

Who Are



the

Seventh- day



Adventists?

JOHN SEAMAN

Copyright © 1998

by Review and Herald® Publishing Association

International copyright secured

The author assumes full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

12 11 1009 9 876

R&H Cataloging Service

Seaman, John G. 1963 Who are the Seventh-day Adventists?

1. Seventh-day Adventists. I. Title.

286.732

ISBN 13: 978-0-8280-1350-5

Contents

Before You Begin

Chapter 1 Where Did the Seventh-day Adventists Come From?

Chapter 2 What Do Seventh-day Adventists Believe?

Chapter 3 What Are the People Like?

Chapter 4 What Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church Like?

Chapter 5 What Is the Seventh-day Adventist Mission?

Before You Finish

Appendix A A Brief Scriptural Summary of Selected Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs

Appendix B 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists

Before You Begin . . .

IF YOU WOULD ASK 100 people on the street the question Who are the Seventh-day Adventists? you would probably get responses ranging from the humorous to the absurd to the inaccurate. Replies might include (which I've heard through the years):

“I think they're a rock group.”

“Aren't they the people who don't believe in Jesus?”

“They don't believe in the Bible. They have some prophet they follow.”

“Aren't those the people who eat only vegetables and soybeans?”

“They're legalists. They believe you're saved by the good works you do.”

“I think they have something to do with the Jewish people.”

“Stay away from them. I hear they're a cult!”

We certainly cannot blame these people for their candid responses, because they probably have never taken the time to learn who Seventh-day Adventist Christians really are. They may never have read a book outlining what Seventh-day Adventists stand for and what their beliefs are. But those simple statements, however candid, certainly reflect who Seventh-day Adventists are not.

So who *are* they really? Are Seventh-day Adventists some strange group with weird ideas? Do their members live in communes? Do their leaders make bizarre predictions about the future? Or are they an assembly of Christians with a message and lifestyle that might be worth a closer look?

As we begin this study together, it's my hope that you'll get a clearer picture of Seventh-day Adventists and their convictions. Then you'll be able to make an intelligent decision for yourself. At this point you can pat yourself on the back for going right to the source and not taking the word of the “experts” on the street.

CHAPTER 1

Where Did the Seventh-day Adventists Come From?

“MOMMY, WHERE DID I COME FROM?” The question can strike terror in the hearts of unprepared parents, or it can bring a smile to the faces of those who have been waiting for an inquisitive youngster to raise it.

Where did we come from? It's a question that has been debated in lecture halls and universities, and by great philosophers. People want to know where they came from and why they're here. So the debates continue.

Where did the Seventh-day Adventists come from? History records many great organizations and movements that were created almost overnight, but this was not the case with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Rather than being an immediate creation, the church was formed by a progressive series of historical events. Through much study its pioneers came to a deeper understanding of Scripture.

Seventh-day Adventism's historical roots go all the way back to William Miller, who was born February 15, 1782, in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Raised in a religious home in northern New York State, Miller was the oldest of 16 children. As a child he was regularly loaded into a hard-case buggy and pulled to church by the family horse. His grandfather and two uncles served as Baptist ministers.

When he was 30 years old, Miller achieved the status of captain in the War of 1812. He was brilliant and well read but had become disenchanted with the Christianity of his childhood and so had chosen to adopt deism. This popular philosophy of the time claimed that God had no genuine, personal involvement in the affairs of our world. It taught that He had simply set the world in space and left it to its own devising.

After honorably serving his country, Miller returned to his farmhouse in Low Hampton, New York. As one might expect, deism didn't ultimately satisfy the longing in his heart for real meaning in life. Sometimes he attended the local Baptist church, but he still had deep questions within his heart.

In 1816 he quietly began a thorough, systematic investigation of Scripture. He studied on his own, without the help of religious teachers, using his Bible and a Cruden's concordance to look up texts for comparison.

His initial interest in prophecy led him to discover Bible truths that differed from the popular opinions of the day. However, these truths actually seemed minor in comparison to the conclusion that he reached after two years of meticulous study. He came to the stunning conclusion that Jesus Christ would return around the year 1843, about 25 years hence. (The date was subsequently revised until October 22, 1844, was settled on.)

This major conviction, the soon coming of Christ, radically departed from the common consensus. Popular teaching insisted that there would be 1,000 years of peace and happiness in the world *before* Christ returned to earth. Being aware of this teaching, Miller went back to his deliberation to make sure he was correct in his assumptions. The more he studied, the more convinced he became.

On August 13, 1831, this 49-year-old farmer felt the strong conviction that he should share his biblical discoveries. He slowly made his way to a private grove of trees, where he knelt in prayer and wrestled with his overwhelming conviction. He wasn't a preacher. He didn't want to preach. Finally, to settle the turmoil in his soul, Miller made a deal with God. He promised God that if someone should invite him to preach, he would. However, he wouldn't solicit any speaking engagements. He left the grove confident: Who would ask a farmer, unschooled in religious thought, to preach?

Miller returned to his house and relaxed in his living room. About 30 minutes later he heard the sound of a horse's hooves clapping up the road. Soon Irving Guilford, Miller's nephew, was knocking on the oak door. Irving had but one purpose in mind—to invite Miller to share his biblical views with the Dresden Baptist Church, seven miles away. Miller reluctantly agreed to go preach, keeping the promise he'd made with God in the grove.

And Miller didn't stop preaching! During the next 13 years Miller preached 4,000 times, in at least 500 towns. More than 200 clergy accepted his views on Christ's soon coming, and estimates of the number of believers who agreed with him range from 50,000 to 100,000. These followers of Miller's views were—and are—often referred to as “Millerites.” This extraordinary sequence of events is recorded in history as the Millerite movement.

What was Miller's message? It was the simple interpretation of a prophetic chapter in Scripture. Taking the prophecy found in Daniel 8:14, which said: “Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed,” Miller applied the biblical principle that in

prophecy a day can symbolize one year. According to Miller, the 2300 days spoken of in Daniel meant 2300 years.

Miller wasn't the first student of Scripture to arrive at such a conclusion. Records show that a number of other Bible scholars, centuries before Miller, held to the belief that these biblical time prophecies referred to years, not literal days. One of the most notable was Sir Isaac Newton. In addition to investigating the laws of gravity, he was fascinated with Bible prophecy and wrote much on the subject.

In the early nineteenth century the understanding of how to interpret the time prophecies of the Bible was widespread. Many teachers of God's Word believed that some fulfillment of the 2300 days spoken of in Daniel would soon take place.

Through biblical and historical study, Miller was able to determine the starting date for the 2300day prophecy as 457 B.C. When adding 2,300 years to this date, he ultimately concluded that October 22, 1844, would be the date for the cleansing of the sanctuary.*

In the popular religious thinking of Miller's day, the term *sanctuary* represented the world. And how else could the world be cleansed but by fire? And if the world was going to be cleansed by fire, then it must mean that Jesus was going to come!

You can imagine the excitement of the Millerites! Those who believed Miller eagerly awaited the coming of the Lord on October 22, 1844. There were those who had lost loved ones just months, weeks, and even days before. They waited with eager expectation to see them again. But Jesus didn't return as Miller and his followers expected. Needless to say, the Millerites endured great disappointment. Some left the movement, starting their own churches. Others abandoned Miller's ideas altogether and returned to their former places of worship. Some Millerites were so wrapped up in the sensationalism of the movement that they wouldn't listen to anything else Miller subsequently said.

This sudden dramatic turn of events dealt a hard blow to Miller. He had never intended that the movement be anything more than a search for truth. He had suffered scorn and ridicule while presenting his teachings. He had listened to the scoffers and had seen the cartoons mocking his message. But now his own friends had deserted him.

However, a small group was trying to obey the Word of God and continue the search for truth. These "former" Millerites went back to the study of the Bible and saw where Miller had made his errors. The dating had indeed been correct, they concluded, but the assumptions about what

would happen had been wrong. After renewed study of Scripture, they were even more convinced than ever that Jesus was coming soon, but they were equally certain that the actual date of His coming could not be determined. They discovered there would not be 1,000 years of peace before Jesus' arrival. They believed instead that the world would become increasingly wicked and that Jesus would come to put an end to the unchecked sin in the world. Then the millennium spoken of in the last book of the New Testament would begin.

As the small group of Bible students discovered that Miller was correct in his chronological conclusions, but wrong in the event, they also uncovered other truths in the process. One of these affirmations was their rediscovery of the biblical Sabbath—the seventh day of the week. The Seventh-day Sabbath had been kept by different groups and individuals since Creation, but now it was unearthed in the context of Christ's second advent.

Joseph Bates, a retired sea captain who had enjoyed an adventurous and active career, was one of the early Sabbathkeepers who also believed in the soon coming of Jesus. He actively promoted his views regarding the biblical Sabbath and served as a member of the committee that would call for the first "Advent General Conference."

Many other Adventist "pioneers" sought further truth from God's Word during the mid-1800s.

Hiram Edson's study of Scripture led him to understand where Miller had made his errors in biblical interpretation and thus why Christ hadn't returned in 1844. He saw that the sanctuary Miller preached about did not represent the earth but rather referred to the ministry of Jesus in heaven. Edson found evidence from the Bible that Christ had indeed begun a new phase of His ministry and the prophecy had, therefore, been fulfilled!

As many struggled with their disappointment following October 22, 1844, God chose to give them encouragement through a 17-year-old girl, Ellen Harmon. While praying with a small group of friends in Portland, Maine, she felt God's power and presence in vision. She saw that they truly were on the right path of Bible study and that as long as they kept their focus on Jesus, He would lead and guide them. She shared what she had seen with others, who were indeed encouraged. One of those who heard her was a young preacher named James White. He and Ellen eventually married, and together they exerted a strong influence in the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In late 1846 James and Ellen White began keeping the Seventh-day

Sabbath themselves. They, along with Joseph Bates and Hiram Edson, led out in studying Scripture and promoting their doctrinal understanding based on God's Word. They were not alone, of course. Hundreds of others were likewise sharing what they had learned. In 1848 the first "Sabbath Conference" was convened in Rocky Hill, Connecticut. It offered a time of prayer and Bible study.

As belief in the lasting importance of the biblical Sabbath grew, so did the need to share it with others. Several papers and magazines were published, among them the *Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, whose first issue was published in 1849. (This periodical continues as the weekly *Adventist Review*.) In 1853 Sabbath schools, patterned after Sunday schools (which had become popular in America in 1791), were organized in the Adventist churches.

As the group of those who believed the Sabbath and the Second Coming grew, it became apparent that they could carry out their mission more efficiently if they would organize. The first organizational step would be to pick a name for this growing movement. After many names were discussed, the appellation Seventh-day Adventist was chosen. It clearly described the denomination—those who keep the Seventh-day Sabbath and look forward to Jesus' soon coming.

In 1863 delegates from the various "conferences" assembled together in Michigan and voted a list of officers to oversee the new denomination. The attendees asked James White to serve as president, but he turned down the nomination. John Byington, a former Wesleyan pastor, was then elected as the first president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The organizational process was pretty much complete.

Miller didn't discover all the truth that needed to be found, but he did take a giant step forward in understanding of the Bible. Miller's teachings helped to change the religious landscape forever. Millions of people today, across denominational lines, believe we cannot expect 1,000 years of peace before Jesus comes. Many churches also teach that the world is getting too wicked and will end soon. Is that so unusual? Well, it is if you realize that before William Miller began his preaching, you might have been disfellowshipped from your church for saying that Jesus was coming soon. Those who believe in the soon coming of Jesus are today called Adventists. So in some respect, there are many "Adventists" in churches across the world today. They owe a thank-you to William Miller for his study of Scripture.

This has been an abbreviated history of the formation of the Seventh-day

End of product sample

This product is available at:

AdventistBookCentre.com.au



Australia