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Untangling The Eschatology of Seventh-day Adventism: Part 1

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Recently Dr. Freddy Davis wrote an excellent article explaining the five different presuppositional views for interpreting the book of Revelation, and eschatology in general, held by various evangelical Christian interpreters (Read it here: <https://www.marketfaith.org/2026/06/revelations-presuppositions/>). He pointed out that most Christians assume that the position they have been taught is the only one that most other Christians hold as well.

In this two part article we will examine an eschatological perspective that few Christians know about. It is that of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA). Eschatology is the study of the end-times, and most evangelical Christians are fascinated by the subject. To begin our look at SDA end times beliefs, we will take a look at the various positions held by Christian theologians.

The diverse interpretative positions Davis described included the following. First is Historic Premillennialism. This view asserts that there will be a future literal 1000 year reign of Christ after His second coming, which will come after the tribulation. The length of the tribulation is not specifically defined by all, but does occur before the post-tribulation rapture. Then comes judgment. It also maintains that Israel and the church are one unified body of Christ.

The second view is Dispensational Premillennialism. This is the perspective that is most common among current day American evangelicals. It teaches an unusual dispensational framework for history. It relies on a strict literal interpretation of Scripture and a prophetic distinction between Israel and the Church. Most who hold this view also assert that a pre-tribulational rapture of the

saved will occur before a seven year tribulation, the physical second coming of Christ, His 1000 year earthly reign, and the final judgment.

The third millennial view is Postmillennialism. This position is rarely held today by many evangelicals. Its primary assertion is that we are already in the symbolic millennium which essentially began after Jesus' resurrection. It assumes that the world will, over time, be completely evangelized which will usher in an era of Christian peace and security. After that, Jesus will return to claim His kingdom.

The fourth primary view is Amillennialism. This perspective, which is still widely held, takes the view that the book of Revelation is essentially apocalyptic literature and should not be read literally. It says that most of the images symbolically represent persons and events occurring in the first century AD. It denies a literal millennium but sees Christ's return as happening at some undetermined time in the future.

The fifth perspective is Preterism. This view contends that nearly all of the prophetic statements in the New Testament were fulfilled in the first century after Christ's death and resurrection, most by AD 70 or AD 136. Those were the dates of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and the crushing of the Bar Kokbha revolt by the Romans. Very few serious evangelical scholars accept this view. However, small groups of passionate adherents occasionally attend Christian conventions and visit churches to sell books and discuss their position with those who will listen. **[Writer's note:** I have encountered these kinds of zealous Full Preterists several times at different locations. I asked them why they spend all their

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time trying to convince fellow Christians of this peculiar doctrine instead of trying to win lost people to accept Christ as Savior and Lord. They really didn't have a good answer except to say that they wanted people to know that Jesus had already returned.]

All that being said, there is another eschatological scheme with which most Christians are totally unfamiliar, yet believed by millions around the world. This came to my mind again when I recently received a "Current Resident" invitation flier in the mail asking me to attend a three night series of free presentations near my home. The theme was: *Revelation Today: The Future Unfolding - An Incredible Journey Through Bible Prophecy*. The three night presentations included: 1. Prophecy's Grand Finale; 2. The Unseen Enemy At Your Door; and 3. Crossroads of Final Conflict.

The invitation flier was brilliantly colored with pictures portraying what appear to be prophetic images from Scripture and current history. It is quite similar to covers you see on end times books written by Christian writers available at Christian bookstores. However, the invitation never explicitly revealed who was behind these presentations or what their theological views may be. It did have a few clues that I was able to discern. For instance, it had the return address for "It is Written" as well as that phrase trade mark logo placed several times on the flier. *It is Written* is an international television ministry associated with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA). Also it had a web address of RevelationToday.com.

When I visited that website, I was further convinced of these presentations' relationship to the SDA. The main speaker was John Bradshaw, a former New Zealand-born pastor of a Seventh-day Adventist congregation in College

Place, Washington. Since 2010 he has been the director and primary speaker of the *It is Written* television ministry, which is clearly associated with the SDA. It is a bit odd, however, that when you visit the *It is Written* website, or watch their TV program, they rarely, if ever, mention their SDA connection. The same is true of *The Future Unfolding* promotional fliers. You have to wonder why a Christian ministry is so reluctant to reveal its theological and ecclesiastical roots.

I think part of it has to do with SDA peculiar eschatological ideas. Yet, when many Christians see the promotional material for *The Future Unfolding* programs, they might be attracted. Why? Because a lot of Christians are very curious about end times questions (some are obsessed). So they are excited to go hear another "prophecy lecture" that will help them know when the second coming is going to take place. However, if the SDA groups said out loud what their belief sources are, most Christians would reject them outright. So, they just don't say who or what they are until people come and hear the whole story. Frankly, it is a bit deceiving and, I believe, unethical. So just what are those peculiar beliefs?

Before we dig into the unusual eschatological beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I want to make something clear. I do not regard the SDA as a pseudo-Christian cult on the same heretical level as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Jehovah's Witnesses, or Christian Science. Those groups, and others, are thoroughly unorthodox on the basic essential doctrines of the Historic Christian faith. The same is not true of the SDA. Though the SDA has some unconventional doctrinal positions, none of them violate the essential doctrines of Historic Christianity. This is also true regarding SDA eschatology. Members of the SDA can be truly saved Christians whom we should respect as fellow followers of Jesus. We may disagree with

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them on this and other doctrines, but on the essentials we are in agreement.

In order to learn SDA eschatology one must understand the SDA's perspective on divine revelation. The SDA has traditionally affirmed the same basic authority as most evangelical denominations for the Bible. Its Fundamental Beliefs #I states:

The Holy Scriptures 1 - The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration. The inspired authors spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. In this Word, God has committed to humanity the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the supreme, authoritative, and the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the definitive revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history. (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 30:5, 6; Isa. 8:20; John 17:17; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20, 21.) (https://szu.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/28_Beliefs.pdf)

That statement on Scripture corresponds well with those of other evangelical denominations and groups. Nonetheless, the SDA also regards the writings of one of its primary co-founders, Ellen G. White (November 26, 1827 - July 16, 1915 - age 87 years), as divinely inspired interpretations of the Scriptures. It refers to her as the "Spirit of Prophecy" from Revelation 22:9, and derives most of its distinctive doctrinal teachings from her books. As its Fundamental Beliefs #18 states:

The Gift of Prophecy. The Scriptures testify that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and we believe it was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings

speak with prophetic authority and provide comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction to the church. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. (Num. 12:6; 2 Chron. 20:20; Amos 3:7; Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 2:14-21; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 12:17; 19:10; 22:8, 9.) (https://szu.adventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/28_Beliefs.pdf)

According to SDA history, when she was about seventeen years old, young Ellen Gould began to have a series of divinely inspired visions. Scribes wrote down her verbalizations during her visions which later became the frameworks of her books. Those, in turn, formed the basis of SDA theology. This means SDA eschatology rests on the unique interpretations of apocalyptic Scriptures, particularly Daniel and Revelation, of Ellen G. White. However, it must be noted that a number of critics have documented evidence showing Mrs. White plagiarized much of her writings, in part or in whole, from other sources. In any case, on August 30, 1846, Ellen Gould married James S. White (1821-1881) and together they spread the message of her visions. On May 21, 1863, James and Ellen G. White officially established the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Battle Creek, Michigan.

The key points they emphasized, and that remain the distinctive elements of SDA theology, were the Seventh-day Sabbath, end times prophecy, and following Old Testament dietary laws. It is the second of these we are specifically addressing in this article. The SDA also adopted a few other doctrines rarely found among evangelical churches. Those tenets include "Soul Sleep" (or "Conditional Immortality"), "Annihilation of the Lost at Judgment", and the "Scape Goat" doctrine of the atonement.

One of the definitions of any cult or sect is that it claims its founder, prophet, leader, president, apostle, or whatever, has written a new divinely inspired extra-biblical Scripture. It may be that he or she is seen as having a divinely inspired authoritative interpretation of the Bible. The SDA's perspective on Mrs. White fits that definition of a sect.

The truth is, Mrs. White's peculiar ideas about the Sabbath and the end times were not unique to her and preceded her visions. In fact several popular religious movements in the early 19th century influenced what she received by divine revelation. Most notable was the Second Advent Movement led by a New York Baptist minister named William Miller (1782-1849). In the early 1840s, Miller began an in-depth study of the book of Daniel and came to the conclusion that the second coming of Christ would occur in 1843 (later changed to 1844). Obviously, his prediction failed, which he publicly acknowledged as the "Great Disappointment." Nonetheless, some of his Adventist colleagues, including Hiram Edson (1806-1882), argued that Miller had gotten the prophetic date right, but the divine event wrong. Instead of being time for the second coming of Christ on earth, it was reinterpreted to be the beginning of Jesus' "Investigative Judgment" in heaven, now an important SDA Doctrine.

Mrs. White also championed the doctrine that Christians are expected to keep the Fourth Commandment of the Seventh-day Sabbath, thus its denominational name. This view was actually promoted heavily by a sea captain named Joseph Bates (1792-1872). He claimed the seventh-day sabbath was the lost key to fully understanding Scripture. Today several small denominations, sects, and cults hold this view, but the SDA is by far the largest. This doctrine also has a major part to play in SDA eschatology.

In SDA theology the Sabbath is a major factor in Christian and world history. Moreover, traditional Adventists argue that Christians who worship on Sunday are in violation of God's supreme law. They argue that Roman Catholic ecclesiastical powers were controlled by the Roman Empire (especially Emperor Constantine in AD 321), who they saw as Babylon the Great in prophecy. They then changed the day of worship from the last day of the week to the first, Sunday. This was done to accommodate Christianity to the pagan Roman worshippers of the sun. SDA eschatology asserts that non-Sabbatarians in the last days will bear the "mark of the beast," which will be a future worldwide papal mandate and government enforced Sunday worship law.

"Seventh-day Adventists believe that the prophecies of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, relating to the beast, refer particularly to the papacy (i.e.: Roman Catholic Church), and that the activities and future persecuting power will come into sharp focus just before the return of our Lord in glory. It is our understanding that the Sabbath will then become a worldwide test... We believe that in the end of time, in the light of clear divine prohibition, all men will be brought face to face with a decision to accept or reject Sunday observance." (George R. Knight. Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine, Annotated Edition, Andrews University Press, 2003. p. 154)

Given the SDA position that since 1844 we are now in the "last days," it would seem this worldwide Sunday Worship Law must happen pretty soon (see next installment).

So the Whites, under the spells of Ellen's visions, mixed these unusual theological concepts into what became the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It now claims nearly 25 million members in 212 countries. The General Conference (world) headquarters is now located in Silver Spring, Maryland.

In the next installment we will continue our analysis of Seventh-day Adventist eschatology. We will look particu-

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larly at the dates Ellen G. White visualized as key to Christ's return. Most important was the 1844 "Investigative Judgment" which officially kicked off the last days count-down now in play until Jesus' return. We will also examine the significance of the Seventh-day Sabbath in SDA end times philosophy. Are you ready?