

The SDA Church – Part 1 – Sabbath

Sabbath

Concerning the Sabbath the SDA church teaches as follows: *“The beneficent Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God’s unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath.”*¹

Although they are correct that God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3) there is no command from God that men also should rest on the seventh day in connection with creation. The command given to the Israelites to set aside the seventh day as a special day of worship, does not come until 1,500 years after the creation. It is true that in Exodus 20:11 when the Lord does establish the Sabbath on the seventh day the reason he gives for that particular day is because it was the day he rested after creation. However the fact remains that contrary to the first sentence of the SDA quoted above the Sabbath, as a day of rest for men, was not instituted as a command on the seventh day of creation. It was in fact instituted 1,500 years later at the time of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt. We will discuss this more later. However what is important is that no command is given, and without a command from God we cannot make the Sabbath binding on the basis of the creation account.

More importantly as the SDA church rightly acknowledges Jesus is the “Lord of the Sabbath.” It was the Lord who established the Sabbath on the seventh day at the time of the Exodus. It was Jesus, who is Lord, who tells us through his Apostles that worship on the seventh day is no longer necessary. Matt 12:5-8; Mark 2:27-28;

Let no one judge you

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col 2:16-17 ESV)

The SDA church attempts to get around this passage from Colossians by saying that the “Sabbath” mentioned here is a reference to special Sabbaths, in other words the Jewish festivals. But we can see clearly from the text that Paul has already mentioned the festivals. The word Sabbath coming later is not a reference to festivals but to something different namely the normal weekly Saturday worship of the Jews. There is nothing in the text that indicates any special meaning for the word Sabbath. Furthermore Paul explains himself quite clearly telling us that all these things including worship on the Sabbath are merely a shadow. Christ is the real substance. Christ is the true Sabbath. Our Sabbath rest is not found on one particular day of the week, but continually every day as we live in Christ who is our rest.

Christ is our rest

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (Mat 11:28 ESV)

It is certainly not a coincidence that Jesus says “I will give you rest.” If you continue reading in Matthew after this quote you will find the story of the Pharisees confronting the disciples and Jesus because the disciples were picking grain on the Sabbath. In Matthew 11:28, Jesus is specifically making reference to the Sabbath and teaching us that we now find our rest in Him.

The writer of Hebrews confirms the same thing in Hebrews 4:3-9. Study carefully this section of Scripture. Here the writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the seventh day Sabbath of the Jews was not the true Sabbath, but only a temporary sign of the true Sabbath. In verse 3 he says, “**For we who have believed enter that rest.**” Therefore he makes it clear that the true Sabbath is found by faith in Christ and not in the observance of one particular day. This is what Jesus himself tells us in our previous passage Matthew 11:28. If we receive rest through faith in Christ Jesus, and enter into the true Sabbath by faith in Christ Jesus, then we have indeed partaken in the true Sabbath every day of our lives through faith in Christ Jesus. If we live every day of our lives in the true Sabbath through faith in Christ Jesus how can anyone condemn us because we do not physically go to a church building on Saturday?

One day or many

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. (Rom 14:5-6 ESV)

While this passage from Paul does not specifically mention the Sabbath, it does speak about the subject. We may take the “one day” Paul mentions as a reference to either Sunday or Saturday. It does not matter which one Paul is referencing. His point remains. If one person wishes to worship on one particular day there is nothing wrong with that. If someone else worships every day then that is okay too. Paul’s point here is that the day is not important, Christ is what is important.

According to Paul’s words here we do not insist on any particular day. Some among us do indeed worship on Saturday, as for example our churches in Nepal, and some worship on Sunday. If the SDA wishes to worship on Saturday then that is fine, as long as they do not try to make demands that we also worship on Saturday. In this regard Paul makes it clear that we are free, to choose one day like Saturday or Sunday or any other, or to choose every day.

What about the 3rd (or 4th) Commandment?

The problem that some have is that they look at the list of the ten commandments and think why do we keep all the other nine commandments but not the 3rd (or some would call it the 4th)? But what they miss is what we have seen above. The Sabbath is not gone. We do not teach that it should be ignored. We do not teach that we should ignore the Sabbath. But rather we see that the Bible teaches that the seventh day of the week is not the true Sabbath. It is merely a shell or as Paul calls it a shadow. The true rest is Christ himself. Thus we keep the Sabbath by resting in Christ. We do not keep it by resting on the seventh day of the week, or even by resting on first day of the week. Sunday is not a replacement of the Old Testament Sabbath. Jesus is the Sabbath. In the Old Testament Saturday was merely a temporary place holder until Christ came.

A Second look at Genesis 2

With all this in mind we can return to where we started Genesis 2:2.

² And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Gen 2:2-3 ESV)

What does it mean that God blessed the seventh day? When we talk about a blessing from God we are talking about a gift. First we might ask to whom is He giving a gift? **“And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’” (Mar 2:27 ESV)** “The Sabbath was made for man.” In other words when God blessed the Sabbath He was giving a gift to men.

What is the gift that God is giving when He blesses the seventh day? Was it simply a day of rest from work? In part we can see that yes part of the blessing was a day of rest after six days of work. However, since the fall into sin the seventh day like all of God’s physical gifts to men was corrupted, Romans 8:20. There is then no true rest for men on this sinful earth. We can find rest alone in Christ our Savior as we saw above.

Furthermore Scripture is clear that physical rest is not the real blessing of the seventh day. For Scripture continues, “God blessed the seventh day and **made it holy** . . .” What does it mean that he made it holy? Sometimes we use the term sanctify. These two words “sanctify” and “make holy” mean the same thing. It means to set something apart as dedicated to God. In the wilderness we see how the Lord instructed that the Temple was holy, sanctified, set apart for himself. Indeed the ark was set apart to the point where no man could touch it and live.

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1Co 6:11 ESV)

In the New Testament we are sanctified, by which Paul means that we are once again united to God. We are set apart as those who belong to God. So also the seventh day was set apart as that which belongs to God. But not for God’s sake, as if He needs a day of rest, or a day of His own. “The Earth is the Lord’s and all the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). This includes all the days, not just one. Rather as we have seen it was sanctified for the sake of man. As Jesus said, “the Sabbath was made for man.” The seventh day of the week at the time of creation was made the Lord’s day for the sake of man. The original purpose of the seventh day was to be a day in which God came to man and gave Himself in fellowship with man. When Adam and Eve fell in sin, this was no longer possible and the Sabbath was broken. The seventh day remained as a reminder of that fellowship even though it could no longer fulfill that purpose until Christ came to restore what had been lost. A second time God gave himself to man, but this time not on a particular day but in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus once again we conclude that Christ is our Sabbath and not one particular day of the week.

¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for

you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. (Act 3:18-21 ESV)

Part 2 – Hell

Concerning death and hell the SDA church writes the following: *There's one upside to human mortality: nobody will spend an eternity in hell, writhing in pain as flames lick their body, screaming in regret and agony forever. What would that achieve? Wouldn't that make God morally worse than brutal dictators, whose victims screamed only for hours rather than centuries? The Bible gives two options: one, "the wages of sin is death"—not eternal life in torment. The second option is "eternal life in Christ Jesus"—and that's a "gift of God," which means I don't naturally have immortality (Rom. 6:23).*ⁱⁱ

I will begin by admitting that what they say above sounds really good. I personally would like nothing better than to believe there is no such thing as hell. However we cannot pick and choose what we want about the bible. When it comes to the word of God we have two choices. Either it is the word of God and everything in it is absolute truth, or it is the word of man and we are free to listen only to that which we want to believe. God's word is more than clear concerning the end of those who refuse to listen to His word.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mar 16:16 ESV)

The argument of the SDA church concerning hell fails in three parts. 1. They fail to understand the biblical terms of life and death. According to the above quote they assume that death and life must only refer to the body. 2. They deny that hell is physical place, implying that when the bible talks about hell and condemnation it must mean only the state of being dead, which they interpret as being nonexistent. 3. They refuse to accept the eternal nature of hell.

Hell is a real physical place

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. (Mat 5:29 ESV)

In Matt 5:29 above Jesus talks about the whole body being thrown into hell. In Matt 10:28 below Jesus makes a distinction between death and hell. Here Jesus clearly shows that something worse than physical death exists after physical death. Further Jesus indicates in this passage that physical death affects only the body, but the death that comes after affects both the body and the soul.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Mat 10:28 ESV)

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; (2Pe 2:4 ESV)

It is true that the Greek term used here in 2 Peter is a different term than the one which Jesus often used. Jesus often used the Greek word gehenna, whereas Peter here uses the verb tartarus. However the passage makes it clear that there must be a real physical place of torment, for it specifically says that the evil angels are kept there until judgment day. In Matthew 8:12 Jesus specifically calls hell “that place” indicating it is a real place with real physical pain “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Jesus uses similar words in Matthew 22:13, Matthew 24:51, Matthew 25:30 and in Luke 13:28.

while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Mat 8:12 ESV)

Hell is Eternal

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. (Mar 9:43 ESV)

In Mark 9:43 Jesus specifically says the fire of hell is “unquenchable.” Likewise in Matthew 3:12 and Luke 3:17 Jesus uses the same term of hell. The term in the Greek is asbestos. This term is often used not only in the bible but also in the classical Greek writings of a fire that never ends, an example would be the eternal flame of Vespa. In Matthew 25:41 and 46 Jesus again refers to the eternal fire of hell. This time He uses the Greek term *aionios* meaning eternal, without end. He also specifically calls it a place “prepared for the devil and his angels.” Another interesting aspect of Matthew 25:46 is that the exact same term Jesus uses for eternal torment is used for eternal life. If you want to suggest that the torment of hell is not forever, then neither is the bliss of heaven, for the same word is used for both.

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’” (Mat 25:41,46 ESV)

The Meaning of Death in the Bible

Death, then, in the OT means ultimate separation from God due to sin.ⁱⁱⁱ

When the SDA church in the quote at the beginning of this section say, “the wages of sin is death”—not eternal life in torment,” they are implying that if a person is dead he cannot be conscious. In fact they imply that death is the same as nonexistence. This is to view death as a matter primarily of the existence of the individual, in other words existence is the same as life and nonexistence the same as death. The Bible however takes a very different view of death. As the above quote from the Theological Word Book of the Old Testament points out the Bible primarily views death as a question of our relationship to God. To be alive means to be joined to God, to be dead means to be separate from God. This can be seen from the fact that the bible repeatedly and often refers to people who are currently “living” on earth as being dead. Matthew 8:22; Romans 8:10; Ephesians 2:1,5; Colossians 2:13; 1 Timothy 5:6;

On the other hand the Bible often refers to those who are physically dead as being alive. As does Jesus when he refers to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and again when He talks about the girl and Lazarus. With regard to both the girl and Lazarus, whom Jesus refers to as “sleeping” Jesus is not trying to imply that they are not physically dead. In both cases the story bears out that Jesus knows perfectly well that they

are dead physically. Rather Jesus is trying to teach us the true meaning of death. Matthew 22:31,32; Matthew 9:24; John 11:11; John 11:25

In Genesis 2:17 God claims that in the very day that Adam and Eve eat from the tree they will die. Yet they eat from the tree and live another 900 years. Is God a liar? Certainly not. But because of their sin they were cast out of the presence of God, and thus they died in the only way that really matters.

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Joh 11:25-26 ESV)

In John 11:25 as well as three times in Revelation, Jesus specifically talks about at least two types of death. In John 11 talking to Mary Jesus uses the term death and life first with a physical meaning. If anyone believes then though he may physically die he will be raised again to life. Secondly Jesus uses the term death and life in a spiritual sense. "Everyone who lives" by which He means is connected to God by faith, "shall never die" by which He means will never be separated from God. In Revelation 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8 Jesus talks about a second death. The first death is the physical death of our bodies. The second is eternal separation from God.

Although the Bible makes it clear that God's main concern is our relationship to him, not that state of our physical bodies, the bible does still often use the term death in what we might consider the normal way, that of physical death. This means we can summarize the Biblical meaning of death into three categories. Spiritual death is when we are separated from God by our sin. Physical or temporal death is when our bodies are separated from our souls. Eternal death is when we are separated from God forever in hell. In Romans 6:23 when Paul says "the wages of sin is death," he is probably referring to all three, however the emphasis has to be on eternal death, the counterpart to "the gift of God is eternal life."

⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved-- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph 2:4-7 ESV)

Part 3 – Christ's Coming

Concerning Christ's second coming a brief but detailed description of the SDA beliefs can be found online at <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/apocalypse/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/article/go/0/the-millennium-and-the-end-of-sin/>. Rather than quote the whole article I've summarized it here.

1. Jesus returns, the wicked are destroyed, the righteous go to heaven, the earth therefore is left empty.
2. Satan and his angels are imprisoned in the abyss for 1,000 years.
3. After this literal 1,000 years, a literal city of God will descend from heaven and sit upon the earth.
4. At this point God will raise the dead unbelievers and they will make war on the city of God.
5. God will then destroy all who aren't in the city with fire, which will also destroy the earth.
6. God will make a new heavens and a new earth.

Most of the ideas which the SDA church teaches concerning the second coming of Christ they get from the book of Revelation and especially Revelation 20. Like many Baptist and Charismatic groups the SDA church makes the mistake of taking these prophecies and visions literally. When they mistake the symbolic nature of Revelation for literal events and attempt to piece them together they end up with some rather strange ideas. As you can see above they teach that God will destroy all the wicked, but then he will raise them again just so that he can destroy them again. They also teach that the righteous will go to heaven but then they will have to come back to earth and endure once again war against the unbelievers. We will take a look at these false conceptions in three parts. First we will look at how the SDA like many others mistakenly take the book of Revelation too literally. Second we will take a brief look at the nature of God's kingdom. And finally we will see what the Bible really does say about Christ's second coming.

The Book of Revelation is mostly Symbolism

Literary devices

One of the most important keys to correctly understand scripture is to remember that God chose to use human languages to reveal Himself to us. In His grace and wisdom He did this so that the message of the glory of His Son could be preached to fallen men. We all know that the material one uses to build a house will greatly affect how you build it and what it will look like. If you use mud, bricks, wood or steel different rules apply as to how you can construct that building. The human language also has different building blocks for expressing ideas and truth; one can use parables, metaphors, prose, poetry, narrative and many other forms of literature. All these different forms are constructed differently and make use of different rules. Consider the following two sentences:

My wife is beautiful.

My wife shines like the sun.

Both sentences express the same idea. Both sentences are true. However the first does so with literal language. The second uses a simile and everyone who reads it knows immediately that the words "shine" and "sun" ought to be taken figuratively, because that is the nature of similes. My wife does not actually produce physical light equivalent to that which comes from the sun.

The Bible, because it uses human language, makes use of these same methods to express ideas. Sometimes it speaks literally and sometimes it speaks figuratively. Throughout history Christians who

have failed to properly understand this have made many great mistakes. Some have insisted on reading the entire Bible figuratively. They therefore teach that historic events like creation and even the resurrection of Christ are merely symbols or parables and didn't really happen. Others have insisted on taking the entire Bible literally. Such a group once taught for example that the parable of the *Sower and the Seed* is an instruction on how farmers ought to plant, and therefore anyone who does not throw his seed like the farmer in Jesus' parable is disobeying the will of God.

We often express this idea with the phrase "the Bible is a literary text." This means exactly what we have been talking about. God uses human language to talk to humans. When using human language, God uses also the devices and forms of that language, including simile, metaphor, poetry, etc. When God uses a metaphor we ought to understand it figuratively, when God uses narrative we ought to understand it literally.

For more on properly understanding the Bible take a look at Pastor David Koenig's essay, *The Fifteen Principles of Biblical Interpretation*: <http://lutheranmissions.org/essay/fifteen-principles-of-interpretation/>

Revelation is a prophetic vision

Concerning the book of Revelation it is quite clear that it is largely a prophetic book. In Revelation chapters two and three John is told to write letters to the seven churches. These letters are not about the future but rather about the current churches. Therefore we might not call this part of Revelation prophetic. However immediately in chapter four we read:

Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. (Rev 4:1 ESV)

That which follows from here on, is therefore prophetic, that is, it is a message about what will happen in the future.

The book of Revelation is also a vision. John tells us this immediately at the beginning of the book. Thus the book of Revelation is a *prophetic vision*.

When we look at the nature of prophetic visions throughout the Bible we can quickly see that they are always largely symbolic. In Daniel chapter 2 we have the prophetic vision of the statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, and iron mixed with clay. Daniel makes it very clear that this is not a literal statue but is *symbolic* of the kingdoms of this earth. Likewise the stone which crushes the statue is not a *literal* stone which will roll over the earth, but instead is Christ. Similarly in Daniel chapter eight we have a prophetic vision about a ram and a goat and a horn. That these things are all clearly symbolic is specifically told us by Daniel and by the Angel who comes to explain these symbolisms. Similarly we might take a look at Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah and many others. We would see the same pattern again and again. Prophetic visions are mostly symbolic. This is true also concerning the book of Revelation.

There are many things in the book of Revelation itself that show that it is mostly symbolic. Jesus is alternatively described as a lamb, a lion, and a man sitting on a throne. Are we to think that Jesus literally appears as all three? Of course not, these things are symbols. In Revelation 7:4 the number of

the believers is numbered at 144,000. Should we believe therefore that only a literal 144,000 will go to heaven? Of course not, for just five verse later, practically in the same breath, John calls this same group of believers “a great multitude that *no one could number*.” It is quite clear from the context that the number 144,000 is symbolic. The 12 tribes of Israel times the 12 apostles times 1000 which is a full complete number equals 144,000. 144,000 is then symbolic of the full complete number of the Old Testament and New Testament believers.

⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, (Rev 20:8-9 ESV)

In Revelation 20:8-9 we have this picture of the wicked making war on the city of God. Once again the SDA church takes this passage literally, a literal city and a literal physical war. Yet compare this passage to Psalm 2. The picture in Psalm 2 is almost exactly the same picture that is given in Revelation 20. The city of God sitting on a hill, the forces of men arrayed in battle against it, the triumph of Christ and of our God. Yet the writers of the New Testament make it clear that Psalm 2 was already fulfilled in Christ; see Acts 13, Hebrews 1, and Hebrews 5. If Psalm 2 is not speaking of a literal earthly city and a literal earthly mountain, then why should we think that Revelation 20 is doing so?

Revelation 20 is not speaking literally, but rather it is symbolic of the constant ongoing spiritual war between God’s people and the people of this world. And it is therefore of the greatest comfort to us, for we are clearly in the middle of this war even now. We can see this war all around us as the forces of this world grow ever bolder in their attacks on Christianity. Yet we know the end of this war and look forward in hope to our final victory through Christ Jesus our Lord.

For a more in depth study on Revelation and why it should not be taken literally, read Pastor David Koenig’s essay on Revelation.

God’s Kingdom will never be a literal place on this earth

The SDA church and many others like them not only fail to understand the largely symbolic nature of the book of Revelation, but they also fail to understand the meaning of the “Kingdom of God” and other similar phrases like the “Kingdom of Heaven.”

This is nothing new. Misunderstandings concerning the true nature of God’s Kingdom began with the Jews. A large part of the book of Matthew deals with this very subject, in which Christ over and over again attempts to explain to the Jewish people that His kingdom is not a physical anything. It is not a physical earthly city, it is not a physical earthly kingdom, and it is not a physical earthly race.

In fact one might argue that misunderstanding the kingdom of God goes all the way back to Eve. In Genesis 4:1 Eve gives birth to Cain and says of him, “**I have acquired a man from the LORD.**” Many commentators believe that a better translation should be “**I have acquired a man, the LORD.**” If this is true it would show Eve’s great faith in God’s promise of sending a Messiah, but it would also show her misunderstanding concerning the nature of how and when that promise would be fulfilled.

Let us consider a few passages showing that Christ's kingdom is not and will never be a physical kingdom on this earth and therefore this idea that the city of God will physically descend and sit upon mount Zion is wrong.

³⁶ **Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (Joh 18:36 NKJ)**

³ **Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (Joh 3:3 NKJ)**

¹⁷ **for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom 14:17 NKJ)**

³¹ **"So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near.**

³² **"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things take place. (Luk 21:31-32 NKJ)**

²⁰ **Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; ²¹ "nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luk 17:20-21 NKJ)**

In John 3:3 it is evident that Kingdom of God is spiritual for only those who are born spiritually can see it.

The passage in Luke has greatly confused many Christians over the years, largely because they do not understand the term "Kingdom of God." Now we are 2,000 years after Christ spoke these words, all those who were there and heard Him are long dead, yet we have seen no physical coming of God's Kingdom. How can Jesus say that "this generation will by no means pass away." This chapter is difficult and deserves an in-depth study if we are to properly understand it. For now, let us simply realize that God's kingdom is not a physical earthly kingdom but rather it is God's power at work, God's power through which He rules the world, God's power through which He creates faith in our hearts, God's power which works through the preaching of His word. All these things are continual and ongoing since Christ's first coming. Therefore the Kingdom of God is among us even now. We can see the Son of Man coming with power when He comes through the power of His word. Even right now the City of God, which is the church of God, sits upon His holy hill of Zion. This means that we the believers live in God's Kingdom when we place our faith and the foundation of our life upon the death and resurrection of Christ, who is Zion, and against this foundation the world and Satan fights but *will not prevail*.

For more information concerning the nature of God's kingdom take a look at:

Pastor David Koenig's Essay, *The Kingdom of God*, <http://lutheranmissions.org/essay/the-kingdom-of-god/>

And this essay on the parables of Matthew 13: <http://lutheranmissions.org/essay/matthew-13-parables/>

So What Will Happen when Christ Returns?

1. Christ will appear and all flesh will see him

Matthew 16:27; Matthew 24:30; Matthew 26:64; Revelation 1:7

2. All the dead, believers and unbelievers, will be raised from the dead

John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2

3. Those who were dead and the living will be judged by God

Matthew 13:49; Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31;

4. The believers will go with Jesus to heaven, the unbelievers will go with Satan and the evil angels to everlasting hell

Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 13:50; Mark 16:16

5. This universe and all that is within it will be destroyed with fire

2 Peter 3:10

6. A new heavens and a new earth will be created

2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65:17

Part 4 – Alcohol, Tobacco, Unclean Foods, etc

Concerning Christian living the SDA church says the following:

We are called to be a godly people who think, feel and act in harmony with the principles of heaven . . . It also means that because our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, we are to care for them intelligently. Along with adequate exercise and rest, we are to adopt the most healthful diet possible and abstain from the unclean foods identified in the Scriptures. Since alcoholic beverages, tobacco and the irresponsible use of drugs and narcotics are harmful to our bodies, we are to abstain from them as well. Instead, we are to engage in whatever brings our thoughts and bodies into the discipline of Christ, who desires our wholesomeness, joy and goodness. (Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 John 2:6; Eph. 5:1-21; Phil. 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:5; 6:14-7:1; 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 10:31; Lev. 11:1-47; 3 John 2.)^v

In the above article from the SDA website the first three lines are very good. We want to do the best to care for our bodies both physically and spiritually because they are the temple of the Holy Spirit. But starting with the fourth line the SDA church goes too far promoting and even demanding of Christian's laws that God did not give us. This may seem like a small thing but the Apostle John at the end of Revelation reminds us we must not add even one thing to the Word of God.

Concerning regulations

Many pastors and other well meaning Christians fall into the trap of confusing Christian wisdom, Christian liberty, and biblical doctrine. Alcohol is a good example of this. Many Christians have seen how the abuse of alcohol can ruin lives. It can ruin not only the lives of those who abuse the alcohol but their family and friends as well. For this reason there are some Christians like the SDA that condemn all use of alcohol. In this however they make the mistake of "Teaching *as* doctrines the commandments of men" (Mat 15:9 NKJ). God's word does not condemn the drinking of alcohol it only condemns the abuse of alcohol. In other words God's word tells us it is sinful to be drunk. It does not tell us it is sinful to drink alcohol. In fact the wedding of Cana (John 2) and the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:29) make it clear that Jesus himself on occasion drank wine. Paul also counsels Timothy that he ought to drink a little wine when he is sick (1 Timothy 5:23).

God's word makes it clear the gluttonous eating is a sin Proverbs 23:20. Should we therefore say that eating itself is a sin? Of course not it is the abuse that is the sin not the eating. Or we can take the example of money, greed is also a sin. Greed is the abuse of money, caring about it and wanting it more than Christ. But this does not mean that money of itself is evil or that having it is sinful. In this regard many Christians have misread 1 Timothy 6:10 thinking it says "money is the root of all evil," but this is not so. 1 Timothy 6:10 says "the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil," which is the same as saying greed. In all these examples the sin is not in the thing itself, money, food, or alcohol but in man when he abuses what God has created.

There are many reasons why with Christian wisdom we might realize it is best to avoid certain things such as wine and tobacco. However if we try to make rules for others saying doing this or that is a sin, than we are guilty of adding to God's word what God has not said. We must always remember that we are messengers. We are here to proclaim what God has already given to us. It does not matter how wise we think we are we do not have the right to make laws, rules, regulations of all Christians that God has not spoken.

¹⁸ For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; ¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book. (Rev 22:18-19 NKJ)

Concerning Unclean Foods

The SDA church seems to put forward two reasons for not eating what the Old Testament called “unclean foods.” One of these reasons is because they imagine that this is a more healthy way of living. Another reason is because they claim it is commanded by God.

The Old Testament regulations that God gave to the Israelites, Christ has removed in His person. This is clearly taught in scripture in numerous places as indeed we have already seen in our discussion on the Sabbath. Mark 2:28; Colossians 2:16; Acts 10:15; Acts 15; Hebrews 9:9-11; Rom 14. This idea that some or all of the Old Testament ceremonial regulations, such as circumcision and eating only clean animals was the very first heresy that the church had to contend with. The council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 was called for the purpose of condemning those who taught that circumcision was necessary. Paul himself deals with these questions in detail in Romans, Corinthians and in Galatians. One would have wished that this false teaching would thus have been dealt with, but here we see Satan has brought it to life again in the teachings of the SDA church.

Secondly the SDA church supposes that because the eating only clean foods is supposedly healthier therefore we must do it. We have to remember the purpose of the Old Testament regulations was as a shadow of Christ, including what to eat and what not to eat Colossians 2:17. The purpose of the Old Testament laws was not to make the Israelites healthier. It may well be that God designed some of the laws because He knew this or that was healthier for His people. But we don't know that. Nowhere in the bible does it tell us anything of the sort. We do not know why God called pigs unclean but sheep he called clean. It is simply what He did and we cannot claim to know the mind of God apart from those things He has chosen to reveal. We can use the wisdom and scientific tools God has given to us to investigate what is better for our health. We can recognize the wisdom of eating and living in a healthy manner so that we are fully capable of doing God's will and honoring Him in our bodies, but we cannot as the SDA church has done say that all Christians must do this and must not eat that.

²⁰ Therefore¹, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as *though* living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," ²² which all concern things which perish with the using-- according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³ These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (Col 2:20-23 NKJ)

Part 5 – William Miller and Ellen White

History of the SDA Church

The following paragraphs are excerpts taken from “Adventism: Its History And Doctrine” by James A. Aderman. The full paper can be found at <http://www.wlsessays.net/subject/a/Adventism>

William Miller, a Baptist and former military officer in the War of 1812, quite unintentionally became the man around whom the interdenominational adventist movement was to rally. Miller, theologically trained but never licensed to preach, became convinced that Christ's return to earth was imminent after a thorough study of the Scriptures in which he especially focused on the books of Daniel and Revelation.

[In 1842 William Miller] announced after intensive study of the Scriptures that Jesus would return between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844.

March 21, 1844, of course, came and went without so much as the sound of one heavenly trumpet. "But the movement seems not to have been greatly shaken by what came to be called the First Disappointment." That summer Miller reviewed his calculations and at the urgings of his colleagues set the date of the second coming at October 22, 1844.

Ushered in on the heels of October 23, 1844 was the Great (and final) Disappointment.

After this second disappointment, the majority renounced the Adventist faith and returned to their respective churches. Those who stayed, banded together to insulate themselves from the hostile world around them. Together they groped for new explanations.

The explanation which satisfied most of the remaining Adventists was presented to an Adventist conference in Albany, April 29, 1845. "Hiram Edson and O. R. L. Cozier stated that according to Hebrews 8:1,2 the sanctuary spoken of in Daniel 8:13,14 is in heaven and not on the earth, as Miller had assumed. (Thus, although) the computation of the '2,300 days' had been correct, the description of the nature of the event had been false." This interpretation was able to temporarily rally the Adventists and reunite them.

In the 1850s the Sabbath-keeping Adventists left New York and headed for the better homesteads available to them in southern Michigan. This separation allowed them to begin anew without the intra-Adventist disputes of the East. Coming to the fore at this time among the Sabbath-keeping Adventists are Joseph Bates, James White, and his renounced wife, Ellen.

Ellen White was to play a very important role in this new movement. In fact, Seventh Day Adventism was shaped and led for the most part by Mrs. Ellen G. White for its first 70 years. Mrs. White is regarded as a prophetess by the Adventists. She authored 53 books and more than 4,500 articles. Much of her writing was based on visions which she received.

From the Website of the SDA Church:

<http://www.adventist.org/information/history/article/go/0/seventh-day-adventist-church-emerged-from-religious-fervor-of-19th-century-1/>

A final group—the future leaders of early Seventh-day Adventists—were convinced the date [Miller's prediction of the return of Christ] was right, but the event was wrong.

Reinvigorated by this possibility, they regrouped and returned to Scripture, determined to discover the truth. What they concluded is that instead of returning to Earth on October 22, Jesus had begun the last phase of his atoning ministry in the heavenly sanctuary.

A young Methodist woman named Ellen Harmon (later White) lent prophetic credibility to this interpretation. Her December 1844 vision of a “straight and narrow path” to heaven confirmed that prophecy had indeed been fulfilled on October 22 and galvanized what would be the denomination’s central focus on Christ.

Analysis

What is clear from the history of the SDA church is that their teachings are largely based on the prophecy and visions of two people, William Miller and Ellen White. The Scriptures give us two standards by which we are to test prophets.

1. Do their visions and prophecies come true?

when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deu 18:22 NKJ)

2. Are their teachings in accordance with scripture?

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (1Jo 4:1 NKJ)

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (Act 17:11 NKJ)

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. (Rom 16:17 NKJ)

We already looked at the teachings of the SDA church, most of which were taught by Ellen White, and compared them to scripture. It is clear that these teachings are not in agreement with the Word of God that we have received from the Apostles. For this reason alone we would not accept the teachings of Ellen White, William Miller, or the SDA church, since what they teach is against the teachings of Christ and the apostles.

Furthermore, the visions and prophecies of William Miller and Ellen White did not come true. They were false prophecies from false prophets. It is clear that Jesus did not return in 1844 as Miller predicted not once but twice. The SDA church does indeed admit that Miller was wrong, but they then try to make excuses saying he was only mistaken as to what would happen. They claim his prediction of the day was correct. This is a poor excuse. It is clear that Miller’s prophecy was wrong. Even if we accepted their

explanation, Miller made predictions for the Lord's coming two separate times. Even if he was right one of those times he was wrong the other. His prophecies failed because they were false prophecies.

Ellen White also had many failed prophecies. She predicted that the world would end four separate times. She claimed that those from the North who fought in the Civil War were being deceived. She claimed that the war would not end slavery. It is obvious now that the Civil War did indeed end slavery. She predicted England would declare war on the US, which never happened. These are just a few examples.

All of this and so much more shows to us that the SDA churches are not our brothers in Christ. But rather that the church is filled with false teachings and false prophecies. We indeed ought to pray for them and deal with them in love, but also we avoid them as God's word directs.

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. (Rom 16:17 NKJ)

³ As I urged you when I went into Macedonia-- remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴ nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. (1Ti 1:3-4 NKJ)

¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, ¹² teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Tit 2:11-14 NKJ)

ⁱ (2013). *28 Fundamental Beliefs*. Available from: <http://www.adventist.org/fileadmin/adventist.org/files/articles/official-statements/28Beliefs-English.pdf>. [Accessed: 7/3/2014].

ⁱⁱ Kent, Grenville. (2014). *Nature of Man: Who You Are*. Available from: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/humanity/nature-of-man/article/go/0/who-are-you/>. [Accessed: 20/3/2014].

ⁱⁱⁱ Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody, 1980. <BibleWorks, v.8.>.

^{iv} *Living Christian Behavior*. Available from: <http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/living/christian-behavior/>. [Accessed: 24/5/2014].