

# What Is The Origin of The Seventh-Day Adventist Church?

## Bible Answers About Denominations

William Miller was a farmer from upstate New York who was a veteran of the War of 1812. He started telling people in 1831 that the Biblical prophecies described in Revelation had yet to transpire.

From the time of our Lord until now there have been those who have proclaimed the immediate coming of the Lord only to be proved wrong each and every time. As Walter R. Martin pointed out, "Seventh-day Adventism sprang from the "great second advent awakening" which shook the religious world about the middle of the nineteenth century, when a re-emphasis about the second advent of Jesus Christ was rampant in Britain and on the continent of Europe. Before long, many of the Old World views of prophetic interpretation crossed the Atlantic and penetrated American theological circles." (The Kingdom of the Cults, p. 361).

Miller drew a large following, and in 1840, he finally announced a specific range of dates for the second coming of Jesus Christ. He said it would occur sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844.

When March 22, 1844 arrived without any perceptible return of Christ, it was a problem for Miller. Thousands of followers had given away their possessions in anticipation of the big day. But then one of Miller's followers realized that his calculations had been off by one year, because he neglected to count the BC to AD rollover. So he revised the date to October 22 and tried again.

In October, of course, the same thing happened, the Lord did not return as anticipated. Except this time, there weren't any arithmetic errors to blame. Upwards of 100,000 Millerites had expected to finally meet God. Many of them dressed in white robes and climbed up on roofs and hilltops. But the chosen night came and went. The milestone would come to be known as the Great Disappointment of 1844.

According to one follower: "The world made merry over the old Prophet's predicament. The taunts and jeers of the 'scoffers' were well-nigh unbearable." Nevertheless, Miller hung tough. The following month, he expressed his never-say-die attitude in a letter:

*"Although I have been twice disappointed, I am not yet cast down or discouraged ... My hope in the coming of Christ is as strong as ever. I have done only what after years of sober consideration I felt a solemn duty to do ... I have fixed my mind upon another time, and here I mean to stand until God gives me more light. And that is Today, TODAY, and TODAY, until He comes, and I see HIM for whom my soul yearns."*

William Miller died on December 20, 1849 without the Lord ever coming as he promised. Almost overnight, the remnants of his church splintered over doctrinal differences. This fragmentation ultimately gave rise to a variety of denominations, including the Jehovah Witnesses and the SeventhDay Adventists.

In the 20th century, an offshoot of the Seventh-Day Adventists updated Miller's prophecy by claiming a Biblical date of April 22, 1959. Again the Lord was a no-show. This group, calling itself the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, broke into two pieces in the resulting schism. One product of this division decided to call themselves the Branch Davidians.

In respect to Mr. Miller it needs to be pointed out that he differed from Seventh-Day Adventist theology in three distinct points: he denied the Seventh-day Sabbath, the doctrine of the sleep of the soul, and the final, utter destruction of the wicked – all doctrines held by the Seventh-Day Adventist denomination.

There were three segments of Millerism which eventually united to form the Seventh-Day Adventist denomination. Each of these groups held a distinctive doctrine. The group headed by Hiram Edson in western New York proclaimed the doctrine of the sanctuary “as embracing a special or final ministry of Christ in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly sanctuary,” thus giving new meaning to the message, “The Hour of God’s Judgment has come.” The second group, headed by Joseph Bates, whose main following was in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, advocated the observance of the Seventh-day “as involved in the keeping of the commandments of God.” The third group, in Maine, emphasized the “spirit of prophecy” or “the testimony of Jesus,” which they believed was to be manifest in the “remnant” or “the last segment of God’s church of the centuries.” Between the years of 1844 and 1847 the thinking of these groups crystallized and was actively declared and promulgated in the writings of their respective leaders, Hiram Edson, O. R. L. Crosier, Joseph Bates, James White and Ellen G. White.

In most religious movements, one extraordinary and gifted personality dominates the scene, and so it was with Seventh Day Adventism. This dominant personality was, and is today, through her writings, Ellen G. White. She was born at Gorham, Me., Nov. 26, 1827. Her maiden name was Harmon. In her “Testimonies for the Church” (Vol. I., pp. 9-58), Mrs. White gives a lengthy account of her childhood, youth, conversion, and acceptance of Adventism under the preaching of William Miller. Because of an unfortunate accident and being unable to continue attending school, her education never went beyond learning to read and write a little (p. 13).

In 1846 she married Elder White. He strongly encouraged her in her so-called visions even though at first she even doubted them. The foundation of Adventism was laid in 1844 and her visions were added to this date in the same year. Then, in 1846, the Sabbath was added. Next came the sanctuary. Then the three messages. Later, the health reform, short dress and other matters were added. All these were, from time to time, simply added to, and built upon, the original time-setting foundation of 1844. Hence, all Seventh-day Adventists point back to this as the great event in their history.

Seventh-day Adventists claim that Mrs. White was equal to the greatest prophet God ever sent to men. But if she was inferior to none of the prophets of past ages, why didn’t God give her some credentials as He did the Biblical prophets? She never wrought a single miracle; never claimed to, dared not claim it. The prophets of old wrought many miracles. If the power of God was with her,

why was there not some tangible proof of it? According to her own testimony, she had to be healed over and over often; but she had no power to heal others. She prayed over many sick, including her own children and husband, but they died early in life. She never had any power to heal the sick.

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