

Feast Days & *The Present Truth*

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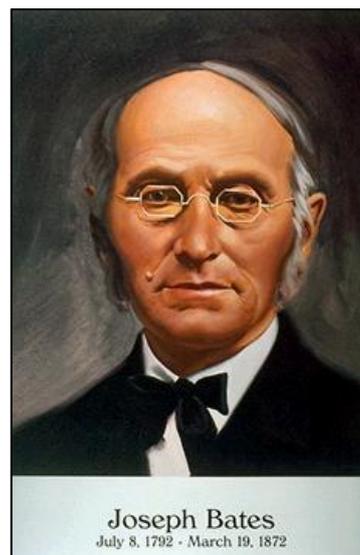
The history of our publishing work and its humble beginnings is of great interest and import. The great disappointment of 1844 left a scattered flock of Advent believers in many places. This flock needed encouragement, support, and meat in due season. It is with this background that the call to begin publishing and sharing the message of truth came from heaven. James and Ellen White often travelled and held meetings with different bands of believers. It was in one such meeting that God directed the believers to the necessity of starting to publish and broadcast the truth in printed form.

The Dorchester Conference

November 1848

The period between the great disappointment of October 22, 1844, and the memorable Sabbath conferences of 1848 was a critical four-year phase. It was during these conferences that the early Adventists better understood the Sabbath truth. In November of 1848, another such conference convened in the home of Otis Nichols in Dorchester. This gathering was to discuss the Sabbath and the sealing message. James and Ellen White were present among the small company of believers. Joseph Bates, also present, briefly reported on that gathering in the following words:

“A small company of brethren and sisters were assembled in meeting in Dorchester, near Boston, Mass. Before the meeting commenced, some of us were examining some of the points in the sealing message; some difference of opinion existed about the correctness of the view of the word ascending, etc., and whereas we had made the publishing of the message a subject of prayer at the Topsham Conference (Mv.) a little previous, and the way to publish appeared not sufficiently clear, we therefore resolved unitedly to refer it all to God.” {Joseph Bates, *A Seal of the Living God*, P.24. 1849}



A Divine Commission

After some time spent in earnest prayer for light and direction, God gave Sister White a vision with some very clear instructions.

“At a meeting held in Dorchester, Mass., November, 1848, I had been given a view of the proclamation of the sealing message, and of the duty of the brethren to publish the light that was shining upon our pathway.” {*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p.125}

The vision also had a clear message for her husband - it was time to publish.



“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 of Ellen G. White*, p.125.2}

Despite being penniless and with no steady income, James White seriously pondered the words spoken in the commission. Regardless of pressing obstacles, he determined to carry out this instruction.

The Present Truth

July 1849

It took less than a year before James was ready to publish the very first paper which he entitled *The Present Truth*. Ellen White gives us an insight about that time:

“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. ... 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 of Ellen G. White*, pp.125, 126}

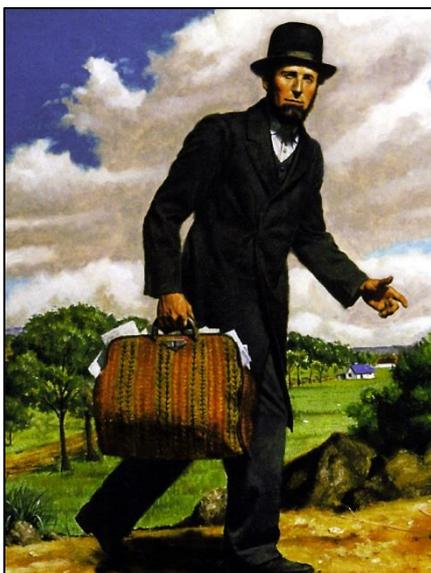
Not only did they pray for an understanding of the word of God as James wrote, but many other prayers were also offered for this fledgling first step in our publishing work.

“One day in July, my husband brought home from Middletown a thousand copies of the first number of his paper. ... The precious printed sheets were brought into the house and laid upon the floor, and then a little group of interested ones were gathered in, and we knelt around the papers, and with humble hearts and many tears besought the Lord to let His blessing rest upon these printed messengers of truth.” {*Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p.126}



Together they folded the papers and prepared them for mailing. It was a customary practice to pray over each number before it was sent out. Many years later, Ellen recalled those early days of that paper:

“It was in Middletown, about 1849, that my husband began the publication of our first paper, a small sheet called, *The Present Truth*. We were then living in Rocky Hills, seven miles from Middletown, and my husband often walked back and forth between the two places,



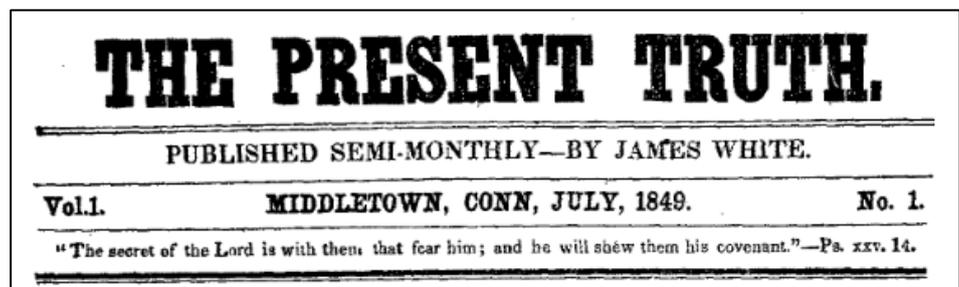
though he was then lame. When he brought the first number of the paper from the printing-office, we all bowed round it, and with humble hearts and many tears besought the Lord to let his blessing rest upon the feeble efforts of his servant. My husband then directed copies of the paper to all who he thought would read it, and walked seven miles to the Middletown post-office, carrying the precious papers in a carpet-bag. Again

and again, before the papers were taken to the post-office, they were spread before God, and earnest prayers, mingled with tears, were offered to God that his blessing might attend the silent messengers. Very soon letters came, bringing means to help in the publication of the paper, and bringing also the good news that many souls were accepting the truth." {E. G. White, *Review & Herald*, October 6, 1904 par. 9}

This little paper that was divinely commissioned had a very humble beginning. It would later grow and exert a powerful influence¹.

The Message in *The Present Truth*

Part of the vision that Ellen White received in 1848 was to do with the sealing message and the Sabbath. James at the time records



that “She saw many interesting things about this glorious sealing Sabbath, which I have not time or space to record.”² Thus it was natural for James to write something about the Sabbath and the sealing message in the very first numbers of that paper. This afforded him both time and space to expound on this question in detail. The articles that followed James White’s opening editorial explanation carried such titles as “The Weekly Sabbath Instituted at Creation, and Not at Sinai”; “The Sabbath a Perpetual Weekly Memorial”; “The Law of God, or the Ten Commandments”; “Scriptures Usually Quoted to Prove the Abolition of the Sabbath Examined.”

James White made it very clear that the seventh-day Sabbath was the eternal memorial and sign of God’s creative power. It was the seal between God and his people forever.

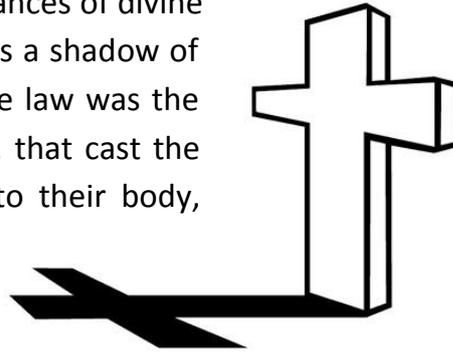
¹ *Present Truth*, in 10 issues published over a period of 11 months, heralded the third angel’s message, with the Sabbath truth as the focal point. It was the forerunner of the paper that would be known by a number of names: *Advent Review*, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, *Review and Herald*, and *Adventist Review*.

² Elder James White, in an unpublished letter, gave his account of this meeting and vision. More of his comments can be found in *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p.116.

The Present Truth and Feast Days

In addressing the importance and validity of the Sabbath James also had to address the subject of the feast days and annual Sabbaths. It was necessary to make this distinction clearly for many were confounding the two. Here are a few extracts from the first few numbers of *The Present Truth* setting forth the relation of the feast days to us today. Note the distinction between the annual Sabbaths and the weekly Sabbath (emphasis supplied in **bold**).

“The first covenant which had "ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary," was a shadow of the second, and better covenant. The law was the shadow, and the Gospel is the body, that cast the shadow; and as all shadows reach to their body, and no farther, **it is very clear that the sacrifices and oblations, new-**



moons, feast days, and Sabbaths of the Jewish law ceased, when the precious body and blood of the Lamb of God was sacrificed on the cross. This is what Paul calls "nailing it to his cross."” {James White, *The Present Truth*, August 1849, p.9}

“All shadows cease when they reach the bodies which cast them. Follow the shadow of a tree to its body, and there the shadow ends. **But the weekly Sabbath will never end; therefore it is not a shadow; but a body, as well as the other nine commandments.** The ten commandments are of the same nature; and if one is a shadow, they are all shadows. How can we make swearing,, stealing, and killing, shadows? This we cannot do. **Neither is there a man that can show that the Sabbath is a shadow.**” {James White, *The Present Truth*, August 1849, p.10}

“Some regarded **the Jewish Sabbaths, new-moons, and feast days, after they were abolished and nailed to the cross, and others did not.** Paul would not have the Colossians judged by **Judaizing teachers, in respect to those things that had ceased,** according to the testimony of the Prophet. [Hosea 2:11 quoted]” {James White, *The Present Truth*, August 1849, p.9}

“The Sabbath of the Lord our God was instituted at the creation, before the fall, when the earth and man were holy, and Eden bloomed on earth. **The convocation sabbaths of the Jews were given at Mount Sinai, more than twenty-five hundred years after, and were a portion of the hand-writing of ordinances of the law of Moses, which was nailed to the cross, at the death of the Messiah.**” {James White, *The Present Truth*, August 1849, p.9}

“**The fact that some were teaching these Jewish customs to the Christian Church, and judging them in respect to them,** drew the Apostle out to write as he has to the Galatians, Romans, and Colossians, upon this subject.” {James White, *The Present Truth*, August 1849 p.9}³

“Finally, the fact that the early Christians were troubled by those who were teaching them that they must observe the law of Moses in order to be saved, shows what Paul's subject was, and that he did not refer to the Sabbath; **but to the shadows of Moses law, which began to reach their body when the new covenant was introduced by the death of Messiah.**” {James White, *The Present Truth*, August 1849, p.11}⁴

It is important to remember that Ellen and James prayed for God to lead and guide in the writing of these articles. She reminds us of what James did “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 of Ellen G. White*, pp.125, 126}

A few questions we need to ask ourselves: Did God answer those prayers or not? Did God give him a correct understanding of the Word when it came to the feast days?



³ The relevant texts being referred to are: Galatians 3:2; 4:10; 5:3, 4; Romans 14:1-6; & Colossians 2:14-17. These passages deal with eating, and feast-days which some of the Church regarded, and others did not.

⁴ James is here commenting on Colossians 2:16-17 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: (17) Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

James saw a clear distinction between God's ten commandment moral law and the ceremonies and shadows of the typical law:

“The keeping of the commandments of God, is no where spoken of in the New Testament as a thing of little importance, as circumcision, eating, **and feast-days are**; but it is always made a test of Christian fellowship, and Eternal Salvation.” {James White, *The Present Truth*, July 1849 p.8}

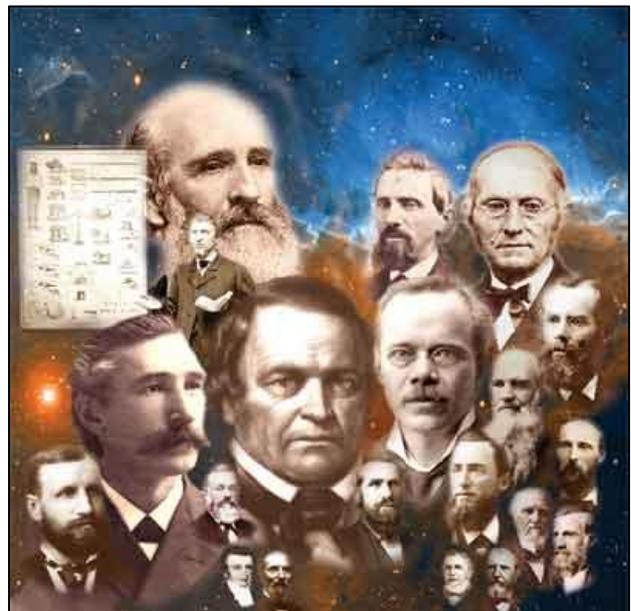
He also comments on the situation that existed in the early church. The issue of feast keeping is not a new debate, but was the doctrine of the Judaizers of Paul's day:

“The Christians at Rome were labouring under trials, similar to those in other Churches. Some of them were holding on to the Jewish customs of eating, and feast-days, and others were opposed to these customs. Paul's greatest trial with them, was their judging one another, and making these things a test of Christian fellowship.” {James White, *The Present Truth*, July 1849 p.8}

God certainly guided the mind of his servant in answer to the fervent prayers offered up to him. The God who commissioned the writing of this paper would not leave its author to stumble in the dark.

Not a Present Truth

As far as James and Ellen White were concerned, the feast days were not a present truth message. This is abundantly clear as one reads through the first numbers of *The Present Truth*. Far from being a present truth message, the feast days (with their annual Sabbaths) were part of the shadowy types that passed away at the cross of Christ. This position and understanding was later confirmed by many pioneers of what later became the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The sealing message, which this movement was raised to preach, was to focus on the seventh day Sabbath, not on the expired shadows.



New Truth Does No Contradict the Old

If the feast days and their annual Sabbaths were indeed shadowy types as James wrote, then it is impossible for them to cease being so now. Unless, of course, James White was wrong in his understanding of them. Some may feel that James did not have all the light on the matter of the feasts, and today we should observe them as binding upon us. Perhaps the feast days are a new light, or a progression into a deeper understanding of truth for today. Maybe they are present truth for us *now*.

Such a position raises some very serious questions, and doubts, as to the foundation that God laid at the inception of our publishing work. If the feast days are valid and binding today then this presents a very serious contradiction with the present truth message in our early days. Truth does not – *cannot* – contradict itself. We are left with only one of two choices:

- 1- James White was *correct* and the feast days are *not binding* on us today, or
- 2- James white was *wrong* and the feast days are *binding* on us today

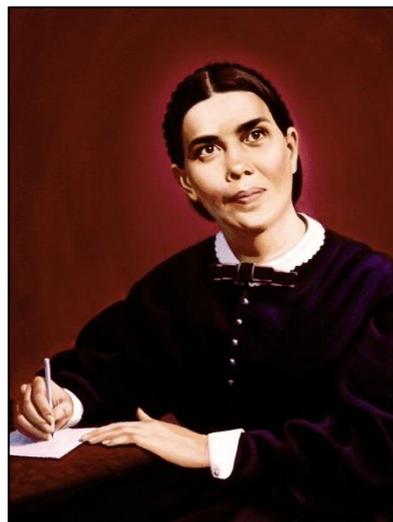
Thankfully, the pen of inspiration clears the matter up for us easily. We need not doubt the leadings of God in our past history, nor question the teachings that he established.

“The truth is the same as it ever has been, and not a pin or a pillar can be moved from the structure of truth. **That which was sought for out of the Word in 1844, 1845, and 1846 remains the truth in every particular.”**

{E. G. White, 1MR 52.2} 1906

“That which was truth in the beginning is truth now. Although new and important truths appropriate for succeeding generations have been opened to the understanding, **the present revealings do not contradict those of the past. Every new truth**

understood only makes more significant the old.” {E. G. White, Review & Herald, March 2, 1886}

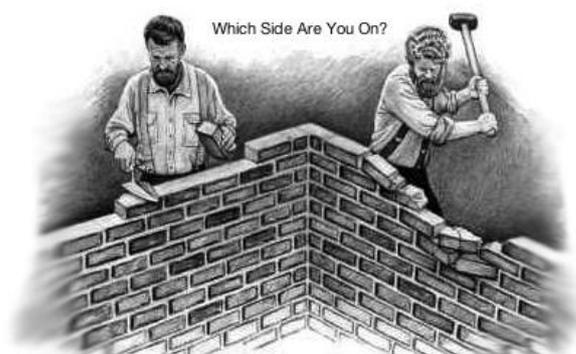


“The Word of the Lord has guided our steps since the passing of the time in 1844. We have searched the Scriptures; **we have built solidly;**

and we have not had to tear up our foundations and put in new timbers.” {E. G. White, 1MR 54.1} 1907

“When the power of God testifies as to what is truth, that truth is to stand forever as the truth. **No aftersuppositions, contrary to the light God has given are to be entertained.** Men will arise with interpretations of Scripture which are to them truth, but which are not truth. **The truth for this time, God has given us as a foundation for our faith. He Himself has taught us what is truth.** One will arise, and still another, with new light which contradicts the light that God has given under the demonstration of His Holy Spirit.” -- Preach the Word, p. 5. (1905.)” {E. G. White, Counsels to Writers and Editors, pp. 31, 32}

These quotes are too plain for comment. There is no evidence to suggest that James White changed his position on the feast days and annual Sabbaths. As the head of his home, his position was doubtless representative of his entire household. Not only was this the position of the White family, it was actually the position and understanding of the entire Church at the time, and for many years to come. After all, none of the pioneers thought it wise or prudent to deviate from the foundation that God had laid at the commencement of our publishing work. Feast keeping was never intended to be part of the platform of eternal truth that God established our movement on.



Conclusion

These early beginnings of *The Present Truth* paper reveal a divine guiding hand in its commission and success. The visions had given assurance that God’s blessing would attend James White as he wrote. God not only provided the funds to sustain the paper, but also blessed the mind of James White as he expounded the Scriptures in its pages. From the very start of our publishing work we find that God did not desire the inclusion of the feast days with their annual Sabbaths as part of the foundation of truth that He was building. The structure of truth was to focus on living realities, on *present* truth, and not on shadows and types that had ceased to be of force. Let us stand fast on that platform that God has built and established for us. He has not commissioned us to alter or add to it that which He intentionally left out.