

THE BIBLE

and

Seventh Day

Adventism



by **Dr. John C. DeKorne**

THE BIBLE AND SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISM

One of the most aggressive religious groups in the world today is the group known as the Seventh Day Adventists. They are found everywhere. With a zeal that commands respect they have extended their witness throughout their native United States and far beyond its borders as well.

The people of this zealous group have some splendid qualities. The writer has met some of them in America, has traveled across the Pacific Ocean with some of them, and has been in fairly close touch with some of their missionaries in China. He has personal knowledge of the splendid medical program they support, and he has seen some of their colporteurs in action in the interior of China. In the abstract, orthodox Christians could join whole-heartedly with them in some of their teachings, such as emphasis upon salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ, the need for regeneration, and the inspiration of the Scriptures, although it is hard to see how they can harmonize their orthodox-sounding statements on these Biblical doctrines with the decidedly unbiblical features which are also found in their system.

For the origin of the Seventh Day Adventist movement one needs to go back to that weird, soul-stirring movement led by William Miller of Low Hampton, N. Y., during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Seventh Day Adventist literature seldom refers to this connection, because William Miller has gone down in the history books as a thoroughly discredited prophet. But the fact is that, although Seventh Day Adventists have definitely and often repudiated some of Miller's teachings, their own movement is beyond dispute an outgrowth of Miller's movement. Miller predicted that the world would come to an end on Octo-

ber 22, 1843. He stirred up tremendous excitement in New York and New England especially, and there is good historical authority for the statement that on that night thousands put on their "ascension robes," expecting to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. When nothing happened in 1843, he said he had made a slight error in his calculations and that it should have been 1844, but that date also went by and the sun continued to rise and set. Miller was then honest enough to admit that he had been wrong, and that 1844 was not a fulfillment of prophecy in any sense, but a group of his followers tried to save something out of the situation. Holding on for dear life to the date which Miller had set, they came out with the ingenious explanation that 1844 was right after all, only with this difference that it did not mark the time that Christ came to earth but the time that Christ entered "the heavenly sanctuary" to cleanse it, whatever that means. And Seventh Day Adventists take that position today! Mrs. Ellen G. White, formerly a follower of Miller, later for many years the leading "prophet" of Seventh Day Adventism, penned the following words regarding Miller's calculations:

"I have seen that the 1843 chart was directed by the hand of the Lord, and that it should not be altered; that the figures were as He wanted them; that His hand was over and hid a mistake in some of the figures."

Letting that testimony of history stand for what it is, however, there is one standard, and only one, by which we have a right to judge Seventh Day Adventism as it is today. That standard is the Bible. For evangelical Christians it is the final court of appeal. And since our Seventh Day Adventist friends also teach that the Scriptures are authoritative for doctrine and practice, we can start from common ground when we subject the principles of this church to the test of Holy Writ.

We wish to point out that on at least six counts the Seventh Day Adventists are at hopeless odds with the teachings of the Bible.

1. The Cleansing of the Sanctuary

Here is a summary, drawn from their own books, of what they teach about the cleansing of the sanctuary:

The starting point is the text on which William Miller had based his calculations, Daniel 8:14: "And he said unto me, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." When Miller's prophecy failed to come true, his disappointed followers

"opened their Bibles, and with determination studied the prophecies anew. Soon they discovered their mistake. The 'sanctuary' of Daniel 8:14 was not this earth, as they had supposed, but, instead was the sanctuary in heaven. (See Heb. 8:1, 2; Rev. 11:19.) They examined again the time of the '2300 days' (literally, 2300 years), and they found no error; nor indeed could there be, for the period is inseparably bound up with the birth, the ministry, and the death of Christ. (See Dan. 9:25-27.) After diligent study of the sanctuary question, they found that Christ, our great High Priest (See Heb. 8:1, 2), upon His ascension to heaven entered the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, and that in 1844. He entered the most holy place, there to cleanse it by blotting out the sins of all those who have accepted the sacrifice He made on Calvary. (The quotation is from "Belief and Work of Seventh Day Adventists" by Alonzo L. Baker; pp. 9, 11.)

The above representation is clearly not the Scriptural representation of Daniel 8:14.

a. The sanctuary of Dan. 8:14 is not in heaven as the "great discovery" of the Seventh Day Adventists would have it, but is clearly on earth. Look at the context in which these

words appear. The sanctuary of verse 14 is certainly the same as the sanctuary of verse 13! That was a sanctuary which was the scene of a daily sacrifice, and that was the sanctuary which was to be trodden under foot by a host of enemies. Could either of those descriptions possibly refer to a sanctuary in heaven? Not by any sensible method of interpretation.

b. The cleansing of the sanctuary in Dan. 8 has nothing to do with the entrance of Christ into the heavenly sanctuary. Christ entered that sanctuary already at His ascension, and not in 1844. The two verses in Hebrews, taken at their face meaning, cannot be interpreted in any other way. We are there told that "He is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens," not in some ante-room where He had to wait eighteen hundred years before He could be admitted! Besides, the sanctuary Christ entered in the heavens needed no cleansing, thus Dan. 8:14 does not apply here at all.

c. It would be strange that William Miller would be the means through whom God would reveal to His church such an important truth as the Seventh Day Adventists think they have found in this doctrine of the cleansing of the sanctuary. For according to the Adventists themselves, Miller was wrong in the main thrust of his prophecy. And on the basis of Deut. 18:21, 22, he certainly was a false prophet. There we read: "How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him." We can well afford to pay no attention whatever to Miller's dates and to Miller's theories. Let us be satisfied with the plain meaning of Daniel 8:14 as referring to the literal cleansing of the sanc-

tuary at Jerusalem after unhallowed hands under Antiochus Epiphanes had defiled it.

d. But the most serious indictment of this "cleansing of the sanctuary" doctrine still remains to be made. Their interpretation clearly implies that Christ did not begin to blot out sins until 1844! That is a positive repudiation of Calvary and of Christ's glorious work of redemption which He Himself declared "finished" when He bowed His head on the cross. If He did it on Calvary, He did not need to do it in 1844; and if He needs to do it since 1844 then He certainly could not have finished it on Calvary. Take your choice! With God's Word in your hand you can only choose for Calvary and forget about 1844.

2. Observance of the Jewish Sabbath

It is when we come to the question of the Sabbath day and its observance that we touch the most distinctive thing about Seventh Day Adventism, and it is on this issue that they make their big appeal to many poorly-instructed or uninstructed Christians.

Just as their teaching on the cleansing of the sanctuary was an outgrowth of their former belief in William Miller's discredited prophecy, so their teaching regarding the Sabbath was an outgrowth of their conviction regarding the sanctuary. And it is interesting to note here that Miller did not share their conviction about the sanctuary. He wrote: "On the passing of my published time, I frankly acknowledged my disappointment . . . I have no confidence in any of the new theories that grew out of that movement . . . or that it was a fulfillment of prophecy in any sense." But the Seventh Day Adventists did accept that 1844 marked the entrance of Christ into the holy of holies for the cleansing of the sanctuary, and that, in turn, opened the way for a revelation of the truth (?) of the Sabbath. Mrs. White wrote:

"Christ had opened the door, or ministration,

of the most holy place, light was shining from that open door of the sanctuary in heaven, and the fourth commandment was shown to be included in the law which is there enshrined . . ." (Quoted from page 435 of Mrs. White's 'The Great Controversy'.)

In her "Early Writings," Mrs. White had made the amazing claim that she had been taken up into heaven and was shown the very building in which the candlestick, table of shewbread, altar, curtains, and ark were kept. Then came this astounding revelation:

"Jesus raised the cover of the ark, and she beheld the tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. She was amazed as she saw the fourth commandment in the very centre of the ten precepts, with a soft halo of light encircling it. The angel said, 'It is the only one of the ten which defines the living God, who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that are therein. When the foundations of the earth were laid, then was also laid the foundation of the Sabbath.'"

From that time on, the keeping of the seventh day was a cardinal principle for Mrs. White and her followers. They insisted we should keep the Sabbath today exactly as the Jews were supposed to keep it in the Old Testament times. They have had to make some adroit maneuvers to avoid running into serious contradictions on that basis. For example, the Jews were not allowed to build a fire on the Sabbath Day, but Mrs. White got around that by saying it was not cold in Palestine and they did not need a fire, but she evidently forgot John 18:18.

But apart from such inner inconsistencies in the Seventh Day Adventist system, the principal problem is to test their view by Scripture. If Scripture really demanded this for New Testament times, we would have to comply

even though it were very inconvenient. But here again Mrs. White and her followers have failed to "rightly divide the Word of truth," because they have failed to distinguish between the character of the Old and the character of the New dispensations.

There is a specifically Jewish element in the Ten Commandments which cannot, yea may not, be carried over into New Testament practice. The very heading shows it: God has brought the Jews, not us, out of Egypt. In the fifth commandment, "the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee," clearly refers to Palestine, and Palestine has not been given to us. Thus we can accept fully the New Testament position that the law of God abides, without falling back into an essentially unchristian position which denies the work of Christ by forcing the New Testament church back into its Old Testament setting. The New Testament church has nothing more to do with the law as a stepping-stone to eternal life; it is now concerned with it only as a schoolmaster to Christ and as a guide to a thankful life. And in finding out what that law asks of us as an expression of a thankful life, we should eliminate the Jewish element and penetrate to the abiding, spiritual element. That we should do that is taught by Jesus in His entire attitude towards the law. Read Mathew 5:17-48 carefully, and you will find that again and again Jesus contrasts His new, deeper, and more spiritual interpretations of the law with what the law had always meant to Israel.

With regard to the fourth commandment specifically, Jesus taught, "The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that His appearance on earth for our redemption would have an effect upon the Sabbath and its observance. His coming did not change that abiding feature of the fourth commandment which pro-

duces a rhythm in the life of many by alternating six days of labor and one of rest. But it did change the relative position of the work days as over against the rest day. The whole Old Testament looked towards the coming of Christ, therefore the day of rest came at the end of the period of man's struggle. That the Sabbath should be the seventh day, and not the third or the first or any other day, was essential to the symbolism of the Old Testament. But must the New Testament church still look forward to the coming of Christ in humiliation? No, it must not, and it may not. He has come, and has thus changed the relation of the days. Our life is in Him, and our rest is in Him. From that life and from that rest we proceed to carry on our work as an expression of our thankfulness. Therefore our day of rest and worship is the first day of the week, and we would be denying the very Lord who bought us if we went back to the Old Testament seventh day.

All very interesting, our Seventh Day friends may say, but where do you find Scriptural authority for that change? We find it in God's own act in raising His Son from the grave on the first day of the week (John 20:1). We find it in Christ's own act of appearing repeatedly to His disciples on the first day of the week (John 20:19, 26; Luke 24:36). We find it in God's act and the glorified Saviour's act in sending the Holy Spirit on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1). We find it in the uniform practice of the apostles to meet for Christian worship and instruction on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). We find it in the revelation which the Lord gave to John on Patmos on the Lord's day which was the first day of the week (Rev. 1:10).

Thus has the Church of Jesus Christ of all ages, with the exception of a few Sabbatarians and Seventh Day Adventists and Seventh Day

Baptists, caught the New Testament meaning of the fourth commandment. Christ had given His church the promise that the Holy Spirit would lead the church in all truth. The Seventh Day Adventists ignore this Spirit-led development entirely, ignore the plain teaching of the Apostles, ignore the plain leading of God Himself in causing those great events to take place on the first day of the week, and ignore the clear distinction between the Old and New Testaments.

3. Eschatological Errors

Seventh Day Adventists teach that between death and the resurrection, the soul sleeps or is in a state of complete unconsciousness. This is not a new error. Within a few hundred years after Christ there was a small group in Arabia that denied the conscious existence of the soul after death. During the Middle Ages there was a fairly large group that held to the same theory; they were called Psychopannychians. Today the same thing is taught by the Russellites, also known as "Jehovah's Witnesses."

Their argument runs like this: Immortality is not inherent in man but is a gift of God through Jesus Christ. When man sinned, the sentence of death passed upon him. Christ abolished death and brought life and immortality to light for those who believe in Him. But immortality is not conferred upon believers until the resurrection day. The souls of all the dead, believers and unbelievers alike, are in a state of unconscious existence until Christ returns.

This involves several positions which are directly contrary to the words of Scripture. Jesus taught plainly that both believers and unbelievers shall continue to exist forever.

Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous unto life eternal." The life and immortality that Jesus brought to light are blessed immortality and eternal life. And as regards the direct question of the state of the souls of the dead, Paul has a word on that which should be conclusive. In II Corinthians 5:8 he speaks of what awaits him when he is "absent from the body," and describes it as a "being present with the Lord." Surely soul sleep could not be thus described! And in Philippians 1:23 he writes: "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." Could soul sleep be described as a being with Christ, and could he possibly say that unconscious existence is better than this life.

4. The Inspiration of Mrs. Ellen G. White

For all their boast about Scripture being their final and only authority, Seventh Day Adventists have made themselves guilty of a very serious attack upon the Scriptures by their acknowledgment of the claims of Mrs. White.

Who is she?

What claims did she make for herself?

What place have her followers accorded her?

Among the followers of William Miller who were deeply disappointed when Christ did not return to earth on October 22, 1844, was a seventeen-year-old girl named Ellen Harmon. When she was nine years old a playmate had struck her with a stone, knocking her unconscious for three weeks. From that time on her nervous system was weak, and she was in such poor health that she could not attend school.

October 22, 1844. was such a bitter disappointment to her that her health failed rapidly and she seemed sinking into death. In December of that year, however, while she was kneeling in prayer with four other women, she had the first of a long series of visions by which she claimed to receive divine revelations. During a long life span, she exerted the most powerful influence on Seventh Day Adventist believers. A group of them who refused to accept her visions as inspired broke off from the parent body and were organized as The Church of God. In 1846 she was married to Rev. James White, the founder of Western Health Reform Institute and Battle Creek College at Battle Creek, Michigan. She died in 1915.

Just as in the matter of adapting the fourth commandment to present day conditions, the Seventh Day Adventists have had to resort to some very adroit maneuvers to maintain their claim to the inspiration of Mrs. White and yet not run contrary to what they say is their cardinal principle, namely, the unique authority of the Scriptures. This much is clear from Mrs. White's writings: She claims that God has given her supernatural revelations. If these revelations go no farther than the truth which God gave us in His Word, they are entirely unnecessary, and God does not do unnecessary things. If it is contended that they reveal truths which are not contained in the Word, then they are a denial of the sufficiency of the Word. Whatever Seventh Day Adventists may now say to defend themselves against the charge of placing something else on a level with the Bible, it cannot be disputed that Mrs. White claimed to be a "voice, a messenger bearing communications from God to His people." A former minister in her denomination, the Rev. D. M. Canright, says:

"Mrs. E. G. White, wife of the late Elder White, leader of the Seventh Day Adventists, claims to be

divinely inspired as were the prophets of the Bible. This claim is accepted by the whole denomination. They defend her inspiration as eagerly as they do that of the Bible. Year after year, in their State and General Conferences, ironclad resolutions have been unanimously adopted, endorsing her revelations in the strongest manner."

It is not necessary for us to consider the many inconsistencies and changes of front that are found in Mrs. White's writings. Even if they were all consistent with one another, they would still stand condemned, and her denomination stands condemned, by the fact that they claim divine inspiration. In fact, their own mouth condemns them, for in their advertising matter distributed to the gullible public they profess to stand on the basis of the Scriptures as the only rule of doctrine and life.

Anyone who claims divine inspiration partakes of the nature of the antichrist for we read of "that man of sin" in II Thessalonians 2:4 that "he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."

5. Salvation Through the Devil!

The heading is enough to send chills down the back of any sensitive Christian. Yet Seventh Day Adventist doctrine teaches just exactly that.

This is such an unusual charge to lay at the door of a group of people calling themselves Christians that it should not be entertained for even a moment without literal proof for it. Here is the proof, taken from Mrs. White's "The Great Controversy," page 658. It occurs in a chapter on "Desolation of the Earth." She has been describing events that shall take place during the last days. On the previous page she had written: "At the coming of Christ the

wicked are blotted from the face of the whole earth,—consumed with the spirit of His mouth, and destroyed by the brightness of His glory. Christ takes His people to the city of God, and the earth is emptied of its inhabitants.” Then follows a statement describing the desolation of the world, and then comes the paragraph which teaches salvation through the devil:

“Now the event takes place, foreshadowed in the last solemn service of the day of atonement. When the ministration in the holy of holies has been completed, and the sins of Israel had been removed from the sanctuary by virtue of the blood of the sin-offering, then the scape-goat was presented alive before the Lord; and in presence of the congregation the high priest confessed over him ‘all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat.’ In like manner, when the work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary has been completed, then in the presence of God and heavenly angels, and the host of the redeemed, the sins of God’s people will be placed upon Satan; he will be declared guilty of all the evil which he has caused them to commit. And as the scape-goat was sent away into a land not inhabited, so Satan will be banished to the desolate earth, an uninhabited and dreary wilderness.”

We are charitable enough to believe that Mrs. White and her followers did not intend to think of Satan as saviour, but this is nevertheless a legitimate conclusion to draw from her words. It illustrates their careless and irreverent method of Bible study, and the soul-destroying conclusions to which that method can lead. The paragraph implies that the atonement was not made upon the cross, for if Satan is going to bear our sins in the judgment day, then Christ did not bear them on the cross nineteen hundred years ago. The fact

is that the Seventh Day Adventists have stated in their “Fundamental Principles”: “We dissent from the view that the atonement was made upon the cross as is generally held.” That puts them entirely outside the pale of biblical Christianity. Hebrews 9:28 says, “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many.” The sin-bearer and the Saviour must be one and the same person. And that sin-bearer is not Satan, as the Seventh Day Adventists teach, but the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

6. Deceptive Propaganda

Our final stricture against Seventh Day Adventism is not a specific doctrine which is contradicted by a specific Scripture passage, but is the deceptive nature of their propaganda, which is through and through unscriptural. I have received their colporteurs into my home on the strength of their statement that they were distributing evangelical literature, and they have steadfastly refused to acknowledge that they were Seventh Day Adventist agents. In China I have met their colporteurs, and they always insisted that they were spreading the truth which is acknowledged by all evangelical believers. If their doctrine is the same as other evangelical Christians, why is it then that they almost invariably work among Christians among whom they try to stir up dissatisfaction, rather than among raw heathen who still know nothing of the gospel?

In the light of the serious divergences described above (and there are many others) what becomes of the statement which they broadcast in their propaganda literature:

“Seventh-Day Adventism is based solidly upon the fundamentals of evangelical Christianity, upon the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” To the grand and broad outline of Chris-

tian truth as taught by such mighty men of God as Luther, John and Charles Wesley, Spurgeon, Moody, and others of that type, Seventh-Day Adventists adhere practically in its entirety."

If they wish to accept Mrs. White's interpretations and prophecies, that is their privilege in a free country, but they have no right to claim affinity with Luther and Wesley and Spurgeon and Moody, and they have forfeited all right to the name of evangelical Christians. To them apply the words spoken by the prophet of God:

"Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you; they make you vain; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord . . . I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran; I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied." (Jeremiah 23:16 and 21.)

DR. JOHN C. DE KORNE.

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