

# Seventh-Day Adventists

## Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church claims to be “one of the fastest-growing Christian churches in the world today adding one new member by baptism every 44 seconds of every day and organizing five new congregations daily. Membership in the world Church is 9.5 million” as of June, 1997 (Gallagher, 1998). Seventh-day Adventists also boast of having “one of the most extensive centralized Protestant educational systems in the world” (5,478 schools, colleges and universities, 55 publishing houses and branches) as well as a “comprehensive network of health-care providers” (615 hospitals, clinics, medical launches and medivac planes, orphanages, and homes for the elderly). The message of the Adventists can be heard weekly on nearly 4,000 television and radio broadcasts (Gallagher, 1998).

Obviously, the size and influence of this religious organization rivals that of many of the denominations we have previously studied. Yet typically, we know very little about them (other than the fact that they believe that Sabbath keeping is still required today). It is important that we educate ourselves concerning the origins, beliefs and practices of Seventh-day Adventists. As we discuss our differences with them, we need not only to be able to defend scriptural truths, but also to guard ourselves against being led astray into their errors (as some in churches of Christ have been).

## Point of Origin

The name ‘Seventh-day Adventist’ aptly describes two of the foundational beliefs of those who wear it. Most of us have an idea about what the “Seventh-day” refers to, but we may be unclear as to the significance of “Adventist.” However, the earliest origins of Seventh-day Adventism actually center around Adventism, not Sabbath keeping.

The word “Advent” means “coming” or “arrival.” In early 19th century America, the religious world was filled with speculation regarding the second coming or advent of Jesus. Feeding on and fueling this expectation, William Miller predicted that Christ would return between March, 1843 and March, 1844. When this proved wrong, he predicted that the advent would occur on October 22, 1844. As the Seventh-day Adventists explain it, “Between 1831 and 1844, William Miller—a Baptist preacher and former army captain in the War of 1812— launched the great second advent awakening... Based on his study of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Miller calculated that Jesus would return to earth on October 22, 1844. When Jesus did not appear, Miller’s followers experienced what became to be called the Great Disappointment” (Gallagher, 1998). Miller died on December 20, 1849. His tombstone in Low Hampton, New York, reads, “At the time appointed the end shall be.”

Many left Adventism after the Great Disappointment, but some did not. A few staunch souls doggedly pursued an explanation of Miller’s failure and a valid reason for continuing their movement. One of Miller’s disciples, Hiram Edson, claimed to have received a revelation to the effect that Miller had been right about the date, but wrong about what event was supposed to occur on that date. Instead of leaving heaven to return to earth, Christ had actually gone into the ‘heavenly sanctuary’ for the first time to do a special ministry for His followers on earth (Gerstner, 1960; Bird 1961). So it was that “From this small group who refused to give up after the great disappointment arose several leaders who built the foundation of what would become the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Standing out among these leaders were a young couple—James and Ellen G. White — and a retired sea captain named Joseph Bates.” (Gallagher, 1998). During this early period it was Joseph Bates who succeeded in persuading other Adventist leaders of the necessity of Sabbath keeping.

Despite the important roles that men like Miller, Edson and Bates played in the early development of

Seventh-day Adventism, no Adventist leader had more influence on the movement than Ellen G. White; Seventh-day Adventism probably owes its very existence to the early leadership of this colorful woman. In December, 1844, at the age of 17, Ellen G. White claimed to receive the first of what would be many revelations. Following on the heels of the Great Disappointment, White claimed that in a vision she saw advent believers receiving their reward at the coming of Christ (Bird, 1961). Among Adventists, Mrs. White's revelations were soon regarded as authoritative, and relied upon as a means of settling doctrinal disputes even among church readers. In one of her visions, she claimed to have seen the ark of the covenant in heaven containing the ten commandments on the tables of stone. As she looked, the fourth commandment was highlighted by a halo of light, and an angel indicated to White that God desired His people to keep the Sabbath.

Ellen G. White was never officially the head of the Adventist Church, but she was the defacto spiritual leader. "In 1850 James and Ellen White began publishing a magazine, *The Review & Herald*, to disseminate Adventist and sabbatarian doctrines. This helped many of the remaining Millerites to coalesce into a distinctive body which adopted the name of Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1860, and finally incorporated in 1863, with approximately 3,500 members in 125 congregations," headquartered in Battle Creek, Michigan. (Oliver, 1996). White's revelations are the basis of most of Seventh-day Adventism's unique teachings. White claimed to have the "spirit of prophecy," and Seventh-day Adventists still refer to her as a prophet and claim that "The prophetic gift...was manifested to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the work and writings of Ellen G. White" (Questions on Doctrine, p. 25). Although she had only a third grade education, White wrote over 5,000 articles and penned 49 books before she died in 1915 (Gallagher, 1998). However, there is substantial evidence of plagiarism in many of her writings (Rudd, 1998).

### **Distinctive Points of Belief**

1. **Authority and Inspiration of Ellen G. White.** According to the official creed of the Seventh Day Adventists, "One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested." (Gallagher, 1998). As seen in this statement, it is difficult to pin down exactly what place Adventists give the words of Mrs. White. On the one hand they say she is "the Lord's messenger" and her words are an "authoritative source of truth," on the other hand they say that her words must be tested by the Bible. Why would her words need to be tested if they are inspired and authoritative? What is known for certain is that Adventist leaders have claimed that Ellen G. White's revelations and writings were on par with those of Biblical prophets such as Daniel, Samuel, Jeremiah and John the baptist. In her 'Testimonies' White herself wrote, "in ancient times God spoke to men by the mouth of prophets and apostles. In these days He speaks to them by the testimonies of His Spirit...The Lord has seen fit to give me a view of the needs and errors of His People." (Rudd, 1998).

2. **Continuing Revelation.** Adventists claim to believe that, in the Scriptures, "God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation." But, as is the case with several other religions popularized in the 1800s, a belief in revelation from God apart from the Scriptures is essential to Seventh-day Adventism. Adventists not only believe that God spoke through Ellen G. White, but also that He continues to reveal new information to the church. The preface to their official Statement of Beliefs reads as follows: "These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word" (Gallagher, 1998).

3. **Christ's Current Ministry of "Investigative Judgment."** According to Adventists, Christ entered the sanctuary of the true tabernacle in heaven in 1844. Prior to this, at His ascension, He had been inaugurated as our High Priest and begun His intercessory work. His entrance into the sanctuary in 1844 began the second and last phase of His atoning ministry as our High Priest, the Investigative Judgment. In this work, Christ investigates, Judges and makes known who among the dead are worthy to have part in the first resurrection, and who among the living are abiding in Christ and ready for His everlasting kingdom (Gallagher, 1998). Ellen G. White wrote that Christ's work in the sanctuary is "as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross" and that without a clear understanding of this doctrine by the people of God it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position God designs for them to fill" (White, 1907, pp. 488-89).

4. **Baptism.** While teaching that baptism in water marks a person's entrance into the church (Oliver, 1996), Adventists appear to fall short of saying that baptism actually saves a person. Rather, "Baptism is a symbol of our union with Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, and our reception of the Holy Spirit" (Gallagher, 1998). "Those who choose to accept God's...offer of eternal life demonstrate their belief through baptism" (Gallagher, 1998).

5. **The Sabbath.** Adventists teach that, after creating the world, God "rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath" (Gallagher, 1996). Ellen G. White wrote that acceptance of Sabbath keeping would be a "final test" and draw a "line of distinction" between those who serve God and those who don't. Those who accept "the false Sabbath (Sunday) in compliance with the law of the State" will "receive the mark of the Beast" while those who accept the "true Sabbath" will "receive the seal of God" (White, 1907, p. 605).

6. **The Great Controversy.** "All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels" (Gallagher, 1996).

7. **The Return of Christ and the Millennium.** Seventh-day Adventists have a very unique belief regarding the future. When Christ returns to earth He will annihilate the wicked and resurrect His people, living and dead (souls "sleep" until this first resurrection). "The millennium," they say, "is the thousand-year reign of Christ with His saints in heaven between the first and second resurrections. During this time the wicked dead will be judged; the earth will be utterly desolate, without living human inhabitants, but occupied by Satan and his angels. At its close Christ with His saints and the Holy City will descend from heaven to earth. The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and with Satan and his angels will surround the city but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth" (Gallagher, 1998). Then, Christ will live with His resurrected saints on the regenerated earth for all eternity (Gerstner, 1960).

8. **Condition of man in death.** According to Seventh-day Adventists, there is no consciousness in death. "While asleep in the tomb the child of God knows nothing" (Questions on Doctrine, p. 523). However, both the righteous and the wicked will be resurrected from this death. The wicked will experience "the second death" which is "a death from which there is no resurrection" (Questions on Doctrine, p. 524).

9. **Punishment of the wicked.** To Adventists, the soul of man is not inherently immortal. In fact, the soul does not even exist apart from the body. Adventists believe in "conditional immortality" — man is not immortal,

but he can be granted immortality through Jesus Christ. Apart from being granted immortality, sinful humans “will be punished according to the deeds done in the body and will ultimately be burned up — annihilated completely. They will cease to exist” (Thurmon, 1984).

### **Distinctive Points of Practice**

1. **Organization.** The following description of the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is taken directly from their official internet site: “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is organized with a representative form of church government. This means authority in the Church comes from the membership of local churches. Executive responsibility is given to representative bodies and officers to govern the Church. Four levels of Church structure lead from the individual believer to the worldwide Church organization:

1. The local church made up of individual believers
2. The local conference, or local field/mission, made up of a number of local churches in a state, province, or territory
3. The union conference, or union field/mission, made up of conferences or fields within a larger territory (often a grouping of states or a whole country)
4. The General Conference, the most extensive unit of organization, made up of all unions in all parts of the world. Divisions are sections of the General Conference, with administrative responsibility for particular geographical areas.

Each level is representative, that is it reflects a democratic process of formation and election. Local churches elect their own officers and church boards by majority voting. Churches elect delegates to the conferences which meet in session every two or three years.” “A similar process operates for Union sessions and General Conference sessions, at which times officers and committees are elected, reports given and policies decided. The General Conference is the highest earthly authority for the Church.” (Gallagher, 1998).

2. **Tithing.** “The principle of tithing is Gods plan for the support of His church; we do not believe that tithing was only for Jews” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957, p. 24). “We acknowledge Gods ownership by faithful service to Him and our fellow men, and by returning tithes and giving offerings for the proclamation of His gospel and the support and growth of His church” (Gallagher, 1998).

3. **Foot washing.** The ordinance instituted by Christ—that of washing one another’s feet at the time of the Lords Supper—is to be practiced.” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957, p. 24). The rite of foot-washing is practiced at their quarterly meetings (Gerstner, 1960).

### **Cross-points**

The following comparisons between the official teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Bible are designed to point out key differences between the two. Study these comparisons carefully and thoughtfully.

#### **Seventh Day Adventists**

1. **Continuing revelation through prophecy.** “One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance instruction, and correction.” (Gallagher, 1998).

#### **The Bible**

1. **Continuing revelation through prophecy.** 1 Corinthians 13:8 ‘But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away.’ Jude 3, “.. contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.’ (see also 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3).

2. **Christ's ministry In the heavenly sanctuary.** “. . . in 1844. Attended by heavenly angels, our High Priest enters the holy of holies... to perform the work of investigative judgement and to make an atonement for all who are shown to be entitled to its benefits. (White, 1907, p.480).

3. **Identity of the scape-goat.** “As the priest, in removing the sins from the sanctuary, confessed them upon the head of the scapegoat, so Christ will place all these sins on Satan.... so Satan, bearing the guilt of all the sins which he has caused God's people to commit, will be for a thousand years confined to the earth...’ (White, 1907, pp. 485-486). Azazel is a transliteration of the Hebrew word used to designate the second goat in the ritual of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:10). “...Azazel represents Satan” (Questions on Doctrine, 1951, p. 291).

4. **When and to Whom the Sabbath Law was given.** “...the seventh-day Sabbath—which was ‘made for man’ (Mark 2:27)—was given to ‘man... in Eden, long before the Hebrew people came into being. And it was observed throughout the patriarchal age...” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957, p. 156).

5. **Ceremonial VERSUS Moral Law.** “The Ten Commandments, or the Decalogue, constitute in principle God's eternal law. Not only is this law eternal, but it is immutable” In contrast, the “ceremonial law” including “all the sacrificial offerings, the feast days, and even the priesthood...met its end on Calvary's cross.” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957, pp. 129-130).

2. **Christ's ministry In the heavenly sanctuary.** We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Hebrews 8:1-2). “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12, see also Hebrews 9:24; 10:19-22).

3. **The identity of the Scapegoat.** “The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:22). “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24). “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

4. **When and to Whom the Sabbath Law was given.** “The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. (3) The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, those who are here today, all of us who are alive.” “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...” (Deuteronomy 5:2-3, 12a) [NOTE: The Hebrew word “Sabbath” is used for the first time in the Bible in Exodus 16:23]. “Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes...” Ezekiel 20:12,13.

5. **Ceremonial VERSUS Moral Law.** “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ. . . I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’ (Romans 7:4a, 7b). (NOTE: The terms “ceremonial law,” ‘moral law” “temporal law,” and “eternal laws” are **NOT** found in scripture.]

6. **Condition of man in death.** “The condition of man in death is one of unconsciousness” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957, p. 13). “Death is consistently set forth in Scripture as a condition of silence, darkness, and unconsciousness (Ps. 6:5; 115:17; Isa. 38:18)” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957, pgs. 558-559). “One who serves God doses his eyes in death, and whether one day or two thousand years elapse, the next instant in his consciousness will be when he opens his eyes and beholds his blessed Lord.” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957, pgs. 523-524).

7. **Punishment of the wicked.** “. the wicked will be punished by suffering and complete destruction in the lake of fire; we do not believe in an eternally burning hell in which souls are tormented without end?” (Questions on Doctrine 1957, p. 23). “The drama of the ages ends in Satan’s final and irrevocable overthrow, and his utter extinction—as well as that of all who follow him—when fire comes down from God out of heaven and devours him (2 Peter 3:10, 11; Revelation 20:9)” (Questions on Doctrine, 1957 p. 506).

8. **Church Government.** “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is organized with a representative form of church government. This means authority in the Church comes from the membership of local churches” “Each level is representative, that is it reflects a democratic process of formation and election. Local churches elect their own officers and church boards by majority voting” (Gallagher, 1998, “Church Structure and Governance”).

6. **Condition of man In death.** ‘So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. (23) “And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:22,23). “And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). “Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment” (2 Peter 2:9, compare this NKJV translation with the KJV & NIV).

7. **Punishment of the wicked.** “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:48). “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). “These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

8. **Church Government** Acts 14:23, “So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” Titus 1:5, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you;”

### **Weak Points of Seventh-day Adventism**

1. **Errors of the founding prophet** The Seventh-day Adventist church recognizes Ellen G. White as its founding prophet. If she was a false prophet or if her “revelations” were fraudulent, the very foundations of Seventh-day Adventism would be weaker than water. An examination of her writings and prophecies shows that this is indeed the case. Walter Rea’s book entitled *The White Lie* has carefully documented a large number of instances of plagiarism (copying from others) in White’s writings. Rea’s findings are summarized as follows:

*The Great Controversy contains the pillars and foundation of Adventist theology. White copied these key doctrine in the Great Controversy from books written by James White. James White copied his books from books written by J. N. Andrews (a writer for the Adventist magazine, The Review and Herald) Thus the ultimate source of Seventh-day Adventist theology is not God*

*inspiring new truths to White, but plagiarizing (copying) J. N. Andrews” (Rudd, 1998).*

The test of a true prophet of God is whether or not the prophet’s predictions come true (Deuteronomy 19:21-22). Ellen G. White also fails this test hands down. Notice the following two samples of White’s prophecies:

*“I was shown the company present at the Conference. Said the angel:”Some food for worms, some subject to the last plagues, some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus’” NOTE: This statement was made in 1856 and every one present in that meeting is now dead. Obviously, this was a false prophecy” (Rudd 1998).*

Concerning events leading up to the Civil War White said, *“This nation will yet be humbled into the dust. England is studying whether it is best to take advantage of the present weak condition of our nation and venture to make war on her... When England does declare war, all nations will have one interest of their own to serve, and there will be general war, general confusion” (Rudd, 1996).*

2. **Failure to practice what the prophet proclaimed.** The following quotations from Ellen G. White’s *Testimonies to the Church (vol. 2)* provide us with what the Adventists’ prophet revealed to them on matters of diet:

“You have used the fat of animals, which God in his word expressly forbids” (p. 61).

“Cheese should never be introduced into the stomach” (p. 68).

“It is just as much sin to violate the laws of our being as to break one of the Ten Commandments” ([i.e. eating a slice of bacon is as sinful as committing adultery] p. 70).

“The use of swine’s flesh is contrary to his express commandments” (p. 96). (Rudd, 1998; Edwards, 1996).

These dietary laws are not observed by many Seventh-day Adventists. Many other laws decreed by White -for Instance, that Adventist women should wear short dresses with long pants underneath — are also not observed today, and are generally regarded as silly, even by some Adventists!

3. **Failure to practice what Is preached — the Sabbath Is not “kept”** One of the weakest aspects of Seventh-day Adventism may be that Adventists themselves do not keep the Sabbath! If, for the sake of argument we would grant that the Sabbath should be kept today, and if we would also agree that the so-called ceremonial laws of the Old Testament need not be kept, the fact remains that Seventh-day Adventists do NOT keep the Sabbath as the Lord commanded in the Old Testament. If the Sabbath law was binding today, then on the Sabbath we could not work (Exodus 20:8-10), kindle a fire (Exodus 35:3), bake or boil anything (Exodus 16:23), leave our place (Exodus 16:29) or bear any burden (Jeremiah 17:21-22). Anyone who violated these rules, including children and foreigners, should be put to death (Exodus 20:10; 31:14-15; 35:1-2). Assembling for worship on Sabbath days was only commanded a few times per year on special feast days (Leviticus 23:1-44). No allowance was made in the Old Testament for one to “leave his place” on the Sabbath in order to travel to a worship assembly of human devising. Considering the distance many modern Adventists travel to meet for worship on Saturday, their worship assemblies would constitute a clear violation of Sabbath law, not a keeping of it!

**Review Questions on Seventh-day Adventism**

1. What does the word “Advent” mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What contribution did each of the following individuals make to the foundation of Seventh-day Adventism:  
William Miller \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Hiram Edson \_\_\_\_\_  
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Joseph Bates \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ellen G. White \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Explain the Adventist doctrine of “investigative Judgment.” Who is doing it? Where? What is it? When it will end? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_
4. Ellen G. White associated the “Mark of the beast” with what practice? \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_
5. According to Adventists, what is man’s condition in death? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What do Adventists believe will be the destiny of the Wicked? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What distinction do Adventists make between the “moral” and “ceremonial” laws of the Old Testament? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
What Scriptures would you study with an Adventist to break down this distinction? \_\_\_\_\_  
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\_\_\_\_\_

8. What other religions have we studied which also believe they are receiving continuing revelation from God?

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9. Compare the founder and doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism with those of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

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10. What do you see as the biggest weakness in Seventh-day Adventism? Why?

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