

The History of the Seventh Day Adventist Church

Modern Seventh Day Adventism traces its origins back to the early 1800's to Mr. William Miller (1782-1849) of Low Hampton, New York. Mr. Miller had converted from deism to Christianity in 1816 and became a Baptist. He was an avid reader, dedicated to God's word, and sought to reconcile apparent biblical difficulties raised by deists. He relied heavily on the Cruden's Concordance in his studies and developed a focus on the imminent return of Jesus. He began preaching at the age of 50.

The time was right. America was hot with discussions on the return of Christ. As a result, many thousands (called Millerites) accepted his idea that Jesus would return in the year covering 1843-1844. He had arrived at this date based upon a study of Daniel 8:14 which says, "And he said to me, "For 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored." He interpreted the 2300 evenings and mornings to be years and counted forward from 457 BC when the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem was given (Dan. 9:24-25).¹ When his initial predictions failed, he adjusted his findings to conclude that Jesus would return on March 21, 1844 and then later on October 22, 1844. After these too failed, Miller quit promoting his ideas on Jesus' return and the "Millerites" broke up.

On the morning following the "Great Disappointment" of October 22, 1844, a Mr. Hiram Edson claimed to have seen a vision. He said that he saw Jesus standing at the altar of heaven and concluded that Miller had been right about the time, but wrong about the place. In other words, Jesus' return was not to earth, but a move into the heavenly sanctuary as is referenced in Heb. 8:1-2.

Mr. Joseph Bates (1792-1872), a retired sea captain and a convert to "Millerism" then began to promote the idea of Jesus moving into the heavenly sanctuary. He published a pamphlet which greatly influenced James (1821-1881) and Ellen White (1827-1915). It is these three who were the driving force behind the SDA movement.

Numerous reports state that Ellen G. White (1827-1915) saw visions from an early age. Such was the case shortly after the Great Disappointment. Mrs. White claimed to see in a vision of a narrow path where an angel was guiding Adventists. Subsequent visions resulted in interpretations of the three angels in Rev. 14:6-11 as being 1843-1844 as the hour of God's judgment; the fall of Babylon signified by Adventists leaving various churches, and admonitions against Sunday worship.

1849 - First paper, the Present Truth, was printed in Middletown, Conn.

1850 - First issue of the Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, printed in Paris, Maine.

1860 - Name of Seventh-day Adventist adopted by the church.

1863 - First General Conference and formation of the SDA church on May 21, 1863.

1871 - First college opened which became Andrews University.

1871 - J. N. Andrews sent to Switzerland as a missionary.

1885 - Missionary work begun in Australia.

1915 - Ellen G. White dies on July 16, at St. Helena, CA.

1941 - Opening of Theological Seminary at Takoma Park.

1942 - Voice of Prophecy radio show begins broadcasting coast to coast.

1950 - Faith for Today TV show begins.

1955 - SDA membership hits 1 million.

1986 - SDA membership hits 5 million.²

Today, the SDA church is very evangelical with mission efforts world wide, numerous publications, and many educational facilities. It claims over 8 million members world wide and is growing rapidly with its educational, TV, Radio, and publication based outreaches.

Notes:

Kingdom of the Cults, by Walter Martin, Bethany House Publishers, Minn. Minnesota, 1977.

1. Religious Bodies in America, by F. E. Mayer, 4th ed., Concordia Publishing House, Saint Louis, Miss. 1961, page 439.

2. Taken from The Seventh Day Adventists: A History, by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Hippocrene Books, New York, 1988.

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Affirmations

1. The Bible is inspired and the word of God.
2. Trinitarian: The Father, Son, Holy Spirit are all one God in three persons.
3. Jesus is God and has always existed with the Father.
4. The Holy Spirit is a person.
5. Jesus' sacrifice was vicarious.
6. Salvation is by grace, not works.
7. Jesus rose from the dead physically in his glorified body.
8. Jesus ascended bodily into heaven.
9. Baptism is by immersion
10. The literal, visible return of Jesus.
11. Jesus will return to set up a millennial kingdom. They are Premillennial.
12. Literal six day creation, not long periods.

Denials

1. Denies the doctrine of predestination
2. Denies baptism by sprinkling
3. Denies infant baptism.
4. Denies the immortality of the soul.
5. Denies the eternity of hell fire.
6. Denies any use of alcohol (as a drink) or tobacco.

Aberrant

1. Our sins will ultimately be placed on Satan - *The Great Controversy*, p. 422, 485.
2. Jesus is Michael the Archangel.
3. Worship must be done on Saturday (the Sabbath).
4. On October 22, 1844 Jesus entered the second and last phase of his atoning work.
5. Investigative Judgment - the fate of all people will be decided based upon this event in the future.
6. The dead do not exist anymore -- soul sleep.
7. The wicked are annihilated.
8. Ellen G. White, the "founder" of Seventh Day Adventism, was a messenger from God gifted with the spirit of prophecy.
9. There is a sanctuary in heaven where Jesus carries out his mediatorial work.