

# LAMPLIGHTER

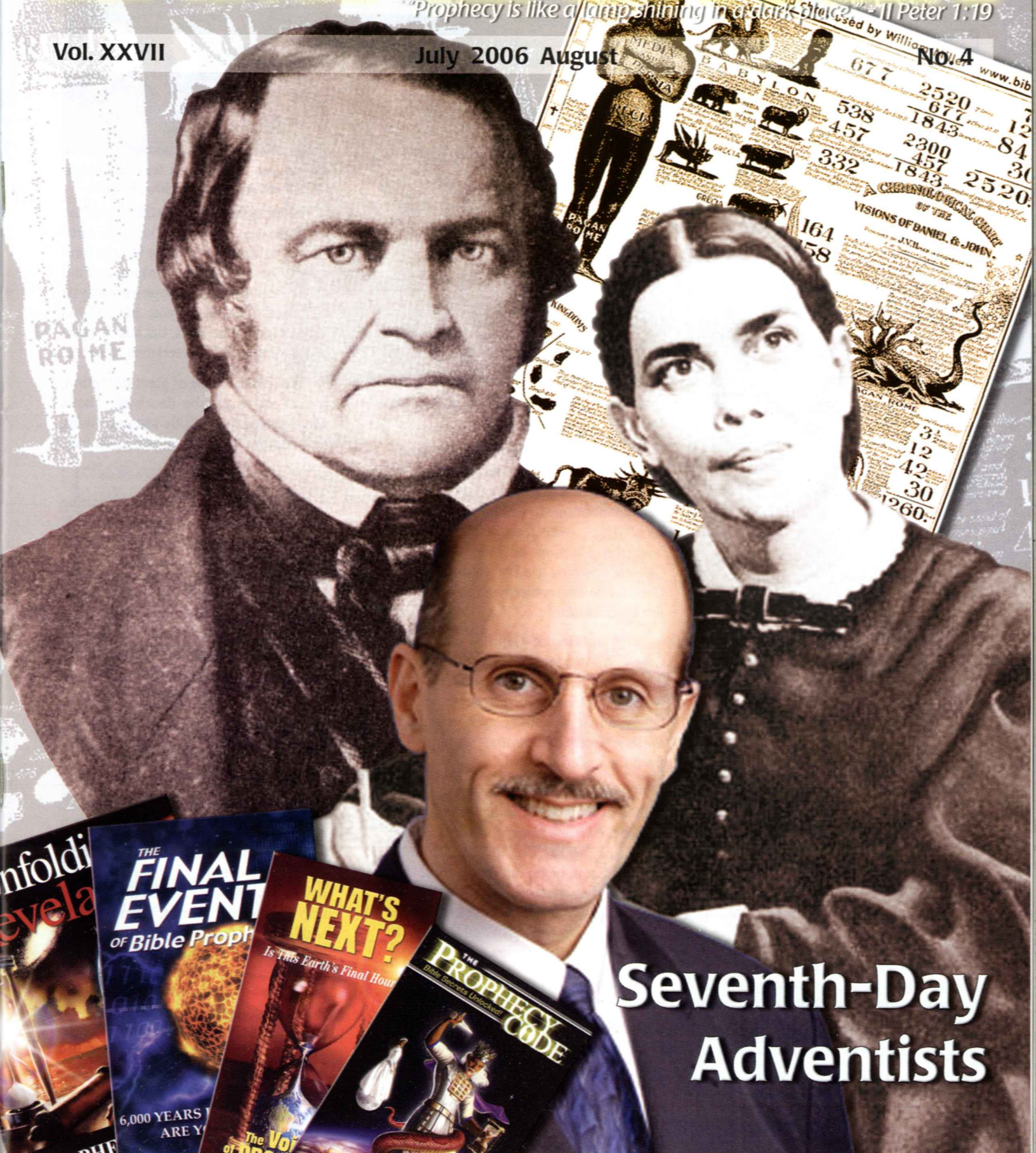
"Prophecy is like a lamp shining in a dark place." - 1 Peter 1:19

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# Observations by the Editor

## Why Cults?

Over the years I have spent considerable time studying cults and writing about them. People often ask me why I have done this, particularly since Lamb & Lion is a Bible prophecy ministry.

The answer is simple. Jesus gave us certain signs to watch for that would signal His soon return, and one of those signs was the rise of false Christs and their cultic groups.

For example, in His famous Olivet Discourse, delivered on the Mount of Olives during the last week of His life, Jesus gave a great variety of end time signs that were are to watch for. The first one He mentioned — and the only one He repeated — had to do with false Christs. He stated this warning a total of three times, obviously emphasizing how important it would be (see Matthew 24:5, 11, and 24).

Cultic groups appeared on the scene almost as soon as the Church was established. The first to raise its ugly head was a group that came to be known as “Judai-zers.” These were Jews who were upset with the addition of Gentiles to the Church, and they tried to demand that all Gentiles be circumcised and follow other Jewish customs.

The addition of Gentiles who had a Greek philosophical viewpoint soon produced another cultic influence — the Gnostics. These were intellectuals who believed that salvation could be found in esoteric spiritual truths that free humanity from the material world.

There have always been cultic groups within Christianity who have denied the deity of Jesus and have proclaimed a false gospel of works. But the explosion of cults did not begin until the mid-19th Century when the world’s largest cult, the Mormons, was founded. Since that time, Christianity has been afflicted by literally hundreds of cultic groups.

Watchman Fellowship, a cult-watching group located in Arlington, Texas, compiles an annual directory of cults, and the directory gets longer and longer each year. Visit their website at [www.watchman.org](http://www.watchman.org).



**Dr. Reagan talks with a lady at Central Christian Church in Wichita, Kansas.**

I approached my investigation of the Seventh-Day Adventists with an open mind. But it did not take me long to form a very firm opinion about whether or not they constitute a cult. I hope my analysis will prove helpful to you, not only in understanding the SDA, but also in comprehending the characteristics of a cult.

We live in a time of great deception, and all of us can be deceived. That’s why we need to carefully test everything by Scripture. I challenge you to do that.

### Television

This issue contains some exciting news about our television outreach. Please note the announcements on page 18 concerning developments that affect the outreach of the DayStar Network.

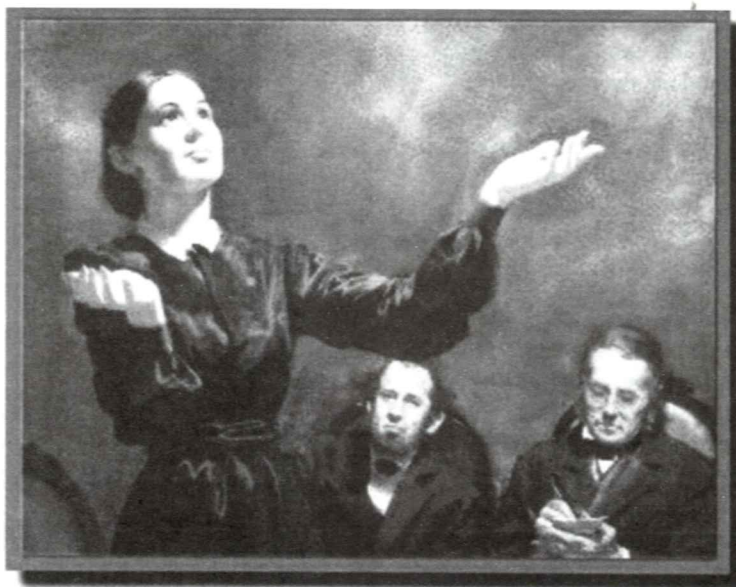
We have an immediate need for a new piece of television production equipment. It is a digital switcher that is HDTV compatible. The switcher is a vital piece of equipment that is used to switch from one camera to another. The unit we need costs \$13,325. If you can help us with this purchase, please mark your gift for “TV Switcher.” Thanks!

### Holy Land

Don’t forget about our Biblelands cruise that is scheduled for late October and early November. We will spend a day touring Athens, and then board our ship for stops at Ephesus, Patmos, Egypt and Israel. For more information, call 1-800-705-8316 or check our website at [www.lamblion.com](http://www.lamblion.com). ❖

Thanks to Keith Fink at Master’s Press in Dallas for the design of this month’s cover. The people pictured are William Miller, Ellen G. White, and Doug Batchelor.

# The Seventh-Day Adventists: Christian or Cultic?



A painting of Ellen G. White relating a vision from God.

## Dr. David R. Reagan

The Seventh-Day Adventists are an anomaly. Evangelical Christians have never been comfortable with them, but they have been unable to decide whether the SDA is a legitimate expression of Christianity or whether it is a cult, like the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses.

The majority view among contemporary cult-watchers is that it is a cult. But the most authoritative cult expert in modern Christian history, Dr. Walter Martin (1928 - 1989), decided in 1965 that "it is perfectly possible to be a Seventh-Day Adventist and be a true follower of Jesus Christ, despite heterodox concepts."<sup>1</sup> This conclusion caused a storm of controversy because Dr. Martin had earlier labeled the SDA a cult in his book published in 1955 called *The Rise of the Cults*.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, shortly before he died, Dr. Martin expressed conflicted second thoughts in a television interview:

I fear that if they continue to progress at this rate, then the classification of a cult can't possibly miss being reapplied to Seventh-Day Adventists because once you have an interpreter of Scripture, a final court of appeal that

tells you what Scripture means — as soon as you judge Scripture by that, as soon as you have someone who has made doctrinal errors in the past, even on the deity of Christ and the doctrine of the atonement and on other things, and that person is raised to that position of authority, you have polarization around that person.<sup>3</sup>

If Christendom's foremost cult expert could not make up his mind about the status of the SDA, you can certainly understand why others have experienced equal difficulty. So, what about it? Does the SDA deserve the designation of a cult?

## A Brief History

Let's begin our consideration of this question by taking a brief look at the origin of the Seventh-Day Adventists.

The SDA Church is rooted in the Millerite Movement that swept the United States in the 1840's. William Miller (1782 - 1849) was a New England Baptist preacher who developed a unique interpretation of Daniel 8:14.<sup>4</sup>

In the *King James Version* that passage reads: "And he [a saint] said unto me, 'Unto 2,300 days, then shall the sanctuary be cleansed.'" This is a prophecy about the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes. But Miller applied it to the end times by converting the days into years. Assuming the prophecy was given in 457 BC, he calculated that Jesus would return 2,300



William Miller

years later, sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844. Incredibly, he interpreted the “cleansing of the sanctuary” to refer to the purging of the earth by fire at the Second Coming of Jesus!

When March 21, 1844 came and passed, Miller recalculated the date for October 22, 1844. When nothing happened on that day, Miller’s followers became totally disillusioned. The whole experience was dubbed “The Great Disappointment.” Miller died in disgrace four years later.

But a small hard-core group of Millerites called “the little flock” continued to insist that the date had been correct. One of the group’s members, a man named Hiram Edson, claimed to have seen a vision of Jesus standing at the altar in Heaven, and he concluded that Miller had been right about the time, but wrong about the place. In other words, Jesus’ return was not to earth but to the Heavenly sanctuary as described in Hebrews 8:1-2. This strange idea was promoted by a retired sea captain and Millerite convert named Joseph Bates.<sup>5</sup> One of his pamphlets greatly impressed a teenage Millerite girl named Ellen G. Harmon (1827 - 1915).

### The Life of Ellen G. White

Ellen Harmon was the daughter of a family in Portland, Maine. In 1840, at age 12, she accepted Jesus as her Savior. She was baptized and received into the membership of the Methodist Church. Shortly thereafter, her parents began to attend Millerite meetings and became avid followers, confidently expecting the Lord to return in 1844.



Ellen White in 1859

In December of 1844, one month after “The Great Disappointment,” this 17 year old girl experienced a vision in which she saw Adventist believers being ushered into Heaven. Her vision was accepted by the Adventist group in Portland as “light from God.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1846, at age 19, Ellen married a young Adventist preacher named James White. Shortly after their marriage, they were introduced to a tract by Joseph Bates, a Seventh-Day Baptist. It convinced them of the sacredness of the Sabbath, and they began to observe Saturday as the Sabbath. Six months later, in April 1847, Ellen had a vision in which she was shown the Heavenly sanctuary with a halo light around the fourth commandment, establishing it in her mind as the most important of the Ten Commandments.<sup>7</sup>

In 1850 James and Ellen began publishing a magazine called

“The Review & Herald.” Its purpose was to disseminate Adventist and Sabbatarian doctrines. Their publication was instrumental in helping the handful of remaining Millerites to coalesce into a distinctive group. In 1860 they adopted the name, Seventh-Day Adventist Church. They formally incorporated in 1863 with approximately 3,500 members located in 125 churches.<sup>8</sup>

Ellen White never held any official title as head of the church, but she was always acknowledged as its spiritual leader. She claimed to have the spirit of prophecy, and she claimed that her messages were directly from God.<sup>9</sup> Here’s how she put it in her own words:

I am presenting to you that which the Lord has presented to me. I do not write one article in the paper expressing merely my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision — the precious rays of light shining from the throne.<sup>11</sup>

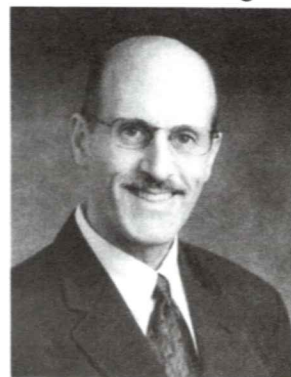
James White died in 1881, and in 1888 Ellen published her most famous book, *The Great Controversy*. Ellen White died in July 1915 at the age of 87. She and her husband are buried in Battle Creek, Michigan.

### The Church Today

Today, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church claims to baptize 2,000 people a day. Church membership reached one million between 1955 and 1961, and it hit 5 million in 1986. At the turn of this century, the church claimed 10.7 million members worldwide. Approximately one million of those reside in the United States.<sup>12</sup>



Much of the phenomenal growth of the church in recent years has been due to the fact that the SDA has been on the cutting edge of media evangelism ever since 1929 when they launched a radio program called “Voice of Prophecy.” In 1956 they began broadcasting the first religious television program to air in color, called “It is Written.” The most effective media thrust began in 1965 as a radio program called “Amazing Facts.” In 1987 this program was converted into a television ministry, and in 1993 it was taken over by Doug Batchelor who has since become the most recognizable face among Adventists.<sup>13</sup>



Doug Batchelor

Doug Batchelor is a very gifted communicator who heads up a team of 12 evangelists who conduct media-spectacular prophecy conferences all across America. Doug’s television program, “Amazing Facts,” is broadcast on several national cable and satellite networks, including the Fox Family Channel, the Black Entertainment Network, the Inspirational Network, the National Network, super station KSBN (SafeTV), and the Three Angels Broadcasting Network. The estimated number of homes the program can now reach within the U.S. exceeds 100 million.<sup>14</sup>

The Three Angels Network, known as 3ABN, was founded in 1984. It provides a 24-hour satellite service that broadcasts the programs of all major Adventist ministries around the world. There is also a Three Angels Radio Network. Both of these networks are privately run as non-profits, and neither is an official arm of the SDA Church.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its phenomenal growth in recent years, the SDA has suffered some major internal disputes. One occurred in the 1970's when Adventist pastors began to question some of the Church's most cherished doctrines.<sup>16</sup> The SDA hierarchy responded by becoming more entrenched in its unorthodox positions. This caused a number of pastors, and even entire congregations, to leave the SDA. Others were asked to leave.

An even greater shaking occurred in the 1980's when one of the SDA's leading theologians, Dr. Desmond Ford, prepared a 900 page doctrinal analysis in which he questioned the biblical validity of some of the Church's most sacred dogmas. The SDA responded by removing Dr. Ford's ministerial credentials.<sup>17</sup> Two years later a book by Walter Rea was published which revealed that a great number of the writings of Ellen G. White were flagrantly plagiarized.<sup>18</sup> This revelation undermined the faith of many who had accepted Ellen White as a prophet of God.

The reverberations continue to this day. In August 2005 Doug Batchelor sent out an email message in which he made an amazing admission:

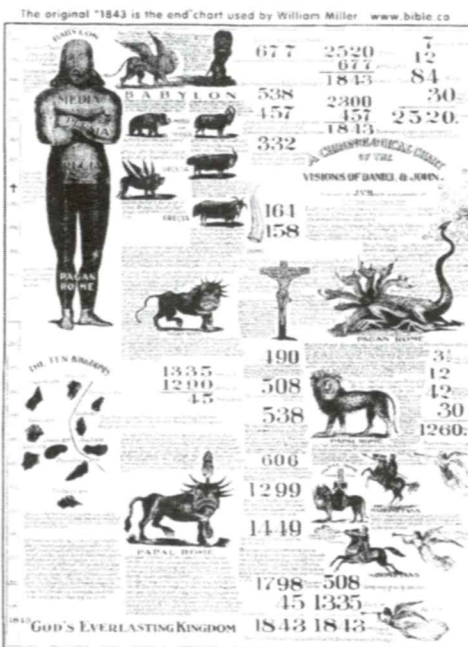
Literally thousands of Seventh-Day Adventists have fallen away from the church in recent years. According to the General Conference Office of Archives and Statistics, in the past ten years alone, over 1.6 million people have requested that their SDA membership be dropped. The annual growth rate within the church has gone from approximately 6%, ten years ago, to a record low of 3.98%.<sup>19</sup>

### Distinctive Doctrines

There are two distinctive doctrines of the SDA.<sup>20</sup> First and foremost is "The Investigative Judgment."

This is the unbiblical concept that in 1844 Jesus entered "the second and last phase" of His atoning ministry — the work of investigative judgment. Instead of returning to earth on October 22, 1844, as William Miller predicted, Jesus entered the Holy of Holies in Heaven and began a review of the works of all believers who have ever lived to determine how faithful they were to the commandments of God. "Sins that have not been repented of and forsaken will not be pardoned and blotted out of the books of record, but will stand to witness against the sinner."<sup>21</sup>

According to Ellen White, a person must believe this doctrine to be saved:



This is the famous chart that William Miller used to teach his theory about the date of the Lord's return in 1844.

All need a knowledge of the position [in the Holy of Holies] and work [investigative judgment] of their great High Priest. Otherwise it will be impossible for them to exercise the faith which is essential at this time or to occupy the position which God designs for them to fill.<sup>22</sup>

### Twisting Bible Prophecy

There is absolutely no valid biblical basis for this bizarre doctrine. As pointed out earlier, it is based upon a misinterpretation and misapplication of Daniel 8:14. The prophecy concerns the actions of Antiochus Epiphanes (215 - 164 BC). It refers to a restoration of "the holy place" after it has been "trampled." This occurred when Antiochus took Jerusalem in 167 BC and stopped the sacrifices in the Temple. This led to the Maccabean revolt which succeeded in reconquering Jerusalem. In 164 BC the Jews cleansed and rededicated the Temple. Hanukkah is the eight-day festival celebrating this event.

Applying this prophecy to the Heavenly sanctuary is ridiculous. Since when has the Holy of Holies in Heaven ever been defiled or trampled down? Since when has it needed to be restored?

The prophecy also refers to a time period during which the "holy place" will remain desecrated. That time period is "2,300 evenings and mornings." The King James version translates this to read "2,300 days." William Miller converted these days into years. SDA teachers defend this conversion on the basis of Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6 where prophets were specifically told to interpret days in their prophecies as years. But those verses have no application to Daniel 8:14.

### Perverting the Atonement

More significant is the fact that the whole concept of "investigative judgment" is unbiblical and contrary to the true Gospel as revealed in the New Testament. Jesus entered the Holy of Holies in Heaven immediately after His Ascension, and not in 1844 (Hebrews 1:3, 6:19-20, 8:1, 9:6-12, 24 and 12:2). His atoning work is not continuing in Heaven. It was finished on the Cross (John 19:30 and Romans 3:24-26). Jesus is currently serving as our High Priest before the Father's throne (Hebrews 8:1-2).

Further, the Bible teaches that a believer's sins are both forgiven and forgotten (Hebrews 8:12). Believers will never be subjected to a judgment of their works to determine their salvation (John 5:24 and Hebrews 9:28). There is no condemnation for the person who has placed his or her faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior (Romans 8:1). The believer can be assured of salvation (1 John 5:13). As believers walk in faith, they experience a continual cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7).



James and Ellen White in 1864.

The concept of an “investigative judgment” is a blasphemy of the blood of Jesus because it asserts that His death on the Cross was insufficient to guarantee a believer’s salvation. Instead, Jesus must continue His atoning work by evaluating the works of each believer.

This whole concept is nothing but a thinly veiled form of works salvation. Think of it — the SDA member is taught that he can never be sure of his salvation until the judg-

ment work of Jesus is completed and he is certified as one whose works validate his salvation. Here’s how Ellen White put it:

Those who are living upon the earth when the intercession of Christ shall cease in the sanctuary above, are to stand in the sight of a holy God without a mediator. Their robes must be spotless, their character must be purified from sin by the blood of sprinkling. Through the grace of God and their own diligent effort, they must be conquerors in the battle with evil.<sup>23</sup>

How could a true prophet of God speak such unbiblical words? The Bible says we are saved by grace through faith and not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Ellen White says salvation is by grace *plus* our own “diligent effort.” The Bible says Jesus will never cease being a believer’s mediator (Hebrews 7:25). Ellen White says that when believers stand before God to be judged, they will be “without a mediator.”

The bottom line regarding the pernicious doctrine of the “investigative judgment” is that it represents a desperate attempt to salvage an incorrect prophecy. William Miller was a sincere Baptist preacher who misinterpreted a biblical passage and inappropriately used it to set a date for the Lord’s return. When his prophecy failed, he took responsibility for his mistake and repented for all the grief and embarrassment he had caused. But his error led to the rise of a true false prophet who spiritualized Miller’s prophecy and then used that spiritualization to manufacture a doctrine that is alien to the Word of God.

### Sabbatarianism

The other distinctive SDA doctrine is the one contained in the very name of the group — observance of the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as the Sabbath. Ellen White stated in her writings that observance of the Sabbath is the “greatest” of all the Ten Commandments:

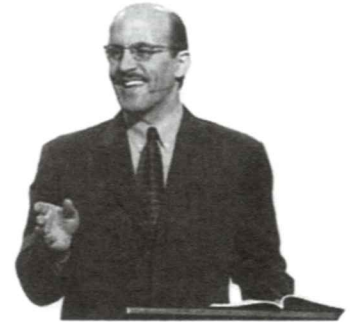
The pope has changed the day of rest from the seventh to the first day. He has thought to change the very commandment that was given to cause man to remember his Creator. He has thought to change the greatest commandment in the decalogue and thus make himself equal with God . . .<sup>24</sup>

## SDA Spokesman

Doug Batchelor, the host of the Amazing Facts television program, is easily the most recognizable leader among Seventh-Day Adventists today.

He is the pastor of Sacramento Central SDA Church in Sacramento, California. He is an author, song writer, evangelist, and Bible commentator. His spontaneous humor and interaction with the audience make him a much sought after speaker.

Doug grew up in New York City. By the time he had finished the 9th grade, he had attended 14 different schools in six different states. Though his mother was Jewish and his father Baptist, he was basically raised an atheist. His father was a millionaire and Doug had everything money could buy, but the meaninglessness of his life drove him into drugs and suicidal fantasies.



Disgusted with himself and convinced that life had no meaning, he moved into a cave in the hills above Palm Springs, California. He ended up scavenging in garbage bins for food.

Doug’s life turned around when he discovered a Bible in the cave and started reading it. His memories of these formative years are recorded in a book he wrote that was entitled, *The Richest Caveman*.

Did you notice that in this statement Ellen White directly contradicts Jesus? What did Jesus say when He was asked to identify the greatest commandment? He said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment” (Matthew 22:37-38).

Ellen White believed so strongly in the necessity of Sabbath-keeping that she asserted that only Sabbath-keepers would be able to resist taking the Mark of the Beast in the end times.<sup>25</sup> She truly believed and taught that Sabbath-keeping is a condition of salvation: “I saw that the holy Sabbath is, and will be, the separating wall between the true Israel of God and unbelievers.”<sup>26</sup>

The fact of the matter is that Sabbath-keeping was prescribed by God to the Jewish people. This law was never given to the Gentiles, nor was it given to the Church. The Law of Moses was nailed to the Cross (Colossians 2:14). The death of Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant — a covenant written on the heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 9:15). In His teaching, Jesus emphasized nine of the Ten Commandments and expanded them in scope to apply to our thoughts as well as our actions (Matthew 5-7). He never commanded the Church to observe the Sabbath.



Ellen White in 1878 at age 51. This was her favorite photo of herself.

When the Church began to convert Gentiles, the issue arose as to how many of the laws of Judaism the Gentiles would be required to observe. For example, should Gentiles be required to submit to circumcision? The issue was so important that it prompted the convening of the first church council (Acts 15). At that council it was decided that Gentile converts should not be “troubled” with Jewish customs. They were simply told to “abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication

and from what is strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:20). If Sabbath-keeping was the most important of all commandments, why was it not mentioned?

There is ample evidence that the early Christians met on Sunday from the beginning in order to remember the Lord’s resurrection on that day. References to these meetings can be found in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

Furthermore, Romans 14 makes it very clear that Sabbath-keeping is no longer a law. In that chapter, Paul states that we have the freedom in Christ to give spiritual significance to any day — or not to do so. What we do not have the freedom to do is to condemn those who give spiritual emphasis to other days (than the ones we choose). Also, Colossians 2:16-17 teaches that the Sabbath was a shadow of things to come. The reality it pointed to was Jesus. Jesus is our Sabbath. We find our rest through faith in Him.<sup>27</sup>

The Seventh-Day Adventists have every right to worship on Saturday if they so please. What they have no right to do (but what they have always done and continue to do) is condemn those who choose to worship on Sunday.

### Characteristics of a Cult

With this survey of the SDA as a basis, let’s return to our original question — Is the Church a legitimate expression of Christianity, or is it a cult?

Let’s begin by defining a cult. You will find dictionary definitions to be so broad and bland as to include “a particular system of religious worship.”<sup>28</sup> I prefer to give the term a more technical meaning. To me, a cult is a religious group that masquerades as being Christian. It employs Christian terms, quotes the Bible, and uses Christian symbols. But it is not a true expression of the Christian faith because it teaches a false Jesus or a false Gospel or both.<sup>29</sup>

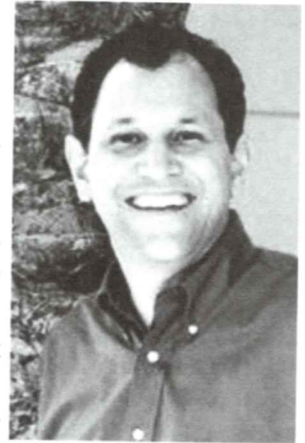
#### 1. The Identity of Jesus

First and foremost is the group’s concept of Jesus. Our salvation depends upon our relationship with Jesus — the true

## Former SDA

J. Mark Martin grew up in Medford, Oregon and was raised in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. He earned a B.A. degree in theology from an SDA liberal arts college called Pacific Union College, located in Angwin, California.

Mark pastored an SDA church for six years. When he began to emphasize the grace of God in his preaching, he outraged the SDA leadership. In 1982 they forced Mark to resign his pastorate, and he was ostracized from the church.



In that same year, Mark started a non-denominational fellowship in Phoenix, Arizona, ministering to a total of 11 members. In 1984, Chuck Smith, the founder of the Calvary Chapel Churches, invited Mark’s church to join the fellowship of Calvary Chapel. The church accepted the invitation, and since that time it has grown to a membership in excess of 10,000. The church is called Calvary Community Church ([www.calvaryphx.com](http://www.calvaryphx.com)).

Mark maintains one of the most informative websites about the SDA. It is called “7th Day Adventist Outreach.” You can find it on the Internet at [www.sdaoutreach.org](http://www.sdaoutreach.org).

Jesus of Nazareth who revealed Himself to the world as God in the flesh (John 14:9-11). There is salvation in no other person (Acts 4:10-12). There is salvation in no other way except through Jesus (John 14:6).

Cults are notorious for presenting a false Jesus. Reverend Sun Myung Moon claims to be the Messiah himself. The Jehovah’s Witnesses claim Jesus is the Archangel Michael. The Mormons view Jesus as one of many gods created by the super-god whom they believe is an exalted man.

We can be wrong about many things, but if we are right about Jesus, we can be saved. Likewise, we can be right about many things, but if we are wrong about Jesus, we can be lost. To be saved, we must put our faith in Jesus — the Jesus revealed in the Word of God (John 17:3).

The official creedal statement of the SDA concerning Jesus is very orthodox. He is affirmed as being part of the Trinity, and He is declared to be God in the flesh. His death, resurrection, ascension and second coming are all confirmed. His atoning sacrifice is endorsed. The only unbiblical information about Jesus in the SDA creed is a statement about His ministry in the Heavenly sanctuary — the so-called “investigative judgment.” But this does not affect the personal identity of Jesus.

So, on the surface, the SDA appears to pass the first and most important test. The disturbing problem is that the many



Ellen G. White in 1899 at age 72.

Internet websites run by former SDA members all assert that behind the scenes the SDA teaches that Jesus is the Archangel Michael.<sup>30</sup> This is the teaching of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but unlike the JW's, the SDA also teaches that Jesus was God in the flesh. Further, the SDA teaches that the title, Archangel, does not mean that Jesus was an angel. Rather, it means He was the "chief over the angels."

This is all very confusing. The more I have studied it, the more convinced I have become that the SDA quietly talks about Jesus being the Archangel Michael because that was the teaching of Ellen G. White,<sup>31</sup> but officially and publicly the Church has endorsed the orthodox view of Jesus. It would be refreshing if the SDA would simply drop all the double talk and unequivocally state that Jesus was God in the flesh.

There has been a similar doctrinal shift with regard to the Trinity. Many early Adventists were not Trinitarian. The official SDA hymnal published from 1941 until 1985 reflected ambivalence about the Trinity. For example, the hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy," which says, "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity," was changed to read, "God overall who rules eternally."<sup>32</sup> Today, the creedal statement of the SDA affirms the orthodox view of the Trinity.

## 2. The Nature of the Gospel

The second characteristic of a cult is the proclamation of a false Gospel. Cults always end up teaching some form of works salvation. This usually leads to the production of a list of "dos and don'ts" which are then rigidly and legalistically enforced by the cult leaders. This is the area where the SDA begins to definitely fail the test.

As I have demonstrated, the SDA teaches a form of works salvation. Instead of asserting that we are saved by grace through faith, they claim we are saved by faith *plus* works that satisfy the "investigative judgment" *plus* Sabbath observance. That is not the Gospel of the New Testament, and Paul says that "even if we, or an angel from Heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8-9).

## 3. The Type of Leadership

A third characteristic of a cult is that it is based upon a charismatic founder who considers himself to be either the true Messiah or the last prophet of God. Classic examples are Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormons, and Sun Myung Moon, the leader of the Moonies.

The SDA certainly bears this characteristic since it was founded by a person who claimed to be a messenger of God. The SDA affirms this in its official creedal statement, section 17,

entitled "The Gift of Prophecy:"

One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord's messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction.<sup>33</sup>

This is a serious matter since the writings of Ellen G. White are full of biblical errors, inaccurate prophecies, and downright silly commandments. Also, much of her writing is plagiarized.

Her biblical contradictions are extensive in nature. She asserted that the plan of salvation was an afterthought of God following the sin of Adam, whereas the Bible says it was preordained before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-20). She claimed that pre-flood humans mated with animals and produced a sub-human species that was destroyed by the flood. There is no mention of this in the Bible. In fact, the Bible asserts that animals can reproduce only according to their kind (Genesis 1:24-25). Ellen White also wrote that the tower of Babel was built before the flood; that angels (rather than ravens) fed Elijah; that Paul learned the Gospel from men rather than Jesus; that the seal of God is the Sabbath instead of the Holy Spirit; and that we can know the date of the Lord's return.<sup>34</sup>

Ellen White's inaccurate prophecies are also well documented. She endorsed William Miller's prophecy that Jesus would return in 1844. She proclaimed that salvation for all sinners ended in 1844 when Jesus supposedly entered the Heavenly sanctuary. This was called "the shut door" doctrine. It was conveniently abandoned in 1850. She prophesied that some who were alive in 1856 would live to see the Lord's return. She predicted that England would enter the Civil War. She claimed she would be one of the 144,000 saints who would be living when Jesus returned. In 1850 she rebuked Bible scholars who were predicting an end time return of the Jews to Israel. She proclaimed that "Old Jerusalem will never be built up."<sup>35</sup>

Ellen G. White pontificated about every aspect of life in her writings, and most of her non-biblical comments are an embarrassment today. She wrote that "drug medication . . . is a curse." She stated that using medical doctors was a dishonor to God. She denounced the eating of eggs, milk, cream, and butter. In fact, she stated that eating eggs would make your prayer life useless! She spent most of her life advocating a vegetarian diet even though she ate meat herself. She forbid the drinking of tea and coffee and the eating of mustard, pepper, pickles and cinnamon. She put a ban on card playing, chess, and checkers, saying that such games "open the door for great evil." Picnics and parties were condemned. Tennis, cricket, baseball, and bike riding were labeled "species of idolatry."<sup>36</sup>

And these are only a few of her many commandments. Keep in mind this is a woman who claimed to speak for God and who had the audacity to proclaim, "There is one straight chain of truth without one heretical sentence in that which I have written."<sup>37</sup>

## 4. The Source of Authority

The fourth characteristic of a cult is that there are always some extra-biblical writings that are considered to be equal to or superior to the Bible. The Mormons have their Book of Mormon



and the Jehovah's Witnesses have their own eccentric and highly inaccurate "translation" of the Bible. The Children of God look to the letters of their founder, Moses David (David Berg). The proclamations of Herbert W. Armstrong and Reverend Moon have been considered holy and infallible by their followers.

What is the status of Ellen G. White's writings among members of the SDA? This is a difficult question to answer. The official creedal statement affirms the Bible as "the infallible revelation of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history." The statement also says "the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested."<sup>38</sup>

But all these orthodox declarations about the Bible are qualified by the creedal statement that the writings of Ellen G. White "are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction."<sup>39</sup>

It is confusing, to say the least. What makes it even more so are the many statements by SDA leaders and pastors that leave the clear impression that Ellen White's writings are considered to be on a level with Scripture:<sup>40</sup>

"I believe . . . Mrs. White's writings are the world's only inspired Bible commentary." — E. E. Cleveland, one time Secretary of the General Conference.

"She did one of the greatest works that I have ever known since John the Revelator. She's to me one of the greatest prophets that have ever lived. Why? Because she had the same gift that Daniel had . . ." — Stanley Harris, SDA pastor.

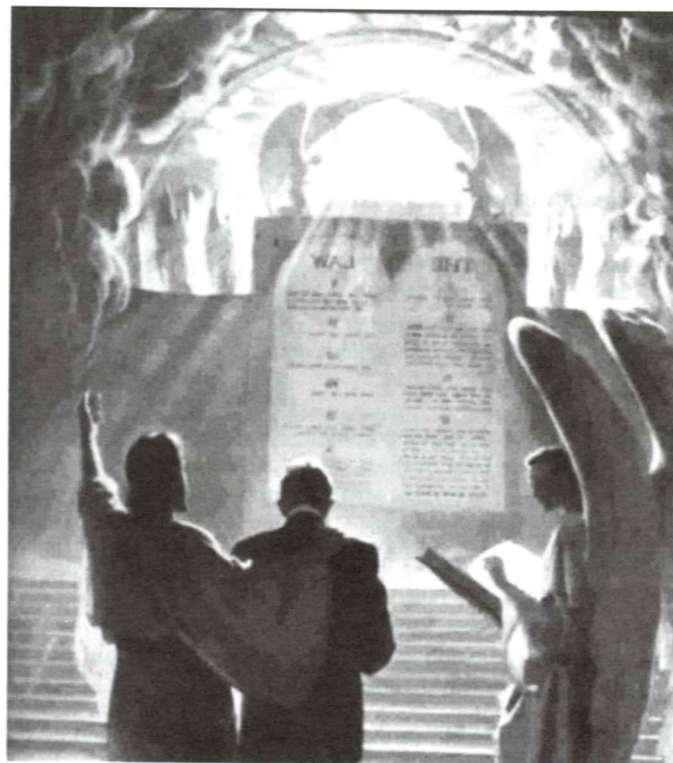
"Ellen White reinterprets Daniel for our time. And because I fully believe and am convinced that God spoke to and through Ellen White, I accept her writings 100% . . . I accept her as an inspired writer." — Raymond F. Cottrell in a talk to the Association of Adventist Forums. Dr. Cottrell was the former editor of the *Adventist Review* and served as a collaborator on the Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary series.

In 1928 the SDA issued an official position paper on the writings of Ellen G. White. It said, "As Samuel was a prophet of Israel for his day, as Jeremiah was a prophet of Israel in the days of captivity, as John the Baptist came as a special messenger of the Lord to prepare the way for Christ's coming, so we believe that Mrs. White was a prophet to the Church of Christ today."<sup>41</sup>

In the October 1981 issue of the SDA *Ministry Magazine*, the following statement was made about the writings of Ellen White: "We believe the revelation and inspiration of both the Bible and Ellen White's writings to be of equal quality. The superintendence of the Holy Spirit was just as careful and thorough in one case as in the other."<sup>41</sup>

In recent years, the status of Ellen White's writings has been a source of constant internal debate and strife. This conflict motivated the current president of the SDA, Jan Paulsen, to make the following statement at the May 2002 General Conference:

A further word needs to be said about our being "loyal to our heritage and to our identity." Some would



An SDA artist's concept of the Investigative Judgment of Believers.

have us believe that there have been significant shifts in recent times in regard to doctrines that historically have been at the heart of Seventh-Day Adventism.

The historic sanctuary message ["investigative judgment"], based on Scripture and supported by the writings of Ellen White, continues to be held unequivocally. And the inspired authority on which these and other doctrines are based, namely the Bible, supported by the writings of Ellen White, continue to be the hermeneutical foundation on which we as a church place all matters of faith and conduct. Let no one think there has been a change of position in regard to this.<sup>42</sup>

Notice carefully the wording, "the Bible, supported by the writings of Ellen White." Does the Bible really need the affirmation of an external, human writer? I think this statement makes it clear that to this day the leadership of the SDA considers the writings of Ellen G. White to be on a par with the Scriptures, and that is clearly a cultic characteristic.

## 5. Attitude Toward Others

A fifth characteristic of cults is their exclusivistic and sectarian attitude. They always view themselves as God's only true church and refuse to have anything to do with other Christian groups. They also tend to be secretive in nature — as evidenced by the secret temple rites of the Mormons.

Once again, the SDA fits the bill. In her early writings, Ellen G. White condemned Christendom as "Babylon" and asserted that the SDA was the "Remnant Church." As recently as their 2000 worldwide General Conference meeting they passed a resolution affirming this belief. They continue to refer to other Christians as "apostate Protestants," "Babylon," "Sunday-keepers," or "sheep that have not yet come into the fold."<sup>43</sup> A

former Adventist has expressed it this way:

Adventists are taught from childhood that they are God's only true church on earth and that they are God's remnant people. They are taught that they have the "truth" and all other Christians are wrong and are apostate.<sup>44</sup>

SDA leaders have toned down their public statement of these sentiments in recent years because of their desire to gain acceptance as a legitimate expression of Christianity. Another motive has been the desire to gain access to Christian television and radio networks. Their strategy has worked, but the change in attitude is only cosmetic in nature.

Although the SDA operates much more openly than do the Mormons and JW's, they are still characterized by a commitment to secrecy when it comes to interacting with the public. This is manifested in the way they try to hide their identity when attempting to communicate with non-members.

None of their media ministries identify themselves as being affiliated with the SDA. When one of their prophecy seminars comes to town, the area's mailboxes will be flooded with beautiful, eye-catching, full color brochures that never reveal any SDA connection. The seminars are always held at a neutral site like a hotel ballroom, and they literally sneak up on the audience with their SDA doctrines. Here is how a participant has described the experience:

Their prophecy seminars take you through a very well developed prophetic scenario, amazingly illustrated and convincing. They give you lots of free stuff to keep you coming night after night. Then, on the last night, the real agenda appears — they reveal the secret, coded, "scriptural" information: all those who reject Sabbath worship will receive the "Mark of the Beast."<sup>45</sup>

Their publications do not reveal their SDA origin or affiliation. Either the publisher is not identified or the publisher is a non-descript entity like "Pacific Press" or "Pilgrims' Press." Ellen White's most famous book, *The Great Controversy*, is often distributed under the title, *America in Prophecy*. And her name on the title page is often printed as "E. G. White." This is obviously done to hide her gender and to keep her from being easily recognized.

Since beginning my in-depth research on the SDA, I have gotten on several of their mailing lists. I recently received a mailing from their number one media outlet, Amazing Facts. The mailing encouraged me to distribute a video called "The Final Events of Bible Prophecy." It gave detailed instructions about how to go door-to-door in an effort to convince all my neighbors to watch this propaganda piece.



An SDA artist's conception of the third angel of Revelation 14:9 who supposedly will go forth to warn the world about false worship on Sunday. The picture shows a halo around the 4th commandment, the Sabbath commandment. Ellen White claimed that in one of her visions she was taken to Heaven where she saw a halo around the Sabbath commandment.

Part E of the instructions was entitled, "Addressing Denominational Questions." I was told that if I were asked, "What church are you with?" I was to reply: "I am representing Amazing Facts, a Christian ministry that provides Bible study resources for people of all different faiths. My goal is to encourage others to read the Bible and learn how to find God."<sup>46</sup> In short, do not reveal that you are in any way related to the SDA! This is deception, pure and simple.

## 6. The Type of Governance

The sixth and final characteristic of a cult relates to governance. The cults tend to be authoritarian, dictatorial, and sometimes even totalitarian. Someone at the top — either an individual or a collective group — calls all the shots. The classic example of this trait can be found among the Mormons and JW's.

The SDA does not appear to be as controlling as these groups, but there is little tolerance for divergent views or independent thought. The fate of Dr. Desmond Ford, mentioned earlier, is a good example of how rigid the SDA is with regard to doctrine.<sup>47</sup>

## Christian or Cultic?

So, where does this leave us? Is the SDA a cult or not? I have proposed six tests. The SDA failed all but one of them — the one concerning the identity of Jesus. And there are serious questions about that one.

I am convinced that Walter Martin declassified the SDA as a cult in 1965 because he became convinced that they had an orthodox view of Jesus. To him, that was the acid test. I would agree that it is the most important one, but the group's perverted concept of the Gospel must be ranked as almost equal in importance because of Paul's warning in Galatians 1:8-9.

I therefore must conclude that the SDA should be considered a cult until they are willing to repudiate the "Investigative Judgment" doctrine and are willing to clearly state that the Bible, and not the writings of Ellen G. White, is their final authority in all matters.

After I concluded this essay, I decided to contact Dr. Ron Carlson, the man who is considered to be Christendom's foremost expert on the cults today. I asked him for a statement about the SDA, and this is what he wrote in response:

As you may know, Walter Martin was my mentor and dear friend for 20 years and spoke at my ordination. I was to have lunch with him the day he died in 1989.

Walter had a real influence on many of the SDA leaders in the 70's and early 80's seeking to move them to a Biblical position. Many were, and there was hope for the SDA Church.

What has happened in the last 20 years is that nearly 50% of the SDA pastors and leaders who were seeking to move it to an evangelical position have all been "kicked" out or left the SDA. The people who are now in control have moved the organization back to following the teachings of Ellen G. White and denying some basic doctrines of Biblical Christianity. In fact, their official position is that if you do not worship on Saturday you are not a Christian and will not go to Heaven. Sunday worship is the mark of the beast. They are clearly today a false Cult.<sup>48</sup> ❖

## Notes:

- 1) Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany House, 1965), p. 517.
- 2) Walter Martin, *The Rise of the Cults* (Zondervan, 1955).
- 3) Walter Martin, Appearance on the John Ankerberg TV show in January 1985, [www.macgregorministries.org/seventh\\_day\\_adventists/sda\\_facts.html](http://www.macgregorministries.org/seventh_day_adventists/sda_facts.html), p. 10 (01/02/2006).
- 4) For a detailed article about William Miller see "William Miller: The Sincerely Deceived Prophet" by David R. Reagan, [www.lamblion.com/articles/doctrinal/Cults/Cults-11.php](http://www.lamblion.com/articles/doctrinal/Cults/Cults-11.php) (05/16/2006).
- 5) Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry (CARM), "The History of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church," [www.carm.org/sda/history.htm](http://www.carm.org/sda/history.htm), p. 1 (02/04/2006).
- 6) Arthur L. White, "Ellen G. White: A Brief Biography," [www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp](http://www.whiteestate.org/about/egwbio.asp), p. 2 (02/23/2006).
- 7) Ibid.
- 8) Melton, J. Gordon, *Encyclopedia of American Religion*, Volume 2, (McGrath Publishing Co., 1978) p. 681.
- 9) Dr. Michael E. Todd, "Truth or Fable? Ellen G. White and the Seventh-Day Adventist Movement," [www.biblebelievers.com/SDA/SDA1.html](http://www.biblebelievers.com/SDA/SDA1.html), p. 13 (02/23/2006).
- 10) Maurice Barnett, "Ellen G. White and Inspiration" (Gospel Anchor Publishing Co., 1983) pp. 5-17.
- 11) Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, (Review & Herald, 1980) p. 27.
- 12) Wikipedia, "Seventh-Day Adventist Church," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-Day\\_Adventist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventh-Day_Adventist), p. 7 (12/30/2005).
- 13) Answers.com, "Seventh-Day Adventists," [www.answers.com/topic/seventh-day-adventist-church](http://www.answers.com/topic/seventh-day-adventist-church), pp. 3-4 (01/02/2006).
- 14) Doug Batchelor, "The Story of Amazing Facts," flyer produced by Amazing Facts, Inc., P.O. Box 1058, Roseville, CA 95678. Further information can be found at [www.amazingfacts.org](http://www.amazingfacts.org).
- 15) Answers.com, p. 4.
- 16) Geoffrey J. Paxton, *The Shaking of Adventism* (Baker Books, 1984).
- 17) Good News Unlimited, "Des Ford," [www.goodnewsunlimited.org/bioford.cfm](http://www.goodnewsunlimited.org/bioford.cfm).
- 18) Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (M & R Publishers, 1982). For a good summary of the evidence of plagiarism presented by this book, see the article by Walter Rea entitled "Ellen G. White: Prophet or Plagiarist?" [www.bible.ca/7-WL-exhibits-Great-Contro.htm](http://www.bible.ca/7-WL-exhibits-Great-Contro.htm) (02/26/2006).
- 19) Email message dated August 17, 2005 from Amazing Facts Ministry.
- 20) A detailed analysis of SDA doctrines can be found in the book, *The Cultic Doctrine of the Seventh-Day Adventists* (Life Assurance Ministries, 1996). This book was written by a former SDA pastor, Dale Ratzlaff.
- 21) Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press, 1950), pp. 480-488.
- 22) Ibid., pp. 488-489.
- 23) Ibid., p. 425.
- 24) Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Review & Herald, 1963), p. 65.

- 25) Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 605.
- 26) Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, pp. 32-33.
- 27) For an excellent discussion of the Sabbath issue, see: CARM. "Does the Bible allow Christians to worship on Sunday?" [www.carm.org/sda/sunday.htm](http://www.carm.org/sda/sunday.htm) (02/04/2006).
- 28) *The American College Dictionary* (Random House, 1967).
- 29) For more detailed information about cults, see "The Deception of the Cults" by Dr. David R. Reagan, [www.lamblion.com/articles/doctrinal/Cults/Cults-01.php](http://www.lamblion.com/articles/doctrinal/Cults/Cults-01.php) (05/16/2006).
- 30) See, for example, SDA Outreach, "Jesus is not Michael the Archangel," [www.sdaoutreach.org/Home/Articles/JesusisNotMichael/tabid/482/Default.aspx](http://www.sdaoutreach.org/Home/Articles/JesusisNotMichael/tabid/482/Default.aspx) (05/13/2006).
- 31) Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Review & Herald, 1958), p. 761: "Jesus was revealed to them as the Angel of Jehovah, the Captain of the Lord's Host, Michael the Archangel."
- 32) SDA Outreach, "Jesus is not Michael the Archangel."
- 33) Seventh-Day Adventist Church, "Fundamental Beliefs," [www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html](http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental/index.html) (05/14/2006).
- 34) Dr. Michael E. Todd, "Truth or Fable? Ellen G. White Contradicts the Bible," [www.biblebelievers.com/SDA/SDA1.html](http://www.biblebelievers.com/SDA/SDA1.html) (02/23/2006).
- 35) "Ellen G. White's Failed Prophecy," [www.bible.ca/7-prophecy-blunders.htm](http://www.bible.ca/7-prophecy-blunders.htm), pp. 1-6 (02/23/2006).
- 36) The Ellen White Research Project, "Thus Saith Ellen White: The Rules and Regulations of Ellen White," [www.ellenwhite.org/egw30.htm](http://www.ellenwhite.org/egw30.htm), pp. 1-15 (05/13/2006).
- 37) Dr. Michael E. Todd, "Truth or Fable?" [www.biblebelievers.com/SDA/SDA1.html](http://www.biblebelievers.com/SDA/SDA1.html), p. 2 (02/23/2006).
- 38) Seventh-Day Adventist Church, "Fundamental Beliefs." See #32 above.
- 39) Ibid.
- 40) The Interactive Bible, "Seventh-Day Adventists: They alone view Ellen G. White as an inspired prophet!" [www.bible.ca/7-Whitelnspire.htm](http://www.bible.ca/7-Whitelnspire.htm), pp. 5-9 (02/23/2006).
- 41) Ibid.
- 42) MacGregor Ministries, "Facts Seventh-Day Adventists Won't Tell You," [www.macgregorministries.org/seventh-day-adventists/sda-facts.html](http://www.macgregorministries.org/seventh-day-adventists/sda-facts.html), p. 2 (01/02/2006).
- 43) Jan Paulsen, "Perspectives on Issues Facing the World Seventh-Day Adventist Church," *Adventist Review*, May 2002.
- 44) SDA Outreach, "Frequently Asked Questions about Seventh-Day Adventism," [www.sdaoutreach.org/Home/FAQ/tabid/61/Default.aspx](http://www.sdaoutreach.org/Home/FAQ/tabid/61/Default.aspx), p. 3 (01/02/2006).
- 45) Email message to the author from Tim Osterholm dated 01/16/2006.
- 46) Amazing Facts, "Inside Report," Jan/Feb 2006, p.18.
- 47) Good News Unlimited, "Des Ford," see # 17 above.
- 48) Email message to the author from Ron Carlson in May 2006.

For a good, overall summary, see "Seventh-Day Adventist Church Profile" by Timothy Oliver, [www.watchman.org/profile/sdapro.htm](http://www.watchman.org/profile/sdapro.htm) (02/04/2006).

## Cult-Watching

If you want to stay on top of developments in the weird world of cults, we recommend that you monitor the website of two ministries:

- 1) Watchman Fellowship ([www.watchman.org](http://www.watchman.org))
- 2) Christian Ministries International ([www.roncarlson.com](http://www.roncarlson.com))

# Seventh-Day Adventist Eschatology

Dr. David R. Reagan

Bible prophecy has always been important to Seventh-Day Adventists, more so than you would find among mainline Christian groups, even Evangelicals. The SDA church was founded on Bible prophecy, and its phenomenal growth during the 20th Century was based on an emphasis on Bible prophecy.

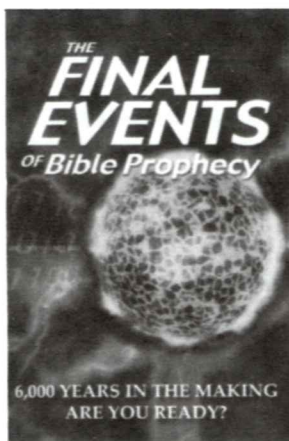
The Millerite Movement of the 1840's gave birth to the Seventh-Day Adventists. The Movement was generated by a false prophecy made by William Miller, a Baptist pastor, that Jesus would return in 1844.

## Compounding the Error

When this prophecy failed to materialize — an event that came to be called “The Great Disappointment” — a small group of Millerite diehards decided to rescue the prophecy by spiritualizing it. They argued that William Miller had set the right date but had prophesied the wrong event! Instead of returning to earth on the prescribed date, Jesus had instead entered the Holy of Holies in Heaven to begin a second aspect of His atoning work called “the investigative judgment.” This process, which continues to this day, involves an evaluation of the sins and works of each believer to determine their eternal destiny.

Thus, one false prophecy led to another which provided the foundation for the establishment of the Seventh-Day Adventists. One analyst has expressed it this way: “The Great Disappointment led to the Great Cover-up.”<sup>1</sup>

## The Source

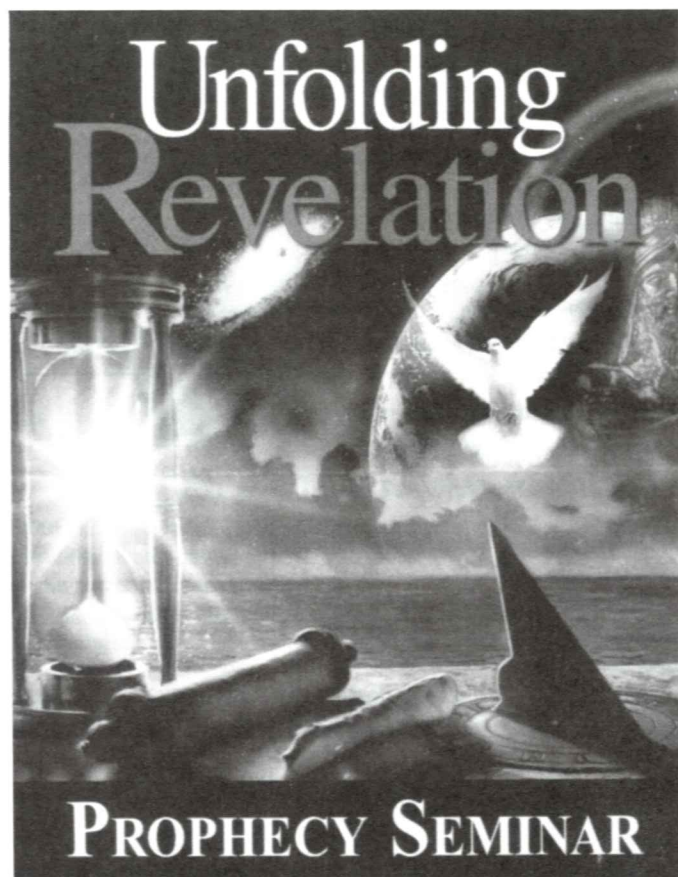


All the fundamental concepts of the SDA scheme of end time events were developed by Ellen G. White and are contained in her book, *The Great Controversy* (1888).<sup>2</sup> Since she is revered by the SDA as a prophet of God, no one has dared to tinker with what she wrote. Accordingly, when you write to the SDA today requesting information about Bible prophecy, you will not receive a summary written by any modern day author. Rather, you will be sent a copy of a brief booklet entitled *The Final Events of Bible*

*Prophecy*.<sup>3</sup> This booklet is nothing but a compilation of relevant chapters from *The Great Controversy*.

Ellen White's writings are not easy going. She was a long-winded writer with a tendency to preach and chase rabbits. Her writings are thus disjointed and difficult to consolidate into a time line of events.

Fortunately, the essence of her end time concepts has been boiled down by Doug Batchelor, the SDA spokesman for the “Amazing Facts” television program. He has summarized the



Seventh-Day Adventists use mail-out spectacular brochures containing outstanding full-color graphics to allure people to their seminars. The brochures never reveal that the seminars are sponsored by the SDA or one of its affiliated ministries.

concepts in a video that is also named “The Final Events of Bible Prophecy.”<sup>4</sup> To date, hundreds of thousands of copies of this very high-tech, spectacular video production have been distributed worldwide.

## The Basic Concepts

**The End Times** — The end times leading up to the soon return of Jesus began in 1844 when Jesus entered the Holy of Holies in Heaven and began His investigative judgment of the sins and works of believers. When this work is finished, the Rapture will occur.

**The Tribulation** — In the end times, the United States will align with the Vatican in a conspiracy to impose Sunday worship upon the world. This will lead to a terrible persecution of Sabbath-keepers. The “crowning act” during this time will occur when Satan impersonates Jesus and declares Sunday to be the official Sabbath. The papacy is portrayed as the Antichrist; Protestant Christianity is the False Prophet; the United States is the enforcer; and the period of persecution will constitute the Great Tribulation which will culminate in the Battle of Armageddon between the true believers and the Sunday-keepers who have taken the Mark of the Beast.

**The Rapture** — At this point, Jesus will appear in the heavens. All eyes will see Him. The righteous dead will be resurrected, the living saints will be caught up, and all the redeemed will return to Heaven with Jesus. Before returning to Heaven, Jesus will pour out the wrath of God on the nations, all the wicked will be

killed, and the earth will be totally devastated.

**The Millennium** — The saved will spend the next 1,000 years in Heaven with the Lord. The sins of the redeemed will be placed upon Satan, and he and his angels will be banished to the desolate earth where they will wander for the next thousand years. Meanwhile, during this time in Heaven, the redeemed will judge the lost, reviewing their deeds to determine their degrees of punishment.

**The Second Coming** — At the end of the Millennium, Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives. The redeemed will return with Him, but they will descend inside the New Jerusalem. Jesus will command the wicked to rise from the dead. Satan will then rally these people to revolt against Jesus and His saints. They will march against the New Jerusalem. Fire will engulf the earth while the redeemed are protected inside the New Jerusalem. The wicked will have their judgments pronounced and will then be thrown into the Lake of Fire where they will experience degrees of punishment and then suffer destruction.

**The Eternal State** — Out of the fiery inferno will come a New Earth, purified by fire. God will then recreate the earth in beauty and perfection. The redeemed will live in the presence of God on this New Earth eternally.

**Analysis**

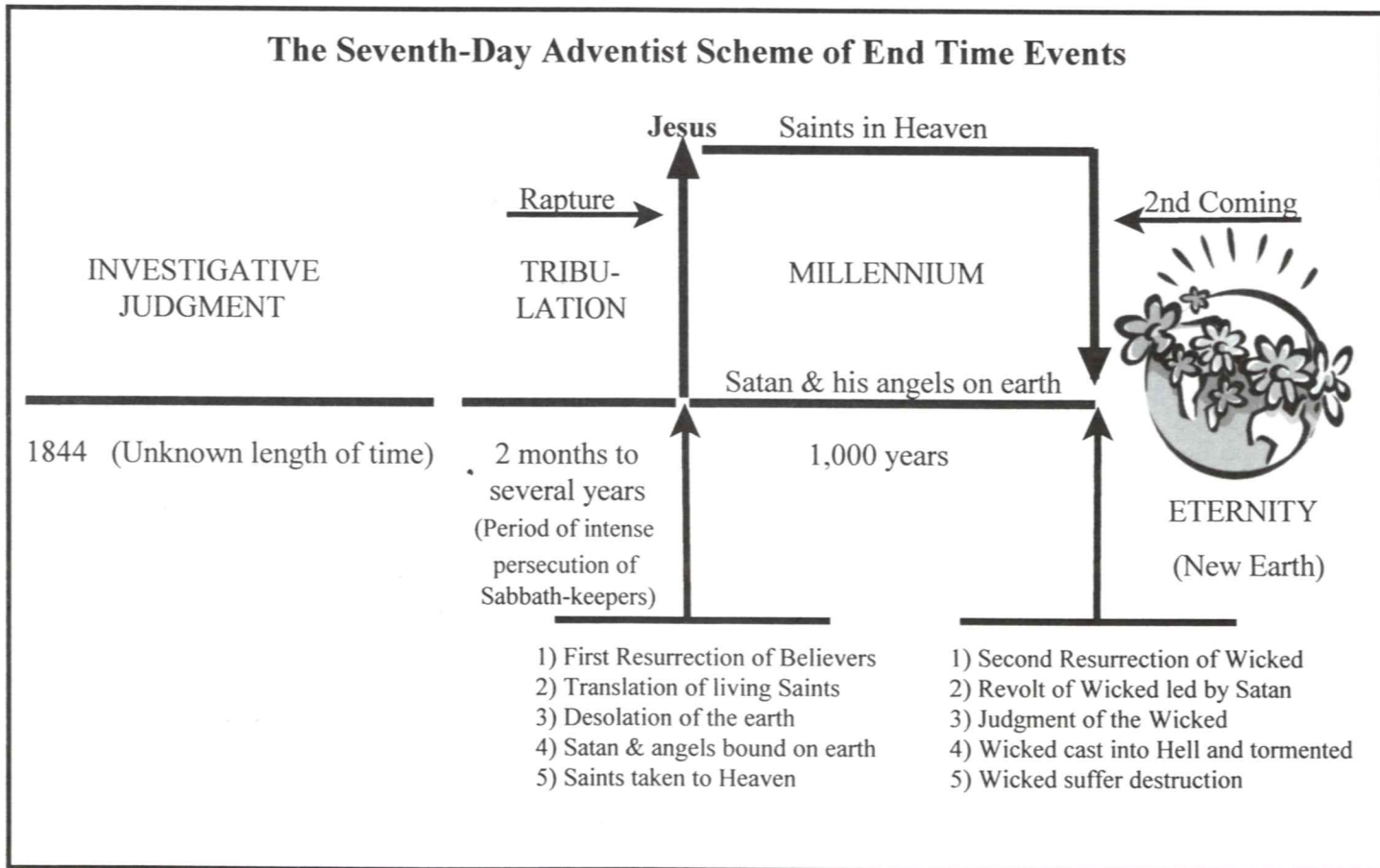
**The Investigative Judgment** — As I demonstrated in the main article in this issue (pp. 5-6), the SDA cornerstone doctrine of investigative judgment is both unbiblical and anti-biblical. The doctrine is unbiblical because there is no true biblical basis for it. It is anti-biblical because it denies the finished work of Jesus on

the Cross. It is also downright silly in nature because it assumes that Jesus, who is omniscient, must take 162 years (and counting) to evaluate and judge the works and sins of all believers.

**The Tribulation** — There are actually two concepts of the Tribulation that can be found in SDA literature. One is the concept that the Tribulation started in 1844 when the “apostate Protestants” began to persecute Adventists. This persecution, of course, intensified (supposedly) when Adventists began to emphasize the essentiality of Sabbath-keeping. The other concept of the Tribulation is that it will be a period of intense persecution that will immediately precede the Lord’s return. Doug Batchelor says he thinks it will last no longer than two months.<sup>5</sup> During this period of time, the United States and the Vatican will be unified in forcing the observance of Sunday worldwide as the proper day of worship.

Both views are unbiblical. The Bible clearly teaches that the Tribulation will be a period of seven years during which time God will pour out His wrath, first on rebellious Gentile nations (Revelation 6-11), and then on the nation of Israel (Revelation 12:13-17). The period will begin when the Antichrist signs a covenant that will guarantee peace in the Middle East (Daniel 9:27). It will end seven years later when a great remnant of the Jews accepts Jesus as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 9:27-28; 11:25-29).

The concept of the U.S. allying itself with the Vatican to force Sunday-worship upon the world is downright ludicrous. This is one of Ellen White’s most flagrant false prophecies. Since the time she wrote this prophecy in the 19th Century, the U.S. has abolished all Sunday observance laws (often referred to as



“Blue Laws”), and the country has become increasingly secular and pagan.

Her scriptural justification for this weird prophecy is a good example of the SDA’s tendency toward nonsensical interpretations. She asserted that chapters 12 and 13 of Revelation teach that the Antichrist (the papacy) would dominate the world for 1,260 days before suffering a fatal wound. She converted the days into years (without any textual authority for doing so) and then decided that the ending point to the 1,260 years was 1798 because that was the year when, during the French Revolution, a French general conquered Rome and took Pope Pius VI captive. She then counted backward 1,260 years and proclaimed that the era of papal dominance over the nations of Europe began in the year 538 AD.

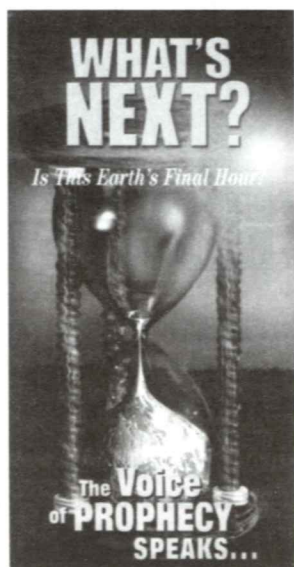


**Last photo  
of Ellen G. White**

Notice that the first thing she did was to violate her own rule that a prophetic year always equals 360 days. This was a rule that had been laid down by William Miller in calculating the date of the Lord’s return, and that rule had been accepted by all Adventists.

The second problem with her calculations is that nothing significant happened in the year 538 AD. The reigning bishop of Rome at that time was Vigilius who never exercised any secular reigning power. Papal power over Western secular governments began during the reign of Gregory the Great who was bishop of Rome from 590 to 604 AD. This is the period of time that is generally recognized by historians as the beginning of the papacy.

A third problem with Ellen White’s calculations is that the papal setback of 1798 was not the first in Vatican history. During the time period she identified, there were at least 20 anti-popes who set themselves up in opposition to the reigning pope, and there was a period of 70 years, from 1309 to 1378, when the papacy was actually moved to Avignon, France.



**SDA prophecy brochure**

The fourth problem with Ellen White’s calculations is that 1798 did not even begin to mark the end of papal influence worldwide. On the contrary, during the 20th Century the papacy was solidified in its power and authority and continues to this day to exercise great authority among the nations of the world. SDA apologists usually respond to the modern day resurgence of the Catholic Church as the healing of the “fatal wound” that is referred to in Revelation 13:3. But this prophecy refers either to a wound experienced by the Antichrist or to the revival of the Roman Empire in the end times.

Finally, the prophecies in Reve-

lation 12 and 13 have absolutely nothing to do with the papacy. They simply declare that the Antichrist (a person) will focus his demonic efforts on the annihilation of the Jewish people during the last 1,260 days of the Tribulation.

So, why did Ellen White conjure us such a bizarre interpretation? Because she wanted to use it as a basis for asserting that the second beast of Revelation 13 was the United States! Here’s how her reasoning went: Since the power of the first beast waned in 1798, the rise of the second beast (Revelation 13:11 ff) must have occurred at that time, and the only candidate on the world scene was the United States which was rising to power at that exact time. Thus, the second beast of Revelation 13 is always portrayed in SDA literature as a bison with either an American flag or a map of the U.S. in the background. This, to say the least, is a reckless interpretation of Scripture, particularly when you consider the fact that Revelation 13:11 specifically states that the second beast “had two horns like a lamb.” Somehow, the lamb became a bison which represented the United States!



**The Mark of the Beast** — Ellen White was equally reckless in determining the meaning of the Mark of the Beast (Revelation 13:16-18). The book of Revelation clearly reveals that this is a mark the Antichrist’s false prophet will require people to put on their right hand or forehead in order to buy or sell anything. It is also stated that the mark will be either the name of the beast or the number of his name. Yet, Ellen White declared that the true mark of the beast would be Sunday-worship! This is an obvious twisting of Scripture to make it mean whatever you want it to mean. It is the problem you always get into when you start spiritualizing the Word of God.

**The Rapture** — The SDA scheme of end time events places the Rapture at the end of the Tribulation and mixes with it some of the events that the Bible says will occur at the time of the Second Coming — such as the pouring out of God’s wrath and the devastation of the earth.

In contrast, the New Testament clearly separates these events. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Jesus is portrayed as appearing in the heavens *for* His Church. Revelation 19:11-16 portrays Him as returning to earth at a later time *with* His Church for the purpose of pouring out God’s wrath and then establishing His worldwide reign.

The New Testament also indicates that the Rapture will occur at the beginning of the Tribulation, not at the end. When refer-

ring to the signs of the end times, Jesus said, “When these things *begin* to take place,” we are to look up for the coming of our redemption (Luke 21:28). Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 1:10 that we are to anticipate the return of Jesus who will “deliver us from the wrath to come.” And in Revelation 3:10 Jesus promises that He will keep the redeemed “from the hour of testing” — that hour which will “come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth.” Doug Batchelor refers to the concept of a pre-Tribulation Rapture as “a Satanic delusion.”<sup>7</sup>

**The Millennium** — Placing the Millennium in Heaven is almost as weird as what Amillennialists have done with it by equating it with the Church Age here on earth! The Bible clearly states that when Jesus returns, He will become king over all the earth (Zechariah 14:1-9) and that He will reign over all the nations from Mount Zion in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-4 and Micah 4:1-7). The Bible also promises that He will redeem the earth, not leave it desolate. It will, in fact, be returned to its original beauty and glory, as it existed before the Fall (Isaiah 11:4-9).

Nor is there any indication that Satan will be bound on earth for 1,000 years. Rather, Revelation 20:3 says he will be bound “in the abyss.” The abyss is pictured in Luke 16:26 as a great chasm located in Hades. Ellen White fancifully interpreted the abyss to be the earth returned to its original state of confusion and darkness.<sup>8</sup> I can’t help but believe that if God had meant the earth, He would have said earth and not abyss!

The concept that the sins of the redeemed will be placed upon Satan when he is exiled to the devastated earth is downright blasphemous! Yet it is clearly taught in the writings of Ellen White.<sup>9</sup> This means that SDAs have two saviors. Christ is the sin-offering who dies for sin. The Devil is the one who plays the role of the scapegoat who bears our sins away! The Bible says Jesus was the one who bore our sins (Isaiah 43:1 and 1 Peter 2:24). The Bible also says there is no savior except the Lord (Isaiah 43:11).

Incredibly, in the SDA scheme, Satan is our final sin-bearer and therefore plays a vital role in our redemption. Jesus becomes simply a mediator between us and Satan. This is plainly “another gospel” that Paul so strongly condemned in Galatians 1:6-9.

During the Millennium, the saints are portrayed as spending their time in Heaven judging the wicked in order to determine their degrees of punishment. The scripture used to justify this concept, 1 Corinthians 6:2, refers to the saints reigning over people on earth during the Millennium. All judgment has been given to Jesus (John 5:22) and will be exercised by Him at the end of the Millennium at the Great White Throne Judgment (Revelation 20:11-15).

**The Second Coming** — At this point, the SDA scheme of end time events finally starts getting a few things right. They assert that Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives, and that is correct (Zechariah 14:1-9). The only problem is that the Bible says this glorious event will occur at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 19:11-16), not at the end of the Millennium. The SDA also correctly asserts that at the end of the Millennium, Jesus will resurrect the unrighteous dead and pronounce their judgments (Revelation 20:11-15).

They are also right when they say that Satan will lead a revolt

## Did the Roman Catholic Church Institute Sunday Worship?

The Seventh-Day Adventists maintain that it was the Catholic church that changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday and enforced the change through a decree issued by Emperor Constantine in 321 AD. This contention is as invalid as the one made by Dan Brown in his book, *The Da Vinci Code*, when he asserts that the Church did not recognize the divinity of Jesus until Emperor Constantine forced them to do so at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. In both cases, the action simply codified what was already the accepted belief or practice.

The New Testament attest to Sunday worship in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. And the writings of the Church Fathers also confirm that Sunday worship was the accepted practice long before Constantine:

*The Epistle of Barnabas* (100 AD) — “Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”

*Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians* (110 AD) — “If therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death.”

*Justin Martyr in his First Apology of Justin* (ca 147 to 161 AD) — “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits . . . Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the day . . . Jesus Christ our Savior . . . rose from the dead.”

*Tertullian in An Answer to the Jews* (ca 200 AD) — “The observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary . . .”

against Jesus and His Saints. But they are wrong when they contend that his rebel force will be made up of the unrighteous who have been resurrected. That’s because the resurrection of the unrighteous does not occur until the rebellion is over and done with. The rebellion is described in Revelation 20:7-10; the resurrection of the unrighteous, described in verses 11-15, does not occur until after this rebellion is crushed. Those who rebel with Satan are people born during the Millennium who never receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

One final thing I believe the SDA gets right is the destiny of the unrighteous. They argue that after their judgment, they will be cast into Hell where they will suffer for a period of time in proportion to their sins, and then suffer destruction. Many have condemned the SDA for this teaching, arguing that they are Annihilationists. But that is incorrect. Annihilationists believe that the wicked cease to exist at death. The SDA has adopted the Conditionalist position that claims that immortality is conditional

on accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Those who refuse to do so never become immortal, but they will be resurrected, judged, tormented, and then suffer "the Second Death" (Revelation 20:14-15).<sup>10</sup>

**The Eternal State** — The SDA is also correct in its concept of the eternal state of the redeemed. The Bible clearly teaches that the saved will live eternally on a New Earth in a New Jerusalem in the presence of the Lord (Revelation 21). The traditional concept of mainline Christianity that Heaven will be an ethereal world of disembodied spirits is not scriptural.<sup>11</sup>

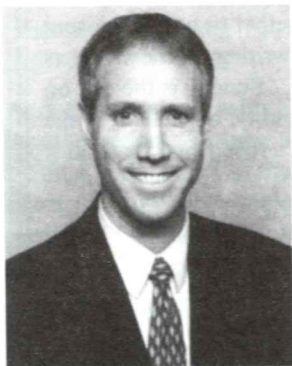
### Two Final Characteristics

There are two characteristics of SDA eschatology that should be mentioned in closing. First, their writings are extremely anti-Catholic in nature. They have been from the beginning and continue to be so to this day. The Catholic Church is blamed for the abolition of Sabbath-keeping, and the papacy is considered to be the Antichrist. Ellen White hated "Romanism" with a passion, and she correctly predicted that the Protestant world would become more accommodating to Catholicism.<sup>12</sup>



Pope Pius IX was the Bishop of Rome during Ellen G. White's formative years.

Another characteristic of SDA end time prophetic interpretations is Replacement Theology. They teach that the Jews got what they deserved in the First Century when God poured out His wrath in 70 AD on Israel and Jerusalem. They believe the Jews have been set aside as God's Chosen People, and that the Church has replaced them, inheriting all the promises that were made to them in the Hebrew Scriptures.



Steve Wohlberg

The amazing thing is that these anti-Semitic views are expressed very strongly by two SDA spokesmen who happen to be Jews — Doug Batchelor and Steve Wohlberg!

In a book entitled *Exploding the Israel Deception*, Steve Wohlberg asserts that the book of Revelation must be read with "Middle East symbolism glasses" and not with "literal Middle East glasses."<sup>13</sup> When read with symbolism glasses, Wohlberg asserts that we will understand that the prophecies apply to spiritual Israel (the Church) and not to literal Israel. The booklet concludes with a remarkable paragraph:<sup>14</sup>

If you have been led to believe that the prophecies in the book of Revelation apply to an Israel in the flesh, these lies must be unmasked. If you have been taught that Revelation's statements about Jerusalem, Mount Zion

(sic), the temple, God, Magog, Babylon, and the Euphrates River apply to those literal places in the Middle East, these errors must be shattered. If you have accepted the idea that the Antichrist will one day walk into a rebuilt Jewish temple during a final seven-year period of tribulation, this false theory needs to be blown up. If sincere people have convinced you that Armageddon centers around Russian, China, and the modern State of Israel, then someone must push the button which reads: "Destroy Global Delusions." It is now time to flee from all frogs and fables!

This paragraph unmasks the fundamental problem with SDA prophetic interpretation. They take a symbolic rather than a literal approach. Instead of accepting the prophecies to mean what they say, they spiritualize them, making them say whatever they desire for them to mean. They ignore the fact that the First Coming prophecies meant exactly what they said. Why then do not the Second Coming prophecies mean what they say? ❖

### Notes:

- 1) John Ecob, booklet entitled *Seventh-Day Adventism Weighed and Found Wanting* (Marayong, Australia: Herald of Hope Magazine, 2004).
- 2) Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, first published in 1888. Now available from Remnant Publications in Coldwater, MI (1997).
- 3) E. G. White, *The Final Events of Bible Prophecy*, (Amazing Facts, 2004).
- 4) Doug Batchelor, "The Final Events of Bible Prophecy," a video produced by Amazing Facts Ministry, Roseville, CA (2004).
- 5) Doug Batchelor, *Anything but Secret!* a booklet published by Amazing Facts Ministry (2004), page 22.
- 6) Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, volume IV (Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), page 212.
- 7) Doug Batchelor, *Anything but Secret!* page 3.
- 8) E. G. White, *The Final Events of Bible Prophecy*, page 110.
- 9) *Ibid.*, pages 109-110.
- 10) David Reagan, "The Reality of Hell," *Lamplighter* magazine, (Lamb & Lion Ministries, March-April 2006), pages 3-6.
- 11) David Reagan, "The Meaning of Heaven," *Lamplighter* magazine, (Lamb & Lion Ministries, January-February 2006), pages 3-7.
- 12) E. G. White, *The Final Events of Bible Prophecy*, page 37-43.
- 13) Steve Wohlberg, *Exploding the Israel Deception*, (Endtime Insights, 1998), page 99.
- 14) *Ibid.*, page 126.

### Outstanding SDA Video

Jeremiah Films has produced an outstanding video about the SDA entitled "Seventh-Day Adventism: The Spirit Behind the Church." It includes interviews with seven former SDA pastors and four former SDA members. You can order a copy from their website at [www.jeremiahfilms.com](http://www.jeremiahfilms.com).