

The Seventh-Day Adventists

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded in the 1860s in the USA. There are about 14 million Adventists worldwide. The Church is heavily involved in education with almost 7,000 schools around the world and over 100 colleges and universities. It also operates 785 medical facilities.

The movement traces its origins to the teachings of the American preacher William Miller (1782 – 1849), who taught that the second coming, or "advent" of Jesus was imminent. Unfortunately Jesus did not appear on the day in 1844 promised by Miller: it came to be known as the Great Disappointment

Miller was followed by Ellen G. White (1827-1915) who taught that Jesus had indeed come again, but not to Earth. Jesus had actually returned to the "most holy place" of the heavenly temple. Jesus, she said, had started to "cleanse" the heavenly temple, and when he had done that, he would come to start cleansing the Earth. She also taught that the Sabbath should be held on Saturday.

Seventh-day Adventists differ from the mainstream Christian denominations in four areas of belief: their teaching on the Sabbath day, their doctrine of the heavenly sanctuary, their doctrine of the second coming and their view on the status of the writings of Ellen White. They teach that salvation is entirely by grace through faith — even though in earlier days that particular doctrine was hotly debated among them.

The Sabbath

The Seventh-day Adventist Church keeps the Sabbath from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday, because God set apart the seventh day of creation week to be a day of rest and a memorial of creation. The importance of doing this was revealed to Ellen G. White in a vision in 1847 in which she saw the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments in the heavenly tabernacle. The fourth commandment, concerning the Sabbath, was bathed in light. White realised that while all the Ten Commandments should be kept, her vision meant that the teaching about the Sabbath was particularly important, and that humanity should follow God's example in Creation and rest on the seventh day of the week — Saturday.

The Saturday Sabbath brought the Seventh-day Adventists into conflict with both commercial interests and other Christians. Early Seventh-day Adventists made things more difficult for themselves by labelling Christians who kept the Sabbath on Sundays apostates.

Adventists believe that at some time in the future the Sabbath versus Sunday question will become a key issue in Christianity. Then Christians will have to make a choice as to which side they are on. It is this decision, choosing to obey God or not to obey Him, that will eventually determine who receives the mark of the beast.

Families join together on Friday evenings to celebrate the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day for rest, for Bible study and worship, both in church and in private. It is also a time to visit the sick and to work for the salvation of souls. Children are expected to attend Sabbath School.

Worship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Adventist worship is much like that of other Protestant churches. Communion services normally take place four times a year. Only unfermented grape juice and unleavened bread are used for communion, and any Christian may take communion, not just Church members. Communion services include "the ordinance of foot-washing" which conveys a message of forgiveness, acceptance, assurance, and solidarity, primarily from Christ to the believer, but also between the believers themselves. It also symbolises purification: cleansing of the heart.

The Heavenly Sanctuary

Adventists believe that sanctuary of the Old Testament was a man-made version of the Temple created by God in Heaven: the place where God lives. They believe that Christ, as high priest of the new covenant, ministers in the heavenly sanctuary.

The heavenly sanctuary has two areas — the holy place and the most holy place. When Christ ascended from Earth to Heaven He went into the holy place and began His intercessory ministry.

In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, Christ entered the most holy place to cleanse it before His second coming to Earth. This cleansing, they say, is typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. In that typical service the sanctuary was cleansed with the blood of animal sacrifices, but the heavenly things are purified with the perfect sacrifice of the blood of Jesus: He is both priest and sacrifice.

Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary is a work of investigative judgment. He examines and reveals to the Father and to heavenly intelligences the life records of those who have died, blotting out the sins recorded against believers. Thus He reveals who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore worthy to have a part in the resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ and therefore ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment, it is taught, vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus.

The completion of this ministry of Christ will mark the close of human probation before the Second Advent.

Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit is working on earth, through the remnant, to cleanse God's people. The remnant is the church. It has the duty of keeping faith in Jesus and obedience to God's commandments alive in this time when many people have abandoned true faith.

Millennialism

Adventists believe that the Second Coming of Christ will happen soon. On that day the righteous dead will be resurrected and taken to heaven, together with the righteous living. The unrighteous will die. The Second Coming will be followed by a period of a thousand years (the Millennium) during which the earth will be deserted except for Satan and his helpers, the righteous will live with God in Heaven and the wicked dead will be judged.

After the Millennium, Christ with his saints and the Holy City will return to earth, the unrighteous dead will then be resurrected, and, together with Satan and his helpers, destroyed by fire — annihilated —leaving behind a universe without sin or sinners where God and humanity will live together in Paradise.

Death

Adventists do not believe that people go to Heaven or Hell when they die. They believe that the dead remain unconscious until the return of Christ in judgement. This doctrine, formulated in the middle of the 19th century, enabled the movement to argue against spiritualism, which was very popular at that time. Adventists taught that since the dead stayed dead until the resurrection there was no surviving soul or spirit for spiritualist mediums to contact, and therefore they were simply peddling superstition.

They will use the term "conditional immortality" meaning that all human beings die at the end of their life but those who give their life to Christ will be resurrected to a new and immortal life. Sinners and unbelievers die for eternity.

The Bible

The Seventh-day Adventist Church puts the Bible at the centre of its faith. However, they do not accept verbal inspiration — it is the meaning rather than the actual words or letters, that is inspired.

The writings of Ellen G White

Prophecy is seen as an identifying mark of the remnant church. Adventists believe this gift was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White, whom they regard as the Lord's messenger. They

see her writings as "a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction." However, these writings are seen not as infallible but as a wise guide to interpreting scripture and living a Christian life.

Healthy living

Adventists are instructed that as their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit it is their religious duty to observe the laws of health, both for their own well-being and for more efficient service to God. They follow the food rules laid down in Leviticus 11. A vegetarian diet is recommended but not insisted upon. Adventists do not use alcohol, tobacco or recreational drugs.

Adventists were responsible for the popularisation of breakfast cereal; the Adventist layman John Harvey Kellogg invented cornflakes as a replacement for eggs and bacon.

War

The Adventist movement has been strongly pacifist from the beginning. In obedience to the 6th Commandment they will not take a combatant role in warfare. This is the only area where Adventists are likely to clash with government as they regard it as a sacred responsibility to be good citizens.

Question For Discussion

1. Would you classify the Seventh-Day Adventist Church as a Christian denomination?