold these institutions according to the world’s standard, his object is gained.

“ ‘It is my greatest anxiety to have the right men in the right place. If those who stand in responsible positions are weak in moral power, and vacillating in principle, inclined to lead toward the world, there are enough who will be led. Evil influences must not prevail. I would rather die than live to see these institutions mismanaged, or turned aside from the purpose for which they were brought into existence.’

“In my relations to this cause I have been longest and most closely connected with the publishing work. Three times have I fallen, stricken with paralysis, through my devotion to this branch of the cause. Now that God has given me renewed physical and mental strength, I feel that I can serve His cause as I have never been able to serve it before. I must see the publishing work prosper. It is interwoven with my very existence. If I forget the interests of this work, let my right hand forget her cunning.” In Memorium, 45.

James had made his decision. He dared not leave Battle Creek and the Review office. God knew that James meant well and was trying to do his best, but also that it was more important that the books, including Great Controversy, be written than that James guard the Review printing company. Within a few weeks, James was dead.

All through the rest of her life, Sister White met and faced challenges to getting the Great Controversy series written, published and distributed to the people. even today one of the best ways to get the sda leaders to go after one is to start giving out the Great Controversy! Satan hates the whole series but especially that book! Basically he hates all the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy and today the organization that calls itself SDA basically ignores them. But in them true believers know they have reliable guidance in all situations in these last days! They are truly the work of the Holy Spirit and part of the ‘eye-salve’ we must have to stand true until Jesus comes! Sister White wrote: “Men may get up scheme after scheme and the enemy will seek to seduce souls from the truth, but all who believe that the Lord has spoken through Sister White and has given her a message will be safe from the many delusions that will come in these last days.” 3SM 83, 84 (1906). Amen!