



## Here We Go Again: The Elephant in the Room, Part 2? By Bob Waldrep

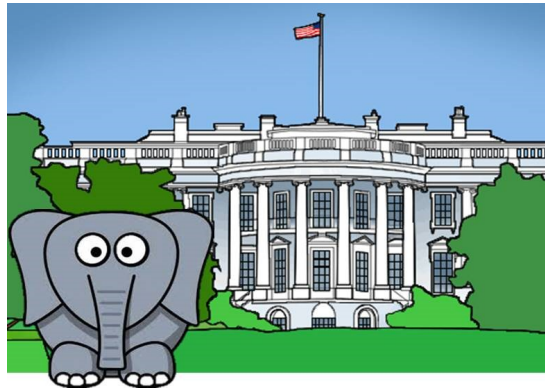
In 2012, the Republican candidate for the office of President of the United States was a devout Mormon. After the election I wrote an article titled *The Elephant in the Room* expressing concern that many Evangelicals, in hopes of electing a Republican, had tried to downplay the fact the Mormon Church is not a Christian Church (Most Christian Churches regard it as a cult of Christianity or a pseudo-Christian group). My concern then was not that a Mormon was running for office, nor that Christians had voted for him – my concern was due to the attempts to present his Church as being Christian, for the sake of politics.

The article concluded:

“Here is the bottom line, this election may have been indicative of what we can expect in future races. It may be that the days of having a “Christian” option are becoming much rarer...In such a new paradigm, we must learn that we don’t need to “Christianize” our candidate. Rather, we must promote him, or her, on the basis of the issues we hold in common, despite our religious differences. [Support should be] on the basis of why he is the best man for the job, not his being Christian, kind of Christian, or the closest thing to a Christian we could find. Then, when questioned about his faith, we could have been more open and honest about it; for, it is what it is.

As Christians, we know the governance of our nation is important; however, advancing the Kingdom of Christ should have much greater significance.

As we select future candidates to support and as we cast our vote, let’s do as conscience dictates, for the good of the nation. And, as we campaign, let’s make sure we do no harm to the future advancement of the Kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>



Christians may now be finding themselves in a similar situation in this election with Dr. Ben Carson, a world-renowned neurosurgeon and Republican candidate for the presidency. Carson is also a highly regarded and active member of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. With only 18.5 million adherents worldwide (just over one million in the U.S.), this group has maintained a rather low profile and most people have little or no idea who they are or what they believe. One of the other candidates expressed this when saying he knew nothing about the Seventh-day Adventist other than they have Church on Saturday.

With a prominent member of the church campaigning for the presidency, people are increasingly curious not only as to why they worship on Saturday but what other beliefs and practices are held by the SDA Church. No doubt,

much of this is due to the amount of support given this candidate by Evangelical Christians who are promoting his candidacy as the “Christian” conservative choice.

This is not to equate the SDA Church with the Mormon Church, nor is it intended to say Carson is not a Christian. It is to address the question: Is the SDA Church part of, or should it be included in, the Evangelical camp? Earlier this year, this issue was raised among Southern Baptists when some of the denomination’s leadership expressed concern with Carson addressing their annual Pastors Conference. Admirably, Carson opted to withdraw as a speaker rather than create controversy.

However, there is little doubt that Carson’s political opposition will raise questions about his Church if it might diminish his support among evangelicals. One indicator this has some traction are media stories about SDA that have appeared in recent months. Clearly there is a growing interest about SDA beliefs and whether they align with the mainstream/historical teachings of the Christian Church. Christians should be willing and able to candidly discuss this question when/if such concerns are raised, while supporting their candidate based on the issues—not his religion.

### Unlocking the Prophetic Code

A few years ago, I opened my mailbox and found an attractively designed, sixteen-page, booklet with the announcement, “Unlocking the Prophetic Code” inviting me to join my “friends and neighbors” at the twenty two day/five

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week *Adventures in Prophecy Seminar*. Naturally, it was being conducted at the "Prophecy Seminar Center."

Apparently it would answer all my questions about the Book of Revelation. Sound intriguing?

This wasn't the first time I had found such an advertisement in my mail. In fact every year, these and similar booklets, flyers and brochures are mailed to homes throughout the country, and nowhere in them is even a hint of who is really behind it (Until a week ago, as of this writing, a typical mailing could be viewed at [www.aip.com](http://www.aip.com). This site has since been removed. However, a video promo can still be viewed online. Search for *adventure-sinprophecy.flv*. Note, it doesn't reveal the conference leader Ric Swaningson is an SDA minister).

The bulk of the content in *Unlocking the Prophetic Code* was actually taken from the booklet *Keys to Happiness*. However, no reference is made to this booklet in the "Prophetic Code" document nor is any information provided about *Unlocking the Prophetic Code* other than a small print message on page 3 stating, "Text was written in the 1800s."

Actually, it was originally published in 1892 under the title *Steps to Christ* by Ellen G. White, the founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. And, it turned out that the "Prophecy Seminar Center" was actually a local SDA Church. And, as you may have guessed, the leader of this seminar (though not identified as such) was an SDA minister.

**"In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, [Jesus] entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry...a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition of all sin..."**  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST FOUNDER/PROPHET ELLEN G. WHITE

Why not be open about this in the advertising mailer? Probably, because these annual "prophecy" studies of Revelation are a primary recruiting tool to Seventh-day Adventism. One can only conclude, they believe if it were promoted as being affiliated with the SDA Church, attendance would be diminished. This is most likely due to their realization that since its inception, the teachings of Seventh-day Adventism and its founder have been considered controversial by many Christians.

### A Brief History of Adventism

In the 1840s a number of people became convinced that the Advent (return of Christ) was near and even predicted specific dates. A central leader of the movement was William Miller, a Baptist preacher, who taught Jesus would return in 1843 (later changed to 1844 after the 1843 prophecy failed). His followers became known as Millerites, and after the prophecy failed again in 1844 (known as the "Great Disappointment"), Miller left the movement and it splintered into several groups as the Adventist Movement (sometimes referred to the Second Adventist Movement).

Even though disillusioned by the Great Disappointment, some in the Movement came to the belief that Miller simply got the date wrong and further study was required. Jonas Wendell and Nelson Barbour were two of the many involved in this aspect of the Adventist Movement. Each of these men eventually settled on 1874 as the year when Christ would return and they incorporated this into their writings and lectures.

One of Wendell's lectures was attended by a young man named Charles Taze Russell, who was so impressed by the

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lecture that he began his own Bible Study based on what he had heard. He also began to read the writings of other Adventists and later affiliated himself with Barbour. The two eventually parted ways over doctrinal issues and Russell went on to establish his own group, which would become the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, better known today as the Jehovah's Witnesses. He continued to keep some of the Adventist doctrines, including the 1874 date – which he interpreted as being the “invisible” return of Christ. (Later Russell predicted the visible return of Christ would occur in 1914, but when it failed, it was reinterpreted as Christ's invisible return and, since there couldn't be two “invisible” returns, the 1874 date was wiped from their history.)

Even though Christ did not return in 1844 as Miller had taught, there were others in the Adventist Movement who would not abandon the idea that something special had indeed occurred that year. Unlike those such as Wendell and Barbour who chose to change the date, these leaders held fast to 1844, choosing to redefine it rather than discredit Miller and his predictions. This led to a variety of theories being set forth as to what had actually occurred in 1844.

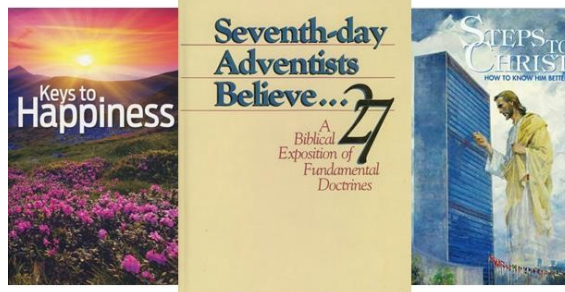
One of these was embraced by Ellen G. White, who emerged as a Prophet and leader of a stream of the movement that organized as the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. White taught that, rather than being a prophecy of Jesus' return, the 1844 date referred to his moving into the second or final phase of His atoning, or high-priestly ministry. She taught – and the SDA Church still holds to the belief – that in 1844 Jesus moved into the Holy of Holies and began an “investigative judgment.”

### Questionable Doctrines

Here is how it is stated in the book *Seventh-day Adventists look to for doctrinal teaching*:

“In 1844, at the end of the prophetic period of 2300 days, He entered the second and last phase of His atoning ministry. It is a work of investigative judgment which is part of the ultimate disposition

of all sin, typified by the cleansing of the ancient Hebrew sanctuary on the Day of Atonement...The investigative judgment reveals to heavenly intelligences who among the dead are asleep in Christ and therefore, in Him, are deemed worthy to have part in the first resurrection. It also makes manifest who among the living are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and in Him, therefore, are ready for translation into His everlasting kingdom. This judgment vindicates the justice of God in saving those who believe in Jesus. It declares that those who have remained loyal to God shall receive the kingdom.”<sup>2</sup>



### Investigative Judgment

In essence, the investigative judgment doctrine is the belief that in 1844 Jesus assumed the duties of examining those who profess to be Christians and distinguishing the genuine from the false. Concerning this, in their doctrinal book, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, we find, “Human beings belong to one of three classes: (1) the wicked, who reject God's authority; (2) genuine believers, who, trusting in the merits of Christ through faith, live in obedience to God's law; and (3) those who appear to be genuine believers but are not.”<sup>3</sup>

We can certainly agree with this. Yet, they continue, “...who is a genuine believer and who is not? Both groups are written in the book of life, which contains the names of all who have ever entered God's service. The church itself contains genuine and false believers, the wheat and the tares...a judgment is needed—before the second coming of Christ—to sift the true from the false and to demonstrate to the interested universe God's justice in saving the sincere believer.”<sup>4</sup>

White and her followers miss an important point here. Yes, there are those who have joined Churches and denominations who are not truly believers; however, Jesus is not trying to discern if our names belong in the Book of Life based upon the evidence of “our works,” on His behalf. Rather, he has established the names that are there on the basis of one's faith in “His work,” on their behalf.

Even SDA leaders recognize the idea of an “investigative judgment” is problematic in the Christian Church. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* states, “This new insight into Christ's heavenly ministry is not a departure from the historic Christian faith. It is, instead, the logical completion and inevitable consummation of that faith.”<sup>5</sup>

Note two points they recognize: 1) it is a “new” insight and 2) it will be viewed as a departure from the “historic Christian faith.” The fact they have to state it is not a departure is in essence an acknowledgment this “new” insight will not be recognized by Christian churches as part of the “historic Christian faith” as they claim.

Even though many of their teachings and writings use language that seems to imply a gospel of grace through faith and not of works, they continue to cling to the investigative judgment doctrine, which clearly mingles works/service and grace. Logically, if one were to believe that Jesus is in the Holy of Holies, examining the works of professing believers to determine/show those who are genuine, wouldn't that, on a practical level, force one to become more conscious of their performance, rather than their faith – to practice a belief rooted in works?

### Keeping the Sabbath

Another questionable issue is their insistence on keeping the Jewish Sabbath, or Saturday worship. Let's be clear, it is certainly not problematic for a Christian to worship on Saturday, or any other day for that matter; the problem arises when one insists on making a particular day as the only acceptable, or required by the Law, day for worship, as do Seventh-day Adventists.

When discussing this with an Advent-

ist, you may very well be told it is not a problem for a non-SDA to worship on another day, but for them it can only be the Sabbath. However, in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, we find, “The central issue will be obedience to God’s law and the observance of the Sabbath. In the face of this conflict everyone must decide whether to keep God’s commandments or those of men. This message will produce a people who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Those who reject it will eventually receive the mark of the beast.”<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, this depicts two camps, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and those who reject it. In the above instance the reference is to keeping God’s command regarding the Sabbath. Those who keep it, keep the faith of Jesus. Those who reject it, receive the mark of the beast. It certainly doesn’t sound as if this is optional.

Furthermore, if Jesus is investigating the works of those who claim to be Christians, how are those not keeping the Sabbath measuring up under this “investigative judgement”? If I were to believe in an Investigative Judgment, I don’t think I could honestly feel too secure in my first-day (Sunday) worship.

### Baptism and Salvation

Finally, it appears, despite their protestations otherwise, the SDA Church believes water baptism is essential for salvation. And, though Adventists might argue otherwise, their Church’s doctrinal position on this is confusing, at best.

For example, on this issue, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* states, “In this commission Christ made it clear that He re-

quired baptism of those who wished to become a part of His church, His spiritual kingdom.”<sup>7</sup> Note, this is not referring to becoming a member of a particular local Church or denomination – it states baptism is required by Jesus to become part of His “spiritual kingdom.”

Yet, just a few pages later they state, “As a sign of a person’s regeneration or new birth (John 3:3, 5), baptism also marks that person’s entrance into Christ’s spiritual kingdom.”<sup>8</sup> This certainly seems contradictory to the former statement so perhaps what they actually mean is baptism is “required” as “a sign,” or evidence of a person having entered the “spiritual kingdom.”

However, the very next sentence on would seem to negate such an interpretation stating, “Since it unites the new believer to Christ, it always functions as the door to the church. Through baptism the Lord adds the new disciples to the body of believers – His body, the church (Acts 2:41, 47; I Cor 12:13). Then they are members of God’s family.”<sup>9</sup>

On this point the Adventist might argue this refers to membership in a local Church. And possibly the latter part does, but what of the statement that baptism “unites the new believer to Christ”? At best, this language is certainly confusing, if not contradictory.

It is safe to say, it is not the language one will find being used in the historical Christian Church. In fact, it is more akin to the positions taught by groups such as the Church of Christ (which proudly teach baptism is necessary for salvation), who erroneously interpret passages that refer to Spirit baptism as being about water baptism.

It is not baptism that makes one part of the Kingdom of God nor does it “unite” the believer to Christ. He is united – joined to – Christ by faith. It is faith which is essential to salvation, not baptism or any other work. It is not faith... plus...something else that saves – it is faith alone.

### Faith or Works

When comparing the beliefs of Seventh-day Adventist to those of the historical Christian faith, one must conclude their beliefs – particularly in the areas of the investigative judgment, Sabbath-keeping, and baptism – are confusing, if not concerning. At best, they offer a faith plus works gospel.

When it comes to the faith experience, one should remember, we have not been called to impress Jesus with our works, but to entrust our lives to him that he might empower us for “His” service. On the cross he cried out, “It is finished.” The work of atonement was completed; our sin-debt was satisfied.

Jesus, our High Priest, is become our Sabbath that we might rest from all “our” efforts to earn salvation (Heb 9:25-10:14). Now, that’s Good News to share!

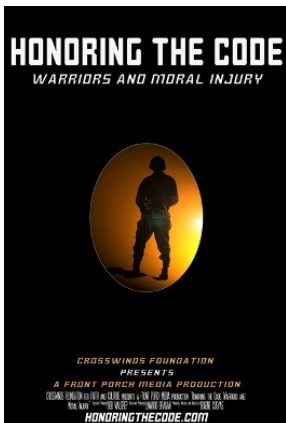
[Ed. Note—Information pertaining to the history and beliefs of the SDA Church is adapted from a chapter in *Spiritual Buffet* by Bob Waldrep]

### ENDNOTES

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|--|-----------------------|
| 1. <i>Elephant in the Room</i> by Bob Waldrep  | 4. <i>Ibid.</i> p 326 |
| 2. <i>Seventh-day Adventists Believe... A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines</i> p. 312 | 5. <i>Ibid.</i> p 325 |
| 3. <i>Ibid.</i> p 325  | 6. <i>Ibid.</i> p 263 |
|  | 7. <i>Ibid.</i> p 182 |
|  | 8. <i>Ibid.</i> p 187 |
|  | 9. <i>Ibid.</i>       |

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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