

Seventh-day Adventism

Interfaith Witness
**BELIEF
BULLETIN**
American Christianity

OFFICIAL NAME: Seventh-day Adventist Church

KEY FIGURE IN HISTORY: Ellen G. White (1827-1915)

CURRENT LEADER: Robert S. Falkenberg, President (since 1990)

HEADQUARTERS: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland

MEMBERSHIP (1996): Worldwide: 9.3 million in 42,220 churches in 230 countries. North American Division (U.S. and Canada): 858,364 in 4,706 churches.

MINISTRIES ASSOCIATED WITH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS: **Radio and Television:** "The Voice of Prophecy" (H.M.S. Richards' sons); "Amazing Facts" (Joe Crews); "It Is Written" (George Vandemann and Mark Finley). **Publications:** "Signs of the Times"; "Liberty"; "Vibrant Life"; "Adventist Review"; "Ministry." **Books:** *The Bible Story* by Arthur Maxwell and *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories* by Arthur Maxwell. **Educational Institutions:** Andrews University; Kettering College of Medical Arts; Loma Linda University.

Interfaith Witness Evangelism (IWE) defines a cult as any group that claims to be Christian yet deviates at a major point of Christian doctrine, especially regarding the nature of God and the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION: Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) affirm the Christian doctrine of the inspiration and authority of the Bible. They also affirm the trinitarian nature of the Godhead: the fatherhood of God, deity of Jesus Christ, and the Person and deity of the Holy Spirit. They teach that man was created in the image of God, but is in a fallen state of sin and in need of redemption. They affirm that Jesus was virgin-born; lived a sinless life; was crucified, dead, and buried; and rose again bodily from the grave.

These SDA beliefs are in basic agreement with historic, biblical Christianity.

Thus, IWE does not designate the SDA as a cult. However, IWE designates the SDA as a Christian *sect* because they have a number of distinctive doctrines not in accord with historic Christian faith. This Belief Bulletin highlights those doctrines and provides biblical responses.

FOUNDING OF THE SDA CHURCH: SDAs teach that the church founder, Ellen G. White, possessed a modern "spirit of prophecy." The church maintains that her visions and writings were divinely inspired interpretations of Scripture. Actually, the SDA movement was derived from several previous movements. Those movements included the Millerite Movement (Second Adventism), which had predicted the coming of Christ in 1844, and Seventh-day Sabbatarianism as taught by Joseph Bates. Mrs. White's visions combined

these unusual theological notions into a unique religious system. She established the SDA movement in the 1850s. The SDA Church was formally organized in 1861 in Battle Creek, Mich.

THE REMNANT CHURCH: The SDA Church teaches that Christianity in its original form was corrupted in the centuries after the New Testament era by apostate Roman Catholic popes. The sign of this apostasy was the shifting of the sabbath day from the seventh to the first day of the week. Throughout history, a small, faithful group of Christians has maintained true worship. Today the "remnant" church is the SDA Church.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The church consists of the body of believers in Christ. It is the body of Christ in which the gospel is proclaimed, Christians are nurtured in their faith, and gifts of the Spirit are exercised. No single organization can claim exclusive title as the true or remnant church. The church includes all the redeemed of all ages (Matt. 16:15-19; Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12-14; Eph. 1:22-23, 3:21, 4:4-13).

THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH: The SDA Church teaches that the biblical sabbath must be observed on the seventh day of the week (Friday evening until Saturday evening) in accordance with Old Testament law. It maintains that the New Testament church observed the sabbath which is the "seal" of God's law. Those Christians who worship on Sunday are in error and, in the last days, will bear the "mark of the beast," which they consider to be Sunday worship.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The New Testament church met on the "Lord's Day" (first day of the week) as a memorial of Christ's resurrection. The SDA church's insistence that sabbath-keeping is mandatory for Christians is unwarranted. The claim that Sunday worship is the mark of the beast is unfounded. Salvation and commitment to Christ are

not demonstrated by adherence to external legalities (Rom. 13:8-10, 14:4-13; 1 Cor. 16:2; Gal. 4:9-11; Col. 2:13-17).

SALVATION MAINTAINED BY WORKS: The SDA Church publicly states its belief that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. However, SDA teaching often implies that certain outward acts of righteousness are necessary to maintain one's assurance of salvation, especially observance of the seventh-day sabbath. SDA members also are expected to observe strict dietary regulations and to abstain from alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The SDA Church's emphasis on a healthy lifestyle is commendable. However, salvation is entirely a result of grace through faith in Jesus Christ as one's Savior and Lord. Good works result from one's assurance of eternal security through Christ's finished work (John 10:28-29; Rom. 8:1-2, 35-39; Eph. 1:13-14, 2:8-10; 2 Tim. 1:12).

THE INVESTIGATIVE JUDGMENT: The SDA Church teaches that the true "holy of holies" sanctuary of God is in heaven where, in 1844, Jesus began the second phase of His atoning ministry. This second phase, called the "investigative judgment," involves an examination of the dead to determine if they are worthy of being part of the first resurrection, and to determine who among the living are abiding in Christ and keeping God's commandments.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible makes no reference to the SDA's idea of two stages in God's plan of redemption. The SDA assertion that Christ entered the sanctuary in 1844 is unwarranted. Christ accomplished the totality of His redemptive work on the cross and in His resurrection. Salvation is assured by God's grace through faith in Christ (John 5:24; Rom. 5:6-10, 8:1; Col. 1:20-22; Heb. 1:3, 9:27; 1 John 5:11-13).

DEATH IS A STATE OF UNCONSCIOUS "SLEEP": The SDA Church teaches that people who have died are in an unconscious, sleep-like, state. Believers are awaiting the appearance of Christ when they will be resurrected and caught up to meet the Lord. The unrighteous wicked will be resurrected and judged after the millennium.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The Bible implies that Christians' spirits go to be with Christ at death. Believers live in a conscious, interim state with the Lord, waiting for the day when they will accompany Him at His return. At that time, they will be reunited with their resurrected glorified bodies (John 11:25-26; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Tim. 1:10).

THE SECOND COMING: The SDA Church teaches that we are in the last days. They do not set a date for the second coming, but imply that it will be soon. Bible prophecy can be understood from world history, as interpreted by Mrs. White. The SDA remnant church is proclaiming the final call for all people to prepare for the coming of Christ. They believe certain, specific signs will precede the end, especially a worldwide legal requirement for Sunday worship, the mark of the beast.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: Jesus will indeed return physically to close the age and judge mankind. Believers are to be ready at any moment for the Lord's return. Mrs. White's interpretations of the prophetic biblical writings are questionable (Matt. 24:4-7,14,32-51; Mark 13:32; Acts 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:1-11).

THE FINAL JUDGMENT: The SDA Church teaches that, after Christ's thousand-year rule, a second resurrection of those not saved will occur. Those whose names are not found in the "book of life" (unsaved) will be cast into the lake of fire and annihilated out of existence. The doctrine of eternal hell is denied.

BIBLICAL RESPONSE: The doctrine of eternal hell is affirmed. The saved will enjoy eternal life with Christ and the lost will suffer eternal punishment (Matt. 18:8-9, 25:41-46; Mark 9:43-48; John 3:16, 14:1-3; 2 Thess. 1:9; Rev. 20-22).

CONCLUSION: Members of the SDA Church may be genuinely saved Christians based on personal faith in Jesus Christ. The SDA Church, however, has some teachings that deviate from historic Christian doctrine. Baptists adhere to sound biblical teachings and reject extra-biblical revelations or interpretations.

WITNESSING TO SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS:

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and of the Bible.
2. Have a basic knowledge of SDA beliefs and the extra-biblical sources of some of their doctrines.
3. Establish the sole authority of the Bible based on sound principles of interpretation.
4. Define all terms clearly. Some common terms may have different meanings for SDAs than they do for Baptists.
5. Determine the level of the SDA's commitment to his or her church.
6. Determine what relationship the SDA has with Jesus Christ. Is he or she trusting in Christ for salvation or in good works and church membership?
7. Present a strong, personal testimony of your faith in Christ and your assurance of salvation by grace through faith.
8. If the person does not know Christ as Savior and Lord, share the basic gospel message and seek to bring him or her to faith in Jesus.

9. If you determine that the SDA possesses a saving knowledge of Christ, you may want to engage in a respectful dialogue of differences in doctrinal beliefs.
10. Trust the Holy Spirit to lead you.

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3. White, Ellen G. *The Great Controversy* (1887) and *Desire of Ages* (1898).

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