

SOME DISTORTIONS

OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

No. 2

*An
Enquiry
into*

The
Seventh Day
Adventism
or
The Voice of
Prophecy

by

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THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS

(Operating in Australia as "The Voice of Prophecy")

In 1831 an American named William Miller announced that he had discovered from the Bible the exact year and day when Jesus would make his second advent, which would also mark the end of the world.

Miller had been born in 1782, in Massachusetts. He was a farmer, and had been active in the local Baptist Church. He had read his Bible assiduously, but had received no training at all as to the correct mode by which to interpret it. His thinking was not Christ-centred, but was fascinated by the prophetic passages and imageries of the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of St. John.

Many simple people were carried away by his enthusiasm, and his dogmatic playing on their fears that the world would end in 1843. When it did not end in 1843, he admitted error, and stated that 1844 would see the end of the world. After that time the door to mercy would be shut, and no one could be saved unless he had accepted the gospel according to William Miller!

There was great excitement among "believers," and much argument. Many left their work, and even their property, leaving farms untilled, and losing hard-won economic standing. Wild fanaticism broke out, and many had to be arrested, and put under guardians, to protect their families.

Of course, Christ did not come as predicted, nor did the world end.

Miller was at least repentant: "We expected the personal coming of Christ at that time, and now to contend that we were not mistaken is dishonest. *We should never be ashamed frankly to confess our errors. I have no*

confidence in any of the new theories that grew out of the movement . . ."

Miller realised that he was wrong to calculate at all about the exact date of our Lord's coming, but, however he might modify his views, some of his followers developed them with fresh novelties.

MRS. WHITE'S "DIVINE REVELATIONS"

Chief among those influenced by Miller was a young girl named Ellen Harmon, who afterwards became a Mrs. White. She was sickly and hysterical, suffering constantly from epileptic fits. She joined Miller from 1841-44, but when her leader realised his own error, she continued the enthusiasm of the Adventists, receiving so-called "revelations" to support her teachings. She believed that "the very voice of God" spoke through her visions, and thousands of credulous persons followed her.

Her "testimonies" are believed by Seventh Day Adventists to be the only true exposition of the Bible, and are equal to the teaching of the Apostles. "It is God," she said, "and not an erring mortal who has spoken."

From her "revelations" has emerged a Church whose aggressive tendencies are well known, a body claiming to harbour the only true believers, and teaching that all other Churches are the "Whore of Babylon."

She not only preserved the Adventist stress on a future physical coming of Christ *at a time which may be determined*, despite the teaching of Matthew 24: 36: "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only," but she introduced a "revelation" that *the only true Christian day of worship is Saturday, the old Jewish Sabbath.*

It is a cardinal teaching of the New Testament that Christ gives us a New Covenant, that our faith centres in Him, and that with Him we are free from the letter of the Old Testament law. As Paul expressed in his letter to the Galatians: "But before faith came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith

which should afterwards be revealed. So that the law hath been our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor" (Chap. 3, vv. 23-25).

For example, circumcision, a requirement of the Old Testament law, is no longer binding on Christians as a religious observance: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love" (Chap. 5, v. 6).

"CEREMONIAL" AND "MORAL" LAW

Mrs. White, having decided that her people should observe the Jewish Sabbath instead of the Christian Lord's Day, conveniently, on her own initiative, and without any support from the New Testament writings, divided the Old Testament law into two, the *ceremonial* law, and the *moral* law. The moral law is identified with the Ten Commandments, which she called the law of God. The rest of the Old Testament she regarded as "*ceremonial*," and called it "the law of Moses."

In Exodus 24: 3 we read: "Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and *all* the judgments; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do."

The Bible thus makes no such distinction between moral and ceremonial law, but there is abundant evidence in the Bible and in early Church history that Christians deliberately expressed their faith as centred in Christ, and not in Moses, by worshipping on the first day of the week—"the Lord's Day." This was quite in harmony with the statement in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel: "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (v. 17).

LORD'S DAY SUPERSEDES JEWISH SABBATH

It is true that, in the earliest days of the apostles, Paul and other Christian missionaries attended Jewish services in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. It is likewise true that distinctive Christian observances were

held on Sunday, and that, gradually, as the divorce between the Christian and the Jewish Churches became absolutely clear, Sabbath observance on Saturday was replaced by Christian observance on the Lord's Day. (The ancient Church of Abyssinia is one exception to this rule, but it observes *both* the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Lord's Day.)

Three short examples of this change from the observance of the Jewish Sabbath to the meeting of Christians for worship on the Lord's Day may be cited from the New Testament:

(a) Acts 20, verse 7: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." Here is reference both to preaching and to the observance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Despite the fact that Paul and Luke were in Troas for seven days, no reference is made to the observance of the Sabbath.

(b) 1 Corinthians 16: 2: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." The context refers to this instruction having been given also to the Galatian Church, and to the collecting of moneys for relief of the poor in the Church at Jerusalem. The collection would naturally be taken when the Christians met for worship, on the first day of the week.

(c) In Revelation 1: 10, John writes from Patmos: "I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day." Here is a clear reference to a day of worship quite distinct from the Jewish Sabbath.

The fact that there was such an early stress on the first day of the week as the Christian day of worship cannot be unrelated to the great experiences of Christians on that day.

It is the day of the Resurrection (Mark 16: 9). It was the day of Pentecost, and the gift of the Holy Spirit occurred on that day. Acts 2 records the way in which Jesus' disciples were "in one place," "and they

were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Their meeting together for this event of great missionary importance was on a Sunday, not on the old Jewish Sabbath.

Likewise the great commandment of Jesus, "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28: 19), was given on the first day of the week.

No wonder that the Church made that day the Lord's Day, and centred its fellowship around it.

WITNESS FROM EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

The Epistle of Barnabas, dated about 110 A.D., says: "We observe the eighth day with gladness on which Jesus rose from the dead." The Didache, in the early second century: "On the Lord's Day do ye assemble, and break bread." Ignatius, about A.D. 110, says that "Christians no longer observe Sabbaths, but keep the Lord's Day." Justin Martyr, writing about 140 A.D.: "Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly." Many other references in succeeding centuries could be quoted.

It is true that early Christians did not abstain from work on Sunday. They could not do so, until the edict of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the fourth century legally recognised the Christian claim for freedom from work on that day. Constantine may have legally recognised Sunday as the Lord's Day, and a day of rest, but he did not originate something for which the Christians had striven for centuries.

Seventh Day Adventists claim that the Pope originated the Lord's Day. It is plain from our evidence that the Lord's Day was observed before there ever was a Pope, in the modern sense of the word, in Rome.

A BALANCED VIEW

The great St. Augustine, who lived A.D. 354-430, taught that "the Old Testament is explicit in the New, the New Testament is implicit in the Old."

We still preserve the Old Testament, the many good laws and teachings of which are all fulfilled and enlarged in meaning by Christ's teaching. Thus Paul, in his letter to the Romans, chapter 13, vv. 8-10, sums up the Christian attitude: "Owe no man anything, save to love one another; for he that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is summed up in this word, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; love therefore is the fulfilment of the law."

Notice that he does not bother to quote: "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy." Even to a proud Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, it had become a minor matter!

Writing to the Colossians, Paul deals with those who would distort Christianity into a new legalism: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of a new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2: 16, 17).

A POSITIVE OBSERVANCE

The development of a weekly day of rest was a physical and spiritual necessity for mankind.

As we have seen, however, the Christians, centering their faith in Christ, early made the first day of the week their sacred day.

Through the positive observance of the Lord's Day, the Church has spread all over the earth. Sunday has been universally recognised by all Christians as the Lord's Day.

Imagine the mischief and the division caused by the Seventh Day Adventists as they have gone to mission fields overseas, and confused the minds of thousands of native converts newly won to Christianity! Repeatedly, members of this movement have moved into areas where missionary spade work has been done, and divided the Christian communities.

One need not doubt the sincerity and the good character of many Seventh Day Adventists. Yet it is not enough to be sincere. A Christian is also expected to have real scriptural authority for his beliefs.

We must deny the authority of Mrs. White to make pronouncements concerning the Jewish Sabbath as a day binding upon Christians, and we must certainly refute an interpretation of the Old Testament which is not authorised anywhere in the New Testament.

Only by rejecting Christ and the New Testament could we revert to the Jewish observance of the Sabbath. If we did so, we would certainly not be free to accept Mrs. White's division of the law into moral and ceremonial, a proposition which would be anathema to any orthodox Jew.

We have no intention of rejecting Christ as our Lord and, under such circumstances, must continue to observe His day.

Consequently, we must appeal to Seventh Day Adventists to bring their undoubted zeal into the service of Christ, and not to express it in a manner which is not only untrue to the New Testament, but is positively divisive and mischievous in the spreading of the Christian faith throughout the world