

## Messenger Party

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The Messenger Party originated during the early 1850s in Jackson, Michigan. It was the first offshoot that emerged from the Sabbatarian Adventists. The rebellion of H. S. Case and C. P. Russell, the two ministers who led this movement, resulted from a controversy over the validity of the prophetic gift of Ellen G. White.

In 1853 Case and Russell accused a woman (Mrs. Dan Palmer) who had been attending their home church of losing her temper and using a “vile name” against her unfriendly neighbor. The accused sister denied using such a word. Meanwhile, James and Ellen White came to visit this church in Jackson. While there, Ellen White had two visions about the disputed situation.

Her first vision revealed that Mrs. Palmer had lost her temper and had not behaved as a true Christian toward her neighbor. At that point the two ministers, Case and Russell, seemed to be satisfied with the prophet’s conclusions.

But in her second vision, a day later, Ellen White was shown that the woman did not use the specific word she was accused of using. White also noted that God was displeased with the unkind and uncompassionate spirit that the two ministers had shown toward Mrs. Palmer, who had confessed her wrongdoing and asked for forgiveness. Case and Russell turned against Ellen White and denounced her visions as utterly false and unreliable. Consequently, in June 1853, the first offshoot out of the Sabbathkeeping movement appeared.<sup>1</sup>

The two ministers began to publicize their ideas in a paper called the *Messenger of Truth*, and their movement became to be known as the Messenger Party.<sup>2</sup> Their allegations were aimed primarily at Ellen White and her visions and against James White, purporting fraud in his management of the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

By 1854 the controversy seemed to have reached a critical point. James White, for example, reported that the Sabbatarian group had received greater opposition from people within their own ranks than from those outside the movement. “Those trials which arise among ourselves are the most severe,” he wrote. “The dragon chooses to work through professed Sabbathkeepers; for in this way he hopes to keep the brethren divided, occupying precious time in church difficulties. In this way he can most effectually weaken the church, and shut her light out from the world around.”<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, Case and Russell were disfellowshipped from the Sabbatarian group. Case was found not “qualified to travel and teach the third angel’s message” by the Sabbathkeeping believers in Michigan.<sup>4</sup> Russell was disfellowshipped because of his “unchristian walk” and attempts to divide the believers and cause disunity.<sup>5</sup>

Several Sabbatarian leaders made plans to respond to the accusations raised by the Messengers. According to John Loughborough’s memory, however, Ellen White experienced a vision that led her to advise the Sabbatarian leaders to “let the *Messenger* people alone, and pay no attention to their work.” She also told them that in a short while the movement

would disintegrate and its paper would cease to exist.<sup>6</sup> The leaders seemed to have listened to Ellen White's advice. At a general conference held in December 1855, in Battle Creek, Michigan, they took a decision not to dispute the accusations raised by the Messenger Party, but to devote their energy to their mission— to advocate “present truth.”<sup>7</sup>

The Messenger group was soon joined by J. M. Stephenson and D. P. Hall, “age to come” advocates from Wisconsin. The two former first-day Adventist ministers became Sabbathkeeping believers, but never gave up their previously held “age to come” theory, according to which humanity would receive a second chance for salvation during the millennium. When James White refused to give any publicity to the “age to come” doctrine in the *Review*, Stephenson and Hall left the Sabbatarian group and eventually aligned themselves with the Messengers.

By 1858 the Messenger Party and their advocates began to lose their influence among the Sabbatarian believers, and gradually the movement fell apart. According to a report in the *Review and Herald*, the Messenger leaders started “biting and devouring one another” until the movement “crumbled and disappeared.”<sup>8</sup> Thus the first offshoot from the Sabbatarian group virtually disappeared, although a few individuals continued to hold animosity toward the Whites and the Sabbatarians in general. Later those individuals allied themselves with Gilbert Cranmer, a Michigan minister who was refused a license to preach because of his refusal to stop using tobacco. In 1865 they joined the Marion Party, another disaffected group, in Marion, Iowa. Eventually this movement would establish the Church of God (Adventists), from which came the Church of God (Seventh Day).

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## Notes

1. C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1982), 134, 135.↩
2. There are three extant issues of the *Messenger of Truth* periodical. Original copies can be found in the State Library of Pennsylvania.↩
3. [James White], “Our Position: Its Trials and Duties Considered,” *ARH*, September 5, 1854, 29.↩
4. “H. S. Case,” *ARH*, April 18, 1854, 102.↩
5. [James White], “The Advent Harbinger,” *ARH*, July 4, 1854, 173.↩
6. J. N. Loughborough, “Sketches of the Past— No. 99,” *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 30, 1910, 1. See also: Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), 1:122, 123.↩
7. Joseph Bates and Uriah Smith, “Business Proceedings of the Conference at Battle Creek, Mich.,” *ARH*, December 4, 1855, 76.↩
8. James White, “A Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Present Truth,” *ARH*, January 14, 1858, 77.↩

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