

# *Seventh Day Adventists*

Adventism is the belief that Christ's personal second coming is imminent and will inaugurate his millennial kingdom at the end of the age. Chiliasm, apocalypticism, and millennialism are cognate theological terms. Adventism in this general sense has been espoused by many diverse groups throughout human history such as the Seventh-Day Baptist, Anabaptists, and Jehovah's Witnesses Seventh-Day Adventists and many more.

Adventism is most commonly used, however, to denote the movement which sprang up in the 1830s from the teachings of William Miller, a Baptist minister in New York. Miller confidently prophesied the imminent return of Christ and set 1843-44 as the time for such event. The Millerite movement spread rapidly among the churches of the Northeast. When the expected return did not occur as Miller originally had predicted, a reinterpretation of the Scripture set Oct. 22, 1844, as the correct date.

The cult met in their local gathering places on the appointed day worshipping and waiting. Their great expectation became the "Great Disappointment" which followed the failure of the prophecy that led many Millerites to forsake the movement and slip back into the churches from which they had never formally dissociated themselves.

Miller himself acknowledged his error and dissociated himself from the movement and all further attempts to redeem it. A series of new signs, visions, and prophecies, however, fed the lagging spirits of those who refused to give up their Adventist hopes.

As early as the day following the Great Disappointment, Hiram Edson, an adventist leader, had a vision which confirmed the prophetic significance of the date: Oct. 22, 1844 but indicated that it marked a heavenly rather than an earthly event. He claimed that on October 22, 1844 Christ had moved into the holy of holies of the heavenly sanctuary to begin a new phase of his ministry of redemption.

That ministry was ultimately defined in the adventist doctrine of investigative judgment; Christ entered the sanctuary to review the deeds of professing Christians (the non-Adventists) to determine whose names should be included in the Book of Life. Other revelations subsequent to the Great Disappointment came to Ellen G. Harmon, a young disciple of Miller in Portland, Maine. She was quickly accepted as a prophetess and her teachings were accepted as authoritative.

The revived movement also adopted sabbatarianism and the belief that the acceptance of the seventh-day sabbath was the mark of the true church. Seventh-day observance and Christ's ministry of investigative judgment, confirmed by the prophetic revelation of Ellen Harmon White, completed the foundations of contemporary adventism.

Most adventist groups also adhere to the belief in soul sleep and annihilation of the wicked. Their strong emphasis on Old Testament teachings also led to a strong traditional concern for diet and health, including their proscription of coffee and tea and their advocacy of vegetarianism.

Two major Adventist bodies represent the movement today, the Advent Christian Church and the predominant Seventh-day Adventists. They vary somewhat in their adherence to the Adventist doctrines outlined above. The Seventh-day Adventists traditionally have been identified as a cult among Christian churches. Such classification resulted from the contention by Christian theologians that the authority which the church grants to Mrs. White's prophecies compromises the finality of scriptural revelation. They further charged that the doctrine of investigative judgment compromises the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone that led to an assurance of salvation based on perfect obedience rather than faith.

In recent years, however, Seventh-day Adventist theologians have tended to regard Mrs. White's prophecies as subject to judgment by the canonical Scriptures and have put forth a more evangelical understanding of justification by faith. As a result some evangelical leaders, although by no means all, have begun to include the Seventh-day Adventists within the pale of orthodoxy.

This division of opinion as to the theological stance of the movement is echoed within the group itself by the intense theological debate of these issues in recent years. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced rapid growth in the post-World War II period. This church, however, still tends to keep to itself among Christian denominations.

The centrality of the events surrounding the return of Christ in the premillennialism context which became so critical in the development of the fundamentalist movement and the contemporary emphasis upon the imminent second coming of Christ in evangelical churches in general show the continuing significance of general adventism in the Christian tradition, and many thought that they are indeed Christians.

Ellen Gould Harmon White (1827-1915) in Maine being brought up in a Methodist family, she with them was influenced by addresses given in Portland by the Adventist William Miller. In 1843 the family was expelled from Methodist membership for doctrinal issues. After joining the Adventists, White claimed to have seen in the first of many "revelations" the triumph and vindication of the Adventists over earthly persecution. Before her death seventy years later she was said to have experienced "two thousand visions and prophetic dreams." Her early followers regarded these visions as partially fulfilling Joel 2:28-32.

The Adventist movement suffered a series of severe setbacks when most of her prediction of Christ's return failed. White became the leader in 1846, soon after her marriage to James White. The Seventh-day Adventist Church as an official denomination was established at Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1863, with Ellen as leader and her writings and counsels accepted as the "spirit of prophecy". This, according to fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, is "one of the identifying marks of the remnant church."

Modern Seventh-day Adventism denies that Mrs. White's writings are to be equated with the biblical canon which closed nearly two thousand years ago, though a leading Adventist says that "just as God enlightened Moses... he enlightened Ellen G. White."

Acceptance of her writings is not to be made a matter of church discipline, but Adventists hold that in her life and ministry the "gift of prophecy" was restored in these last days of the Christian church. Through more than sixty works (100,000 handwritten pages) Ellen G. White still dominates the movement 88 years after her death.

Among her publications are the nine-volume Testimonies for the Church (1855-1909) and Steps to Christ, which has sold more than twenty five million copies in more than a hundred languages. Mrs. White committed a thousand and one misinterpretations and deficiencies and yet her followers are willing to die for her doctrines.

Sabbatarianism is the view which insists that one day of each week be reserved for religious observance as prescribed by the OT Sabbath law. It is most important that we note a distinction between strict and liberal sabbatarinism. They contend that God's directive concerning the Old Testament Sabbath law is natural, universal, and moral; consequently the Sabbath requires mankind to abstain from all labor except those tasks necessary for the welfare of society. In this view the seventh day, the literal Sabbath, is the only day on which the requirements of this law can be met. However, the Sabbath was for Israel.

Adventists believe they have been raised for the express purpose of proclaiming that God requires all men to observe the sabbath. Their arguments for the universally binding character of the sabbath law are these: it (1) is part of the moral law, (2) was given at the creation, and (3) was not abrogated in the NT. Some adventists see in Sunday observance a fulfillment of the prophecy (Rev. 14:9) which states that deluded mankind will be forced to accept the mark of the beast (Sunday observance) in order to survive during the days prior to Christ's second advent.

William Hallows Miller, was the Baptist minister who predicted the Second Advent of Christ would occur in 1844. Many of his followers sold their properties in expectation of the end of the world. Although Miller's movement disbanded soon after, his teachings paved the way for later Adventist sects. Miller disjoined from the group and died in 1849 with a heart filled with remorse. Ellen White his disciple, carried-out and expanded the heretical teachings that became known today as Seventh-Day Adventism.

Miller was expelled from the Baptist and White from the Methodist, both for doctrinal errors. In arrogance and antagonism, they created their own doctrines. Their salvation is by faith plus human good works contrary to biblical salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. Therefore, they are not saved and they are not Christians. Salvation is the free gift of God (Romans 6:23) and received through non-meritorious faith of the individual (Eph. 2:8-9).

Bibliography:P. G. Damsteegt, Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission; L. E. Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, W. Martin, The Kingdom of the Cults; F. D. Nichol, The Midnight Cry; G. Paxton, The Shaking of Adventism; Seventh Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine; A. A. Hoekema, The Four Major Cults.



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