

ABSTRACT

“The Concept of Present Truth in *The Present Truth*, 1849–1850”—This article examines the concept of “present truth” in *The Present Truth* (1849–1850), edited by James White. It explores how early Sabbatarian Adventists connected time and truth within the framework of 19th-century epistemology. Present truth was understood as restorative, doctrinally systematic, participatory, future-oriented, mission-driven, and communitarian. The article concludes that this concept played a crucial role in theological development, eschatological urgency, and identity formation within early Seventh-day Adventism.

Keywords: Present truth, Sabbatarian Adventism, eschatology, restorationism, identity formation

RESUMEN

“El concepto de verdad presente en la revista *The Present Truth*, 1849–1850”—Este artículo examina el concepto de verdad presente en la revista *The Present Truth* (1849–1850), editado por James White. Explora cómo los primeros adventistas sabatarios relacionaban el tiempo y la verdad en el marco de la epistemología del siglo XIX. La verdad presente se entendía como restauradora, doctrinalmente sistemática, participativa, orientada al futuro, impulsada por la misión y comunitaria. El artículo concluye que este concepto desempeñó un papel crucial en el desarrollo teológico, la urgencia escatológica y la formación de la identidad dentro del primer adventismo del séptimo día.

Palabras clave: Verdad presente, adventismo sabatario, escatología, restauracionismo, formación de la identidad

THE CONCEPT OF PRESENT TRUTH IN THE *PRESENT TRUTH*, 1849–1850

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Introduction

“When I commenced the ‘Present Truth,’ I did not expect to issue more than two or three numbers,”¹ wrote James White in December 1849. Little did he know that what began as an eight-sheet, irregularly-issued paper, would profoundly impact the incipient Sabbatarian Adventist movement.² Behind the title of this paper stood a specific understanding of the *present truth*. The concept of present truth was vital to developing the early Seventh-day Adventist theology and identity, as it encapsulated its historical and epistemological convictions.³ Given its importance, several Adventist studies explore this concept.⁴

1. James White, “The Paper,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 6, December 1849, 47. I used James White’s name wherever the author or the source is not mentioned in the *Present Truth*.

2. Merlin D. Burt, “The Historical Background, Interconnected Development, and Integration of the Doctrines of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and Ellen G. White’s Role in Sabbatarian Adventism From 1844 to 1849” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2002), 380.

3. Kwabena Donkor, “Present Truth,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon, 2nd ed. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1052. Understanding it as “truth whose time has come,” Fritz Guy considers the concept “the most important single element in the Adventist theological heritage.” Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically: Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1999), 81.

4. In his paper, Wesley C. McCoy analyzes the theological content encompassed by the concept of truth in the *Present Truth*. Wesley C. McCoy, “Concepts of Truth in ‘the Present Truth’ (1849–1850)” (term paper, Andrews University, 1973). Laurence A. Turner investigated the doctrines reflected in the *Present Truth*. Laurence A. Turner, “Present Truth as Defined By ‘Present Truth’ (1849–50)” (term paper, Andrews University, 1975). In his dissertation exploring the role of the sanctuary and three angels’ messages for the Sabbatarian Adventism’s system of doctrine during 1844–1863, Alberto R. Timm views the concept of present truth as referring to eschatological and neglected biblical teachings. Alberto R. Timm, *The Sanctuary and the Three Angels’ Messages: Integrating Factors in the Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 1995), 115–116, 122–129, 243–252. Rolf J. Pöhler interprets present truth as a shibboleth for theological continuity and change. Selecting several publications to support his case, he notes that, for the early Adventists, present truth referred to as “prophetic truth” was

The present study analyzes the same concept between July 1849 and November 1850 in the *Present Truth* Sabbatarian Adventist publication. However, it attempts to unveil its dimensions focusing on the relationship between time and truth. As such, this exploration has an epistemological slant.

Time and Truth in the Nineteenth Century

When James Springer White (1821–1881), encouraged by his young wife's vision,⁵ began publishing in July 1849 the first Sabbatarian Adventist publication, the *Present Truth*, he used the KJV of 2 Pet 1:12 to introduce his thoughts: "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the PRESENT TRUTH." By emphasizing present truth using capital letters, he pointed to a system of beliefs for which he and other Adventist believers had sufficient cumulative reasons to accept as knowledge. In doing this, James White was in sync with the epistemological approach of his contemporaries.

In the nineteenth-century United States, the ruling epistemology was Scottish Common Sense.⁶ Common sense was not folk belief but "certain principles every sane human being shares with every other sane human being" that "we are to trust ... unless overwhelming evidence

"contextual and relevant" and had a "progressive and constantly developing" nature. Rolf J. Pöhler, *Continuity and Change in Adventist Teaching: A Case Study in Doctrinal Development* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2000), 182–183. Zoltán Szalos-Farkas places present truth at the intersection of a historicist hermeneutical tradition with a specific eschatological ethos in his published dissertation. He defines the present truth doctrinally as "the concept of the historically progressive unfolding of biblical truth to human understanding." Zoltán Szalos-Farkas, *The Rise and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality* (Cernica, Romania: Institutul Teologic Adventist, 2005), 147. In his short thematic analysis of the concept, George R. Knight qualifies the early Adventists' view of present truth as fluid. He notes that they "had a dynamic concept of what they called 'present truth,' opposed creedal rigidity, and had an openness to new theological understandings that build upon the landmark doctrines that had made them a people." George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 27.

5. James White and Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches. Ancestry, Early Life, Christian Experience, and Extensive Labors of Elder James White, and His Wife, Mrs. Ellen G. White* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1880), 259–260.

6. Mark A. Noll, "Nineteenth-Century American Biblical Interpretation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in America*, ed. Paul C. Gutjahr (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 116.

proves them unreliable.”⁷ Trust in the “sane” function of cognitive powers warrants the true beliefs about reality as knowledge.⁸ As a result, people can trust their experience, and with sufficient cumulative evidence, their experience warrants their knowledge.⁹ As for a handful of believers, for James White, the Millerite experience was genuine. The scriptural and experiential evidence provided him with proof beyond doubt that humans were living in the last days, just before the pouring of the seven last plagues that preceded the second coming of Christ. Convinced that the prophecies of Revelation are fulfilled in his generation, James White uses the *A Word to the “Little Flock”* tract to outline a historical flow connecting his time with the postmillennial executive phase of divine judgment and the new earth.¹⁰ This linear view of history created a temporal framework wherein one could understand the concept of *present truth*.¹¹

The Concept of Present Truth

The present truth was not new when James White used it in the title of his publication. On the one hand, time featured prominently in William Miller’s (1782–1849) explanations regarding the cleansing of the sanctuary interpreted as taking place at the second coming of Christ, before the millennium.¹² It was also present in the title and the content of the first Millerite paper, *The Signs of the Times*, published beginning with 1840 by Joshua V. Himes (1805–1895)¹³ and in other

7. Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 105.

8. Alvin Plantinga developed Reid’s epistemological reliabilist as “Reformed Epistemology.” For details, see Alvin Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (1983; repr., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

9. Olson, *Journey of Modern Theology*, 107.

10. James White, ed., *A Word to the “Little Flock”* (Gorham, ME: James White, 1847), 24.

11. Merlin D. Burt, “Word to the ‘Little Flock,’ A,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1288.

12. Miller first published his views in *Vermont Telegraph*, a Baptist publication, in sixteen numbers, starting on May 15, 1832. For details, see William Miller, *Wm. Miller’s Apology and Defense* (Boston: J. V. Himes, 1845), 16–17. For a detailed analysis of Miller’s theological-historical hermeneutics, see P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 16–46.

13. For more on Himes’s publishing skills, see George R. Knight, *William Mill-*

Millerite Adventist publications that reached the staggering number of four million in only four years, all focused on “how this world would end in 1843.”¹⁴ For Miller and the Millerites, time was not a subjective matter or a way of organizing events relationally. They believed that time is real and underlies all divinely prescribed and human-conditioned events.¹⁵ God predicted the history of salvation culminating with restoration, considering the free will of humans who could accept God’s plan or reject it.¹⁶

On the other hand, the truth was also prominent in Miller’s writings. His understanding of truth was primarily a correspondence view, wherein what is true corresponds to the external reality, which corresponds “to the facts.”¹⁷ Miller carefully compared various biblical texts with “collateral passages” and also “with history,” discovering that prophecies are fulfilled literally, concluding that “the Bible is a system of revealed truths, so clearly and simply given.”¹⁸ “Finding all the signs of the times and the present condition of the world, to compare harmoniously with the prophetic descriptions of the last days,”¹⁹ Miller conceived the present as a crucial moment for one’s decisions regarding the future envisioned by biblical prophecy.

James White was aware of Miller’s view on the importance of *truth* in the *present* time. After listening to Miller “in the mammoth tent in Eastern Maine”²⁰ in 1842, James White was motivated at another

er and the Rise of Adventism (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2010), 64–70.

14. Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 126.

15. Using Adrian Bardon’s categories on the philosophy of time (idealism, relationism, and realism; Adrian Bardon, *A Brief History of the Philosophy of Time* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 6–7), I can call Miller a realist when it comes to his understanding of the nature of time.

16. Miller notes that the final events of the world’s history “were predicted in the Scriptures to be fulfilled in so short a space of time, the question came home to me with mighty power regarding my duty to the world in view of the evidence that had affected my own mind” (Miller, *Apology and Defense*, 13).

17. Keith Simmons, “Truth,” in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Donald M. Borchert, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 9:534.

18. Miller, *Apology and Defense*, 6. For Miller’s principles of interpretation, see Apollos Hale, *The Second Advent Manual: in Which the Objections to Calculating the Prophetic Times are Considered; the Difficulties Connected with the Calculation Explained; and the Facts and Arguments on Which Mr. Miller’s Calculations Rest, are Briefly Stated and Sustained. With a Diagram* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1843), 103–106 and Sylvester Bliss, *Memoirs of William Miller, Generally Known as a Lecturer on the Prophecies, and the Second Coming of Christ* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1853), 70–72.

19. Miller, *Apology and Defense*, 9.

20. James White, *Life Incidents, in Connection with the Great Advent Movement*,

camp meeting in Exeter, Maine, in October of the same year to start preaching the Millerite message.²¹ He felt the *present* urgency to proclaim the *truth*. After Jesus did not return on October 22, 1844, James White chose, with a handful of Millerite believers, to reinterpret the date as the passing of Christ into the Holy of Holies of the heavenly sanctuary for an extended work of atonement.²² With the same burden “to enter the field in defense of truth,”²³ James White began publishing the *Present Truth*. This periodical became the voice of Sabbatarian Adventism between 1849 and 1950, established James White as a leader of the movement, and, “combined with the continuing conferences, gave Sabbatarian Adventists the status of a religious entity.”²⁴

The Present Truth in the *Present Truth*

James White published the *Present Truth* in eleven numbers between July 1849 and November 1850. Each number, writes many years later Ellen G. White (1827–1915), was “spread before the Lord and earnest prayers mingled with tears, were offered to God that his blessing would attend the silent messengers.”²⁵ These “were a great help in the cause,”²⁶ wrote James White almost twenty years later. A careful analysis reveals several dimensions of the present truth understanding James White and the early Sabbatarian Adventists had.

Present Truth is Restorative

Before anything else, it is important to understand the restorationist impulse of Sabbatarian Adventism. In his annotations to Miller’s

as *Illustrated by the Three Angels of Revelation XIV* (Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1868), 25.

21. White, *Life Incidents*, 73. Given that the big tent was manufactured in the summer of 1842 (LeRoy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1954], 4:657), James White listened to Miller the same year.

22. Whereas in 1845, James White believed that atonement was completed on October 22, 1844 (Merlin D. Burt, “The Extended Atonement View in the *Day-Dawn* and the Emergence of Sabbatarian Adventism,” *AUSS* 44, no. 1 [2006]: 337), in 1847 he accepted an extended atonement of Christ’s heavenly ministry (James White, “The Seven Last Plagues,” in *A Word to the “Little Flock”*, ed. James White [Gorham, ME: James White, 1847], 2).

23. White, *Life Incidents*, 290.

24. Burt, “The Historical Background,” 388.

25. White and White, *Life Sketches*, 260.

26. White, *Life Incidents*, 292.

dream, published in the *Present Truth* and as a separate pamphlet,²⁷ James White interprets the “casket with jewels” as “a harmonious system of truth” comprising “four important points in advent history”: “First the time, 1843, second the tarrying time, third the midnight cry, at the seventh month, 1844, and fourth, the shut door.”²⁸ The acceptance of this prophetic biblical truth creates a present experience that God intended as a means to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ. However, the “advent truth” is dynamic, comprising new aspects of truth. Miller saw in his dream another “casket much larger,” which James White interprets as “the broad field of living present truth into which the scattered flock will be gathered ... all of them having the seal of the living God.”²⁹ Miller also saw a “man with a dirt-brush” cleaning the scattered and muddied jewels and putting them into the new casket. James White interprets this as the restorationist impulse of Sabbatarian Adventism that removes the “darkness and error,” helping believers to stand “in the clear light of present truth.”³⁰

The restorationist impetus has at its core the reinstatement of the seventh-day Sabbath. The proclamation of the Sabbath repairs the breach of God’s law. Given that the Sabbath is God’s seal, James White identifies “the repairing of the breach in the law of God” with “the sealing” as “one and the same work.”³¹ Nevertheless, for James White, present truth is *present* truth, not “*future* truth.”³² As such, when some believers argued that swine’s flesh should not be consumed, James White accepts that for the “scattered flock,” temperance is needed, not

27. James White, “Brother Miller’s Dream,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 10, May 1850, 73–75; James White, ed., *Brother Miller’s Dream* (Oswego, NY: n.p., 1850). The dream was first published in the correspondence section of Himes’s *Advent Herald* (William Miller, “Letter from Bro. Wm. Miller,” *Advent Herald* 14, no. 23, January 8, 1848, 182). In short, Miller dreamt about having received a casket with jewels so beautiful that he began inviting people to see it. Soon, the growing crowd that came to see the jewels began to scatter them throughout the room. Some even brought fake jewels; others brought dirt until all the jewels were covered by dirt and the casket was torn to pieces. As Miller was weeping and praying, a man entered the room, cleaned it, gathered the jewels, and put them in a new, larger casket. The dream was very encouraging for Miller.

28. James White, “Brother Miller’s Dream,” 75.

29. James White, “Brother Miller’s Dream,” 75 Cf. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brother Bates,” in *A Word to the “Little Flock”*, ed. James White (Gorham, ME: James White, 1847), 19.

30. James White, “Brother Miller’s Dream,” 75

31. James White, “Repairing the Breach in the Law of God,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 4, September 1849, 26.

32. White, *Life Incidents*, 292, emphasis mine.

abstinence. He considers that such topics distract people from “the importance of the present work of God among the remnant.”³³ In Ellen White’s view, the “sealing truth” is the “meat in due season”³⁴ Citing Revelation 12:17, she calls present truth “the commandments of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ.”³⁵

Present Truth Is a System of True Beliefs

“Truth is a unit, while error has a variety of heads and horns,”³⁶ wrote James White in September 1849. For him, present truth is “truth applicable” to the “present time” that “shows present duty and the right position for us who are about to witness the time of trouble.”³⁷ Truth refers to a system of beliefs, or propositions about reality, that believers know, that is, consider true and have sufficient evidence to justify them. The kernel of present truth is a system of true beliefs that one assents to and accepts.³⁸ The present truth connects the proclamation of the second coming and the Sabbath as a unit.³⁹ It also connects the Sabbath, as the seal of God, with the shut door within the heavenly sanctuary.⁴⁰ James White points to the need to publish this relevant system of beliefs for the “scattered flock.”⁴¹ These beliefs were also presented at various conferences and meetings.⁴²

The Sabbath as the Seal of God

The fact that, in the 88 pages of the *Present Truth*, the word “Sabbath” occurs approximately 580 times indicates that it is a crucial concept. “The

33. James White, “Swine’s Flesh,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 87. On the same page, James White notes that “we find that the New Testament does not, directly or indirectly, teach any such thing [that swine’s flesh is forbidden].”

34. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 4, September 1849, 31.

35. Ellen G. White, “Beloved Brethren, Scattered Abroad,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 34.

36. James White, “Repairing the Breach in the Law of God,” 27.

37. James White, *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 1.

38. See, for example, the excerpt of Joseph Bates letter at the end of *The Present Truth* 1 no. 11, November 1850, 88, where a certain “Bro. Butler ... yielded to the present truth,” “Brn. Hart and Brailley ... confessed the whole truth,” or Butler’s eldest daughter “heard readily and settled on the right Sabbath.”

39. James White, “Repairing the Breach in the Law of God,” 27.

40. Ellen G. White, “Beloved Brethren, Scattered Abroad,” 35.

41. James White, *The Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 1.

42. James White, “Conferences,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 3, August 1849, 24; Ellen G. White, “Beloved Brethren, Scattered Abroad,” 34.

keeping of the fourth commandment is all-important present truth,” wrote James White in the first number of the *Present Truth*.⁴³ It stands at the core of the third angel’s message as “the great sealing truth.”⁴⁴ The *Present Truth* dedicates many pages to arguments favoring the seventh-day Sabbath.⁴⁵

The argument for the Sabbath as the seal of God has several significant steps. First, James White establishes the perpetuity of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was instituted at Creation, not later. “If man had kept the weekly rest,” wrote James White, “he would never have forgotten God, who made heaven and earth.”⁴⁶ After an array of biblical passages supporting this idea, he draws a parallel between the freed Israelites and the

43. James White, “The Two Laws in the New Testament,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 6.

44. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 9, April 1850, 68.

45. James White, “The Weekly Sabbath Instituted at Creation, and not at Sinai,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 1–2; James White, “The Sabbath a Perpetual Weekly Memorial,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 2–3; James White, “The Two Laws,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 3; James White, “Scripture Usually Quoted to Prove the Abolition of the Sabbath, Examined,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 2, August 1849, 9–11; James White, “Evidence for the First Day Sabbath Examined,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 2, August 1849, 11–13; James White, “The Sabbath,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 2, August 1849, 13–16; James White, “The Sabbath Taught, and Enforced in the New Testament,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 3, August 1849, 17–20; James White, “Repairing the Breach in the Law of God,” 25–29; John N. Andrews, “The Sabbath,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 36–39; James White, “Popular Objections Answered,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 6, December 1849, 48; James White, “‘Seventh-Day Sabbath Abolished,’ by Eld. Marsh, Editor of the ‘Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate,’ Reviewed,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 7, March 1850, 49–56; James White, “‘Seventh-Day Sabbath Abolished,’ by Eld. Marsh, Editor of the ‘Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate,’ Reviewed (Concluded),” *Present Truth* 1, no. 8, March 1850, 57–59; James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 65–69. In addition, several tracts or other publications of the American Sabbath Tract Society were also published in the paper. “Twenty Reasons for Keeping Holy in Each Week the Seventh Day instead of the First Day,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 3, August 1849, 20–21; “Plain Questions,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 4, September 1849, 29–31; “Extracts,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 9, April 1850, 70–71; “Misuse of the Term ‘Sabbath,’” *Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 81–82; “Sabbath Controversy,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 82–83; “The Fourth Commandment,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 83–83.

46. James White, “The Sabbath a Perpetual Weekly Memorial,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 3. In another place, he writes that if humans “had always observed this memorial, none would have forgotten God, and there never would have been an infidel in the world.” James White, “‘Seventh-Day Sabbath Abolished,’ by Eld. Marsh, Editor of the ‘Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate,’ Reviewed,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 7, March 1850, 51.

“little flock.” He notes that keeping the Sabbath was impossible before coming out from the churches that rejected the Millerite message. In his view, this was a providential divine intervention in contemporary time, as it freed believers who were “bound by sectarian creeds.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, he distinguishes between the moral and the ceremonial law. In his view, “by not having a correct view of this subject many have stumbled, and have kept from the Sabbath truth.”⁴⁸ In reviewing an article by Joseph Marsh (1802–1863), James White states that Christ’s sacrifice “did ‘destroy’ the law of Moses, ‘nailing it to the cross,’ and took ‘it out of the way,’ at his crucifixion, but the law of commandments he did not come to destroy.”⁴⁹ The moral law of the ten commandments stands at “the foundation of the whole Bible”⁵⁰ and represents the standard of divine judgment. Consequently, the moral law is kept “in the Heaven of Heavens,”⁵¹ that is, in the heavenly sanctuary. Finally, to support the perpetuity of the Sabbath, James White answers the objections usually raised against the Sabbath, in numbers 2, 3, 7, and 8 of the *Present Truth*.

Second, James White argues that the restoration of the fourth commandment fulfills various prophecies in his present time. Drawing a parallel between a national fast held on August 3, 1849, and the prophecy of Isaiah 58:12–13, he points out that God cannot listen to citizens’ prayers as long as they are not releasing the oppressed (Isaiah 58:6), that is, renouncing “the cruel and damning sin of slavery.”⁵² He then connects abolitionism with Sabbath, considering Isaiah 58 a prophecy about his national context. Although not developed by James White, the implicit idea is that Sabbath-keeping can restore proper social relationships. He also applies Ezekiel 13:3–5 to the “advent preachers who have rejected the Sabbath,”⁵³ misleading and scattering the “flock” of believers entrusted to them. However, “our present work is to vindicate the Sabbath of the Lord our God,” writes James White, “and thus

47. James White, “The Weekly Sabbath Instituted at Creation, and not at Sinai,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 2.

48. James White, “The Two Laws in the New Testament,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 5.

49. James White, “‘Seventh-Day Sabbath Abolished,’ by Eld. Marsh, Editor of the *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate*, Reviewed,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 7, March 1850, 54.

50. James White, “The Two Laws,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 3.

51. James White, “The Law of God, or the Ten Commandments,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 4.

52. James White, “Repairing the Breach in the Law of God,” 25.

53. James White, “Repairing the Breach in the Law of God,” 26.

repair the breach that has been made in the commandments.”⁵⁴

Third, given the perpetuity of the Sabbath and the restorationist outlook, James White connects the Sabbath with the third angel’s message.⁵⁵ He perceives a global polarization between an oppressive group that has the mark of the beast (“the observance of the first day of the week as a holy day of rest instead of the seventh”⁵⁶) and the remnant, which has the “seal of the living God” and is sealed “by keeping ‘*the commandments of God*’.”⁵⁷ Given that the sealing is eschatologically crucial, James White feels so moved that he notes, “Never did I have such feelings while holding my pen as now.—And never did I see and feel the importance of the Sabbath as I do this moment.”⁵⁸ Accepting that the Millerite experience was divinely-led, he considers that God providentially brought to the attention of believers the truth about the Sabbath immediately after the fulfillment of the second angel’s proclamation regarding the fall of Babylon representing the apostate churches. The third angel announces God’s judgment against those who receive the mark of the beast, thus refusing the seal of God. The precise moment of this angelic pronouncement correlates with the opening of the door inside the heavenly sanctuary after the 2300 years, in 1844. “The Sabbath truth came up in just the right time to fulfil [*sic*] prophecy.”⁵⁹

The Shut Door Within the Heavenly Sanctuary

Already in August 1849, Ellen White recounts a vision given on March 24, 1849, at Topsham, Maine, where she saw “the command-

54. James White, “Repairing the Breach in the Law of God,” 26.

55. James White is indebted to Joseph Bates for this connection. See Joseph Bates, *The Seventh Day Sabbath, A Perpetual Sign, from the Beginning, to the Entering into the Gates of the Holy City, according to the Commandment* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 58–60. Bates distinguished Revelation 14:12 as a separate proclamation in history, which he calls the “ninth say mark.” Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Way Marks and High Heaps, or a Connected View of the Fulfillment of Prophecy by God’s Peculiar People, from the Year 1840 to 187* (New Bedford, MA: Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 68–69. James White disagreed with Bates (James White, “Thoughts of Revelation 14,” in *A Word to the “Little Flock”*, ed. James White (Gorham, ME: James White, 1847), 10–11), considering Revelation 14:9–12 as a unit, a view that Bates later accepted (George R. Knight, *Joseph Bates: The Real Founder of Seventh-day Adventism* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 144). In the *Present Truth*, James White develops his argument (James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 65–69).

56. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 67.

57. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 66.

58. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 68.

59. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 68.

ments of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, relating to the shut door, could not be separated.” In her view, “the present test on the Sabbath could not come, until the mediation of Jesus in the Holy Place was finished.”⁶⁰ She adds, “Jesus rose up, and shut the door in the Holy Place, and opened the door in the Most Holy, and passed within the second vail [*sic*], where he now stands by the Ark; and where the faith of Israel now reaches.”⁶¹ In addition to using the shut door in reference to the heavenly sanctuary,⁶² she emphasizes the action of opening and the grace available to sincere seekers for the truth. In the same article, she cites two visions (January 5/6, 1849, Rocky Hill, CT) published in a broadside on January 31, 1849,⁶³ and reprinted in the *Present Truth*. In the first vision, she saw “Jesus still interceding for Israel” and that he “would not leave the Most Holy Place, until every case was decided either for salvation or destruction.”⁶⁴ Israel is equated with the remnant, a dynamic group growing as it nears the second coming. She mentions that Jesus was interceding for the remnant while the four angels holding the winds “until the servants of God were sealed with the seal of the living God.”⁶⁵ These visions on the topic of the shut door played a vital role in the future development of the Sabbatarian Adventist mission.⁶⁶

The final number for 1849 has an extended article by David Arnold (1805–1889) on the shut door that partially echoes Ellen G. White’s view. Arnold offers a biblical argument for coalescing the imagery of

60. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 3, August 1849, 21.

61. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 3, August 1849, 21.

62. Ellen G. White, “The Open and Shut Door (Ms 1, 1849),” in *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations: 1845–1859*, ed. Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 160n4.

63. Ellen G. White, “To Those Who Are Receiving the Seal of the Living God (Ms 4, 1849),” in *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations: 1845–1859*, ed. Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 148–149.

64. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 3, August 1849, 22.

65. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 3, August 1849, 23.

66. Merlin D. Burt, “The ‘Shut Door’ and Ellen White’s Visions,” in *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations: 1845–1859*, ed. Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 52.

the bridegroom from the parable of the ten virgins of Matthew 25:1–11 into that of a high priest for Jesus Christ.⁶⁷ In another article, Arnold reviewed the 2300-day prophecy from Daniel 8, indicating that, after 2300 years, Christ shut “the door of the first apartment” and opened “the door of the most holy place” in order to “cleans[e] the antitypical sanctuary.”⁶⁸ While not detailing what cleansing means, Arnold connects it with divine judgment and the restoration of ethnic Israel.

James White wrote on the same topic, synthesizing his present understanding, in the May 1850 number. For him, there is a literal sanctuary in heaven “containing two Holies, as distinct as the two Holies of the worldly Sanctuary,” wherein Jesus, as a high priest, ministers. The cleansing of the sanctuary takes place on the Day of Atonement, which represents the post-1844 period. Regarding the literal period of 2300 days interpreted as years, he writes that “figures won’t lie,” adding that “this is as true in 1850, as it was in 1843.”⁶⁹ James White draws a parallel between the Advent history and the parable of the ten virgins and notes that when the bridegroom (Christ) shuts the door, the wise virgins enter with him. Just as in the typical Day of Atonement when only the sins of Israel were cleansed from the sanctuary, in the post-1844 period, Christ “is still merciful to his saints” whereas the one who has rejected “the offer of salvation, was left without an advocate.”⁷⁰ The saints are the ones who accepted the Millerite message, while the sinners rejected it. Only after 1852 would James White drop the shut door in favor of an *open* door for the salvation of sinners.⁷¹

Present Truth Is Participatory

Present truth is not just a system of beliefs that one accepts or rejects. Everyone is invited to take part to the new life the truth envisions. When people accept the present truth, the natural result is to live according to it. For James White, obedience by faith to truth represents the starting point of justification and sanctification. Such obedience he perceives as a participatory experience, not just cognitive. For him, “the

67. David Arnold, “The Shut Door Explained,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 6, December 1849, 41–46.

68. David Arnold, “Daniel’s Vision, the 2300 Days, and the Shut Door,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 8, March 1850, 60.

69. James White, “The Sanctuary, 2300 Days, and the Shut Door,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 10, May 1850, 78.

70. James White, “The Sanctuary, 2300 Days, and the Shut Door,” 79.

71. Burt, “The ‘Shut Door’ and Ellen White’s Visions,” 47.

truth brings with it freedom, and gives light and life,” and by obeying it, humans “are made ready to enter the everlasting kingdom.”⁷²

It is important to note that James White emphasizes the experience of sanctification, not just that of justification. “To enter the saint’s rest, at the appearing of Christ,” writes James White, humans “must live wholly” for Jesus, which, he continues, means that “we must keep all ten of the commandments, and strictly follow all the directions of the New Testament, and have living active faith in Jesus.”⁷³ Sanctification has participatory aspects, involving spiritual growth towards a mature character.⁷⁴ This is not a result of God’s monergistic action, but it involves human choice as well, as believers need both “to receive the truth, and [also] be established in it,” thus making truth an eschatological “shelter.”⁷⁵

The fact that the Sabbath—announced by the third’s angel message—became prominent after the coming out of the fallen churches—the second angel’s message—reflects God’s providence in James White’s view.⁷⁶ One cannot judge the success of the movement by the backsliding of Adventist believers; instead, the past experience fulfilled the prophecy and justifies the present assurance of divine guidance.⁷⁷ Denying the past Advent experience is denying or misapplying the Scripture. The person who acknowledges the past experience and keeps God’s commandments has present and future assurance of salvation.⁷⁸

72. James White, *The Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 1.

73. James White, “The Two Laws in the New Testament,” 6.

74. See, for example, Ellen G. White’s description of the state of some believers in “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 4, September 1849, 31. She also admonishes the professing believers to support those actively involved in proclaiming the present truth (Ellen G. White, “To the ‘Little Flock,’” *Present Truth* 1, no. 9, April 1850, 71).

75. Ellen G. White, “To the ‘Little Flock,’” *Present Truth* 1, no. 9, April 1850, 71. James White indicates that his publication has the purpose of helping believers “be rooted, and build up in the present truth” (James White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 6). In his review of Joseph Marsh’s article against the seventh-day Sabbath, James White recognizes that only the sincere “have an ear to hear, and an honest heart open to receive the truth” regarding Sabbath. James White, “*Seventh-Day Sabbath Abolished*,’ by Eld. Marsh, Editor of the *Advent Harbinger and Bible Advocate*,’ Reviewed,” 49.

76. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 68.

77. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 65.

78. James White, “Who Has Left the Sure Word?,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 6, December 1849, 46.

Present Truth is Future-Oriented and Mission-Focused

Another dimension of the present truth concept is its eschatological and missional outlook. While called *present*, it is future-oriented and mission-focused. James White clarified this from the very first page of the *Present Truth*. “What is done to spread the truth must be done quickly,” he writes, as “the four Angels are holding the angry nations in check but a few days, until the saints are sealed.... Then it will be too late to spread before precious souls the present saving, living truths of the Holy Bible.”⁷⁹ Almost one year later, in April 1850, he wrote, “God has marked out our past experience and present position so very clearly, that none need to doubt,” indicating that “all the saints may see and know their whereabouts, and understand present truth and present duty.”⁸⁰

James White understood himself as living just before the second coming of Christ. His arguments regarding the relevance of the Sabbath as present truth spring from eschatology. “The time has come when we must be wholehearted in the truth,” wrote James White; “those whose feet are not planted on the rock, will be shaken all to pieces.”⁸¹ The rock metaphor refers to the commandments of God, including Sabbath. All those who appeal to Scripture to support the abolition of the fourth commandment “are on a sandy foundation.”⁸²

For James White, the time of trouble—central to his argument—is daunting.⁸³ Ellen G. White reflects the same understanding. The coming wrath “will soon fall on the heads of those who have rejected the truth,” while those who have accepted the present truth “have the seal of the living God.”⁸⁴ She perceived her present time as short. The same urgency that characterized her husband, James, characterizes her, also. “What is done to rescue souls from the coming storm of wrath must be done before Jesus leaves the Most Holy Place of the Heavenly Sanctuary.”⁸⁵ Every published material was to “be put immediately into

79. James White, *The Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 1.

80. James White, “The Third Angel’s Message,” 69.

81. James White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 6.

82. James White, “Scripture Usually Quoted to Prove the Abolition of the Sabbath, Examined,” 11.

83. For a detailed explanation of James White’s understanding of the time of trouble, see Burt, “The Historical Background,” 311–314.

84. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 4, September 1849, 32.

85. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 4, September 1849, 32.

the hands of those seeking for the truth. Soon it will be too late.”⁸⁶ This sense of urgency had a communitarian impact.

Present Truth Is Communitarian

The eschatological and missiological orientation represents the driveshaft for creating a community of believers prepared to meet Jesus Christ. If the period between 1844 and 1848 was considered the “scattering time,” starting with the Bible conferences in 1848 and the publication of *Present Truth* in 1849, the “gathering time” began.⁸⁷ “My spirit is drawn out after the scattered remnant,”⁸⁸ writes James White on the first page of the first number of his publication. A community-funded publishing project, the *Present Truth* was distributed freely. Those already convinced were invited to pay it forward for others.⁸⁹ This approach, echoing Joshua V. Himes’s publishing philosophy,⁹⁰ strengthened the ties between the believers and created an Adventist identity of self-consciousness and a strong sense of community.⁹¹

Whereas the first three numbers focused on theological aspects, in the fourth number James White publishes the suggestion of John C. Bowels (c. 1802–1853)⁹² of inserting “extracts of the letters ... from the brethren who have or may receive the message.”⁹³ Starting with the fifth number, James White begins to publish various letters and letter excerpts from believers, providing the readers a window into the

86. James White, “The Present Truth, Number 1,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 40.

87. George R. Knight, “‘Scattering’ and ‘Gathering’ Times,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1135.

88. James White, *The Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 1.

89. James White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 1, July 1849, 6.

90. Knight, *William Miller*, 64–70.

91. As Burt indicates, *The Present Truth* played an important role “in organizing Sabbatarian Adventism into a distinct religious entity” (Burt, “The Historical Background,” 380).

92. For details on John C. Bowels, see Roland Karlman, “Biographical Sketches,” in *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations: 1845–1859*, ed. Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 796. Bowels and other less-known Sabbatarian Adventists’ biographical information is taken from Karlman’s work or the fourth volume of Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*.

93. J. C. Bowels, “Dear Brother White,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 4, September 1849, 32.

development of the movement and encouraging them by presenting the success of the present truth.⁹⁴

The same John C. Bowles calls the *Present Truth* “light of the truth” and is convinced that the “paper is doing the Lord’s work.”⁹⁵ One example of the positive effects of the *Present Truth*’s work is in a letter from Hiram S. Case (1814–1882).⁹⁶ After pointing out that other Adventist publications did not nourish him spiritually and how Samuel W. Rhodes (c. 1810–1883) brought him the needed light, Case decides to do missionary work and “get some precious ‘jewels’ for the ‘second casket’.”⁹⁷ This brief reference to Miller’s dream that was interpreted and popularized by James White⁹⁸ reveals that Case not only read the material that first appeared in the previous number of the *Present Truth* but internalized its core message and was motivated by it to spread the present truth.

James White also contributed with details on the progress of the missionary work. For example, writing in May 1850 about “the state of the cause,” he notes how a conference “was one of the best” he ever attended or how “the precious band” in another place, although “scattered and torn by spiritualism, and other errors,” benefits God’s gracious in-

94. The following persons published letters in *The Present Truth*: Ellen G. White (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 34–35); Hiram Edson (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 35–36); John N. Andrews (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 39); Harvey Childs (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 39); J[ohn] C. Bowles (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 5, December 1849, 40); [George W.] Holt (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 6, December 1849, 47); S[amuel] W. Rhodes (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 8, March 1850, 63); Geo[rge] W. Holt (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 8, March 1850, 64); E[lle]n G. White (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 8, March 1850, 64); Rebekah G. Whitcomb (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 9, April 1850, 72); Otis Nichols (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 10, May 1850, 79–80); E[lle]n G. White (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 10, May 1850, 80); S[amuel] W. Rhodes (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 84–85); J[ohn] C. Bowles (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 85); H[iram] S. Case (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 85); Geo[rge] W. Holt (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 85); S[amuel] W. Rhodes (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 86); Joseph Bates (*The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 88). I did not include some materials by Ellen G. White that are rather articles than letters providing information about the missionary progress of Sabbatarian Adventists.

95. J. C. Bowles, “Dear Brother White,” 32.

96. For details on his life and subsequent break with Sabbatarian Adventism and founding of the *Messenger Party*, see Karlman, “Biographical Sketches,” 805–806 and Theodore N. Levterov, “*Messenger Party*,” in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 974–976.

97. H[iram] S. Case, “Letter from Bro. Case,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 85.

98. See note 27.

tervention of “uniting and healing them, and making them valiant for his truth.”⁹⁹ The last number of the *Present Truth* has, on its final page, a call for “communications” from believers, “brief, and strictly confined to the present truth,” and also from the workers bringing news on “how the cause prospers, and of their success in searching out the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”¹⁰⁰

In creating the Sabbatarian Adventist social network, the concept of present truth entailed an organizing impulse. Considering the present as a “gathering time [when] God will heal and bind up his people,”¹⁰¹ Ellen G. White offers practical advice. She writes that “shepherds should consult those ... firm in the present truth, before they advocate any new point of importance.” “Such a course,” she continues, “would prevent unhappy divisions, and then there would be no danger of the precious flock being divided, and the sheep scattered, without a shepherd.”¹⁰² She refers here not only to the beliefs that comprise the “truth,” but also to praxis. For example, the advice initially addressing some weaknesses in Joseph Bates’s (1792–1872) practice, like praying for the sick in the presence of unbelievers or attending communion among unbelievers,¹⁰³ became general advice for all the readers of the *Present Truth*.¹⁰⁴

The *Present Truth* stopped being published by November 1850. However, another paper, the *Advent Review*, which began in August 1850, continued to foster the Sabbatarian self-identity in its five numbers.¹⁰⁵ In November 1850, a third publication came out of print, the

99. James White, “The State of the Cause,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 10, May 1850, 80.

100. James White, “The Paper,” *Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 88.

101. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 86.

102. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 86. Ellen G. White specifically included Joseph Bates among these shepherds. Ellen G. White, “A Vision the Lord Gave Me at Sutton, Vermont (Ms 14, 1850),” in *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations: 1845–1859*, ed. Timothy L. Poirier, Kenneth H. Wood, and William A. Fagal (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2014), 241. For the larger context of the relationship between Joseph Bates and the White family in 1850, see Knight, *Joseph Bates*, 162–166.

103. White, “A Vision the Lord Gave Me (Ms 14, 1850),” 237.

104. Ellen G. White, “Dear Brethren and Sisters,” *The Present Truth* 1, no. 11, November 1850, 86.

105. The *Advent Review* was published in August (no. 1–2), September (no. 3–4), and November (no. 5). It also had an Extra, published in September 1850 by Hiram Edson, and a 48-page special number, also published in September 1850. For details, see Committee on Publications, “Historical Setting of These Documents,” in *Early S.D.A. Periodicals: Facsimile Reproductions of The Present Truth and The Advent*

Second Advent Review, and Sabbath Herald. By December, the *Present Truth* and the *Advent Review* were discontinued and merged into what came to be known as the *Review and Herald*. This latter publication became a vital unifying doctrinal and communitarian factor before the formal organization of Sabbatarian Adventism.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Although spanning less than two years, the *Present Truth* was essential in developing Sabbatarian Adventism by outlining a detailed understanding of the present truth. First, the present truth is restorative. At the core of the restorationist impulse is the fourth commandment Sabbath. Second, the present truth is a system of true beliefs. The Sabbath represents the seal of God for the end time. Its proclamation correlates with opening the door inside the heavenly sanctuary, bringing Christ's unique post-1844 ministry into view. Third, the present truth is participatory. Sincere people are invited to experience the new life of obedience that provides the present assurance of future salvation. Fourth, the present truth is future-oriented and mission-focused. For the believers living just before the second coming of Christ, there is a sense of urgency that engages everybody. Fifth, the present truth is communitarian. Its proclamation aims to gather the believers in a dynamic and growing remnant ready to face the time of trouble and meet Jesus at his second coming.

All these dimensions of present truth unveil a concept that forges a close bond between time and truth. Assuming the genuineness of God's providential intervention in their history, Sabbatarian Adventists began to spread their convictions about reality using the *Present Truth* as a spearhead. Together with other means, this facilitated access to new vistas of theological knowledge that enriched the still germane concept of present truth.

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106. Denis Fortin, "Review and Herald Articles, Ellen G. White *Present Truth* and," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, ed. Denis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2013), 1102.