

Seventh-day Adventism

By Dr. James Bjornstad

I. History

Seventh-day Adventism originated during the great “Second Advent” awakening of the 19th century. In 1818 William Miller, a Baptist minister, read Daniel 8:14 and predicted Christ’s return in twenty-five years—between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844 [2300 years from 457 BC]. Later his associates set the date for October 22, 1844.

During the following years, from 1844-1847, three groups came together to form Seventh-day Adventism:

Hiram Edson, who was from western New York, provided the doctrine of the Sanctuary and Christ’s final ministry in the Holy of Holies [the Investigative Judgment]. As he walked across a cornfield on October 23, 1844:

Suddenly there burst upon his mind the thought that there were two phases to Christ’s ministry in the Heaven of Heavens, just as in the earthly sanctuary of old. In his own words, an overwhelming conviction came over him: that instead of our high priest coming out of the most holy of the heavenly sanctuary to come to this earth on the tenth day of the seventh month at the end of the twenty-three hundred days, He for the first time entered on that day the second apartment of that sanctuary, and that He had a work to perform in the most holy before coming to this earth. (Froom 4:881).

Joseph Bates, of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, provided the doctrine of seventh-day worship, the Sabbath.

Ellen G. Harmon [White], who came from Maine, provided the doctrine of the “Spirit of Prophecy.” Her visions and prophecies brought the theological notions above together to form a unique religious system.

II. Theology

Seventh-day Adventists are in basic agreement with historic, biblical Christianity in many areas:

1. The inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible.
2. The Trinitarian nature of the Godhead: the Fatherhood of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, and the person and deity of the Holy Spirit.
3. Man was created in the image of God, but is in a fallen state of sin and in need of redemption.
4. Jesus Christ was virgin-born; lived a sinless life; was crucified, dead, and buried; and rose bodily from the grave.

On the other hand, Seventh-day Adventists also have a number of distinctive doctrines which are not in accord with historic Christianity:

The Role of Ellen G. White

Seventh-day Adventists claim that Mrs. White holds a unique role. For example:

Seventh-day Adventists hold that Ellen G. White performed the work of a true prophet during the seventy years of her public ministry. As Samuel was a prophet, as Jeremiah was a prophet, as John the Baptist, we believe that Mrs. White was a prophet to the Church of Christ today (The Advent).

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 (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 40).

Mrs. White herself claimed:

When I send you a testimony of warning and reproof, many of you declare it to be merely the opinion of Sister White. You have thereby insulted the Spirit of God (Testimonies 4:661).

However, there are some problems with Mrs. White's "gift of prophecy". Walter Rea, in his book The White Lie documents extensive plagiarism. She was also frequently in error. For example, as she herself admitted:

Under these circumstances I yielded my judgment to that of others and wrote what appeared in number eleven in regard to the Health Institute, being unable to give all that I had seen. In this I did wrong (Testimonies 1:563).

The Person of Jesus Christ

Seventh-day Adventism differs from historic Christian doctrine in some of their teachings regarding the person of Jesus Christ. Among the different teachings, we mention four.

Some early Seventh-day Adventists contended that the Son was not fully equal to the Father, and that the former must have had a beginning in the remote past (Questions 46-49).

The name Michael is applied not to a created angel but to the Son of God in His pre-Incarnate state (Questions 71-83).

When Christ became a man, He took upon Himself human flesh and a human nature, but no human soul as a distinct immaterial substance.

[Christ] could have sinned, He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity (Nichol, Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary 4:1128).

The Sleep of the Soul and the Destruction of the Wicked

In contrast to historic Christian teaching, Seventh-day Adventism holds that:

- A. The soul represents the whole man and the whole man [the body] remains in the tomb until the resurrection morning.
 - 1. The soul cannot exist apart from the body.
 - 2. There is no conscious existence after death.
- B. The righteous will be resurrected and caught up to meet the Lord at His return.
- C. The unrighteous will be resurrected after the millennium and then cast into the lake of fire where they will be destroyed or annihilated.

The Sabbath and the Mark of the Beast

In regard to observance of the Sabbath, Seventh-day Adventists teach that:

- A. The Seventh-day Sabbath [Friday evening until Saturday evening] was instituted by God. Observance of this day is a test of one's loyalty to Christ.
- B. A counterfeit Sabbath will be proclaimed during the Tribulation period.
 - 1. Those that worship on that day will receive the mark of the beast.
 - 2. Those who remain faithful to God will continue to worship on the Sabbath.

The Heavenly Sanctuary, the Investigative Judgment, and the Scapegoat

Once again, we see a contrast to historic Christian doctrine when we see that Seventh-day Adventists teach:

- A. Jesus entered into the heavenly sanctuary in 1844 to begin a second phase of His ministry. (See Robert D. Brinsmead, 1844 Re-Examined, and Desmond Ford, Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment, for a critique).
- B. The sins of believers have been transferred to, deposited or recorded in the Heavenly Sanctuary, and are now being dealt with in the Investigative Judgment. Those who have died are examined to determine if they are worthy of being part of the first resurrection. The living are also examined to determine who are abiding and keeping God's commandments. When the cases of all the righteous will have been decided [the standard being the Ten Commandments], their sins will be blotted out and Jesus will return to this earth in all His glory.
- C. Azazel [the goat the high priest sent out into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement] designates Satan.

Satan makes no atonement for our sins. But Satan will ultimately have to bear the retributive punishment for His responsibility in the sins of all men, both righteous and wicked (Questions 400).

Law, grace, and salvation

Finally, we see a difference in doctrine when we examine two perspectives of law, grace and salvation. (See Geoffrey Paxton, The Shaking of Adventism.) On the one hand we see justification by faith alone.

Opposed to that we find justification by faith which is demonstrated by obedience to God's commandments. This view strongly advocates Sabbath-keeping and the Old Testament dietary laws which is difficult to harmonize with Seventh-day Adventist's assurance that salvation is by grace through faith and not of works. For example:

The best summary of the requirements for salvation is found in the counsel Jesus gave the rich young nobleman (Mt 19:16-22), "If thou wilt enter into life, (1) keep the commandments . . . and (2) follow me." There is no other hope of salvation. By the standard of God's holy law we shall be judged in the day of reckoning (Detamore, Just What 32-34).

As long as Isaiah 66:15-17 is in this book, how dare I tell you it doesn't make any difference whether or not you eat swine's flesh and other unclean foods? . . . It would be much easier for me to say, 'Go ahead and eat as you please; You needn't worry about those things anymore.' But God says those who are eating unclean things when He comes will be destroyed. Wouldn't you rather I put it plainly so that you'll not be deceived and be destroyed at our Lord's coming? (Detamore, Just What 22-23)

III. Sharing the Truth with Seventh-day Adventists

Our concern is to be sure that individual Adventists are confronted with the one true gospel.

If an Adventist will admit that Mrs. White was fallible, that no record in heaven could possibly bring a believer into condemnation, and that the works of the Law such as Sabbath-keeping are not necessary conditions of salvation, then other things being equal, he should be acknowledged as an evangelical.

On the other hand, if the Adventist persists in defending Mrs. White's infallibility, the

Investigative Judgment and the Old Testament dietary laws, he chooses for himself the Galatian heresy and places himself under the curse of the Law (Gal 3:10) and of preaching another gospel (Gal 1:8-9).

In response, to those who believe faith must be demonstrated by obedience to God's commandments:

1. Stress the biblical teaching that a man is justified by faith *in* Jesus Christ apart from the deeds of the Law (Romans 3:28; 4:6; Galatians 2:16; 3:10-14).
2. Point out that the Law of Moses [the ceremonial and moral aspects] has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. By His perfect life He met all the requirements of the moral aspect of the Law; by His death He fulfilled all the ceremonial ordinances which prefigured His incarnation and sacrifice (Romans 5:10; Colossians 2:16-17).
3. The law or commandment which Christians are called upon to follow is the law of love (e.g. Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:8-10).

To those who believe the Sabbath is binding on the believer, you might point out that:

1. Constantine did not, as Adventists claim, change the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. He enacted that the first day of the week should be a public holiday, but centuries before Constantine, Christians gathered together for worship on the first day of the week.
 - a. Reference to worship on the first day of the week can be found in Scripture. See Acts 2:41; Acts 20:6-7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; and Rev 1:10 (Note: both the Didache and Ignatius refer to Sunday as the "Lord's Day" ["Kuriake"]).
 - b. In addition, references to worship on the first day of the week can be found in the writings of the early church fathers—Ignatius (110 AD); Justin Martyr (100-165 AD); Barnabas (120-150 AD); Irenaeus (178 AD); Bardaisan (154 AD); Tertullian (200 AD); Origen (225 AD); Cyprian (200-258 AD); Peter of Alexandria (300 AD) and Eusebius (315 AD).
2. There is no indication in the New Testament that the observance of the Sabbath was binding on Gentile believers. On the contrary we find such words as these:

One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike.

Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord (Romans 14:5-6).

Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to . . . a Sabbath day (Colossians 2:16)

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