

Why I Left Adventism

By José T. Guerra

Since my childhood I was a committed Seventh-day Adventist and for many years I earnestly preached the Adventist message as “*the last message of mercy to a sinful world.*” One day, however, after an intense and honest examination of its distinctive doctrines, I came to the firm conclusion that the Seventh-day Adventist doctrines did not have the solid Biblical foundation I had always believed they had. Although it was difficult for me to accept it, I had the courage and honesty to break away from what until then had been my most precious faith.

What follows is a brief summary of the most important reasons that led me to leave Adventism.

Disappointment with Ellen G. White

As a Seventh-day Adventist, I always believed in Ellen G. White’s gift of prophecy. For me, she had been God’s messenger for his people of the last days and I had always considered her writings to be an inspired commentary and complement to the Bible. It never crossed my mind that she might have written anything contrary to the Holy Scriptures. As a sincere believer in Mrs. White’s spiritual gift, I was a devout reader of all her books, always ready to mold my life according to her teachings and admonitions.

In October 1980, when I was a pastor in Los Angeles, California, a disturbing article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* where Dr. Walter Rea, a longtime Seventh-day Adventist pastor, made public amazing and conclusive evidence that Mrs. White had copied extensively from other authors as she wrote her books. Similar findings were also exposed some time later by other Adventist researchers. Suddenly, many things were revealed that questioned the “inspiration” of Ellen G. White.

At the beginning, I thought this was simply the work of the devil in order to discredit and destroy the cause of God. But as I began to examine and compare the evidence, after much prayer and intense inner struggle, I had no choice but to accept the bare fact that Mrs. White had obtained much inspiration from other sources to write her books and “testimonies.”

Now, it was revealed that she had plagiarized extensively from Christian works such as *The Great Teacher* by John Harris, *Our Father’s Home* by Daniel March, *The Life of Christ* by William Hanna, *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life* by Hanna Withal Smith, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* by Alfred Edersheim, and many others. Mrs. White always claimed that everything she wrote in her books was a direct revelation from God. In fact, she once stated, “I do not write one article in the paper expressing my own ideas. They are what God has opened before me in vision” (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 67). Except for a few sections in her well-known book *The Great Controversy*, she never acknowledged her sources. The irony of all this was that the authors she copied from were from churches Seventh-day Adventists now considered to be the fallen and apostate “Babylon” of Revelation 14:8. But even more disappointing was to find that Mrs. White did not always agree with Scripture.

The Investigative Judgment

Central to the Adventist message is the belief that in 1844, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 8:14, Jesus began his final phase of ministry in the heavenly sanctuary and that at the same time an investigative judgment of all the believers started as a prelude to Christ's second coming.

A careful study of the prophetic key used to determine the year 1844 as the beginning of the investigative judgment proved to be without any solid basis. The "*year-day principle*" is defended by quoting Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6. But a simple reading of these passages in their context can easily show that they don't teach that a day in prophecy equals a literal year. Israel would wander 40 literal years in the desert according to the 40 literal days the spies traveled through Canaan. And Ezekiel would lie down a literal day for each literal year of wickedness of Israel and Judah. If a rule could be deducted from these passages is that a literal day represents a literal year, which is not exactly what those who hold on to the so-called "*year-day principle*" affirm.

On the other hand, to affirm that the 2300 evenings and mornings of Dan. 8:14 mean 2300 years is also pure speculation. Although the phrase "evenings and mornings" is somewhat obscure, it no doubt refers to the daily sacrifices that took place at the temple in Jerusalem since it agrees more with the context. Daniel 8:14 is the answer to a question about how long the interruption of the daily sacrifice and the desolation of the sanctuary caused by the "little horn" would last. A growing number of Bible scholars interpret this passage as referring to the time of persecution suffered by the Jews around 167 BC under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, his desecration of the temple, and its subsequent deliverance (1 Maccabees 1:41-64). Seventh-day Adventists, however, complicate the interpretation of this passage even more when they identify the "little horn" as the Papacy, which they say began to rule in 538 AD, while they place the beginning of the 2300 evenings and mornings in 457 BC, some 995 years earlier. This is no doubt a serious contradiction in their prophetic reckoning!

This particular interpretation of Daniel 8:14 has a very interesting background. It was William Miller, a nineteenth century lay Baptist preacher, who first concluded that the 2300 evenings and mornings meant 2300 years and that they pointed to Christ's second coming around 1844. When the coming of the Lord did not take place as expected, instead of recognizing their mistake, as Miller himself did, some Adventists developed in time the new doctrine of the investigative judgment. What took place in 1844, they now said, was that Jesus entered for the very first time into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary to begin a judgment of all righteous people and to determine who would eventually be saved.

This teaching has details that even many Seventh-day Adventists don't fully understand. Suffice it to say that it is not supported by the Bible. The New Testament teaches that when Christ ascended to heaven he went immediately into the very presence of God and did not need to wait over 1800 years to go into the Most Holy Place (Hebrews 9:11, 12, 23-25). Also, and even more important, the gospel teaches that all of our sins are totally forgiven at the moment when we receive Christ (Col. 2:13). To believe that God will review our sins again in order to determine who will be truly saved is not only contrary to the gospel but something that continually torments Seventh-day Adventists not knowing if they will finally be saved or not.

The Observance of the Sabbath

Another powerful reason that led me to renounce Adventism was to find out that the keeping of the Sabbath was not required for Christians. My Adventist friends may forgive me for having questioned Ellen G. White as a prophetess and for not believing anymore in an investigative judgment. But to have stopped keeping the Sabbath, which “is so clearly taught in the Bible,” as they firmly believe, is something they cannot understand.

The Sabbath is for Seventh-day Adventists the seal of the Ten Commandments, which they consider to be the eternal law of God. Sabbath keeping is for them the sign that distinguishes true Christians. Although in theory they may declare that salvation is only by faith in Christ, in practice they believe that only those who keep the Ten Commandments, especially the Sabbath, will be saved. According to their prophetic speculations, the Sabbath will become an issue of controversy among Christians in the last days, and for observing the Sabbath Seventh-day Adventists will be persecuted by the apostate Christians when the terrible “Sunday laws” will be enacted, beginning in the United States. Everyone who does not keep the Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast and be lost forever. Because of this particular understanding about the Sabbath, Seventh-day Adventists believe that they are “the remnant church” of Revelation 12:17, the only true church of God on earth. Other churches may have some truth, but they only have the whole truth.

The first thing that helped me understand that Sabbath keeping was no longer necessary was to find that the Bible does not speak of two laws (moral and ceremonial), as Adventists affirm, but only of one law. For the Bible writers, the law was one with no distinction between the Ten Commandments as the moral law and the rest as the ceremonial law. The Ten Commandments were “the words of the covenant” which God made with Israel, and were, so to speak, a summary of the law of Moses (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13). All the commandments and ordinances given through Moses were considered to be moral obligations since they came ultimately from God, and therefore, in part or in total they were “the law of the Lord” or “the law of God” (Nehemiah 8:1,8,14; Luke 2:22-24).

When I understood that the Bible did not make any distinction between the various parts of the law and that it presented the law as a unity, it was not difficult for me to understand that the law that had been abolished and nailed to the cross was the law of Moses, which also included the Ten Commandments and the weekly Sabbath (Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-15). At first, it was difficult for me to accept this new understanding. All my life I had believed in the Ten Commandments as the rule of conduct for Christians. If the Ten Commandments were no longer such a rule, by which rule were Christians to abide now? As I continued studying the New Testament I found that we Christians are now under a superior law, which the apostle Paul simply calls “the law of Christ” (1 Corinthians 9:20,21; Galatians 6:2). This is not a new set of regulations but “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” which now leads the believer. Therefore, the apostle Paul says, “there is no condemnation” for those who have put their trust in Christ (Romans 8:1-4).

The question of whether I needed to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, however, was solved even more clearly when I found that its observance was never imposed on the Gentile Christians. True, the Christians of Jewish origin continued to keep not only the seventh-day Sabbath but also other holy days and traditions from the Old Testament. But the new Gentile converts

were never taught to keep the Sabbath as part of their Christian obligations. When a controversy arose on whether the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, which, as we have seen, included the Sabbath, the decision of the Jerusalem council was that the Gentiles should not be disturbed by such things and that if they abstained from idolatry, blood, and sexual immorality they would do well (Acts 15:22-29).

Even more interesting was to find that there was no admonition or exhortation from Paul or any other New Testament writers about the keeping of the Sabbath or the dangers of its transgression, which for Seventh-day Adventists it's a serious sin. Those churches to which Paul wrote were made up mainly of Gentiles with no experience in Sabbath keeping, and even though he admonished them against those sins that could prevent them from inheriting the kingdom of heaven, he never said anything about the "sin" of not keeping the Sabbath (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; Ephesians 5:3-5). Instead, the only time he referred to the Sabbath by name was to rebuke those who were trying to impose it along with other Jewish holidays and practices.

"Do not let anyone judge you," he said, "by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day" (Colossians 2:16). As a Seventh-day Adventist I had believed that the Sabbath day mentioned in Colossians 2:6 referred to the ceremonial Sabbaths such as Passover, the Day of Atonement, etc. However, as I studied how the term "religious festival, a New Moon celebration, and a Sabbath day" was used in the Old Testament, I could see that each time "religious festival" meant the annual religious festivals such as Passover, the Day of Atonement, the feast of Tabernacles, etc., the "New Moon celebration" referred to a monthly religious ceremony, and the "Sabbath day" was the seventh day of the week (1 Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 8:12,13; Ezekiel 45:17; Hosea 2:11). With this background, I could see now that when Paul used the same phrase in Colossians he was talking specifically about the seventh-day Sabbath. "These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:17). My own conclusion was therefore that if the weekly Sabbath along with the other Jewish festivals were only a shadow of the things to come whose reality is Christ, then to continue to keep the Jewish Sabbath would be to deny the reality of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Sabbath was just a symbol that pointed to the rest that Christ came to bring us under the gospel (Matthew 11:28-30). This is why the author of the letter to the Hebrews says that the Sabbath represents the rest we enter in when we believe (Hebrews 4:3).

Despite this new understanding in the light of the gospel, it was not easy for me to leave Adventism. I had been raised and gotten my education in its schools. Most of my friends and relatives were there, and for many years I shared pleasant experiences as a Seventh-day Adventist. But now I felt that I could no longer continue to serve the Lord in an environment where the main preoccupation was other things rather than the simple gospel of Jesus Christ. With God's help I had the courage and the moral integrity to break from those bonds in order to be where the Lord wanted me to be.

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