

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Effectiveness of Training Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day to Minister Biblical  
Truth to Seventh-day Adventists**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Liberty University School of Divinity  
in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Ministry

by

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## THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This study addresses Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day's lack of understanding of how to communicate biblical truths effectively to local Seventh Day Adventists. The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent a training program could improve the confidence of church members to share biblical truths with Seventh-day Adventists. The method of study involved training eleven members of the church. These members were from different races, ages, and genders. The training program consisted of seven one-hour training sessions. The data collection methods included interviews and surveys. The results of this study indicate that a training program can increase the confidence of church members in communicating biblical truths with Seventh-day Adventists. This study implies that if this same program were to be carried out on a much larger scale within the evangelical community, it might increase the confidence level of believers and equip them to be more confident in their dialogues with Seventh-day Adventists. It is recommended that further research be carried out in multiple regions and churches to evaluate this research's fuller potential.

Keywords: Seventh-day Adventist, training program, remnant eschatology, Ellen G. White, two-phase atonement, health message, abortion

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## Abbreviations

ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
JCOG7D	<i>Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day</i>
QOD	<i>Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine</i>
SDA	<i>Seventh-day Adventist</i>
SDAC	<i>Seventh-day Adventist Church</i>



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC) is to evangelize non-Christians and proselytize Christians of other denominations.<sup>1</sup> The SDAC views itself as having a special calling to share its unique doctrinal understandings with other Christian faiths. Since its inception, the SDAC has frequently focused its evangelistic efforts on calling members out of other Christian churches to join the SDAC. The SDAC's founder and prophetess, Ellen G. White, instructed her denomination:

We are to give the message, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird... Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." This message is to come to the churches.<sup>2</sup>

She envisioned a future with an epic end-time conflict within Christianity. The battle lines of this final spiritual war would be drawn over the issue of Sabbath observance. In this end-time scenario, Catholics and Protestants unite against the SDAC to enforce Sunday observance, the Mark of the Beast, upon not only Christians but upon the entire world.<sup>3</sup> SDAs view it as their divine directive to call Christians who observe Sunday to come "out of Babylon," in other words, leave their Sunday-keeping church and join the *true* remnant church that properly observes the Sabbath commandment, the SDAC.

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<sup>1</sup> The Seventh-day Adventist Church will hereafter be referred to as SDAC.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen White, "A Call for Consecrated Workers," *Bible Training School* (Sept. 1, 1902): 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ellen White, *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), chapter 25.

Because of this distinctive missional mindset, when the SDAC establishes a church in a community, that church typically engages in evangelizing Christians in their community. This negatively impacts other churches in that community. In a relentless war of gradual attrition, the SDAC siphons off members from nearby churches. In these communities, Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) evangelists will sometimes be brought in to hold public meetings with high-quality multimedia presentations.<sup>4</sup> Rather than being a simple gospel presentation, these meetings often last for weeks, with sophisticated lectures designed to show the superiority of SDA doctrines over those of other Christian denominations. This evangelism is typically geared towards convincing people who are already Christians to leave their current church and join the SDAC. In addition to these methods, well-indoctrinated SDA lay members are sent out into the local community on door-to-door missions to sell SDA books, give out SDA tracts, and introduce SDA doctrines to other Christians.

The leaders of non-SDA churches are often faced with the baffling challenge of how to counteract the SDAC's influence in their community. These Christian leaders face a daunting task because SDAs have honed their approach and augmented their arsenal for over 150 years. Far from being a group of fringe cultists that can easily be defeated with a few proof texts, SDAs have developed a surprisingly sophisticated and well-reasoned theology. Plausible answers have been developed to counter nearly every argument against them. For someone unfamiliar with the SDAC's teaching, trying to make sense of the dizzying array of proof texts and intricate logical arguments underpinning their doctrines can be quite bewildering. Since 1965, up to forty million people have departed from other churches to join this self-described "remnant" church.<sup>5</sup> Because

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<sup>4</sup> Seventh-day Adventist will hereafter be referred to as SDA.

<sup>5</sup> David Trimm, "Attrition, Losses, and Growth Rates in the Seventh-day Adventist Church," Oct. 13, 2020, accessed Dec. 12, 2022, <https://adventistreview.org/news/attrition-losses-and-growth-rates-in-the-seventh-day-adventist-church/>. In the same article, Trimm acknowledges that sixteen million have left the sect during the same

of this rapid growth, in 2021, the SDAC boasted a membership of twenty-one million people, making it much larger than the Southern Baptist Convention with less than fourteen million.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the SDAC represents a real threat to the leaders of the other Christian churches in the community.

The mere fact that the SDAC had developed an evangelistic method that has convinced forty million Christians to leave their churches and join the SDAC speaks to the impressiveness of their arguments and their approach. Many unorthodox SDA doctrines are well-reasoned and have enough biblical proof texts to give them an air of plausibility. SDAs have developed elaborate and believable interpretations of Bible prophecy that identify themselves as the one and only true church. This set of doctrines is known internally as *present truth*. It is described as *present* because it is *new* truth that is relevant for the last days of earth's history and was not known to Christians before 1844. These doctrines were developed through Bible study by SDA pioneers and ratified by the visions of Ellen White. *Present truth* includes doctrines such as the necessity of keeping the seventh day as Sabbath, adherence to the Old Covenant law, the imminent return of Christ, and Jesus' work of atonement in the heavenly sanctuary which is said to have begun in 1844. The SDAC has a missional fervor to share the *present truth* with Christians who are not aware of it because without this *truth*, because they believe their souls are at risk of being deceived and lost in the last days.

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time period. Mike Reddy attributes SDA success in membership growth to a combination of factors. These include a strong organization, which includes primary and secondary schools, a robust hospital system, food industries, retirement centers, nursing homes, orphanages, and a worldwide relief organization. Reddy also argues that SDAs have maximized their use of communication channels, including television, radio, publishing, social media, Internet, public evangelistic meetings, and door-to-door evangelism. (Mike Megrove Reddy, "Organizational Communication: Types of Communication Used by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Spreading Christianity," *Gender & Behaviour* 17, iss. 1 (2019): 12674–95.

<sup>6</sup> Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, *2022 Annual Statistical Report*, vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: SDA Church, 2021), 9. SBC statistics are from: "Fast Facts," <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/fast-facts/>, extracted Feb. 16, 2023.

Evangelical churches could benefit from a bulwark to keep their members from falling prey to the sophistry of SDA doctrines. Without a solid background in biblical theology, many churchgoers are ill-prepared to deal with the sophistication of the arguments presented. These well-reasoned arguments will win over some believers. Every year, hundreds of thousands of Christians of other faiths adopt SDA teachings and leave their churches to join the SDAC. Once in the SDAC, many often adopt the same missional fervor that brought them into “the remnant.” After a period of indoctrination, they will go out and try to recruit their former church brethren to adopt SDA doctrines. Thus, the attrition continues from generation to generation.

A human tragedy is played out with varying degrees of intensity whenever a believer leaves their church and joins the SDAC. The recruit is instructed that non-SDA churches are living in deception or rebellion regarding the law of God and that in the end times, their former brethren will persecute them for keeping the seventh day Sabbath. SDA founder Ellen White saw two groups within Christianity. Those who observe the Sabbath are under the banner of Christ, while those who “break God’s law and lead others to break it” are following the antichrist under the “banner of Satan.”<sup>7</sup> She instructs new converts thus:

Our work now is to enlighten the world, in the place of bearing a peace-and-safety message. A banner has been placed in our hands, upon which is inscribed, “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.” This is a distinct, separating message, —a message that is to give no uncertain sound. *It is to lead the people away from the broken cisterns that contain no water, to the fountain of living waters.*<sup>8</sup>

If the recruit adopts these beliefs, this places them in a position of opposition to their former brethren. Their former brethren are now under a different banner, a different leader.

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<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *SDA Bible Commentary: Ellen G. White Supplementary Comments*, vol. 7A (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1970) 949.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 102. Emphasis supplied.

The newly converted SDAs will often strain their relationships with their former brethren through their continued efforts to proselytize them and convince them to join them under the “banner of Christ.” If these efforts fail to bear fruit, the recruits will often sever their relationships with their former brothers and sisters with whom they may have fellowshiped with for years or decades. Eventually, they will form new friendships within the SDAC and start shunning those who are walking under the “banner of Satan.”

The SDAC missional fervor continues to destroy relationships, splitting up families, and breaking up friendships. Blog posts written by former SDAs reveal the depth of the problem and speak to the pain that believers have experienced. One online magazine that ministers biblical truth to both current and former SDAs is *Proclamation*. This magazine published some of its reader responses in its April 2019 issue.<sup>9</sup> One Lutheran wrote that he started attending SDA Bible studies, investing months in those studies and lectures, and ultimately found the whole experience to be “beyond disturbing.” While he stayed at his original church, he essentially wasted substantial time and emotional investment in the process of this attempted proselytization. This was time he could have spent sharing the gospel with unbelievers.

Another individual left his unnamed church to join the SDAC, and then after a year in the SDAC, he realized he had been “indoctrinated.” It is unknown what he did next, and this illustrates one of the problems with indoctrination. It can have life-long effects. For example, if one is indoctrinated in the belief that all Sunday-keeping churches are part of Babylon, then even if that person later leaves the SDAC, he may be hesitant to return to a Sunday-keeping church. After all, who wants to return to Babylon?

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<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, comment, on “Our Readers Respond,” *Proclamation! Online Magazine*, August 16, 2019, accessed October 29, 2022, <https://blog.lifeassuranceministries.org/2019/08/16/our-readers-respond/>.



A third testimony came from a 68-year-old woman who had been an SDA all her life. After learning the biblical truth, she wrote, “Seventh-day Adventism is a cult. God, please forgive me. I had no idea what was wrong with the church. Now I need to find a new church. It will be hard.” Why will it be hard? Because, like many SDAs, she has no doubt been indoctrinated her entire life to identify the falsehoods and errors of non-SDA churches. This makes it a challenge to connect with people who you suspect may be corrupted with the taint of falsehoods.

A fourth testimony comes from the European website Zoella. A woman was interviewed who had left the SDAC but has since been struggling for fifteen years with her identity. She is in therapy, undergoing “a process of deprogramming,” but still suffers from anxiety, depression, and an inability to form trusting relationships with others.<sup>10</sup> These four people are a tiny sample of the many believers who are struggling or hurting over their experience with Seventh-day Adventism.

It is important to address the problem of indoctrination into SDA doctrines proactively. Once a believer has been implanted with SDA doctrines, it becomes much more difficult and time-consuming to recover them. The best defense is to educate believers in biblical truth *before* they encounter SDA doctrines. To address this problem, the body of Christ must be equipped to deal with SDA efforts to evangelize and convert its members to Seventh-day Adventism. Furthermore, the body of Christ must be equipped to proactively share biblical truths with SDAs. Many of them are yearning for biblical truth that brings them peace with the assurance of salvation by faith alone, not through the works of the law.

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<sup>10</sup> Team Zoella, “‘I Was in A Cult’ – We Spoke To 2 People Who Have Left a Cult-Like Organization,” Zoella, July 26, 2021, <https://zoella.co.uk/2021/07/26/i-was-in-a-cult-we-spoke-to-x-people-have-left-a-cult-like-organisation/>.

## Ministry Context

The Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day (JCOG7D) was planted in Jacksonville, Florida in February 2009 by Pastor Dirk and Marina Anderson.<sup>11</sup> Both spent decades in the SDAC before leaving due to their concerns about the theology of the SDAC. They believed the SDA dual-phase atonement teaching lacked biblical support. They were disgusted with the SDAC's neutral stance on abortion. They were also gravely concerned about the SDAC's reliance upon the teachings of their prophetess, Ellen G. White. Because of these theological differences, they decided to part with the SDAC in 1998.

Having become accustomed to worshipping on Saturday, they desired to find a New Covenant Bible-based church in Jacksonville that worshipped on Saturday. Unfortunately, the only Sabbath-keeping congregations in Jacksonville were SDA churches or offshoots of the Worldwide Church of God.<sup>12</sup> They began attending a large Evangelical church, and one day the pastor had an alter call and said that God was calling men to go plant churches. Pastor Anderson felt the call of God on his life. After much prayer and consultation with others, he decided to plant a new church. Pastor Anderson's goal in planting the church was to provide a New Covenant, judgment-free, and grace-filled place where believers could worship together on Saturday. The focus of the church is on Christ and Christ alone. The motto of the JCOG7D is: "It's all about Jesus." Rather than attempting to convert Christians from other faiths, the church seeks to share the gospel with the lost and minister grace to the unchurched. In its fourteen-year existence, the church has never attempted to "convert" a Christian of another denomination.

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<sup>11</sup> Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day will hereafter be referred to as JCOG7D.

<sup>12</sup> In the 1990s, Joseph W. Tkach, Sr. began to move the Worldwide Church of God into mainstream Protestantism. As the doctrines were rewritten, the name of the denomination was eventually changed to Grace Communion International. The majority of members left Grace Communion and started offshoots that continue to hold heretical doctrines, such as denying the triune Godhead, requiring observance of feast days, claiming Christ died upon Wednesday, and uplifting Herbert W. Armstrong as a latter-day prophet.

To gain much-needed guidance and assistance in planting the church, the Andersons decided to join the Church of God (seventh day) denomination of Denver, Colorado. The church remained associated with that denomination until 2021. As of November 2023, the church remains an independent non-denominational organization. Pastor Anderson was certified and licensed as a local leader by the Church of God (seventh day) denomination after receiving Bible training from Artios Christian College, the denomination's theology school. Later, he completed his dual master's degrees in Christian Apologetics and Christian Ministry at Liberty University.

JCOG7D is an Evangelical church and adheres to doctrines taught by Evangelical churches, such as the inerrancy of Scripture, the triune godhead, the humanity and deity of Christ, the Second Coming of Christ to rule the earth, water baptism by immersion, salvation by faith in Christ alone, the sanctity of life in the womb, and the primacy of the gospel commission. JCOG7D also adheres to worshipping on Saturday, a practice some evangelicals would consider heterodox. Congregating on Saturday allows the church to provide a home to those whose preference is to worship on Saturday, or those whose work schedules do not permit them to attend Sunday services. The other doctrine the church adheres to that is outside of the Evangelical mainstream is the doctrine of annihilationism.<sup>13</sup>

### Historical Context

The roots of the JCOG7D trace back to the 1830s. In 1831, Baptist preacher William Miller studied biblical prophecies and came to the conviction that he could calculate the date of Christ's return. Reckoning the return of Christ to be in the fall of 1843, he felt it his duty to begin

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<sup>13</sup> Annihilationism is the doctrine that the wicked will be destroyed in hell and will not be punished eternally. This doctrine is advocated by some evangelical scholars such as Clark Pinnock and John R. W. Stott. A brief study appears on the JCOG7D web site: [https://cog7jax.org/eternal\\_hell\\_fire.htm](https://cog7jax.org/eternal_hell_fire.htm).

warning others about the imminent return of Jesus Christ. After lecturing in various churches across North America on this subject for over a decade, Miller convinced as many as 50,000 people that Christ's return was imminent.<sup>14</sup> After his initial prediction of Christ's return in 1843 failed, he and the other leaders in the movement settled upon October 22, 1844, as the date when Christ would ultimately return to the earth.

At first, many churches in North America opened their doors to Miller. However, as the movement developed, Protestant leaders became much more wary of it. As the date of Christ's supposed return approached, many Protestant churches began closing their doors to Miller and his fellow preachers. Many Protestant ministers rejected Miller's proofs of Christ's imminent return. One reason they rejected Miller's doctrine was that setting dates for Christ's return had always failed in the past. Whenever Christ failed to return as planned, believers would be severely disappointed, sometimes even giving up the faith altogether. The practice of date-setting also gave critics ammunition to lambast the faith after the date passed without event. Moreover, Protestant ministers routinely pointed out that Jesus himself forbade believers from setting dates (Matt 25:13).<sup>15</sup> These ministers no doubt believed the artificial excitement of setting dates to be counterproductive and did not wish to be part of a movement that would dash the hopes of their flock when Christ did not return upon the planned date. Furthermore, it was apparent to many that not all the Bible prophecies of Revelation had been fulfilled yet. As resistance against Miller and his time-setting escalated, Millerite leaders reacted passionately, denouncing Protestant

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur Lacey White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years: 1827–1862*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 53. The estimate of 50,000 followers in North America was made by the followers of Miller and may not be entirely reliable. There were also perhaps several thousand believers in Europe, primarily in England.

<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references are from the King James Version Bible (Blue Letter Bible edition).

churches as fallen Babylon, and encouraging the members of those churches to leave those churches and follow the divine directive to “come out of Babylon.”<sup>16</sup>

The date of October 22, 1844, became known as the Great Disappointment because Christ did not return as expected. After the date passed, many who joined the Millerite movement acknowledged that Miller’s calculations were flawed and returned to their former churches. Miller and nearly all the other Millerite leaders eventually recanted and admitted their mistake. However, one small group of Millerites not only refused to admit their mistake and return to their former churches but also continued to label Protestant churches as Babylon. The most vocal leader of this group was former sea captain Joseph Bates. He caricatured Protestant churches as “Babylon,” claiming they were left “desolate” and in “confusion,” and he vociferously encouraged former Millerites—now known as Adventists—to “come away and separate themselves from all unrighteous unbelievers.”<sup>17</sup> About this time, Bates adopted the practice of observing Saturday as the Sabbath, a doctrine he acquired from Seventh Day Baptists. Bates integrated this new belief with his belief that Protestant churches were Babylon. Soon afterward, he began espousing a new doctrine, that worshipping on Sunday was tantamount to receiving the Mark of the Beast.<sup>18</sup>

Not long after the Great Disappointment a young Millerite couple, James and Ellen G. White, met Joseph Bates. Before long, they adopted his ideas about Sabbath observance, Protestant churches being Babylon, and Sunday worship as the Mark of the Beast. Meanwhile,

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan M. Butler, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 197.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Bates, *Second Advent Waymarks and High Heaps or a Connected View of the Fulfillment of Prophecy by God’s Peculiar People* (New Bedford, MS: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847), 69–70.

<sup>18</sup> Pieter Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 141.

Bates adopted their belief that the truculent young visionary Ellen was a prophet of God. In 1850, James White echoed Bates' theology, writing in a periodical: "Babylon, the nominal church is fallen. God's people have come out of her. She is now the 'synagogue of Satan' (Rev 3:9). 'The habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit...'<sup>19</sup> In the same periodical, he claimed that all who worshipped on Sunday would receive the Mark of the Beast.<sup>20</sup> Ellen placed the *divine* stamp of approval upon the theories of Bates and James White. She wrote that she saw in a vision that Jesus sent angels to "lead His people out from among the unclean [Protestant churches], lest they should be defiled."<sup>21</sup> She declared the "door of salvation" was shut on all Christians who rejected Miller's teaching, and the group began lifting themselves up as the one and only remnant church of Bible prophecy while labeling all other churches as the Synagogue of Satan.<sup>22</sup>

One challenge with the SDAs identifying themselves as the *sole* remnant church was that there were other Christian groups, such as the Seventh Day Baptists, that kept Saturday as the Sabbath. The Whites found a clever way to differentiate their sect from other Sabbath-keepers by claiming that Ellen White was the "Spirit of Prophecy" of Revelation 19:10. That verse says the "Spirit of Prophecy" is the "Testimony of Jesus." The Whites were able to connect Revelation 19:10 to Revelation 12:17, which states that the "remnant...keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." According to the Whites, the "commandments of God" are

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<sup>19</sup> James White, "The Harvest," *Present Truth* 1, no. 9 (April 1850): 70.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., "What is the Mark of the Beast," 68. White wrote: "Then as the observance of the first day as a day of holy rest, instead of the seventh, is a mark of the beast... One class keeps the commandments of God, and of course, they keep the Sabbath, and they are seen on mount Zion with the Lamb. The other class has the mark of the beast, and they drink of the unmingled cup of the wrath of God."

<sup>21</sup> Ellen White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1882), 249.

<sup>22</sup> Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1958), 63–64.

the Ten Commandments, including Sabbath observance. The “testimony of Jesus” is the inspired writings of the modern-day prophet, Ellen White. Since they were the only Sabbath-keeping group that had a prophet, they could thus lay claim to the title of the one and only church that fulfilled both requirements of the remnant church of Bible prophecy (Rev 12:17, 19:10).

By the late 1850s, the Whites were promoting Ellen as the “Spirit of Prophecy” among the small and scattered groups of Sabbath-keeping Adventists in the United States. Naturally, this claim created some degree of controversy. Many Adventists, having read Ellen White’s writings, or having heard her *visions* in person, doubted that she was inspired.<sup>23</sup> Many rejected the suggestion that she was a prophet of God. They insisted that the church must be established upon the Bible and the Bible alone. Gradually a split began forming between these Sabbath-keepers. One group believed Ellen White was an end-time prophet of God. They believed that they were the one and only group of Christians that had the *present truth*. They believed God had called them to declare *present truth* to other Christians to save them from being lost in the last days. This group formed the SDA denomination in 1863.

The other group of Sabbath-keepers did not consider themselves to be the one and only church accepted by God. They considered themselves to be part of the universal Church of God but with the distinction of worshipping on Saturday. In addition, they rejected Ellen White as an inspired prophet. Gilbert Cranmer became the leader of this group. In 1858, he broke away from the SDAs to establish a church built solely upon the authority of the Bible. This group was formally organized into the Church of God (seventh day) in 1884.

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<sup>23</sup> Arthur Lacey White, *Ellen G. White: The Early Years: 1827–1862*, vol. 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), 213.

### SDA Missional Identity

Over subsequent decades, SDAs gradually softened their tone about non-SDA churches. However, they never repudiated their teaching that they are the *sole* remnant church. They view the Protestant Reformation as having *started* the recovery of biblical truth lost during the centuries of Roman Catholicism. However, they believe Protestants stalled out before restoring the complete biblical truth. They view themselves as the completers of the Protestant Reformation. The official SDA doctrinal statement explains that the Protestant Reformers failed to discover “other important truths” that had been lost during the apostasy of Roman Catholicism.<sup>24</sup> The authors contend that the Protestant faith “degenerated into formalism” and was itself “in need of reform.”<sup>25</sup> SDA authors assert that Revelation’s description of Babylon “finds its fulfillment in the departure of Protestantism” from the “gospel of righteousness by faith.”<sup>26</sup> To address these perceived failures of Protestantism, which had now become *Babylon*, God raised up a remnant to “continue the stagnated reformation of the Christian church.”<sup>27</sup> This remnant is differentiated from *Babylon* in that the remnant church keeps all Ten Commandments of God, including the seventh day Sabbath, and has the manifestation of the gift of prophecy.<sup>28</sup> Every believer in Christ who is not part of the remnant SDAC is therefore a part of *Babylon*, which is described as “all apostate religious organizations.”<sup>29</sup> Since they believe that

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<sup>24</sup> Seventh-day Adventist General Conference Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Silver Springs, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 2018), 193.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>29</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 198.



Protestantism has fallen, SDAs view it as their mission to call “God’s people who are still in the various religious bodies comprising Babylon to separate from them.”<sup>30</sup>

The missional identity of the SDAC is that God has anointed them with the special task of calling believers out of the Babylonian religions (i.e., Catholicism and Protestantism) into the SDAC. This mindset leads them to target other Christian churches for proselytization. SDAs view it as their God-given mission to complete the reformation by convincing other Christians to adopt the peculiar doctrines of the SDAC.<sup>31</sup> SDA tele-evangelist Mark Finley, host of “It Is Written,” the SDA television program that targets other Christians, wrote a study for SDAs in which he encouraged them to witness to Baptists, non-denominational Bible churches, Churches of Christ, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, and other Christian churches. In the introduction to his book, Finley explains that his purpose in writing the book was to teach SDAs how to share “Jesus and His truth” with the above-named groups.<sup>32</sup> By “Jesus and His truth,” Finley is referring to SDA doctrines that differ from standard Protestant understandings of Jesus and biblical truth.

There is no doubt that the SDAC spends some missionary effort trying to evangelize non-Christians. However, the group spends considerably more time and effort attempting to evangelize other Christians, ostensibly to save them from receiving the Mark of the Beast. For over one hundred and seventy years, the SDAC has aggressively evangelized members from other Christian churches throughout the world, fulfilling their founders’ desire to call fellow Christians “out of Babylon.” With a heavy emphasis on the evangelization of other Christians,

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<sup>30</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 199.

<sup>31</sup> According to Neil Wilson, former SDA General Conference president, the “name Seventh-day Adventist proclaims the truth about Jesus, neglected truth, that needs to be recovered to complete the Reformation.” George E. Vandeman, *What I Like About...: Rescuers of Neglected Truth* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1986), 102.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Finley, *Studying Together* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), xi.

SDA church membership has increased dramatically since its inception. Meanwhile, the Church of God (seventh day), which does not promote the proselytization of other Christians, has grown much more slowly, depending largely on defections from the SDAC, the Seventh Day Baptists, and the Messianic Jews.

### Shared Context

Because both the SDAs and JCOG7D have a brief period of shared history from 1852 to 1858, this provides a bridge of commonality between the groups.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the two groups share some similarities in doctrine. Both groups were originally non-trinitarian but eventually rejected that heresy and accepted belief in the triune godhead. In addition, both groups hold the heterodoxical doctrines of Sabbath observance and annihilationism. It is these two doctrines that bring the JCOG7D into closer proximity to the SDAC.

Because of their shared doctrinal heritage, the groups tend to interact more. Because JCOG7D worship on Saturday, they are not regarded by SDAs as having the Mark of the Beast.<sup>34</sup> They are viewed more as brothers who are under the delusion of rejecting the prophetic message of Ellen White. The Sabbath bridge opens more opportunities for communication and fellowship between the groups. For example, several SDA members have visited JCOG7D church services over the years. In addition, some JCOG7D members have been approached by SDAs who have attempted to convince them to adopt SDA teachings on Bible prophecy or other subjects.

Because of the Sabbath-keeping status of JCOG7D, SDAs are not as guarded about

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<sup>33</sup> Gilbert Cranmer, founder of the Church of God (seventh day), was associated with the founders of the SDA sect (James and Ellen White and Joseph Bates), from 1852 to 1858. He separated from them over differences regarding the SDA two-phase atonement and the prophetic role of Ellen White. See Robert Coulter, *The Story of the Church of God (Seventh Day)* (Denver, CO: Bible Advocate Press, 1983), 11–14.

<sup>34</sup> While Sabbath observance is a bridge between the groups, it is still understood that SDAs regard JCOG7D as part of Babylon because they do not accept the prophetic authority of Ellen White, thus placing JCOG7D outside of the SDA definition of the remnant.

fellowshipping with JCOG7D members. Thus, this shared bridge provides JCOG7D with a unique opportunity to cross over the theological boundaries that divide the groups and engage in dialogue with SDAs in Jacksonville.

### **Problem Presented**

The SDAC has been a subject of controversy since its inception. When the SDAs plant a church in a community, it can have a drag effect on other Evangelical churches in that community by slowing down or even inhibiting their growth. There are several reasons for this. First, as noted earlier, the SDAC seeks to “save” Sunday-keeping Christians from the fate of receiving the Mark of the Beast by converting them into the *sole* remnant church.<sup>35</sup> They spend considerable effort in the community to convince believers to leave their Sunday-keeping churches and join the SDAC. In all too many cases, they are successful in siphoning off members from Evangelical churches. As a result, these churches incur a loss of membership, a loss of talent, a loss of gospel workers, and the subsequent loss of financial support.

Second, Evangelical pastors are forced to shift their efforts from engaging in the gospel commission to guarding their flocks against SDA influence. They must spend energy responding to sophisticated SDA arguments that they may not fully understand or even know how to combat. Many of them have not received adequate training in seminary to address this situation. They must spend time contending for the truth within their own congregation, convincing their own members that some of the teachings of the SDAC are not biblical. Thus, time, energy, and effort that could have been spent evangelizing the lost and growing the church are instead spent trying to retain their members and refute the arguments of SDAs.

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<sup>35</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 200.

A third reason this negatively impacts the community is that many who join the SDAC are later disillusioned. Over time, many converts to Seventh-day Adventism come to the realization that the SDAC is not God's one and only remnant. Some conclude that the SDAC's teachings conflict with the Bible, while others learn enough about Ellen White to begin doubting that she was inspired. Regardless of the reason, eventually, a high percentage leave the SDAC. For example, in 2019, the SDA General Conference Secretary, G. T. Ng, reported an "alarming" apostasy rate of 49 percent.<sup>36</sup> In 2021, 1,069,234 people joined the SDAC, while an amazing 789,912 were removed from the SDAC's membership.<sup>37</sup> The situation is even more pronounced among younger members of the SDAC.<sup>38</sup> While some who leave return to their former congregations, the sad reality is that many remain unchurched, sometimes for the remainder of their lives. The SDA indoctrination against Sunday-keeping churches can be so convincing to some believers, that even after they depart from the SDAC, they never feel comfortable worshipping again with Sunday keepers. They may retain a fear of being associated with *Babylon*. Thus, being separated from the body of Christ, not only does their spirituality suffer, but they also often fail to engage in the work of the Great Commission, thereby slowing the progress of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

JCOG7D is not immune from the drag effect of Seventh-day Adventism. A few examples demonstrate the problem. In the first case, a JCOG7D member left the church and joined the SDAC. He stayed in the SDAC for over five years but eventually returned to JCOG7D. During

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<sup>36</sup> Kirk Thomas, "Nurture, Retention, Reclamation: Can You Hear Their Cry?" *Ministry* 91, no. 4 (April 2019): 19.

<sup>37</sup> *2022 Annual Statistical Report*, 9. Approximately ten percent of the losses were attributed to deaths.

<sup>38</sup> Douglas Jacobs, et al., "Adventist Millennials: Measuring Emerging Adults' Connection to Church," *Review of Religious Research* (Nov 2018): 2, DOI:10.1007/s13644-018-0348-3. According to Douglas, et al., the attrition rate among millennials in the SDA denomination is similar to that of other Christian denominations, around seventy percent.

his absence, his relationship with his wife was strained because she stayed at JCOG7D. In other cases, SDA members have actively attempted to proselytize JCOG7D members with SDA *present truth*. Rather than viewing these proselytization efforts as entirely counterproductive, the silver lining of these attempts is that JCOG7D has been provided an opportunity to engage members of the SDAC in dialogue regarding their more questionable doctrines.

Unfortunately, many members of JCOG7D are ill-equipped to understand the intricacies of SDA dogma and how to argue effectively against it. To many, SDA doctrine is a *black box* that remains unfathomable to them. While many SDA doctrines are like Evangelical teachings, some differ subtly, while others differ more substantially. Even upon subjects wherein SDAs have commonality with JCOG7D, such as the Sabbath, SDA teachings on the Sabbath are significantly different from JCOG7D teachings in many subtle ways. Few JCOG7D members have a clear understanding of these nuances. Without a full grasp of SDA doctrines, JCOG7D members feel ill-equipped to engage SDAs in dialogue. Thus, within JCOG7D, a gap exists in confidence regarding ministering to SDAs. Members do not feel confident or conversant enough in SDA doctrines, and the problems with those doctrines, to communicate effectively with SDAs about their sect's beliefs. The problem is that many members at JCOG7D do not clearly understand how to communicate biblical truths effectively to local SDAs.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to implement training to equip JCOG7D members to communicate biblical truth to the local SDAC community. If JCOG7D members do not fully grasp the meaning or implications of SDA theology, then they may be less effective in reaching SDAs with biblical truths of the gospel. Conversations between the groups can end up being one-sided, with SDAs, who are well-versed in the so-called *errors* of Protestant

churches, bombarding the JCOG7D member with a barrage of proof texts, along with colorful tracts featuring gruesome beasts, to convince them to flee from *Babylon* and join the *remnant*.<sup>39</sup> Thus, JCOG7D members are missing the opportunity to communicate biblical truths to SDAs effectively.

Furthermore, because of the phenomena of disillusioned SDAs departing from the SDAC in droves and ending up unchurched, there are likely many opportunities being overlooked to communicate with these former members and bring them back into the body of Christ. Therefore, the proposed way to address these multiple missed opportunities is to develop and implement an effective training program.

This research project is focused on developing and implementing a training program to raise the level of understanding within JCOG7D of the doctrinal issues and weaknesses of the SDAC. Many SDAs are trained in the mindset that they have the *present truth*. They are indoctrinated with the various *flaws* in Protestant doctrines and are well-prepared to engage in offensive warfare against other churches. However, they are sometimes unfamiliar with biblical passages that refute their dogma and support traditional Protestant understandings. They are also typically less well-versed on problems with their own sect's doctrines.

While SDA theology has many points that could be questioned, this training will seek to identify the most vulnerable aspects of SDA theology. The training will arm JCOG7D members with the information they need to challenge these weaker points with biblical truth. After this training is completed, the members will be better able to defend their own beliefs and explain the problems and dangers of SDA doctrines to SDAs and former SDAs. Ultimately, the benefit and

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<sup>39</sup> This can be enticing. After all, what believer would not want to leave Babylon and join God's last-day remnant people?

goal of this training are to increase knowledge and awareness to such a degree that JCOG7D members will be able to engage effectively in discussions with SDAs and perhaps even persuade some to abandon their counterproductive proselytization efforts and work side-by-side with JCOG7D and other Bible-believing churches in proclaiming the true gospel message to the lost. Furthermore, this training should benefit the cause of Christ by equipping JCOG7D for the task of bringing unchurched former SDAs back into the fold of Christ.

### **Basic Assumptions**

There are two basic assumptions inherent in this study. First, since this research involves qualitative analysis, it is imperative that the subjects of the research respond in a forthright and honest manner. This is expected since all participants are believers and members of the local church body. Honesty is a valued character trait at JCOG7D, and it is taught and practiced by its leaders. Nevertheless, because the participants have a personal relationship with the researcher, they could be tempted to answer in ways they think the researcher would find to be favorable. To reduce the likelihood of that, the survey portion of the research was carried out with complete anonymity so that the researcher did not know which participant provided the answers. Google Forms<sup>40</sup> was used to capture survey responses which were then transmitted anonymously by the tool to the researcher. In addition, during group discussions, the facilitator emphasized the importance of being candid when discussing the research.

Second, this research assumes that the participants have a genuine desire to engage in this study and want to learn how to communicate more effectively with SDAs. Since this research involves training, it requires an investment of time. For it to achieve its goal, the study must have

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<sup>40</sup> Google Forms is an online survey tool. Survey link: <https://forms.gle/14axsBBmSrK9r25W8>.

participants who are willing and able to make that commitment of time. Before the study began, the participants were informed of the amount of time and effort that was expected of them. Only those who voluntarily agreed to this investment were invited to participate in the study.

Third, this research assumes that the participants have the basic ability to understand theology and doctrines. Much of the training will require the ability to understand SDA doctrines and how they differ from core biblical doctrines. Some SDA doctrines are complicated. It is assumed the participants can think theologically and comprehend this subject matter. To ensure this, only mature adults who have demonstrated scholastic aptitude in Sabbath School classes were allowed to participate in this study.

Fourth, this research assumes the researcher will present training in a manner that the participants can assimilate and understand. To ensure this, the training material was reviewed by a small group that recommended improvements. During the training, the researcher presented the material carefully and thoroughly, checking frequently with the participants to make sure they acknowledged that they understood the topic.

### **Definitions**

*Seventh-day Adventism.* The exact definition of Seventh-day Adventism has been described by Walter Martin as a “puzzle.”<sup>41</sup> While founder Ellen G. White was alive, the SDAC maintained a semblance of unity of faith and practice. After her death, some divisions began to develop within the SDAC. In 1919, a group of SDA academic and denominational leaders met privately to discuss their concerns with the role of Ellen White’s writings and other doctrinal

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<sup>41</sup> Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2019), 586.



issues. However, the disagreements that were voiced behind closed doors remained largely private, and the minutes of that meeting were not released until 1974.

SDA historian George Knight acknowledges the following regarding Ellen White: “Between the 1920s and the 1960s mythology regarding her writings and her gift became dominant.”<sup>42</sup> In terms of unity, this was the golden age of Seventh-day Adventism, but it was not to last. The homogenous nature of Seventh-day Adventism began to unravel after Martin met with SDAC leaders and pressured them to reform. As an outcome of the discussions with Martin, the SDAC published a document in 1957 entitled *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (QOD).<sup>43</sup> This publication fractured the unity of the SDAC. It was described by Knight as “the most divisive book in Seventh-day Adventist history.”<sup>44</sup> This book essentially split the church into two camps, which Kenneth Samples described as “traditional” and “Evangelical.”<sup>45</sup>

According to Samples, evangelical-leaning SDAs believe in the imminent return of Christ, the Sabbath, Christ’s substitutionary atonement on the cross, and salvation by grace through faith. They continue to believe in the prophetic role of Ellen, although acknowledging the primacy of Scripture.<sup>46</sup> While traditionalists also believe in many of those same doctrines,

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<sup>42</sup> George R. Knight, “Ellen White’s Afterlife: Delightful Fictions, Troubling Facts, and Enlightening Research,” *Spectrum* 47, iss. 1 (2019): 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine: An Explanation of Certain Major Aspects of Seventh-day Adventist Belief* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), will hereafter be referred to as QOD. The book was prepared by “Prepared by a Representative Group of Seventh-day Adventist Leaders, Bible Teachers, and Editors.” This document will hereafter be referred to as QOD.

<sup>44</sup> George R. Knight, “Historical and Theological Introduction to the Annotated Edition” in *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, ed. George R. Knight, (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xiii.

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Richard Samples, “Evangelical Reflections on Seventh-day Adventism: Yesterday and Today,” (paper presentation, Questions on Doctrine 50th Anniversary Conference, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, October 24–27, 2007), 4. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=qod>.

<sup>46</sup> Kenneth Samples, “Evangelical Reflections,” 5.

according to Martin, by the 1970s, a “rift” had developed between the evangelicals and the traditional SDAs, with the latter emphasizing “works-righteousness, legalism, and the prophetic status accorded to founder Ellen G. White.”<sup>47</sup>

The traditional position appears to be maintaining dominance within the SDAC even though evangelicals outnumber traditionalists in some west coast regions of North America.<sup>48</sup> Traditional dominance is demonstrated by the fact that many prominent evangelical-leaning scholars, such as Desmond Ford, have been defrocked by the SDAC. Matthew Quarty comments that the current SDA General Conference president, Ted Wilson, has advocated the historic SDA position of perfectionism, using Ellen White’s “writings as his special weapon of advocacy.”<sup>49</sup> André Bohnet and Bad Wildbad note that since the 1980s, SDA universities have pressured SDAC leaders to open up a greater dialogue with evangelicals, but after his election in 2010, Wilson’s public comments have effectively re-entrenched the SDAC into traditional teachings on the Sabbath and Ellen White.<sup>50</sup> Ronald Osborn agrees, warning that since the arrival of Wilson, the SDAC has shifted towards “the direction of rigidly prescribed hermeneutics and intensified apocalypticism.”<sup>51</sup>

For this research, Seventh-day Adventism will be defined within the context of traditional, historic Seventh-day Adventism as opposed to evangelical-leaning Seventh-day Adventism. While it is acknowledged that the Evangelical branch of Seventh-day Adventism has

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<sup>47</sup> Martin, *Kingdom*, 587.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 591. About two thirds of the SDAs in the Southeastern California Conference of SDAs are evangelical according to a 2018 survey cited. This may not represent the rest of North America.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew Quarty, October 15, 2020, “Will Jesus Not Return Unless We Become Perfect?” *Spectrum*, accessed Nov. 6, 2022, <https://spectrummagazine.org/views/2020/will-jesus-not-return-unless-we-become-perfect>.

<sup>50</sup> André Bohnet and Bad Wildbad, “Zwischen Öffnung und Restauration: Die Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten,” *Materaildienst der EZW* 5 (2016): 164–171.

<sup>51</sup> Ronald E. Osborn, “The Theopolitics of Adventist Apocalypticism,” *Modern Theology* 30, iss. 2 (2014): 220, doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/moth.12077.

made inroads in academic circles and on the West Coast of the United States, the branch that will most likely be encountered in Jacksonville, Florida, is the traditional branch.

*SDA Theology.* Unlike many Protestant churches, the doctrines and teachings of Seventh-day Adventism are not entirely stable. The teachings of the SDAC have been in a state of flux for over half a century, primarily due to the impact of Martin's interactions with SDAC leaders. As an outcome of those discussions, the SDAC fulfilled its commitment to Martin to publish QOD. However, the document proved highly controversial among traditional SDAs because it contradicts some of the teachings of Ellen White. Thus, the SDAC has never formally adopted all the aspects of that document into its official theology.

In recent years, in SDA periodicals, diverse opinions have been expressed on the role of Ellen White, perfectionism, sectarianism, and other SDA doctrines. An individual viewing this from the outside might be perplexed trying to understand what SDAs believe. Have they moved over into the Evangelical camp? Or are they tethered to their long-held historical positions? Because the SDAC has such a large volume of theology, it can be daunting for even the average SDA member to comprehend exactly what their sect teaches. Arguably, the best and most widely accepted definition of SDA theology can be found within the latest edition of the SDA doctrinal statement, the 452-page book entitled *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.<sup>52</sup> This official publication of the SDAC was written by the ministerial staff of the SDA Church. While both the traditional and the more progressive Evangelical SDA branches have areas of disagreement with sections of this book, it is currently the most authoritative published document in the SDAC. Thus, for this

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<sup>52</sup> SDA General Conference Ministerial Association, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Silver Springs, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 2018).

research, SDA theology will be understood as the doctrines and teachings expounded upon in the most recent version of the SDA doctrinal statement, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study is the number of participants. The scope of this study is the local body of JCOG7D. Since JCOG7D is a small church with only thirty adult members, this limits the pool of potential candidates. Of those, some are too elderly to participate, and others are disinterested in this subject. This leaves only approximately one-third who have an active interest in participating in this study. This group of people is a relatively small representation. Furthermore, not only are the participants limited in quantity, but they are also uniform in location. All the participants live in the greater metropolitan area of Jacksonville, Florida. Because of the small number of participants and because of the lack of diversity in location, the findings will not be as robust or as universally applicable as they would be if the participant size had been much larger and represented more diverse locations throughout the world.

A second limitation of this study is the researcher's personal bias. The researcher was born, raised, and educated in the SDAC. Both of his parents were university professors at an SDA university.<sup>53</sup> He personally knew a sizable number of SDA professors, pastors, and evangelists. For years he worked for an SDA radio evangelist as a ghostwriter. During his time in the SDAC, he was closely associated with a group of traditional SDAs. Because of his relationships within the heart of the SDAC, he has been an eyewitness to the subterfuge practiced by some in the SDAC. When he discovered the biblical gospel and eventually left the SDAC to join another denomination, he was treated by his former brethren as an apostate. When he

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<sup>53</sup> Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Texas.

exposed the truth about Ellen White on a website in the late 1990s, he was personally vilified by SDA individuals and threatened by SDA corporate lawyers with legal action. This experience left a taint that makes him vulnerable to bias against the SDAC. While this potential bias is a limitation of the study, the study can also benefit from the researcher's in-depth inside knowledge of the SDAC. He spent years studying the doctrines of the SDAC, and this places him in a stronger position to effectively develop and carry out the action research program.

### **Delimitations**

First, this research will be constricted to members of JCOG7D. These members all live in Northeast Florida, and all belong to one denomination. In theory, a study with a larger group of participants, on a national or even an international scale, would provide added credibility. For example, SDAs outside of the United States tend to hold to more traditional SDA doctrines, while SDAs on the West Coast tend to be more Evangelical. It is possible that a difference in location could affect how the participants judge the effectiveness of the training. Furthermore, a study that includes members of other denominations may render different results. For example, when a participant engages in the training, a Baptist participant may discover there is a larger theological gap for them to cross than a member of COG7D. This may make the training more arduous for them to digest. Thus, it may be difficult to infer that the same results can be replicated in other geographic areas or amongst other denominations.

Second, this research will not investigate the impact of the training from the SDA perspective. This research will not evaluate whether SDAs considered the communications they received from the participants to be beneficial. Neither will this research track the success rate of recovering people from the SDAC or bringing unchurched former SDA members back into Christian fellowship. The research will be solely focused on whether the participants judged they

were better equipped to minister to SDAs after the training. However, some insight into these topics may be gained from the shared experiences of the JCOG7D participants.

Additionally, the training program will focus only on core SDA beliefs. Multiple SDA teachings could be challenged from a biblical perspective. One example is their interpretations of Bible prophecy, which have come under fire from SDA scholars. It is not the purpose of this training to identify every potential flaw found within the large body of SDA doctrine. Doing so could make the training too extensive, which may discourage participation, or so voluminous that participants could lose focus on the most critical points. Therefore, the study will focus on the weakest points of SDA theology while ignoring more trivial areas of concern.

### **Thesis Statement**

JCOG7D members encounter SDA members with some degree of frequency. This is because both groups share some distinctive beliefs within the Christian community that set them apart. Both groups attend church on Saturday, and both teach the doctrine of annihilationism.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, there is some shared history because the founders of both churches worked together for a period of six years in the 1850s. Because of these shared roots and similarities in some core doctrines, it is not uncommon for JCOG7D members to fellowship with SDAs or former SDAs. Instead of these encounters being one-sided dialogues, with SDAs expounding upon their sect's doctrines, these encounters can become opportunities for meaningful two-way dialogue. These encounters provide excellent opportunities for JCOG7D to share biblical truths with SDAs.

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<sup>54</sup> Although both groups observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, JCOG7D does not hold the position held by many SDAs that Saturday observance is the “seal of God” and Sunday observance is the “mark of the beast.” JCOG7D does not view Sabbath observance as an issue that should separate believers (Rom 14:5–6).

In addition to this, because the SDAC has a high turnover rate, JCOG7D members have a unique opportunity to witness to those unchurched people who have departed from the SDAC. Often, these people harbor some suspicion regarding Sunday worshippers and are reluctant to attend a Sunday-keeping church. JCOG7D members have a unique opportunity to engage these unchurched people and bring them into a Saturday church that aligns more with orthodox Protestant Evangelical teachings. Unfortunately, most JCOG7D members do not fully understand how to minister biblical truth effectively to SDAs or former SDAs.

Proper training is the key to successful engagements with traditional SDAs. Nearly every worldly business provides training for their employees. For example, before ever engaging with customers, newly recruited salespeople are first carefully taught by their employer how to present their product effectively. They are taught how to make strong arguments affirming their product. They are instructed on how to defeat the arguments of competing companies. Companies are willing to invest a substantial amount of time and effort into this training because it is effective.<sup>55</sup> Believers in Christ should be no less wise. To be effective ministers for Christ when engaging SDAs, JCOG7D must be grounded in biblical truth and understand the framework of SDA theology and its weak points. If training is developed and delivered to equip JCOG7D to communicate biblical truths with SDAs, then JCOG7D will be better prepared to minister to SDAs.

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<sup>55</sup> For example, a survey of the construction industry in the United States found that the cost savings from training outweighed the costs of conducting the training by a factor of 2.26 to 1. UNESCO, *Understanding the Return on Investment from TVET: A Practical Guide* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2020), 21.

## **CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Literature Review**

The literature review will approach the problem of ministering to SDAs from four angles. The first approach will examine literature that deals with the subject of denominational switching. This includes the question, what does the literature say about the feasibility of converting people from Seventh-day Adventism to traditional Christian beliefs? The second approach examines the literature on the history of the SDAC. Formulating an effective solution is only possible by first understanding how the current situation evolved and is evolving. The third approach attempts to understand a biblical methodology for dealing with heretical doctrines. The fourth approach will examine SDA doctrines and respond to the question, do SDA doctrines indeed contain heretical content?

### **Denominational Switching**

There are multiple studies on denominational switching, which entails a believer in Christ leaving one denomination and joining another. However, none of the research addresses the SDAC in particular. The literature does support the notion that denominational switching is currently prevalent in North America. There are many reasons for this that are not relevant to this research. However, it is important to establish whether the research provides insight into both the methodology and the feasibility of denominational switching.

While methods have been developed to deprogram members of certain religious cults like Hare Krishna, the same does not exist for Seventh-day Adventism. In discussing this lack, Ralph



Hood et al., note that there are “no ‘scripts’ that those who deconvert [sic] can follow.”<sup>1</sup> Henri Gooren provides no methodology to solve this other than arguing that “conversion and deconversion are two sides of the same coin.”<sup>2</sup> He asserts that the same factors influence both. In other words, if one is converted to the SDAC because of indoctrination into the church’s teachings, then it can be reasoned that they can be de-converted by indoctrination on the truths of the Bible, particularly those that highlight the heretical ideas in the SDA doctrines. If one is converted into the SDAC after reading Ellen White’s writings and accepting her as a modern prophet, then perhaps that person might be de-converted by being exposed to evidence demonstrating she was not a true prophet in the biblical sense.

Regarding the feasibility of convincing a person to switch denominations based on theological grounds, there is some research to support the fact that people sometimes switch denominations because of a change in their belief in the doctrines of their church. For example, in a 1995 study regarding denominational switching, R. Hoge et al., found that twenty-seven percent of Presbyterians who switched to another denomination did so because of dissatisfaction with Presbyterian teachings.<sup>3</sup> In a more recent study in 2022, N. Beider determined that dissatisfaction with the teachings of one’s religion accounted for twenty-nine percent of all defections from one’s childhood religion.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the literature supports the concept that close to a

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2018), 252.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10.

<sup>3</sup> R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, “Types of Denominational Switching among Protestant Young Adults,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34, no. 2 (1995): 256, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1386770>.

<sup>4</sup> N. Beider, “Motivations and Types of Religious Change in Contemporary America,” *Review of Religious Research* 64 (2022): 943, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-022-00507-z>.

third of people are willing to switch denominations if they lose faith in the teachings of their denomination.

### The Historical Evolution of Seventh-day Adventism

The SDAC is an outgrowth of the 1844 Millerite religious movement. After Christ failed to return as expected on October 22, 1844, some believers separated from the main body of Christ and formed other church organizations. The SDAC was officially formed in 1863. They are noteworthy for adopting some doctrines that are dissimilar from most other Christian denominations. Since its formation, the SDA denomination has been embroiled in controversy over these doctrines and their practice of evangelizing other denominations. Up until the 1950s, many Christians regarded Seventh-day Adventism as a cult. In the mid-1950s, a series of meetings were held between top evangelical-leaning SDA leaders and the Baptist counter-cult expert Walter Martin.<sup>5</sup> The shockwaves of those meetings are still being felt today. Martin surprised the evangelical world by removing the cult label from Seventh-day Adventism. He declared it possible to be an SDA and a “true follower of Christ” despite the SDAC’s heterodox doctrines.<sup>6</sup> When the findings were published in *Eternity*, Kenneth Samples reported it was so controversial that twenty-five percent of the subscribers canceled their subscriptions.<sup>7</sup> Even after Martin’s reclassification, many evangelical scholars continued to label the SDAC as a cult. For example, Anthony Hoekema’s 1963 book of cults includes Seventh-day Adventism as one of the top four.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The meetings also included the Presbyterian theologian Donald Barnhouse, editor of *Eternity* magazine.

<sup>6</sup> Martin, *Kingdom*, 586.

<sup>7</sup> Samples, “Evangelical Reflections,” 4.  
<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=qod>.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 388–403.

Within the SDAC, some leaders welcomed the removal of the cult stigma. They prophetically foresaw that the SDAC would experience unprecedented growth without that label. Meanwhile, others felt the individuals who negotiated with Martin had compromised the SDA faith. They believed that unauthorized changes were made to traditional SDA doctrines to placate Martin. Per an agreement brokered with Martin, the SDAC published and distributed QOD. SDA historian George Knight reports that the controversial document split the church into factions.<sup>9</sup> On one side was a small group of academics and evangelical-leaning leaders who embraced and championed the changes. They viewed the changes to be a positive step in aligning the SDAC with biblical teachings. On the other side was a much larger group of traditional ministers and lay members who questioned or outright rejected the changes. Some in the latter group, along with some in the non-SDA Evangelical community, felt that the SDA leaders who represented the SDAC in its negotiations with Martin had surreptitiously altered SDA doctrines to make them appear more closely aligned with evangelical thinking. Some went so far as to claim that Martin had been duped into removing the cult label.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the denomination's most distinguished theologian, M. L. Andreasen, made public his disagreement with parts of QOD. For example, he rejected the statement that the atonement was completed at the cross.<sup>11</sup>

While Martin was successful in nudging the SDAC in the direction of mainline evangelicalism, there is continued controversy over how far the SDAC moved. There is an open question regarding whether the SDA leadership ever entirely accepted QOD. In 1984, William Johnsson, editor of the SDAC's official magazine, *Advent Review*, met with Martin on the *John*

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<sup>9</sup> George Knight, "Questions on Doctrine: Symbol of Adventist Theological Tension," (paper presentation, Questions on Doctrine 50th Anniversary Conference, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, October 24–27, 2007), 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

*Ankerberg Show*. Martin grilled Johnsson on why QOD was out of print, but Johnsson provided no answer. Martin pressed Johnsson as to whether the atonement was completed at the cross, but Johnsson could not reply with any definitive answer. Near the end of the five-part series, Martin concluded, “If they continue to progress at this rate, that the classification of a cult cannot possibly miss being re-applied to Seventh-day Adventism.”<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, doubt continues as to whether the SDAC ever accepted QOD. In 2008, traditional SDA scholar Herbert Douglass attacked QOD as creating a muddled theology that undermined Seventh-day Adventism’s foundational doctrines.<sup>13</sup> It is uncertain how long this internal split will continue to fester. However, whether one views Seventh-day Adventism as a cult may largely depend upon which faction of the SDAC they interact with.

Whether or not one classifies Seventh-day Adventism as a cult, it is evident that Martin had serious concerns about the SDAC. Martin regarded the mixture of truth and human error as more dangerous than complete falsehood.<sup>14</sup> Some Christians may lower their guard when they see a group meeting in a church building, singing hymns, and carrying Bibles in their arms. They may assume from that behavior that the group teaches roughly the same doctrines as Evangelical churches. However, Martin warned that these are the groups that Christians have most to fear. Near the end of his life, Martin said,

...cults succeed most accurately and powerfully when they imitate the church most closely. The closer they look like us, the worse the deception. The closer they can get to our vocabulary, carry our Bible, mention the name of Jesus, and talk the lingo of Christianity, the more dangerous they become.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Walter Martin, “Seventh Day Adventism: Who is Telling the Truth? – Program 5,” transcript of the debate on the John Ankerberg Show, 1985, accessed Jan. 18, 2022, <https://jashow.org/articles/seventh-day-adventism-who-is-telling-the-truth-program-5/>.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert E. Douglass, *A Fork in the Road* (Coldwater, MI: Remnant Publications, 2008), 61, 72.

<sup>14</sup> Martin, *Kingdom*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Martin, “Cult of Liberal Theology” (YouTube video, Cult Conference, Canada, 1987), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAapUXTqNhU>.

If Martin is correct, then a group that adopts the Bible and basic Christian doctrines but teaches false doctrines may be best positioned to deceive believers and lead them astray.

### Dealing with Heretical Teachings

Throughout Christian history, more heresies have been born from within than from without. Writing in the first century, Peter warned that “false teachers” would arise from within the church, bringing in “destructive heresies” (1 Pet 2:1, NKJV). After the death of the apostles, the problem continued to grow. In the second century, Irenaeus of Lyon wrote a five-volume book, *Against Heresies*.<sup>16</sup> He warned against false teachers who employ “plausible words” to “cunningly allure the simple-minded,” and “draw away the minds of the inexperienced and take them captive,” overthrowing the “faith of many.”<sup>17</sup>

Over the subsequent centuries, all manner of heretical teaching emerged from within the church. Gnosticism, Docetism, Arianism, and other heresies arose in the early centuries of Christianity. The nineteenth century witnessed the arrival of Mormonism, the Jehovah’s Witness, Christian Science, and Seventh-day Adventism. The adherents of these groups number in the tens of millions.<sup>18</sup> These groups often go to great lengths to portray themselves as Bible-believing, orthodox Christians. However, each group teaches what many Christians would regard as destructive heresies comingled with orthodox teaching.

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<sup>16</sup> In Latin, *Adversus Haereses*.

<sup>17</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* vol. 1, ANF 5:1–2.

<sup>18</sup> SDAC lists membership for 2021 at 21,912,161 (<https://www.adventist.org/statistics>). Mormons list membership for 2021 at 16,805,400 (<https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics>). Jehovah’s Witness lists their membership for 2022 at 8,699,048 (<https://www.jw.org/en/jehovahs-witnesses/faq/how-many-jw>). Christian Science does not publish membership figures.

The biblical approach to heresy is to confront it and attempt to counteract it. Ignoring heresy can erode the Church of God as members leave it to join a cult or sect. Ignoring heresy also shows a lack of regard for the soul of the one deceived by the sect's false teachings. Paul provides a leadership example by demonstrating serious concern for the sheep in his flocks. He modeled the example of fighting vigorously against false doctrines wherever and whenever they presented themselves. He warned the elders in Ephesus that people would arise from within the church and "distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30, NIV). He no doubt understood that this attrition would weaken the church and harm the faith of those who were drawn away by false teachers.

Peter also warned that some from within the church who were "ignorant and unstable" would twist the scriptures to "their own destruction" (2 Pet 3:16, RSV). Thomas Schreiner points out that this destruction is eschatological in nature, meaning that their twisting of the scriptures will land them in hell.<sup>19</sup> Thus, believers who are causing confusion and dissension instead of being valuable disciples are weakening the church rather than strengthening it. Other believers must expend effort trying to recover them from the abyss of falsehood. This is another way in which defections harm the church. Had they stayed in orthodoxy, those disciples could possibly have brought others into the faith. Recognizing the seriousness of this problem, the apostles dealt with heresy head-on by confronting and exposing falsehood. In effect, the sheep's clothing must be ripped off the wolf by good shepherds, thereby exposing the ugly nature beneath (Matt 7:15).

Paul believed that one key to defeating false teachings was to ground the church in the truth. He castigated the Corinthians for accepting those who preach another Jesus or another

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1–2 Peter and Jude: The Christian Standard Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020), 3i.

gospel (2 Cor 11:4). In both of the Corinthian letters, Paul makes a formidable effort to set forth the true gospel teaching. When false teachers brought in a works-based theology in Galatia, Paul railed against those preaching “a different gospel” and those who “pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:6–7, NKJV). It should be noted that these false teachers sought to bring in elements from the law of Moses, such as circumcision, as works that must accompany salvation. Paul wrote that these false teachers were *anathema* (Gal 1:8). Grant Osborne points out the seriousness of the situation, noting that “these Judaizers and their followers are no longer Christians and will come under eternal punishment at the last judgment.”<sup>20</sup> Timothy George labels this “one of the harshest statements in the entire” New Testament.<sup>21</sup> After giving this serious warning, Paul spends a considerable part of his letter to the Galatians exposing the errors of the false gospel and expounding upon the true gospel. Because of Paul’s investment in educating the Galatians about this heresy, they were much better equipped to deal with the false teachers of their era. Therefore, to follow the apostles’ example means to first understand the seriousness of the situation, and then confront and oppose false doctrines.

### The Doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism

Confronting and opposing false doctrines demands that one understand those doctrines and how they diverge from biblical truth. The typical SDA adherent is well-trained in their sect’s heterodox doctrines. Unfortunately, most JCOG7D members are not equally trained to refute or even understand those doctrines. Without the proper preparation, JCOG7D members are ill-equipped to counter SDA arguments or convince SDAs of biblical truth. Martin once lamented

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<sup>20</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Galatians: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 26.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy George, *Christian Standard Commentary: Galatians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen et al., (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), 14a.

that Christian churches have failed to understand false teachings and have failed to “develop a workable methodology both to evangelize and refute” adherents to false teachings.<sup>22</sup> This sobering gap provides the *raison d’être* for this review assessing contemporary literature. This review includes five doctrines within Seventh-day Adventism that differ from traditional Evangelical beliefs: remnant eschatology, prophetic authority, two-phase atonement, the health message, and the sanctity of human life.

### **Remnant Eschatology**

SDAs view themselves as truly unique within the Christian world. SDA professor Petr Činčala acknowledges that the SDAC “prides itself” on being set apart from other Protestant denominations.<sup>23</sup> One major teaching that separates the SDAC from most other Protestant denominations is the concept of remnant eschatology. This is a theology that propounds that at the end of earth’s history, there will be one separate and distinct group of Christian believers that are “cut off” from the main body of believers, much akin to how a remnant of cloth is cut off from the main garment. SDA theologian Dan-Adrian Petre acknowledges that SDA teachings on remnant eschatology are at the core of the SDA theological system.<sup>24</sup> Brendan Pratt explains that the identity of the SDAC is formed around the notion of them being the remnant people described in Revelation 12:17.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Martin’s comments were made in the context of cult teachings, but whether a false teaching is held by a cult, a sect, or an orthodox church, Martin’s observation on the need for a workable methodology to refute those teachings is apropos. Martin, *Kingdom*, 21.

<sup>23</sup> Petr Činčala, René D. Drumm, Monte Sahlin, and Allison Saucedo, “A Look at the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Unique or Only ‘Different?’” *Theology Today* 78, no. 3 (October 2021): 247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00405736211030231>.

<sup>24</sup> Dan-Adrian Petre, “Eschatological Dimensions of the Seventh-Day Sabbath within the Adventist Doctrinal Framework,” *Theologika* 36, no. 1 (2021): 37, doi:10.17162/rt.v36i1.1499.

<sup>25</sup> Brendan Pratt, “Christianity and Advanced Consumer Culture: Shaping a Response with Reference to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Australia,” (PhD diss., Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, Australia, 2020), 203.



SDA theologians have devised a method of interpreting Bible prophecy, especially the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, in such a way as to elevate themselves above and separate themselves apart from all other Christian denominations. According to SDA teachings on remnant eschatology, at the time of the end of the current age, faithful SDAs who are a part of God's remnant church will receive the Seal of God. Everyone else, including the vast majority of Christianity, will receive the Mark of the Beast. The critical issue that divides those who receive the seal from those who receive the mark also happens to be the SDAC's most important doctrine: Sabbath observance on Saturday. Fearful characters in the book of Revelation are interpreted as opponents of the SDA remnant. For example, Babylon and the Beast of Revelation 13 are both said to represent Catholicism. Protestant denominations are defined as the children of the mother of harlots (Rev 17:5). SDAs have appropriated the anti-Catholic rhetoric of early Protestant Reformers, who saw Catholicism in nearly every beast, harlot, and wicked city in Revelation and lumped the Protestants in with the same cast of characters. SDA scholar Edward Vick admits that not only Catholicism but also "apostate Protestantism" is a component of the SDA understanding of those who worship the beast and its image (Rev 13).<sup>26</sup> Osborn adds that SDA remnant theology confirmed the SDAC's "unique election as God's true church amid rampant Protestant apostasy."<sup>27</sup>

The concept of being the remnant church of Revelation is fundamental not only to SDA theology but also to its mission. The SDA General Conference acknowledges that "God has his children in all churches" but goes on to argue that the "remnant church" continues to call God's

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<sup>26</sup> Edward W. H. Vick, *Seventh-day Adventists Interpreting Scripture and Establishing Fundamental Doctrine* (Gonzalez, FL: Energion Publications, 2020), 20.

<sup>27</sup> Osborn, "Theopolitics," 232.

people “out of apostasy.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, members of non-SDA churches are called out of the apostasy of worshipping on Sunday and invited to join the true remnant who go to church on Saturday.

Much hinges on the identity of the message of the second angel which warns of the fall of Babylon (Rev 14:8). The SDA doctrinal publication connects this passage to Revelation 18:4, “Come out of her, my people...” SDAs have historically taught that Protestant churches “fell” in 1844 when they rejected the message of William Miller.<sup>29</sup> At that time, God turned to the Adventists who believed Miller’s false message about the soon return of Christ and designated them to call believers out of the *fallen* Protestant churches into what would eventually become the SDAC. SDA scholar Jiri Moskala adds that SDAs, not angels, have been entrusted with the weighty responsibility of communicating the three messages of Revelation 14 to the world.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the SDAC identifies itself as playing a crucial and leading role in end-time events. They are the holders of *present truth*. They are the ones entrusted with giving the last message of warning to Christianity and the world. They view themselves as having the assignment of calling people out of the failed systems of Catholicism and Protestantism. The SDAC understands their identity to be the remnant saints who oppose Sunday observance, keep the seventh day Sabbath, and will eventually receive the Seal of God and be transported to heaven at the return of Christ.

SDAs use two Bible passages to identify their sect as the remnant church. First, they use Revelation 12:17 to identify the end-time remnant as those who keep the “commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”<sup>31</sup> SDAs believe this verse refers to the Ten

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<sup>28</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 201.

<sup>29</sup> SDAs, like many Protestants, believe that the Catholic Church fell into apostasy centuries earlier.

<sup>30</sup> Jiri Moskala, “The Seventh-day Adventist Identity - Who Are We as a Community of Faith?” *Current* 8 (2020): 4, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/2412>.

<sup>31</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 257.

Commandments of the Old Covenant (Exod 20:3–17). SDAs do not believe that a person can truly obey the Ten Commandments unless that person observes the seventh day (Saturday) as a 24-hour period of rest from labor. Since Sunday-observing churches do not observe Saturday as a sabbath, SDAs believe this eliminates them from being identified as the remnant. However, other denominations, such as the Seventh Day Baptist Church, also observe Saturday as the Sabbath. To eliminate other Sabbath-keeping churches from the remnant, SDAs teach that in addition to keeping the Sabbath, the remnant is identified as having the “testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17). SDAs point to Revelation 19:10 to find the definition of the “testimony of Jesus.” This verse states that the “testimony of Jesus” is the “Spirit of Prophecy” (Rev 19:10). SDAs interpret the “Spirit of Prophecy” to be the *gift* of prophecy, not the actual *Spirit* that inspires the prophetic word. They teach the *gift* of prophecy was manifested in Ellen White, thereby identifying their sect as the one with the “testimony of Jesus.” The SDA doctrinal statement contends that the “gift of prophecy was active in the ministry of Ellen G. White” and is “an identifying mark of the remnant church.”<sup>32</sup> Since other Sabbath-keeping groups did not have an active prophet, this allowed the SDAs to identify themselves as the one and only church that had *both* identifying marks of the remnant (i.e., they kept all ten of the Commandments, including the Sabbath, and had the gift of prophecy as manifested in the ministry of Ellen White).

The SDA’s identification of themselves as the remnant relies upon the prophetic ministry of Ellen White. This position is not without controversy, both from within and outside the SDAC. A survey of recent graduates of SDA universities found that remnant eschatology had the highest level of disagreement among all the SDA doctrines.<sup>33</sup> Former SDA scholar Steve Daily

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<sup>32</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 253, 261.

<sup>33</sup> Jacobs, et al., “Adventist Millennials,” 12. 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the doctrine: “The Seventh-day Adventist Church is God’s last-day church with a message to prepare the world for the Second Coming of Christ.” The doctrine with the second highest level of disagreement was at 12%: “Marriage was established in

disagrees with the SDA assessment that they are the remnant in his 360-page review of White's life and prophecies. Rather than being a real prophet, he concludes that White was "possibly the most successful con artist in history."<sup>34</sup> Charles Scriven views it as a travesty that White has been used since the formation of Seventh-day Adventism to identify the SDAC as the remnant church. He declares that such an interpretation is not only unbiblical, ignoring that the spirit of prophecy was the Hebrew prophets, but more importantly, their "constricted" interpretation of Revelation 19:10 is, in effect, a falsification of the gospel.<sup>35</sup> Fernando Canale, while arguing strenuously for the SDA concept of the remnant, admits that when SDAs began turning to Scripture instead of Ellen White's writings to find support for SDA doctrines, they "found it harder to prove Adventists doctrines and practices only from Scripture."<sup>36</sup> Canale laments that some SDAs are returning to a Protestant understanding of the remnant and abandoning the SDA traditional idea that the "remnant" is a separate and distinct group of Sabbath-keeping believers in Ellen White.<sup>37</sup> SDAs have adopted the position that the ministry of Ellen White is crucial to their identity as the single denomination that is the true remnant church of Bible prophecy, but they struggle to support this position from Scripture alone. The primary support for this belief comes from Ellen White herself, thus creating circular reasoning in support of this doctrine.

Part of the SDAC's "remnant eschatology" is their belief in a final battle between good and evil involving the day of worship. According to Osborn, the SDA pioneer theologian J.N.

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Eden by God to be a lifelong, loving union between a man and a woman." The authors concluded that Millennials' support for some SDA doctrines is "weakening" (2).

<sup>34</sup> Steve Daily, *Ellen White: A Psychobiography* (Conneaut Lake, PA: Page Publications, 2020), 301.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Scriven, "On Rejecting the Spirit of Prophecy," *Spectrum* 47, iss. 1 (2019): 2–3.

<sup>36</sup> Fernando Canale, "On Being the Remnant," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 24 no. 1 (2013): 165.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 165–66.

Andrews advanced the idea in 1851 that Protestants and Catholics would unite at the end of time to impose a death penalty upon Sabbath-keepers.<sup>38</sup> The SDAC eventually adopted this teaching into White's *Great Controversy* and it became part of their core eschatological theology. Osborn argues that this eschatology continues to be taught in SDA churches and schools, "cloaked in the garb of Evangelical theology."<sup>39</sup> Osborn criticizes the SDAC for teaching a doctrine that may have appeared plausible in a nineteenth-century era of blue laws but no longer correlates to the current religious landscape.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, while acknowledging there is no apparent design to carry out this end-time scenario in the current era, SDAs continue to espouse a conspiratorial theory that Catholic and Protestant leaders plot behind closed doors to persecute SDAs.

Some SDA scholars cast the Sabbath-Sunday debate as love versus hate. According to Petre, Sabbath observance represents "love," whereas observance of Sunday represents "hate."<sup>41</sup> Petre views the Sabbath-or-Sunday issue as the line of demarcation, the great "litmus test," over which the final epic battle between good and evil will be fought.<sup>42</sup> He believes that the observance of Sunday as a day of worship will result in the Mark of the Beast being placed upon *apostate* Christians. These Sunday-keeping believers will ultimately be consigned to the lake of fire. During the final battle for the heart and soul of the planet, Wendell Johnson notes that SDAs believe that Catholicism will unite with apostate Protestantism to use the power of the secular

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<sup>38</sup> Osborn, "Theopolitics," 234.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>40</sup> Blue laws are regulations preventing trade or other activities on Sunday. Over the last century, most counties and states in the United States have removed or struck down blue laws.

<sup>41</sup> Petre, *Theologika*, 57.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

government to persecute SDAs for their Sabbath observance.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, Christ will return to destroy the Catholics, Protestants, and all other Sunday keepers.

One of the most significant challenges scholars have with SDA teachings on Bible prophecy is that there is no proof of the accuracy of their interpretations. Many interpretations appear suited for the religious landscape of the nineteenth century rather than the twenty first century. More than a few scholars have noted that SDA interpretations seem conveniently skewed in favor of the SDAC. SDA scholar Sigve Tonstad calls this out, claiming that the SDA interpretations “cannot be derived from the text of Revelation.”<sup>44</sup> Sigve also questions the SDAC’s methods of interpretation. He challenges their arbitrary use of the historicist method of interpreting Bible prophecy, which he views to be outmoded.<sup>45</sup> Critics view the SDA system of prophetic interpretation to be based mainly upon presupposition and proof-texting. Ultimately, to find support for the SDA interpretations, the SDAC must resort to their prophetess, Ellen G. White, as the source of authority for their unique understanding of Bible prophecy.

### **Prophetic Authority**

The SDAC would not be where it is today without its enigmatic leader, Ellen G. White. After the failure of William Miller’s prediction about the return of Christ in 1844, many Millerites were devastated. Through her timely visions, White gave them hope that they were still on the right theological track. Like Ann Lee of the Shakers, Joseph Smith of Mormonism, and Mary Eddy Baker of Christian Science, the charismatic visionary Ellen White rose quickly

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<sup>43</sup> Wendell G. Johnson, ed., *End of Days: An Encyclopedia of the Apocalypse in World Religions* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 328.

<sup>44</sup> Sigve Tonstad, “Revelation and the Crisis of Historicism,” *Spectrum* 47, iss. 1 (2019): 23.

<sup>45</sup> The historicists method of interpreting Bible prophecies, such as Daniel and Revelation, involves interpreting prophetic symbols to correlate with historical people and events that have transpired from the time of the writing through the present time, and concluding in the future. For example, many equate 666 with the papacy.

to a position of power and prominence in the SDAC. By the 1860s, belief in the inspiration of White's visions was being made a test of fellowship in many SDA churches.<sup>46</sup> Daily explains that her visions placed the seal of approval on many of the SDAC's unorthodox doctrines, such as the criticality of Sabbath observance, soul sleep in death, and annihilationism.<sup>47</sup> He explains that her ability to approve of doctrines contrary to New Testament theology demonstrates "how the authority of Ellen White trumps and surpasses Scripture with regard to any subject or any doctrine."<sup>48</sup> Osborn agrees that early in the SDAC's history, White's authority became a core part of SDA identity.<sup>49</sup> In a genuine sense, she became the "Spirit of Prophecy" that identified the SDAC as the remnant church of Revelation.

By 1881, the other founders of the SDAC had passed away (i.e., Ellen's husband, James, and their friend Joseph Bates), leaving Ellen at the helm as the sole living founder of the SDAC. She began to take on the aura of a biblical prophet. White engaged more heavily in the politics of the growing denomination while carrying her prophetic mantle. Her power grew so much that Jonathan Butler asserts that she "almost single-handedly deposed General Conference presidents and handpicked their successors."<sup>50</sup>

Mrs. White did all in her power to foster belief in her authority and her unique prophetic role. Her primary method of communicating her messages was through writing. SDA professor Jud Lake explains that White produced more than one hundred thousand pages of writing during

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<sup>46</sup> See for example: M. O. Burdick, *Hope of Israel* 1, no. 12 (May 2, 1864): 1. J.C. Day, *Hope of Israel* 1, no. 13 (May 16, 1864): 2. J. C. Day, *Hope of Israel* 1, no. 17 (Jan. 2, 1867): 131. R. G. Whitcomb, *Hope of Israel* 1, no. 13 (May 16, 1864): 3. Br. T., *Hope of Israel* 1, no. 16 (July 6, 1864): 1. Anonymous, *Hope of Israel* 1, no. 7 (Aug. 21, 1866): 55. Brother and Siter Stults, *Hope of Israel* 1, no. 4 (July 10, 1866): 32.

<sup>47</sup> Daily, *Ellen G. White*, 71.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Osborn, "Theopolitics," 232.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan M. Butler, "Seventh-day Adventist Historiography: A Work in Progress," *Church History* 87, no. 1 (2018): 160.

her lifetime.<sup>51</sup> The SDAC compiled her written testimonies into a series of nine books. In addition, with the assistance of others, she wrote dozens of other books, along with articles in the denomination's magazines. She also sent out thousands of personal letters to members, which they often regarded as the voice of God speaking directly to them. Many began to view her writings as inspired, akin to how the writings of Old Testament prophets were inspired. White encouraged and fostered this view when writing about her testimonies and books. She claimed God "has spoken to us through the Testimonies," "the Holy Ghost is the Author of the scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy," and the "unalterable truth" and "instruction" in her books is "not of human production."<sup>52</sup> With such proclamations about the divine origin of her writings, it is no wonder that members of the SDAC began to regard her writings as inspired in the same manner as the Bible. They came to rely on her writings as though they were biblical truth. Furthermore, they began to understand the Bible through the lens of her writings. Butler notes that when it came to understanding Bible prophecy, many SDAs did not study the Bible to understand those prophecies but mindlessly adopted White's understanding.<sup>53</sup>

By 1890, SDA historian George Knight asserts that some SDA leaders, such as A. T. Jones, were quoting her texts as an authority in their articles and books, similar to how an author would cite the Bible.<sup>54</sup> However, Knight acknowledges that this method of using her writings as

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<sup>51</sup> Jud Lake and Michael W. Campbell, *The Pocket Ellen G. White Dictionary* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2018), 22.

<sup>52</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies* 8 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1904), 298; Ellen G. White Estate, *Selected Messages Book 3* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 30; Ellen G. White Estate, *Letters and Manuscripts* 19 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing, 2014), 2792.

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Butler, "Second Coming," in *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, eds. Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 186.

<sup>54</sup> George R. Knight, "Ellen White's Afterlife," 37.



an authoritative reference occurred internally and was not for public consumption.<sup>55</sup> In presentations designed for public consumption, the Bible was always cited as the source of authority. Butler disagrees strenuously with Knight's claim that A. T. Jones and other SDA authors elevated White to the role of prophetic authority within the SDAC. Butler lays the blame squarely on the shoulders of the Whites themselves. Butler claims James White and the White's son, W. C. White, were the principal impetus behind the SDAC's inflated views of Ellen. He claims that "no one made higher claims for her inspiration than Ellen White herself."<sup>56</sup> Denis Fortin chimes in, claiming that SDAC members had a faulty view of White's inspiration because top SDA leaders were not candid and transparent about the problems in their prophet's writings.<sup>57</sup> Fortin points to a closed-door meeting of top SDAC leaders in 1919, wherein they discussed the issues and fallacies in White's writings. According to Fortin, instead of coming clean with the SDA members and publishing the minutes of their discussion, the leaders decided to "hide the information and perpetuate misinformation and developing myths about her inerrancy and infallibility."<sup>58</sup> The minutes of that meeting were not published until 1979. Even then, they were published in a scholarly magazine and were not widely disseminated to the SDA members.<sup>59</sup> Ronald Graybill notes that the SDA leaders most familiar with Ellen White wished to revise her writings to be more accurate, but they feared to do so, lest they upset the belief of

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<sup>55</sup> This seems to be the beginning of the duality of the sect's approach to Ellen White's authority. Knowing the public was suspicious of prophets like Joseph Smith, the sect made an effort to avoid citing White as an authority in public documents. However, in internal documents and internal meetings, White was frequently cited as an authority for the sect's stance on various doctrines. George R. Knight, "Ellen White's Afterlife," 37.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Butler, "Response to George R. Knight's 'Ellen White's Afterlife,'" *Spectrum* 47, iss. 1 (2019): 56.

<sup>57</sup> Denis Fortin, "I Had to Adjust My View of Things," *Spectrum* 48, iss. 1 (2020): 20.

<sup>58</sup> Fortin, *Spectrum*, 23.

<sup>59</sup> *Spectrum* 10, iss. 1 (May 1979): 23–57.

many that her words came from God. As a result of this reluctance, they “allowed that inerrant view” of Ellen White’s inspiration “to persist” in the church.<sup>60</sup>

Belief in Ellen White’s prophetic gift continued to grow among rank-and-file members. By 1928, Francis Wilcox, writing in the SDAC’s official paper, claimed that while White’s writings were not an addition to the biblical canon, her messages should be received in the same way the messages of biblical prophets, such as Samuel, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist, were received.<sup>61</sup> Vick explains that Mrs. White gradually came to be viewed as the SDAC’s inspired interpreter of the Bible. Within SDA circles, when a verse was under discussion and differing views were expressed, a “thus saith Ellen White” would be sufficient to settle the matter beyond all questions.<sup>62</sup> No interpretation outside of the boundaries set by White’s writings would be seriously considered.<sup>63</sup> Jiri Moskala would seem to concur, noting that White admonished her followers not to remove or alter any of the doctrines of the SDAC.<sup>64</sup> It appears that even Martin was concerned that the SDAC was backing away from QOD regarding the authority of White. According to Samples, just before Martin died in 1989, he confided in Samples that he was concerned about whether the SDAC “had come to view White as the infallible interpreter of Scripture.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ronald D. Graybill, *Visions and Revisions: A Textual History of Ellen G. White’s Writings* (Westlake Village, CA: Oak and Acorn Publishing, 2019), 95.

<sup>61</sup> Francis Wilcox, “The Spirit of Prophecy in the Remnant Church,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 105, no. 40 (1928): 11.

<sup>62</sup> Vick, *Seventh-day Adventists*, 21–22.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>64</sup> Jiri Moskala, “The Seventh-day Adventist Identity - Who Are We as a Community of Faith?” *Current* 8 (2020): 10. <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/2412>.

<sup>65</sup> Samples, *Reasons to Believe*, March 15, 2011, accessed Oct. 9, 2022, 5.

Martin's concern about White's authority as a divine interpreter of Scripture appears to be validated by recent SDA literature. For example, Lake proclaimed that the function of White's writings is to "give an inspired application of the Bible."<sup>66</sup> Lake regards it as vital for modern SDAC members to obey White's counsel.<sup>67</sup> Requiring members to obey the voluminous counsels of Ellen White implies her writings have considerable authority in the SDAC. Daily goes even further, asserting that "the authority of Ellen White trumps and surpasses Scripture about any subject or any doctrine."<sup>68</sup> SDA scholar Gerhard Pfandl views Ellen White as having the same authority as other non-canonical biblical prophets. He writes:

Seventh-day Adventists reject the idea that there are degrees of inspiration. They believe that Ellen White was a messenger of God and that she was inspired like the Old and New Testament prophets. Now, if Ellen White was as inspired as the Old and New Testament prophets, what authority do her writings have? The answer can only be: They have the same authority the writings of the non-canonical prophets had for their time.<sup>69</sup>

In the latest version of their official doctrinal statement, published in 2018, the SDAC continued to trumpet what the sect has advocated for over a century, that the writings of White "speak with prophetic authority."<sup>70</sup> While claiming the Bible as the SDAC's standard of truth, the same document hints that White's writings can be used to settle biblical questions of interpretation. The document states that one purpose of the prophetic gift is to protect from heresy and unify the church on biblical truths.<sup>71</sup> To protect from heresy and promote unity within the sect implies that those who teach doctrinal understandings contrary to the framework of Ellen White's writings

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<sup>66</sup> Lake and Campbell, *White Dictionary*, 23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Daily, *Ellen G. White*, 71.

<sup>69</sup> Gerhard Pfandl, "The Authority of the Ellen G. White Writings," *Reflections – A Biblical Research Institute Newsletter* 6 (April 2004): 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 253.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

are in danger of being cast as heretical and causing disunity in the SDAC. This would be grounds for expulsion from the SDAC.<sup>72</sup> Thus, while the SDAC maintains the Bible is the authority for their beliefs, they continue to rely on Ellen White's writings for guidance in doctrine and practice. As Martin states, this creates a situation that is "at best paradoxical, and at times contradictory."<sup>73</sup>

### **Two-Phase Atonement**

The SDA doctrine of the Sanctuary, with its pre-advent investigative judgment and two-phase atonement, is perhaps the SDAC's only genuinely unique contribution to Christianity. So important is this doctrine to SDAs that Moskala calls it "the essence of the biblical good news."<sup>74</sup> Whether this doctrine is "good news" could be a matter of interpretation because many scholars regard it as just the opposite. Regardless, SDAs view it as their calling to warn the world to fear God because "the hour of his judgment is come" (Rev 14:6). SDAs view this judgment not as a judgment of punishment upon the wicked, as the passage implies, but rather a courtroom judgment where God ponders the case of each person who accepted Christ as their Savior to decide if they should actually be allowed into heaven. SDAs feel a particular urgency to share this message with other Christians out of fear that those Christians will be found wanting in the judgment because they are not keeping the Seventh-day Sabbath. Bohdan Koval concurs with Moskala, writing that it is the "sacred duty" of SDAs to study the Sanctuary doctrine and teach it to others.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Desmond Ford is one example of an SDA scholar getting defrocked for taking a contrary doctrinal view.

<sup>73</sup> Martin, *Kingdom*, 628.

<sup>74</sup> Moskala, *Current*, 8.

<sup>75</sup> Bohdan Koval, "Doctrine of the Sanctuary and Its Ecclesiological Implications in Eastern Orthodox and Seventh-day Adventist Theology," *TheoRema* 16, no. 2 (2021): 88.

The SDA Sanctuary doctrine was born out of necessity. In the early 1840s, William Miller headed a fanatical religious movement that claimed the return of Christ was imminent. Eventually, the leaders decided the day of Christ's return would be October 22, 1844. The movement gathered a sizable following of perhaps 50,000 adherents in the United States.<sup>76</sup> When Christ did not return as expected, the Millerites were bitterly disappointed. While many returned to their former churches, and others abandoned religion altogether, some believed their experience was not in vain. These people began studying the Bible, hoping to find some explanation for their mistake. In particular, they turned to the Day of Atonement as a potential explanation for why they went astray.

To explain the 1844 failure, Millerite O.R.L. Crozier concocted the doctrine that a significant event had actually occurred on October 22, 1844. However, contrary to their mistaken expectations, that event had occurred in heaven rather than on the earth. He, along with many Millerites, believed that the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14 was 2,300 years ending in 1844. He noted that after the 2,300-day period ended, Daniel 8:14 says, "then shall the sanctuary be cleansed." Crozier hypothesized that the sanctuary being cleansed was not the earth, as the Millerites had thought, but the heavenly sanctuary. He proposed that Christ had changed His location in heaven. He suggested that Christ moved from the Holy Place to the Most Holy Place in Heaven on October 22, 1844. On that date, Christ commenced the antitypical Day of Atonement activities of blotting out the sins of His people. In Crozier's understanding, the atonement began at the cross with the sacrifice of Christ, which paid the penalty for sin. However, the atonement

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<sup>76</sup> David T. Rowe, "Millerites: A Shadow Portrait," in *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler (Knoxville, TN: Knoxville University Press, 1993), 7.

activities would not be completed until Christ's blood was *applied* in the "cleansing of the sanctuary," which is to be completed before the return of Christ.<sup>77</sup>

While Crozier soon abandoned this teaching as heretical nonsense, other Adventists embraced the idea. It was, after all, precisely what they were looking for—a viable explanation for the disastrous failure of 1844. According to Glenn Hansen, the Adventist convert, Elon Everts took Crozier's idea and added the concept that God began the work of judging the deceased on October 22, 1844.<sup>78</sup> Before long, James White was on board with the idea. According to Butler, after James adopted it, Ellen White also latched onto Crozier's interpretation, making it the subject of her visions and later writings.<sup>79</sup> William Burns concurs, noting that Seventh-day Adventism repurposed October 22, 1844, as the date on which Christ entered the heavenly sanctuary to determine who would be saved.<sup>80</sup> Mangara Simanjuntak suggests that Ellen White not only validated Crozier's teaching, but she expanded upon it. White agreed with Everts that God began judging the dead saints first. Then, she added that at some future point in time, God would finish judging the dead saints and would commence judging the living saints. White's understanding of the atonement was widely distributed within the SDAC through her books. That practice continues to this day. For example, White's position on the atonement was republished by the SDAC as recently as 2011:

For eighteen centuries this work continued in the first apartment of the sanctuary. The blood of Christ obtained pardon and acceptance with the Father for repentant believers, but their sins still remained on the books of record. As in the symbolic service there was a work of atonement at the close of the year, so before Christ's work for humanity is done there is a work of atonement to remove sin from the

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<sup>77</sup> O. R. L. Crozier, "The Sanctuary," *Day-Star Extra*, Feb. 7, 1846.

<sup>78</sup> Glenn Hansen, "A Brief History of the Investigative Judgment," *Adventist Today* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2016): 22.

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Butler, "Second Coming," 181–82.

<sup>80</sup> William E. Burns, "Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology," in *End of Days: An Encyclopedia of the Apocalypse in World Religions*, ed. Wendell G. Johnson (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017), 326.

sanctuary. This began when the 2,300 days ended. At that time our High Priest entered the Most Holy Place to cleanse the sanctuary.<sup>81</sup>

White indicates that the second phase of the atonement began in 1844 and is currently ongoing. Some current SDA scholars teach this same concept. According to Simanjuntak, those whom God accepts will have their sins blotted out.<sup>82</sup> When the sins of all the saints have been blotted out, the second phase of the atonement will be completed.

Using language contrary to Simanjuntak's and the SDAC's historical teaching, the most recent SDA doctrinal statement states that the atonement was completed on the cross. However, several pages later, the document back-peddles a bit, speaking about the sins of the saints not being blotted out until their names come up for review in the Investigative Judgment.<sup>83</sup> The document's affirmation of the completion of the atonement at the cross could be viewed as a concession to Martin. However, while acknowledging that Christ completed the atonement at the cross, the authors continue to argue that the antitypical Day of Atonement activities began in 1844 and continue to the current day. It is not evident from SDA literature that their scholars believe the atonement was entirely completed at the cross. Douglass, in his refutation of QOD, arduously defends the two-phase atonement, demonstrating that White and other SDA leaders supported a two-phase atonement from the inception of the SDAC down through the current era.<sup>84</sup> In a 2018 interview, Moskala seemed to be searching to find some middle ground between QOD and traditional SDA scholars. He claimed the atonement was indeed complete on the cross;

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<sup>81</sup> Ellen G. White, *Love Under Fire* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2011), 173. This book is a modern revision of White's classic book, *The Great Controversy*.

<sup>82</sup> Mangara Juara Simanjuntak, "An Evaluation of the Historical Objection of the Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine of the Pre-Advent Investigative Judgment," *Abstract Proceedings International Scholars Conference* 7, no. 1 (2019): 2057. doi:10.35974/ISC.V7I1.999.

<sup>83</sup> Seventh-day Adventists Believe, 354, 359.

<sup>84</sup> Douglass, *A Fork*, 37–38, 68–70, 109–60.

however, it will not be completed until evil is entirely eradicated from the individual believer's life.<sup>85</sup> It is too early to say if Moskala's logically contradictory compromise will find traction within the SDAC.

Since its inception, SDA scholars have been challenged to prove the two-phase atonement doctrine from Scripture. Simanjuntak notes that this doctrine has been criticized more frequently than any other SDA doctrine.<sup>86</sup> Desmond Ford found numerous flaws in the doctrine, which he presented to SDA leaders who gathered in 1980 to examine his 991-page critical document.<sup>87</sup> Many others within and without the SDAC have questioned the doctrine, viewing it as the most vulnerable lynchpin of the entire SDA doctrinal structure.<sup>88</sup> Despite the repeated attacks, Bohdan notes that the SDAC steadfastly clings to the doctrine as one of the central pillars of the SDAC.<sup>89</sup> Moskala also acknowledges that this doctrine is central to the identity of the SDAC.<sup>90</sup> If these scholars are correct, demolishing the doctrine may prove the downfall of the denomination.

One of the main complaints against the Investigative Judgment component of the two-phase atonement made by Ford and other scholars is that the omniscient God already knows who will be saved and does not need to perform any lengthy investigation to discover what he already

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<sup>85</sup> Dale E. Galusha, "God's Character and the Last Generation: An Interview with Dr. Jiri Moskala," *Community Through Conversation* (blog), *Spectrum*, May 4, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 2050–51.

<sup>87</sup> See Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980).

<sup>88</sup> See Robert D. Brinsmead, *Judged by the Gospel: A Review of Adventism* (Fallbrook CA: Verdict Publications, 1980); Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, The Day of Atonement, and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980); Dale Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* (Sedona, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries, 1996); and Russell Earl Kelly, *Exposing Seventh-day Adventism* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2005).

<sup>89</sup> Bohdan, *TheoRema*, 73.

<sup>90</sup> Moskala, *Current*, 7.



knows. Former SDA evangelist Elce-Junior Lauriston asks the logical question of what God will do with all of the saints who arrived in heaven before 1844: What is the benefit of investigating them? Will they be cast out of heaven if they are found wanting?<sup>91</sup> SDA theologian John Peckham recognizes that this is a problem. In a footnote in his scholarly article on the Sanctuary, Peckham acknowledges that an omniscient God does not need to investigate who will be saved. However, he continues to insist that the investigation is still relevant to prove to a watching universe that God is just in his dealings with humanity.<sup>92</sup> Apparently, the cross is not sufficient to demonstrate God's justice. Thus, while SDA scholars acknowledge the difficulties with the doctrine of the two-phase atonement, it is so intertwined with the pillars of SDA identity and so central to the writings of the SDAC's prophet that SDA scholars find it difficult to discard.

### **The Health Message**

Throughout Protestant Christian history, gluttony has been frowned upon, but food choices have been left to the individual. Here is where the SDAC differs dramatically from Protestantism. SDAs have a health message which is about more than just physical health. Ruben Sàbaté et al., note that SDAs have given their health message an important moral imperative, even going so far as to describe it as the “right arm” of the gospel.<sup>93</sup> The SDAC has adopted a missional fervor for its health message, advocating it to both its members and non-members. SDA ministers, physicians, and healthcare workers preach this message in evangelistic crusades,

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<sup>91</sup> Elce-Junior Lauriston, *Hiding in Plain Sight: The False Doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism*, vol. 1 (Montego Bay, Jamaica: self-published, 2021), 73–74. SDAs would counter this argument by contending the saints are sleeping in the earth and will not be resurrected until the return of Christ.

<sup>92</sup> John C. Peckham, “Toward a Systematic Theology of the Sanctuary: Part 2,” *Theologika Magazine*, 34, no. 1 (2019): 22.

<sup>93</sup> Ruben Sàbaté, Sánchez, Ramon Gelabert, Yasna Badilla, and Carlos Del Valle, “Feeding Holy Bodies: A Study on the Social Meanings of a Vegetarian Diet to Seventh-Day Adventist Church Pioneers,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 72, no. 3 (July 2016): 3, doi:10.4102/hts.v72i3.3080.

health seminars, and to patients in hospitals and nursing homes. Petre calls this missional aspect a part of the “divine model” for the church.<sup>94</sup>

The origins of the moral imperative for the SDA health message can be traced back to Ellen White. The SDAC adopted the health message primarily due to the influence of White, who is thought to have had a health reform vision in 1863, which was about the same time she was studying how to improve her family’s health. According to D. C. McBride et al., this vision led to a “health message” doctrine that, among other things, proscribed SDAs to abide by the Levitical dietary restrictions.<sup>95</sup> Pork and other unclean meats were removed from the SDA menu, and eventually, all flesh meats were ruled out as unfitting for SDAs who were sanctifying their souls. Sábaté et al., agree that White was the source of the health message doctrine. They argue that White moved health teachings “into the moral sphere” of the SDAC, arguing that her writings fueled a new understanding of faith “in which diet was a crucial part.”<sup>96</sup> Since the body was the temple of the Holy Spirit, it made sense to them to make sure nothing evil entered the soul temple (1 Cor 6:19). Within a few years of her vision, White adopted many of the health reforms that were being preached by other popular reformers of her day.<sup>97</sup> For example, she forbade her followers from eating clean flesh meats and drinking coffee and tea. White re-interpreted Peter’s warning to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” to include health habits (1 Pet 2:11). She wrote: “A close sympathy exists between the physical and the moral nature. Any habit which does not promote health degrades the higher and nobler faculties.

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<sup>94</sup> Petre, *Theologika*, 55.

<sup>95</sup> D. C. McBride et al., “Health Beliefs, Behavior, Spiritual Growth, and Salvation in a Global Population of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Review of Religious Research* 63 (2021): 538. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1007/s13644-021-00451-4>.

<sup>96</sup> Sábaté, “Feeding Holy Bodies,” 4.

<sup>97</sup> Ronald L. Numbers, *Prophetess of Health: A Study of Ellen G. White*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), chapter 3.

... Indulgence of appetite strengthens the animal propensities, giving them the ascendancy over the mental and spiritual powers.”<sup>98</sup> Although, in recent decades, the SDAC has gradually de-emphasized the restrictions on clean meats, coffee, and tea, their baptismal vow still requires the candidate to vow not to eat unclean meat.<sup>99</sup>

SDAs view violations of White’s health laws to be not only a physical issue but also a spiritual issue. Just as the Jews were set apart by dietary laws forbidding unclean meat, SDAs have a set of dietary restrictions that they believe sets them apart as a holy remnant. Their dietary restrictions are not merely about *healthy* living. More importantly, they are about *holy* living. Like many mid-nineteenth-century health reformers, early SDAs came to regard meats, condiments, coffee, and tea as arousing animal passions or exciting the nervous system. They believed this led to the strengthening of the lower, base passions of humanity. At the same time, they believed these items had the effect of reducing a person’s interest in spiritual matters. Thus, the dietary restrictions became more about morality than physical health.

Asep Awaludin applauds White’s health reforms, writing that they are “related to spiritual values,” “have a positive impact on character development,” and have an influence on the “behavior” of SDAC members.<sup>100</sup> Former SDA evangelist Lauriston studied Mrs. White’s statements on this subject and concluded that SDAs believe certain foods “can affect the soul or defile one spiritually.”<sup>101</sup> According to Lauriston, SDAs teach their peculiar health message to

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<sup>98</sup> Ellen G. White, *The Sanctified Life* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1889), 25.

<sup>99</sup> McBride, “Health Beliefs,” 538.

<sup>100</sup> Asep, Awaludin “The Doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on Food According to Ellen G. White,” *Kalimah* 16, no. 1 (2018): 58, 70. doi:10.21111/KLM.V16I1.2513.

<sup>101</sup> Elce-Junior Lauriston, *Hiding in Plain Sight: The False Doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism*, vol. 1 (Montego Bay, Jamaica: self-published, 2021), 272.

converts, even going so far as to label it as the “gospel of health.”<sup>102</sup> Lauriston raises the concern that this message has become so intertwined with the SDA gospel message that it mixes in a system of dietary works with the gospel of grace. Lauriston concludes that the SDA health message is a “false gospel” that denies Christian dietary liberty and opposes the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>103</sup>

The SDA doctrinal statement advises SDA members to “abstain from the unclean foods identified in the scriptures.”<sup>104</sup> It also notes that the “wise Christian will abstain” from all that is harmful, which in the authors’ estimation, includes “coffee, tea, and colas” containing caffeine.<sup>105</sup> To many evangelicals, the SDA restrictions are a contradiction of Scripture, which proclaims that “Jesus declared all foods clean,” the kingdom of God is not about “meat and drink,” and “every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving” (Mark 7:19, NIV; Rom 14:7; 1 Tim 4:4).

SDAs scholars acknowledge the lack of biblical evidence for their restrictions, but they consider themselves vindicated in their teaching because their members live longer lives than those outside the denomination. For example, Ben McArthur and Eric Anderson, alluding to a long-term study of the Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle in California, assert that due to the SDA health message, SDAs live “substantially longer and healthier lives.”<sup>106</sup> While it may be true that vegetarian SDAs living in California outlive the general public, several scientific studies have produced a body of evidence indicating that Christians who attend regular religious services,

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<sup>102</sup> Lauriston, *Hiding in Plain Sight*, 278.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>104</sup> *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 317.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>106</sup> Ben McArthur and Eric Anderson, “Not Talking to Ourselves Any More: Adventists, Ellen White, and the Scholars,” *Spectrum* 43, iss. 3 (Summer 2015): 19.

pray regularly, abstain from tobacco, exercise, and do not drink heavily, also live substantially longer and healthier lives than the general population.<sup>107</sup>

### **The Sanctity of Human Life**

The SDAC has been severely criticized, both from without and within, for its seeming inability to formulate a solid pro-life position. Perhaps this is because abortions form a non-trivial source of revenue for the Adventist Health System. Many SDA hospitals and healthcare institutions perform abortions and profit from the practice. After decades of internal debate, the SDAC came out with a tepid statement in 1992. The statement explains that God's ideal is to respect human life. SDAs are advised not to engage in abortion "thoughtlessly," emphasizing it should only be performed for "the most serious reasons."<sup>108</sup> Jonathan Martin takes exception with the document because it leaves it up to the individual whether to intentionally kill an innocent baby. He wonders, what does the document mean by *thoughtlessly*? Does that mean it is okay to perform abortions so long as one thinks about it for a while? Is abortion okay so long as one has a "serious reason?" What qualifies as a *serious* reason? He argues that the guidelines are too subjective to be meaningful, and fail to uphold the "biblical view that the unborn are children."<sup>109</sup> Jonathan Martin points out the cognitive dissonance of an organization so intent on keeping the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant law but is willing to accept a watered-down stance on abortion. In his estimation, this undermines the SDAC's stated commitment to the Sixth Commandment.<sup>110</sup> Many SDA scholars appear uninterested in getting involved in the

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<sup>107</sup> Dirk Anderson, *More Than a Profit, Less Than a Prophet* (self-pub., 2023), chapter 7.

<sup>108</sup> "General Conference Guidelines on Abortion," *Spectrum* 47, iss. 3 (2019): 35.

<sup>109</sup> Jonathan Martin, "Eight Problems with the Adventist Abortion Guidelines," *Spectrum* 47, iss. 3 (2019): 40.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

abortion debate. Moskala, one of the few SDA scholars to speak out on the subject, appears to recognize the tension between the SDAC's stance on abortion and the Sixth Commandment. In 2019, he acknowledged that the Sixth Commandment was contrary to abortion.<sup>111</sup>

Teresa and Arthur Beem point out what they believe to be an incongruity in the SDAC's position on abortion. The SDAs have oddly aligned themselves to the pro-abortion movement, not because they believe abortion is a good option for believers, but because they fear any government involvement in enforcing what they view as religious dictates. This derives from their conspiratorial eschatology in which they espouse that the U.S. government will eventually enforce religious laws restricting them from worshipping on Saturday. Driven by this mindset, they generally deplore any government laws enforcing religious teachings. The Beems come to the startling conclusion that SDAs feel it is more important to preserve their right to worship on Saturday than to protect the lives of the unborn.<sup>112</sup>

### **Theological Foundations**

In discussing the problem of effectively communicating truths to those who have deviated from the true biblical faith, it is essential to first elaborate on the extreme importance the Bible places upon the purity of doctrine and practice. Paul mentored both Timothy and Titus to practice "sound doctrine" (1 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:9, 2:1). Both the Old and New Testaments provide further examples of the criticality of practicing the religion of God according to his requirements. Both testaments warn strongly against those who lead God's people away through false teachings.

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<sup>111</sup> Jiří Moskala, "'You Shall Not Kill' or 'You Shall Not Murder'? The Meaning of Ratsakh in the Sixth Commandment," *Reflections* 67 (July 2019): 5.

<sup>112</sup> Teresa Beem and Arthur Beem, *It's Okay Not to Be a Seventh-day Adventist: The Untold History and the Doctrine that Attempts to Repair the Temple Veil* (North Charleston, SC: BookSurge Publishing, 2008), 237.

### Historical Warnings

The battle over truth is not new. On this earth, it began in the Garden of Eden when the serpent questioned the validity of God's sure word (Gen 3:4–5). Throughout sacred history, the doctrine of God has been under attack by the same serpent. God gave Abraham laws to guide his life (Gen 26:5). God came down on Sinai to provide the Hebrews with his moral law (Exodus 20). God provided the Hebrew people with instruction through Moses. Moses recorded this instruction for later generations and commanded the people to diligently teach it to their children (Deut 6:7). Whenever the people of God lost sight of the truth of God's Word, they did whatever they felt was right in their own estimation (Judg 17:6). Sadly, this resulted in them getting involved with the false teachings of the surrounding nations. Through Isaiah, God warned that those who do not speak according to the law have no light in them (Isa 8:20). Despite these warnings and admonitions, pagan practices and idolatry crept into the Jewish religion, corrupting it.

False prophets exasperated the problem. God spoke through Jeremiah, condemning false prophets that were causing his people to err (Jer 23:32). Yahweh stated that because of false prophets and false leaders, a horrible condition existed in the land of Judah (Jer 5:30–31). The nation had become ripe for judgment. Speaking through Ezekiel, Yahweh warned that false prophets would be cast out of the assembly of the house of Israel (Ezek 13:9). These prophets disseminated a false narrative of the future. They proclaimed peace when Yahweh had prophesied the opposite. Thus, proclaiming a false narrative of future events, and twisting God's prophecies into an unintended direction is contrary to the will and purpose of God. Yahweh declared He was "against" those prophets, placing them in a position of opposition to him (Ezek 13:8). Thus, the Old Testament provides abundant examples of the negative impact of false teachings and false prophets upon the people of God.

In the Old Testament, God deposited the treasure of His law with his people. However, by the time of Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees had so misinterpreted the law and had so misunderstood the prophets that they were unable to recognize the Law-giver when He appeared in human form. Jesus' teaching was so contrary and threatening to their doctrine that they constantly disputed with Him and looked for an opportunity to silence Him by killing him (Matt 12:14). Because of the baleful influence of the scribes and Pharisees, many Jews rejected Christ. Within a generation of the rejection of Christ and His doctrine, the city of Jerusalem was reduced to rubble, and many lives were lost. Thus, the history of Judah provides a potent warning at a macro level, showing that deviation from true doctrine can result in catastrophic consequences. This story is but one of many from the pages of the Bible that provide instruction on both the necessity and manner of correcting false teachings.

### The Heresy of Disunity

In the New Testament, the word *heresy* is used by Luke to describe the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Acts 5:17, 15:5, 26:5). According to *Strong's*, the literal meaning of the word is "sect."<sup>113</sup> The word is not used in the English sense to describe a false doctrine, but rather it refers to a group that is differentiated from the orthodox group by its beliefs. The word was not necessarily negative and could be considered akin to the modern word *denomination*. Frederick Danker defines this word as a subgroup having beliefs that "deviate in certain respects from those of the larger membership party" and is "perceived as a threat to the integrity of the larger group."<sup>114</sup> Even the followers of Christ were derided by their opponents as a "heresy" or "sect"

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<sup>113</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Bible Concordance Including Holy Bible - King James Edition* (Chicago, IL, e-artnow, 2021), G139. Greek word: αἵρεσις.

<sup>114</sup> Frederick William Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 10.



of the Jewish faith (Acts 24:5,14, 28:22). Thus, a heresy is a group that promulgates teachings or practices that are in some aspect different from the main body of faith.

Disunity is one common adverse effect of those practicing and promoting beliefs that are distinct from the main body of believers. Disunity creates division, and division creates weakness and confusion. Disunity in the body of Christ is contrary to the doctrine of Christ, who taught that a kingdom divided against itself could not stand (Mark 3:24). The history of Israel provides a sobering example of this. When the ten tribes in the north separated from Judah and Benjamin, this created two nations that were both weaker than the original one. Furthermore, the two nations fought against each other multiple times, further weakening each other (e.g., 2 Chron 13:2–3, 13–20). Ultimately, both nations fell. The same is no less true for the body of Christ. In autoimmune diseases, the body attacks itself. This can cause weakness and even death. If one part of the body of Christ spends energy fighting against the other parts, the entire body will be weakened. Thus, it is essential that the New Testament body of Christ practices unity. The song of David should be the song of the people of Christ: “How pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps 133:1).

Paul applies the word “heresy” to those who cause divisions. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he opens by rebuking them for their disunity. Paul exhorts them that there should be no divisions among them (1 Cor 1:10). It appears that some in the church were saying they were following the teachings of Paul. Others claimed to be following Apollos or Peter. Still others said they were following Christ. Paul asked the rhetorical question, “Is Christ divided?” The answer is clearly no. Church members should not be contending with each other because there is one baptism (1 Cor 12:13). The theme of unity of the faith pervades his letter. When preparing to discuss the disunity in the church over the Lord’s Supper, he decries the divisions that have

arisen within the Corinthian church, which he describes as heresies (1 Cor 11:18–19). Paul presents a beautiful illustration of a human body representing the Church of God. He emphasizes that there is only one body (1 Cor 12:12). Paul continues this theme in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul admonishes them to “keep the unity of the Spirit” because there is “one body...one faith” (Eph 4:3–5). Thus, for Paul, it was essential that church members strive for unity with one another. Paul did not view sects and heresies in a positive light. He even went so far as to write that “strife” and “heresies” were works of the flesh (Gal 5:20). So strongly was he opposed to these sins that he wrote that those who engage in them would not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21). Paul instructed Timothy to avoid speculations that could produce quarrels (2 Tim 2:23). After warning Titus to avoid contentions and strivings about the law, Paul instructed him that the “heretic” should be rejected after the second warning because that person is perverted and sinning (Titus 3:9–11). In this context, it appears Paul used the word *heretic* to describe one who generates strife and contention in the church. Thus, it would seem that Paul regarded a factious, divisive spirit to be sinful and contrary to the spirit of Christ.

Paul’s stance against heresy should not be viewed as intolerance. As a former Pharisee, Paul was well-familiar with intolerance. He understood the human toll of intolerance. Paul advocated that Christians manifest a spirit of tolerance towards other believers (Eph 4:2). In the latter part of his letter to the Romans, Paul explained what it meant to be one body (Rom 12:5). Being one body meant that believers were to not quarrel with one another over matters of opinion (Rom 14:1). The question is, what did Paul consider a matter of opinion versus a matter worth contending over?

The subsequent verses of Romans 14 reveal two subjects upon which Paul believed that tolerance should be practiced. First is the subject of diet, and the second is the observance of

days of worship.<sup>115</sup> In verse two, Paul starkly contrasts two people on polar ends of the subject of diet. The first person eats “all things,” presumably including unclean meat. Paul’s statement about eating “all things” brings to mind the command that God made in Genesis 9:3, shortly after the flood story. In this verse, Yahweh permits humankind to eat “all things.” The same Greek word that Paul used for “all things” in Romans 14:2 (i.e., *πάντα*) is also found in the LXX and translated “all things” in Genesis 9:3. Furthermore, Paul states later in the chapter that all foods are clean (Rom 14:20). Thus, there can be little doubt that Paul is referring to an individual with no Old Covenant dietary restrictions. On the other side of the spectrum, Paul presents a person who only eats vegetables. This person represents a vegetarian or perhaps even a vegan. According to Paul, God has accepted both individuals, and they should not judge one another (Rom 14:3–4). John Reumann understands this to mean that God has welcomed both into His household.<sup>116</sup> Thus, from a Pauline perspective, matters of diet should not be a source of separation or strife between believers.

The second subject concerns days of worship. Paul does not provide a precise meaning to “days.” Commentators have various opinions on this. David Garland suggests that Paul probably refers to the Jewish Sabbath since the one who honors the day does it “to the Lord.”<sup>117</sup> Aaron

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<sup>115</sup> Interestingly enough, these two subjects are made a point of contention by SDAs. SDAs forbid the eating of unclean meats and advocate a vegetarian diet as the “ideal” diet (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 285). As noted earlier in this chapter, some SDA scholars view the vegetarian diet as something that separates SDAs from other Christians. A restricted diet is viewed as part of the sanctification of the remnant people. SDAs also regard worshipping on Sunday to be the mark of the beast (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 167). SDAs regard the Sabbath-Sunday issue to be the line of demarcation between those who worship God and those who do not. This subject was addressed earlier in this chapter.

<sup>116</sup> John Reumann, *Eerdmans’ Commentary on the Bible: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2019), 83.

<sup>117</sup> David E. Garland, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, eds. Eckhard J. Schnabel and Nicholas Perrin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 6:5c.

Sherwood believes this verse refers to Sabbath and feast day observance.<sup>118</sup> Reumann believes it could refer to the Sabbath, days reserved for fasting, or feast days.<sup>119</sup> Since Paul does not explicitly state what kind of holy day he is referring to, the principle would be universally applicable to any holy day. Paul states that one person regards a day while another does not (Rom 14:5). Sherwood concludes that both those who observe days and those who do not are righteous before God so long as they do so with a clear conscience.<sup>120</sup> As with diet, holy days are not to be a matter of contention between believers (Rom 14:6,9).

It is essential to point out that diet and holy day observance are both mentioned explicitly by Paul as subjects upon which believers are to be tolerant of one another. He apparently did not view such differences as a threat to the gospel message. Thus, from a New Testament perspective, they are not subjects that are to form lines of demarcation between *evil* and *good* Christians. If any believer or group makes them into lines of demarcation, then such would be contrary to the teachings of the New Testament.

While Paul taught his followers to practice tolerance concerning diet and observance of holy days, it is clear from Romans 14 that he did not tolerate arguing over matters of opinion that would lead to disunity. Paul's tolerance did not include those who sought to separate believers over false lines of demarcation. For example, when Peter was at Galatia, he separated himself from eating with the gentile believers. Paul became aware of this and likely perceived Peter's actions as not only contrary to the gospel but also as a threat to the church's unity. He declared

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<sup>118</sup> Aaron Sherwood, *Romans: A Structural, Thematic, and Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 458.

<sup>119</sup> Reumann, *Romans*, 83.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

Peter's separation was contrary to the "truth of the gospel" and rebuked him to his face (Gal 2:11–14). Paul had no tolerance for practices or doctrines that upset the unity of the faith.

Paul regarded dissension over matters such as continuing to keep Old Covenant ceremonial laws and customs to be contrary to the gospel of Jesus. Paul's ultimate vision for the believers at Ephesus was for them to attain unity of faith (Eph 4:13). In Paul's mind, this was something worthy of striving for rather than striving to win arguments over ceremonial laws. For Paul, unity was a sign of Christian maturity. To reach this level of maturity, he encouraged the believers at Philippi to strive together, rather than against each other, seeking to be of one mind for the faith of the gospel (Phil 1:27). It is essential, therefore, that Christians always seek for the unity of faith and practice, while at the same time manifesting tolerance by avoiding condemning each other for matters of opinion.

### Preserving the Faith

The scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' era disseminated false teachings and practiced many extra-biblical traditions.<sup>121</sup> Jesus addressed this in his teachings. For example, when discussing a sheepfold, Jesus warned that some people had malicious plans against the sheep, labeling them "thieves and robbers" (John 10:8). Marianne Thompson points out that these thieves and outlaws likely included not only those leaders who refused to accept the work of Christ but also false Messiahs.<sup>122</sup> These instigators were thieves in the sense that their opposition and deception were robbing the people of the truth that Jesus came to deliver to them, preventing them from entering the kingdom of heaven (Matt 23:13). The thieves were seeking to turn the hearts of the people

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<sup>121</sup> The Sadducees denied the resurrection (Mark 12:18). The Pharisees transgressed God's laws with their traditions and ignored the most important aspects of the law (Matt 15:3, 23:23).

<sup>122</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2015), 201.

away from Jesus and the soul-searching truth he came to bring to humanity. Instead, they went about “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:9). As they heard Christ’s teaching about the robbers, the disciples could not fail to understand the necessity of stopping these false teachings. The danger of thieves and robbers stealing sheep and other animals in first-century Palestine was well known. The disciples would have immediately recognized the necessity of protecting the flock against those who would steal the sheep away. Thieves and robbers must be actively resisted and thwarted to protect the flock. Furthermore, Jesus warned of “false prophets” who were “ravening wolves” (Matt 7:15). Wolves were also a threat who could cause loss and injury in the flock. Thus, Christ reinforced the necessity of resisting false teachers.

Near the close of His ministry, Jesus pronounced a series of woes upon the scribes and Pharisees. He aggressively attacked their false doctrines, labeling these false teachers as “blind guides” (Matt 23:24). He declared they had taken the “key of knowledge” away from the people and were hindering people from entering the kingdom of God (Luke 11:52). The key was removed from the hand of the people by Jewish spiritual leaders who were proclaiming their false doctrines to the near exclusion of preaching truth and righteousness. Instead of joining Christ and working together with Him in proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, they resisted him. Instead of being softened by the gospel, they became hardened by becoming further entrenched in their vain traditions. Surely the disciples understood the danger of blind guides. Jesus warned that if the “blind” are leading people, they will all end up in a ditch (Matt 15:14). Ulrich Luz comments that this blindness consists of the Pharisees’ inability to interpret the law of God correctly.<sup>123</sup> They ignored weighty matters of great importance while simultaneously

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<sup>123</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 333.

elevating issues of trivial importance to great prominence (Matt 23:23). In a profound way, this demonstrates the danger of taking minor points in the Bible and making a mountain out of them.

False doctrine is not just teaching subjects wildly different from the gospel of Christ. It is treating major doctrines of the Bible, such as the sanctity of all human life, as if they were of little importance while exalting minor parts of the Bible, such as dietary restrictions, as if they were of profound importance. This wrong placement of emphasis was the sin of the Pharisees that caused them to lead many people astray. This speaks to the necessity of resisting false doctrine, even though it may be backed with proof texts. False doctrine includes teachings with some semblance of biblical backing, but their emphasis is distorted. These doctrines must be resisted and uprooted from the minds of believers. Jesus said that every plant that his Father did not plant would be uprooted (Matt 15:13). To restore the purity of the Father's religion, Christ revealed the necessity of uprooting every teaching and every doctrine that was not of the Father.

Having established the necessity of thwarting false teachings, Jesus also taught His disciples how to uproot them. Falsehood must be defeated by truth. Jesus forbids using force to accomplish this goal (John 18:36). Rather, the Church of God must be established by teaching people the truth (Matt 28:19–20). Just as Jesus trained His disciples for several years, teachers in the Church of God must be trained to divide the Word of God rightly. Jesus' teachings, as recorded in the Gospels, lay out a framework of truth upon which the Church of God was built. Jesus called this framework a "doctrine" and asserted that it originated not with Him, but with God (John 7:16–17).

Not only must divine truth be taught, but it must also be practiced. Jesus described those who practiced his teachings as analogous to a wise man building an abode upon a rock (Matt 7:24–25). Daniel Doriani points out that the foolish person manifests a gap between words and

action. He may say the right words, but action is lacking. For example, he may talk about obedience to the law, but he may be breaking the law by his actions.<sup>124</sup> By nature, a foundational rock is sturdy and fixed. It cannot be moved by time or tempest. Practicing Christ's teachings provides a believer with a firm and unshakable foundation to build their spiritual life upon. Any doctrines devised outside of the teachings of Christ are like structures built upon shifting sands. A structure built upon the sand is prone to collapse when the sand beneath it shifts. Anyone inside the building at the time of collapse may be in danger of serious injury. Likewise, the practice of doctrines not built upon the foundation laid by Christ can result in spiritual injury. Thus, Christ reinforced the importance of the wise man and woman building upon truth and practicing the truth.

### Defending the Apostles' Doctrine

The doctrines of Christianity originated with God. They were communicated to the apostles by Jesus. The apostles received the teachings of Christ and disseminated them to every nation. These teachings became known as the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42, 5:48; 2 Tim 3:10). Being of divine origin, this doctrine cannot be changed except by divinity. Jude admonishes the early church to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). James Samra finds it significant that Jude is not just interested in fighting false doctrines himself. He expects his readers to stand up and contend and fight for their faith.<sup>125</sup> Stephen Motyer and Peter Davids point out that believers are expected to not only hold fast to the doctrines that have been delivered to them but they are also to rescue those who have been

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<sup>124</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *ESV Commentary: Matthew – Luke*, vol. 8, eds. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Skylar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 172.

<sup>125</sup> James George Samra, *James, 1 & 2 Peter, and Jude*, eds. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 233.



deceived.<sup>126</sup> The work of the Great Commission includes more than just preaching to the lost. Jesus' command to teach people includes teaching them about the errors of false doctrines (Matt 28:20). It includes rescuing those deceived by false teaching, and pulling them away from the fire they are falling into (Jude 23). The fact that believers must contend earnestly for the faith suggests that active efforts were underway in the first century to corrupt the doctrine of Christ. Jude's words underscore the necessity of fighting false doctrines.

Paul was certainly no stranger to those attempting to corrupt the doctrine of Christ. When Paul was mentoring Timothy, he warned him of the dangers of those who teach contrary to the doctrine of Christ and lack understanding (1 Tim 6:3). He told the Church of God in Rome to avoid those who act contrary to the doctrine (Rom 6:17). He warned the Ephesians not to be tossed around by "every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:16). He warned the Corinthians of "false apostles" and "deceitful workers" (2 Cor 11:13). Finally, in his second letter to Timothy, he warned him that the time would come when people would no longer endure "sound doctrine," but would turn away from the "truth" to embrace fables (2 Tim 4:3–4). The fact that people would turn away from the truth and accept fables is a warning about the seductiveness of false doctrines. Despite the best efforts of the gospel minister to present the truth of God's Word, false apostles and deceitful workers will manage to subvert his work and lead souls astray.

Perhaps one of Paul's most significant challenges was the false teachers circulating among the churches in Galatia. In these churches, Judaizers had bewitched the believers with a doctrine of salvation by faith plus works (Gal 3:1). John Stott notes these teachers did not deny belief in salvation, but they "stressed that you must be circumcised and keep the law as well."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Stephen Motyer, and Peter H. Davids, *Commentary on 1–2 Peter and Jude from the Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary*, eds., Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 36.

<sup>127</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, rev. ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 11.

Paul expressed concern that these false teachers were perverting the gospel of Christ (Gal 1:7). Grant Osborne contends that Paul viewed these men as *more* than false teachers. He writes that Paul regarded them as “false Christians, under the curse of God,” adding that they were teaching “heresy, and throughout the New Testament, such people are satanic in origin.”<sup>128</sup> For Paul, accepting these false doctrines would cause the Galatians to be brought into “bondage” (Gal 2:4). Paul warns them that they are in the dangerous position of having “fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4). According to Stott, “it is impossible to forsake it (the gospel) without forsaking him (God).”<sup>129</sup> In effect, to forsake the gospel truth taught by the apostles is tantamount to forsaking God. Paul wrote of the necessity of stopping false teachings, warning the Galatians that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (Gal 5:9). Stott comments, “because its influence was spreading, Paul was determined to resist it.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, Paul teaches his followers to identify and actively resist false teaching.

As can be seen from Paul’s letter to the Galatians, the manner of stopping false teaching is to expose its errors by explaining the true gospel. Paul explained to the Galatians how salvation based upon “faith plus works” contradicts the true gospel of Jesus Christ. This is consistent with his other writings on salvation. In the sporting world, it is often said that the best defense is a good offense. When it came to stopping false teachings, Paul taught a strong offense. For example, he encouraged Timothy to preach the word, teaching no other doctrine than the ones Paul taught him, and to pay careful attention to the true doctrine (1 Tim 4:2–16). Craig Keener comments on the necessity for sound doctrine, writing that it is “clear that Timothy’s

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<sup>128</sup> Osborne, *Galatians*, 40.

<sup>129</sup> Stott, *Message of Galatians*, 11.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

attention to his teaching is critical: his teaching would affect the salvation of his hearers.”<sup>131</sup> For Paul, combatting false teaching required church leaders to be vigilant in teaching sound doctrine to their members.

The other apostles also recognized the necessity of combatting false doctrines. John advised believers to not even accept people into their homes who did not abide in the “doctrine of Christ” (2 John 1:9–10). According to John Painter and Scot McKnight, John refers to “progressives who go beyond the teaching of Christ.”<sup>132</sup> Once again, false teachers agree with some parts of the apostles’ doctrine, or perhaps even all of it. However, if they go beyond that doctrine and add teachings not found in the Bible, then they are just as false as those who reject the gospel (Deut 4:2). In fact, they may be even more dangerous because they adopt so much of the apostles’ doctrines that it may be difficult for believers to discern that they are dealing with a counterfeit faith.

Peter used strong language when he warned of false teachers who bring “damnable heresies” into the church (2 Pet 2:1). Commenting on this passage, K. W. Rick explains that heresy is a “false teaching that leads people away from God’s revelation.”<sup>133</sup> False teaching redirects believers down a different theological path. It can cause them to act and behave in ways that are contrary to the gospel of Christ. Motyer and Davids comment that Peter’s use of the word “heresy” indicates that the main focus of this verse is not such much upon the false doctrines these people were teaching, but upon the fact that their ideas were leading to divisions

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<sup>131</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 616.

<sup>132</sup> John Painter and Scot McKnight, *The Epistles of John and Jude*, Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2019), 53.

<sup>133</sup> K. W. Rick, “Heresy,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 550.

in the church community.<sup>134</sup> As with Paul, Peter regarded divisions as a serious matter. Peter knew that a divided kingdom could not stand. Therefore, Peter and the other apostles were united in their belief in the urgency of opposing false doctrines.

### False Prophets

Finally, the Word of God warns of the necessity of exposing and warning about false prophets. Jesus warned that false prophets would arise and “deceive many,” even the “very elect” (Matt 24:11, 24). Doriani comments that Jesus repeated this warning three times to His disciples to prepare them to avoid deceptions that could hinder them from enduring to the end.<sup>135</sup> This repeated warning cannot be taken lightly. John added that even in his day, “many false prophets” had gone “out into the world” (1 John 4:1). All these passages describe the criticality of maintaining constant vigilance against false prophets. They underscore the importance of testing their lives and teachings against sound doctrine to ascertain whether God indeed sent them.

In the Old Testament, Jeremiah was beleaguered by false prophets. He was burdened by fake prophets teaching “vain and foolish things” (Lam 2:14). These prophets would frequently convey messages contrary to the messages Jeremiah received from Yahweh. This caused confusion among the people of Judah. Which prophet were they to believe? Yahweh expressed concern about these false prophets because they caused his people to “err by their lies” (Jer 23:32). This speaks to the grave danger presented by false prophets. They cause God’s people to believe in a false narrative and that false reality has consequences. The threat today is just as real as it was in the time of the prophets of the Old Testament. Therefore, it is necessary to expose and resist false prophets.

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<sup>134</sup> Motyer and Davids, *Commentary on 1–2 Peter and Jude*, 28.

<sup>135</sup> Doriani, *ESV Commentary: Matthew – Luke*, 493.

In conclusion, the Bible admonishes disciples of Christ to study sound doctrine so that they can detect error and cast down every argument contrary to the knowledge revealed by God (2 Cor 10:5; 2 Tim 2:15). Just as those who wish to detect counterfeit money must first study the attributes of valid money, so must the disciple of Christ study biblical truth to detect and thwart false teaching. By understanding the necessity of resisting false teachings and by understanding how those teachings are most effectively opposed, with the Holy Spirit's help, disciples can be effective in stopping the carnage caused by false teachings.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The Bible establishes a theological foundation for the importance and necessity of countering false doctrines. The question remains, how can that be implemented successfully in a local church? Thankfully, churches have dealt with this issue for nearly two thousand years, so plenty of historical examples exist.

#### **Faith as a Battle**

From a historical standpoint, the approach of Peter and Paul in exposing and countering false teachings has been a model practiced by Christian ministries for two millennia. Jesus, Paul, Peter, and Jude actively opposed false teachers, giving the church an example to follow. Church leaders have recognized the importance of following Jude's instruction to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3). Andrew Mbuvi shows that this contention is more than just attacking false teachers. It involves overcoming false messages through faith and resisting it like soldiers defending their territory in a battle.<sup>136</sup> Before going into a battle, any wise commander considers

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<sup>136</sup> Andrew Mūtūa Mbuvi, *Jude and 2 Peter: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2016), 31.

whether he has the strength to win (Luke 14:31). Before a battle, whether physical or spiritual, a soldier arms himself with offensive weapons and puts on defensive armor (Eph 6:11–17).

Likewise, a spiritual battle of ideas requires the disciple to prepare carefully. This includes preparing both offensive arguments and defensive answers for their faith. Only when one is fully equipped is one ready for battle. Martin Luther did not enter battle against the false doctrines of Catholicism until he had thoroughly examined them, written his ninety-five theses, and prepared himself to defend his arguments. His Berean attitude is a good model for a successful apologetic program.

In the early centuries of Christianity, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian battled against the heresies of Marcion. In addition, many church leaders fought against the Gnostic heresy that plagued the church during its early years. Later, during the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, John Calvin, and many other men of God used their preaching and writing to convey biblical truths to convince people that Roman Catholicism had strayed away from biblical truth. In recent centuries, the armies of liberal theology have threatened the church's foundation. Roger Olson warned against liberal ideas that trickle into the church, threatening to undermine faith.<sup>137</sup> These examples show that since the church's inception, leaders understood the importance of maintaining the integrity of the teachings of the faith. Thus, over two thousand years, various attacks have been made against biblical faith, and each generation of Christian leaders has risen to the challenge to expose error and refute it.

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<sup>137</sup> Roger E. Olson, *Against Liberal Theology: Putting the Brakes on Progressive Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022), 28.

### Models for Contending for Truth

There are different models for contending with false teaching. In recent years, the apostle Peter's model of dealing with false teachings has been the subject of research by Donald Morcom. According to Morcom, Peter provided a multi-faceted approach to dealing with false teaching that applies to the modern church.

First, Peter prepared his church for the eventuality of false teachers. Knowing that a problem is coming allows one to prepare for future battles. Second, Peter grounded believers in the veracity of God's revealed Word. Morcom writes, "Peter wants to be certain that his readers are standing on the firm foundation laid by God as declared through the apostles and prophets."<sup>138</sup> From this firm foundation, they are less likely to be blown over by the winds of false doctrine.

Next, Morcom identifies the characteristics of false teachers as delineated by Peter, concluding that these features apply in "any age or situation."<sup>139</sup> Morcom explains that by examining the fruit of a ministry, one can ascertain whether the tree is rotted.

Finally, to resist false teachers successfully, one must walk in the light of God's Word. While Morcom's research is helpful and relevant in dealing with false teachings in a general sense, it does not address the nuances of Seventh-day Adventism.

Nick Roark and Robert Cline advocate a strong offense as the best defense against false teachings. In their book on teaching the gospel, they write that "biblical theology guards the church from the deadly error of proclaiming a false gospel."<sup>140</sup> This aligns with Jesus' teaching

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<sup>138</sup> Donald L. Morcom, *Living in God's True Story: 2 Peter*, eds. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 32.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>140</sup> Nick Roark and Robert Cline, *Biblical Theology: How the Church Faithfully Teaches the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 13.

that a house built upon the rock will stand in the storm (Matt 7:24–26). In evaluating false teachings such as the prosperity gospel, the civil gospel, and liberal theology, Roark and Cline conclude that false gospels result from missing out on the true gospel. Their solution is to build a biblical theology that explains the Bible’s big story about God’s kingdom in detail. Church leaders must communicate this big story until their congregations are situated on a solid foundation. They believe that the ship will right itself when correct biblical theology is put at the forefront.

While it makes sense that good theology will make people less vulnerable to false teachings, their book does little to address the specific fallacies of false teachings directly. It would seem essential to identify the “chinks in the armor” of the false doctrines to know how to defeat them most effectively. When the false teacher claims to believe the same gospel as the disciples of God, it becomes important to do more than teach the gospel. The specific false teachings must be analyzed and addressed.

R. T. Kendall’s approach starts similarly to Roark and Cline by focusing first on the true gospel. Kendall points back to Luther to explain what the real gospel looks like. Next, he addresses one false teaching that overemphasizes grace to the exclusion of sanctification.<sup>141</sup> He then pivots to spend significant effort defining the true gospel message and genuine faith. As with Roark and Cline’s book, Kendall clearly delineates the true gospel message. Thus, Kendall endorses the approach that any defense of the faith must begin with a firm understanding of the biblical truth. However, many false teachings are additions to the Bible that do not necessarily

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<sup>141</sup> Other than addressing a single heresy, Kendall does not touch upon any other issues related to other false teachings. R. T. Kendall, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel?* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2018), 37.



contradict the main doctrines of the Bible. The question is, are these doctrinal differences worth contending over?

There is ongoing tension in the Christian community over when to contend for the faith and when to restrain. As Christianity moves more in the direction of non-denominational churches, it seems that love is being emphasized over doctrinal purity. While all agree that minor matters of opinion should be overlooked, the question is whether significant doctrinal differences should be ignored for unity. After all, Paul advised Timothy and Titus to avoid arguments and quarrels (Titus 3:9; 2 Tim 2:23–24). Can a ministry that loves the truth also be one that loves people and the unity of the brethren? John Piper addresses this thorny question with a resounding “yes.” Piper believes that a loving ministry does not shy away from controversy. He believes that a strong biblical foundation is the only foundation that will support a healthy ministry. He points to the Protestant Reformation as proof that controversy was necessary to restore the church’s health and growth.<sup>142</sup>

Piper used the example of Athanasius to demonstrate how love works through controversy. The false teaching of Arianism had arisen in the Alexandrian church, and it was threatening to split the Eastern churches from the Western churches. This is one of the historical problems with false teachings, they cause divisions in the Church of God, not unity. In this situation, one of the subtleties employed by the false teachers was to use scriptural language to promote non-biblical ideas. Instead of glossing over the issue and accepting two contrasting views on the deity of Christ, church leaders decided they must come to a unity of belief on this subject. Thus, Athanasius spent forty-five years fighting for orthodoxy.<sup>143</sup> From his example, it is

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<sup>142</sup> John Piper, *Contending for Our All: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius*, eds. John Owen and J. Gresham Machen (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2022), 18–19.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33.

evident that loving Christ includes defending the truth Christ taught. Love is demonstrated not by avoiding controversy but by engaging it, for God's glory, with a supreme emphasis placed on always exhibiting a Christ-like demeanor.

### Contending with the SDA Denomination

Historically, there have been many who have contended with the theological errors of Seventh-day Adventism. Nearly all of them were at one time SDAs. These individuals have made significant contributions to the understanding of false doctrines within Seventh-day Adventism. Each provides an insight into methods and arguments for combatting false doctrine.

In 1865, Dudley Canright was ordained by James White as a minister in the SDAC. He was active in evangelism and served on the SDAC executive committee. He had strong debating skills and was frequently called upon to debate non-SDA ministers publicly. In 1887 he left the SDAC over doctrinal differences and joined the Baptist church. Shortly after that, he published a book attacking what he believed to be the false doctrines of the SDAC.<sup>144</sup> In this book, Canright dealt with SDA eschatology, the visions of Ellen White, and the Sabbath. In choosing these subjects, he apparently regarded these as the weakest links in SDA theology. Canright also published multiple tracts dealing with the Sabbath issue. Late in life, he wrote an entire book critical of Ellen White which was published posthumously.<sup>145</sup> This book is still considered one of the most effective books in enlightening people about the true character of Ellen White.

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<sup>144</sup> Over the next twenty-six years, Canright revised and added to the book, coming out with a final 14<sup>th</sup> edition in 1914 which was published by Fleming H. Revell Company (New York). D. M. Canright, *Seventh-day Adventism Renounced: After an Experience of Twenty-Eight Years by a Prominent Minister and Writer of That Faith* (Kalamazoo, MI: Kalamazoo Publishing, 1888).

<sup>145</sup> D. M. Canright, *Life of Mrs. E.G. White, Seventh-day Adventist Prophet: Her False Claims Refuted* (Vineland, NJ: Standard Publishing Co., 1919).

While Canright mentioned some problems with the SDA dual-atonement in his first book, SDA Albion Ballenger greatly expanded upon it. As an SDA evangelist, Ballenger desired to understand the biblical proof for the SDA position on the Sanctuary so that he could teach the topic to others during his evangelistic meetings. He began his study around 1901 and eventually concluded that the SDA position was unsustainable from the Bible. He determined that the SDAC was dependent upon the inspiration of Ellen White for that doctrine rather than the Bible. Recognizing that the doctrine was flawed, he sought a hearing with SDA leaders so that he could explain the problem and they could correct the sect's doctrinal position.

Ballenger obtained a hearing before an SDA committee at the 1905 SDA General Conference session, but they rejected his revisions. Shortly after that, White came out publicly against him, and he was removed from SDAC employment. In 1909, Ballenger published the results of his study in a book.<sup>146</sup> In that book, he examined the theological problems with the SDA doctrine of the atonement, arguing the atonement had been completed at the cross. Ballenger's effectiveness can be tied back to the extensive time he spent studying the issue.

The Australian SDA theologian Desmond Ford began his studies under F. F. Bruce, and in 1972 he received his second doctorate in New Testament from Manchester University in England. Ford soon became the head of theology at the SDA University in Avondale, Australia. Gerhard Pfandl writes that during this time, most SDAs "had no assurance of salvation" due to the SDA Investigative Judgment doctrine.<sup>147</sup> Ford, to his credit, saw this as a real growth opportunity for the SDAC. Ford built upon Ballenger's understanding that the atonement was completed on the cross, adding the argument that the Investigative Judgment was not a biblical

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<sup>146</sup> Albion F. Ballenger, *Cast Out for the Cross of Christ* (Tropico, CA: self-pub., 1909).

<sup>147</sup> Gerhard Pfandl, "Desmond Ford and the Righteousness by Faith Controversy," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 27, iss. 1-2 (2016): 344.

doctrine. Ford's teachings on righteousness by faith created a controversy in Australia, and the SDAC moved him to the United States in 1979. Like Ballenger, Ford studied the subject intently and assembled a 991-page document that the SDAC's theologians and administrators reviewed at a special conference at Glacier View, Colorado, in August of 1980.<sup>148</sup> At the end of the conference, SDAC leaders rejected Ford's ideas. Ford was then summarily dismissed from employment.<sup>149</sup>

Even though the SDAC rejected Ford's ideas, they profoundly impacted the SDAC. As Ford's ideas were disseminated through the SDA ministry, Loren Siebold observed that SDA pastors began preaching less on SDA eschatology and the Investigative Judgment. He also notes that pastors started relying less on Ellen White and emphasizing righteousness by faith more frequently.<sup>150</sup> This demonstrates that even though the SDAC may reject revision of its doctrines, those revisions may still have a ripple effect at the ministerial level within the SDAC. Ford's success can be attributed to recognizing a real need and building upon the success of others in the past.

SDA pastor Walter Rea discovered that Ellen White plagiarized substantially from other authors, many of them non-SDA. After many years of painstaking research, in 1982 he published his findings in a 409-page book.<sup>151</sup> Once again, the key to his success was careful research.

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<sup>148</sup> Desmond Ford, *Daniel 8:14, the Day of Atonement and the Investigative Judgment* (Casselberry, FL: Euangelion Press, 1980).

<sup>149</sup> In 1989, Walter Martin questioned whether the SDAC was living up to its commitment to QOD because "they are busy firing people" whose teachings aligned with QOD. He went on to add that while the SDAC was not a cult, SDA individuals could be "very, very cultic," (Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 591). In 1983, Ford estimated that after his removal, 150 teachers and pastors were removed from SDAC employment because of their refusal to believe the Investigative Judgment doctrine. James C. Hefley, "Adventist Teachers are Forced out in a Doctrinal Dispute," *Christianity Today* 27, no. 6 (1983): 23.

<sup>150</sup> Loren Siebold, "Part 2: How the Church Changed Because of Desmond Ford," *Adventist Today*, March 20, 2019, <https://atoday.org/part-2-how-the-church-changed-because-of-desmond-ford/>.

<sup>151</sup> Walter T. Rea, *The White Lie* (Turlock, CA: M. & R. Publications, 1982).

In recent decades a plethora of books have been published delineating issues with SDA theology and the SDA prophetess, Ellen White.<sup>152</sup> Many of these build upon previous books but add additional nuances or new findings. Recent decades have also witnessed the success garnered by leveraging technology in new ways. There are several apologetic websites that question SDA doctrines.<sup>153</sup> These have the advantage of reaching a vastly wider audience who would not ordinarily purchase and read a book. YouTube has also become a fertile ground for apologists from both sides to discuss SDAC doctrines.

### Interactive Intervention

Historically, the primary method of reaching SDAs with biblical truth is publishing and disseminating books. The Internet has allowed for the dissemination of these materials on a much broader scale, including to an international audience. While these books and Internet articles are informative on issues with SDA doctrines, their main drawback is that they lack a personal connection. An individual can read a book and leave the SDAC, and no one would ever know about it. Without someone to guide them, they may never land back into a church fellowship. Furthermore, they may have questions that a book cannot answer. What is lacking is interactive contact.

If JCOG7D members could be trained to understand the doctrines of the SDAC and if they could be instructed on how to reach SDAs and former SDAs with biblical truth, then new

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<sup>152</sup> See Dale Ratzlaff, *Cultic Doctrine of Seventh-day Adventists* (Sedona, AZ: Life Assurance Ministries, 1996), Russell Earl Kelley, *Exposing Seventh-day Adventism* (New York: iUniverse, 2005), Teresa and Arthur Beem, *It's Okay Not to Be a Seventh-day Adventist: The Untold Story of the Doctrine That Attempts To Repair the Temple Veil* (North Charleston, SC: Booksurge Publishing, 2008), Elce-Junior Lauriston, *Hiding in Plain Sight: The False Doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism* (Montego Bay, Jamaica: self-published, 2021), and Steve Daily, *Ellen White: A Psychobiography* (Conneaut Lake, PA: Page Publications, 2020).

<sup>153</sup> For example, Proclamation Magazine (<https://lifeassuranceministries.org>), Truth or Fables (<http://www.truthorfables.com>), Sabbath in Christ (<https://www.sabbathinchrist.com>), NonSDA (<https://www.nonsda.org>).

opportunities would arise. They could interact with SDAs and demonstrate that they love them. They could respond to their questions and connect them with people who could answer them. They could invite SDAs to their homes, get to know them, and eventually invite them to worship at their church. This approach would be more likely to bring people back into the fold rather than leave them isolated and confused. This interactive approach demands a training program. Today, there is no unified training program that brings this information together in a way that members of JCOG7D can easily digest and practice. This is the gap that must be addressed to effectively recover SDAs and former SDAs back into Evangelical fellowships.

Substantial research material is available describing the true gospel message of Jesus Christ and accurate biblical theology. There are countless books, articles, tracts, training materials, and videos on that subject. Furthermore, as noted in the section above, numerous books, articles, and videos contain substantial research that elucidates the issues with SDA doctrines. However, there is no research on developing and delivering a training program to address SDA doctrines within a local church body. There is no training on what should be communicated to SDAs, on what areas will be most likely to resonate with them, on what subjects to avoid, and on what methods to use to present biblical truth to them in the most effective manner. This research could turn the dial to get believers thinking of new and effective ways of reaching the SDAs in their communities.

This research contrasts with other research in that it brings the subject matter down to a practical, local level. Being aware of false doctrines is essential. However, more is needed. Rather than merely being aware of a false doctrine, this training will teach a person how to present that false doctrine to someone who believes in that doctrine. In most cases, the interaction necessary to retrieve SDAs back from the remnant into the main body of Christ will

require personal intervention. However, JCOG7D members will be reluctant to engage in this ministry without being adequately equipped. This research will seek to equip believers with the skills they need to be effective. It will answer the question: Can a group of ordinary non-SDA church members, many with limited education, be taught how to share the biblical truth with SDAs so that those members will have greater confidence that they will be successful in that endeavor?

### **Conclusion**

JCOG7D members have frequent contact with former and current SDAs, and yet many JCOG7D members do not feel confident in communicating biblical truths to SDAs. This lack of confidence will stymie efforts to engage SDAs in meaningful dialog. Therefore, this research seeks to develop and deliver training that will equip JCOG7D members to be more effective in communicating biblical truth to SDAs. If the training is designed and delivered to JCOG7D members, then it stands to reason that they will be better prepared to share biblical truths with SDAs.

The review of the current literature has identified five areas of opportunity for training JCOG7D. These are doctrinal subjects wherein many SDAs already have doubts. Like Goliath's exposed forehead, these are areas of potential weakness. Just as David chose "five smooth stones out of the brook," five subjects will be presented in the training (1 Sam 17:40). These subjects include remnant eschatology, the inspiration of SDA prophet Ellen White, the doctrine of the two-phase atonement, the SDA health message, and the SDAC's stance on abortion. Just as David confronted Goliath at the Elah valley, this research will seek to follow the biblical model of exposing and confronting false doctrines with biblical truth. Like David's slingshot, this training will be designed to accurately deliver an effective payload that the average church

layperson can understand. This training will address the “chinks in the armor” of important SDA doctrines while grounding the trainees in the biblical truth of the gospel. Just as David, when armed with his slingshot and five stones was confident in taking the field of battle, it is expected that after receiving this training, JCOG7D members will have greater confidence in sharing biblical truths with SDAs.



### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This project was designed to equip the members of JCOG7D to be more confident and effective in their interactions with SDAs. JCOG7D is in a unique position to minister to SDAs, and yet before this research, there were indicators that JCOG7D members were not entering these interactions well-equipped enough to defend their faith. Several examples of this lack of readiness have been observed at JCOG7D over the last year. First, at JCOG7D one deacon recently asked the researcher how to respond to his SDA friends' doctrinal arguments. The deacon did not feel he was equipped with the ability to respond effectively to their arguments. Second, one JCOG7D member asked the researcher about the doctrinal differences between JCOG7D and the SDAC. He did not know enough about the SDAC to point definitively to any significant differences. This shows that there was some confusion among the members regarding the essential areas of differentiation between the churches. Finally, some members of JCOG7D have engaged SDAs and former SDAs at the local flea market where the JCOG7D sets up an outreach booth on the fourth Sunday of every month. Although these interactions have been cordial, they have not resulted in any noticeable positive outcome. It is theorized that this is because the JCOG7D members staffing the outreach booth are not cognizant enough of SDA doctrines to dialogue confidently and effectively with local SDAs about their beliefs during these interactions.

A lack of confidence can be a severe barrier to communication between JCOG7D members and SDAs. The researcher addressed this gap by seeking to strengthen participants' knowledge and understanding of the SDAC's doctrinal positions and theology. The researcher

developed a training curriculum designed to increase the participant's ability to engage in successful ministry dialogue with SDAs.

To address the perceived deficiencies in knowledge, this intervention provided training to equip JCOG7D to communicate biblical truths to SDAs effectively. This training familiarized the participants with the history and background of the SDAC. Although there are many differences between the SDAC and mainstream evangelical theology, the training focused on five key doctrinal areas: Remnant eschatology, prophetic authority, the two-phase atonement, the SDA health message, and the sanctity of human life.

### **Intervention Design**

This project used an educational intervention. It entailed an instructor-led series of training sessions supplemented by reading material from books and the Internet. As with any action research, the major factor in this research was the extent to which JCOG7D is affected by the problem.

The problem being studied was the lack of confidence of JCOG7D members in communicating gospel truth to current or former SDAs. Among the members of JCOG7D, there was a lack of depth in understanding the doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism and the ramifications of those doctrines. To address this gap, this intervention aimed to develop and deliver training to JCOG7D members to educate them on how to communicate biblical truths more effectively with current and former SDAs. To understand the effectiveness of this type of intervention, pre- and post-surveys along with pre- and post-interviews were used to determine if the training has affected the confidence of JCOG7D members to dialogue with current and former SDAs.

### Assembling Credible Participants

Assembling a credible group of participants was essential for the success of the research. This training program was made available to adult members of JCOG7D interested in participating in this type of research. Because of the complexity of the issues with the SDAC, only those who demonstrated a good aptitude for understanding the Bible at weekly Sabbath School classes were considered.<sup>1</sup>

The first step for participation was advertising the program to the congregation. The researcher developed a one-page flyer explaining the study at a high level.<sup>2</sup> This was shared first with the church board on March 25, 2023. On April 22, 2023, the project was announced to the congregation during the afternoon church service. At that time, the flyers were handed out to the adults in the congregation who were interested in participating. The researcher asked the recipients of the flyers to read the study overview, reach out to him with any questions, pray about whether they should participate, and then come back to church the following week prepared to decide on whether they would participate.

On the following week, during church service, the researcher asked those who had received the flyers and wanted to volunteer to participate in the study to meet with him in the multi-purpose room at four o'clock in the afternoon after church for a kick-off meeting. Eleven adults attended this initial meeting and volunteered to participate.

At the kick-off meeting, the researcher explained the duration of the study and the commitment required. He also gave a verbal overview of the study. At the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> A good aptitude is defined as one who regularly attends Bible study, one who studies his lesson before class and is prepared for the topic, and one who demonstrates an ability to engage in intelligent discussion on whatever subject is being studied.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C.

presentation, the researcher provided a question-and-answer period and responded to the questions and concerns. The researcher made it clear to the participants that after understanding the parameters of the study if there were any who did not want to volunteer, they would be dismissed.<sup>3</sup> All decided they wanted to proceed. The researcher encouraged all participants to be diligent in their attendance and if possible, to stick with the training to its completion. The eleven people who volunteered provided a good demographic cross-section in terms of age, sex, race, and ethnicity. The participants were asked to sign the confidentiality statement and the informed consent documents. There were no participants who felt uncomfortable signing the documents, so none were dismissed. For communication purposes, the researcher obtained each participant's email address and phone number.

The researcher's relationship with the participants was that he was pastor for the participants. In addition, one of the participants was the researcher's spouse. The researcher chose the research site as the local JCOG7D because he determined he had the best likelihood of being able to carry out a successful research project on this subject by using his local congregation. The researcher acknowledged a personal bias against the SDAC. He left the SDAC for doctrinal reasons in 1998, and thus openly acknowledged that he is opposed to some of the teachings of that organization. He felt that some of the doctrines were spiritually detrimental to him. Thus, he harbored some bias against the SDAC. To temper this, he was careful to include the SDA perspective on every doctrine of the curriculum. He also included a silent external observer in every session who was a member of the SDAC. This person sent him feedback and helped to keep the researcher's biases in check.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix G for a description of the dialogue of the kick-off meeting.

## Evaluation

The baseline evaluation included a survey and an interview. To perform the survey, the researcher created an online quantitative survey using Google Forms.<sup>4</sup> This survey contained eight questions used to evaluate the participants' knowledge of Seventh-day Adventism and SDA doctrines, along with a self-assessment of their willingness and confidence to communicate with SDAs. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale. The survey took approximately five to ten minutes to complete. It was designed so that the participants could only make a single submission.<sup>5</sup> After the survey was submitted, the answers could not be altered by the participant. To avoid any concerns over the participants selecting answers to please the researcher, the surveys were anonymous.

At the kick-off meeting, the participants were given two weeks to complete the survey. The same survey was also given at the end of the training. As with the beginning survey, for the ending survey the participants were given two weeks to complete it. It was recognized during the kick-off meeting that some participants did not have access to an Internet device that would allow them to complete the online survey. For those without access to an Internet device, the researcher printed out a paper form of the survey and they used a marker to select answers on that form.<sup>6</sup> They were instructed not to put their name on the form. The paper forms were then collected and the results were entered into the online survey by another person who had access to an Internet device.

When all the surveys had been completed by the researcher, the survey was closed and the results were collected. The researcher extracted the results from Google Forms and stored

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>5</sup> The participant's e-mail address was used to verify that only a single submission was made.

<sup>6</sup> The paper forms were anonymous. Three people submitted paper forms.

them into Excel. He then used another Excel spreadsheet to tabulate the survey results, with separate tabulations for the pre-survey and the post-survey results. This allowed the researcher to perform before-and-after analysis and identify any differences or trends. This provided him with the ability to produce explanatory documentary charts and visualizations. To communicate important aspects of the training results, the researcher used the Excel data to produce graphs showing the effectiveness of the training by comparing the baseline survey results with the final survey results using contrasting colors.

According to Ernest Stringer, one of the first objectives in the action research process is “qualitative, requiring researchers to gather information about participants’ experiences and perspectives.”<sup>7</sup> To accomplish this, the researcher scheduled thirty-minute individual interviews with each participant which took place within two weeks following the kick-off meeting. Most of these interviews took place over the telephone. The researcher made these calls using his cell phone during the evening or weekend from his home office. His home office door was shut so that no one else in the home could eavesdrop on the conversations. Some of the interviews took place at the church on Saturday after service. Once again, privacy was protected.

During each preliminary interview, the researcher asked questions to understand the participant’s familiarity with Seventh-day Adventism and some of its doctrines.<sup>8</sup> They were also asked a series of questions to ascertain their confidence and willingness to engage SDAs in dialogue. When the interviews were performed over the telephone, the researcher typed the answers given into a separate Word document for each participant. When the interviews were performed in person, the researcher wrote down on paper the answers to each question. Later, the

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<sup>7</sup> Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, 2013), 101.

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix D, pre-interview questions.

answers were entered by the interviewer into a Word document for each participant. For the post-interview, a briefer fifteen-minute interview was scheduled with each participant. A similar set of questions, albeit briefer, was asked during the post-interview.<sup>9</sup> The same recording methods were used for both interviews.

When all the pre- and post-interviews had been completed, the researcher used Excel to tabulate the interview responses that had been collected in the Word documents for each participant. This allowed the researcher to view the responses in one location and allowed him to easily compare the answers given before the training to the answers that were provided after the training. The responses were analyzed by the researcher to identify any significant changes between the pre-study and post-study interview responses.

Finally, the weekly observations and impressions of the researcher were recorded in a Word document. In addition, the researcher received the weekly observations and impressions of the external observer via his personal and private church email address. The email messages were copied into a Word document for preservation. The observations and impressions were triangulated and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the training.

The researcher also documented lessons learned. Some of these came through comments made by participants during the training sessions. Some of them came from the post-interview discussions, during which the participants were asked what could improve the training program. Some of the lessons came from the external observer. Finally, some observations were made to the researcher in person after the research had completed. These were compiled and may be beneficial for future researchers on this subject.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix D, post-interview questions.

### Curriculum Design and Delivery

The curriculum was designed to be delivered using Zoom video communications. To enable this, the researcher was required to use his home computer which had the necessary audio and video equipment to operate with Zoom. The JCOG7D board permitted the researcher to use the church's Zoom account to host the meetings. That Zoom account provided the ability to record the meetings so that those who could not attend in person could later watch the sessions on video. The only equipment needed by the participants was a device that could connect to Zoom. Most participants connected through their phones via the link provided. There were two participants who did not have data plans on their phones, so they dialed into the Zoom phone number for the sessions.<sup>10</sup> A minority of participants accessed the sessions using a non-phone device such as an iPad or a computer.

Certain software resources were necessary to complete this research. The researcher installed Zoom on his computer. Microsoft PowerPoint was used to generate visuals that were displayed during the Zoom sessions. These graphics included pictures of important figures in SDA history, historical timelines, Bible verses, quotes from Ellen G. White and other historic figures, lists showing details of SDA doctrines, and other supplemental information. The researcher used Microsoft Excel to capture notes from the interviews. The researcher used Microsoft Word to develop the curriculum.

The researcher has developed an innovative curriculum for training the JCOG7D members regarding SDA history, doctrines and biblical truths.<sup>11</sup> This curriculum had three components. The first component was to explain the SDA doctrine with great accuracy, making

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<sup>10</sup> These participants were limited to an audio-only experience.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix E.



certain not to malign the doctrine in any way. When an issue was not clear, the researcher went out of his way to give the SDAC the benefit of the doubt. The second component was to identify challenges or weaknesses of the SDA doctrine. The third component was to provide biblical evidence that would challenge or refute the SDA doctrine. The literature review provided some foundational material for the curriculum. To establish an accurate understanding of SDA doctrines, the researcher used material that came from SDA books, articles, the SDA official web page, and Ellen White writings which were sourced from the Ellen G. White Estate's web site.<sup>12</sup> To understand the problems with SDA doctrines, material was gathered from books and articles criticizing SDA doctrines, along with web sites critical of Seventh-day Adventism.<sup>13</sup> To understand the biblical truth about the topics being presented, material was gathered from the Bible using a biblical search engine and biblical commentaries.<sup>14</sup>

Each training lecture was designed to be delivered within a one-hour window. The training was commenced at 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday evenings on Zoom. Each session started and closed with prayer. The training commenced with a brief introduction of the topic and the goals for the evening's session. After the introduction, the topic for the training session was presented by the researcher, along with the accompanying PowerPoint presentation. When the presentation had concluded, time near the end of each session was provided for the participants to ask questions. After all questions had been addressed, the training session was concluded with a preview of the topic for the next week.

The training curriculum focused on five key doctrinal areas, along with an introductory and concluding lesson, for a total of seven lessons. The introductory lesson examined the origin

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<sup>12</sup> <https://m.egwwritings.org/advsearch>.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, some of the strongest criticism came from SDA authors.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>.

and history of the SDAC, discussing its founders, its connection to the 1844 Millerite movement, and the overlap in history between the SDAC and the Church of God Seventh Day. The first main doctrinal topic explored SDA remnant eschatology, a teaching that the SDAC is the remnant church of the book of Revelation and that in the last days, all Christians must either join them in accepting the Sabbath and other SDA doctrines, or else they will receive the Mark of the Beast. The second doctrinal topic explored the prophetic role and authority of the SDA prophetess Ellen G. White. This training included a discussion about the biblical tests of a prophet and whether White passed those tests. The third doctrinal topic examined the two-phase atonement, which teaches that Christ only *started* the atonement at the cross but did not *finish* it there. This topic included an explanation and discussion of the SDA Investigative Judgment doctrine. The fourth doctrinal topic investigated the SDA teachings on diet and vegetarianism. The SDA stance on this topic was compared to biblical teachings. The final doctrinal topic examined the SDA teachings on the sanctity of human life. The SDA stance was then compared and contrasted with biblical teachings. The concluding session was a role-playing session, where the moderator assumed the role of an SDA and the participant was challenged to discuss with him one of the five main topics learned in earlier sessions.

During the introduction it was acknowledged that some of the doctrinal topics were complex. It was communicated that it may not be possible to cover every topic in great depth. It was recognized that some participants may desire more information and deeper explanations than could be provided in a one-hour session. Therefore, optional further reading material was provided for those who desired to dig deeper into a subject. To respect the participants' time, the length of the optional readings was designed to not exceed one hour for an average reader. The goal was not to make the participants into theological experts on SDA doctrines. Rather, the goal

was to equip them to be effective enough to communicate biblical truths about SDA doctrines to SDAs. Thus, the training sessions and reading material were limited in scope to meet these stated goals. Links to the optional reading material were sent to the students by email following each training session. Also, the link to the recorded Zoom session was sent to the participants in the same weekly email.

**Table 1 Curriculum Details**

Lesson	Subject	Key Outcomes
1	History of the SDAC and the Importance of Sound Doctrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the origin of the SDAC</li> <li>• Understand how the SDAC intersected with the Church of God (seventh day)</li> <li>• Understand the importance of not deviating from the pure doctrine of Christ</li> </ul>
2	SDA Remnant Eschatology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the SDA doctrine on the remnant</li> <li>• Understand the SDA meaning of the Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast</li> <li>• Discover the biblical meaning of the Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast</li> <li>• Understand the SDA definition of the Spirit of Prophecy and Testimony of Jesus</li> <li>• Discover the biblical definition of the Spirit of Prophecy and Testimony of Jesus</li> <li>• Discover who Christians are to share the gospel with</li> </ul>
3	Ellen G. White: A True or a False Prophet?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discover the biblical tests used to identify true and false prophets</li> <li>• Evaluate if Ellen White passes the biblical tests of a prophet</li> <li>• Understand the danger of adding to the inspired Word</li> <li>• Understand the authority of Ellen White in the SDAC</li> </ul>
4	The Two-Phase Atonement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the SDA doctrine of the two-phase atonement</li> <li>• Discover the biblical meaning of the cleansing of the sanctuary in Daniel 8:14</li> <li>• Understand the fallacies of the Investigative Judgment doctrine</li> <li>• Recognize that believers can have the assurance of eternal life</li> </ul>
5	SDA Health Teachings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn the SDA health message</li> <li>• Evaluate whether the SDA health message is biblically appropriate</li> <li>• Learn if believers should make the kingdom about “meat and drink”</li> </ul>

6	Abortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discover the biblical truth about abortion</li> <li>• Learn how the SDA teaching on abortion differs from the Bible</li> </ul>
7	Ministering to SDAs (practice session)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand the motivation and reward for sharing biblical truth with SDAs</li> <li>• Practice to gain confidence in sharing biblical truth</li> </ul>

Eleven days after the kick-off meeting, the church secretary sent text messages to all the participants containing the link that would be used for that evening's training session. This served as a reminder to ensure optimal attendance. On Tuesday, May 2, at 7:30 p.m., the first training session commenced at the church's Zoom meeting place. Each meeting included time at the end for questions and discussion regarding the lesson for that week. The moderator ensured that all participants had a chance to ask questions and discuss the topic and that one person did not dominate the discussion or use an inordinate amount of time. If a question could not be adequately addressed during the limited time available during the meeting, the researcher asked to get together with the questioner after the meeting. There were several instances where additional dialogue about the topic took place either at church or over the phone. The sessions were recorded on Zoom. Three sets of observations were gathered. First, the researcher captured his observations in a journal.<sup>15</sup> Second, an outside observer joined each session and captured his observations. Third, the recorded sessions were provided to an outside observer for him to make observations.

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<sup>15</sup> The journal recorded both positive and negative reflections from the training sessions.

### Assessing a Successful Outcome

This research used three methods of gathering meaningful data to assess the success of the project: surveys, interviews, and journal notes from the training sessions.

Fig. 1. Three criteria for a successful project.



Figure 3.1 Three criteria for a successful project

All three data sources were compared against each other to validate the credibility of the research. A further level of triangulation was accomplished by having an external observer take

notes for the seven group training sessions. The researcher's weekly journal notes for those sessions were compared against the journal notes from the external observer to test the validity and credibility of the researcher's observations. Any of the researcher's observations that could not be corroborated with the other observers were discarded.

A successful outcome for the project was based on a combination of three criteria: Effectiveness, confidence, and willingness. First, a successful outcome was deemed to be that most of the participants judged that the training was effective in increasing their understanding of the SDA doctrinal subjects that were presented. This is critical because God desires all believers to attain "the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Second, a successful outcome was deemed for most of the participants to indicate that they had obtained an *increased* confidence level in engaging in dialogue with SDAs. Paul preached the kingdom of God with "all confidence," setting the pattern for JCOG7D to follow (Acts 28:31). Knowledge of the truth is important, but when it comes to witnessing to others, that truth is only effective if the participant feels confident enough to use it. Third, a successful outcome was deemed for most of the participants to indicate that they judged that they had an *increased* willingness or motivation to dialog with SDAs. Paul pointed out the importance of believers, especially those in leadership positions, of having a "willing mind" (2 Cor 8:12). Knowledge and confidence are essential, but if there is a lack of willingness to engage, then the research outcome would have proven to be unsatisfactory. Thus, the threefold combination of effectiveness, confidence, and willingness must be demonstrated to be considered a successful outcome.

### **Implementation of the Intervention Design**

A schedule was set up for the research project's five phases. In the preliminary phase, all approvals were obtained, including IRB approval,<sup>16</sup> JCOG7D board approval, and approval from each of the participants. Any approvals that were generated electronically were stored in an electronic folder on the researcher's personal computer. This computer is protected by a password. The documents were copied to a secure backup device in case the originals should be lost. All the forms received electronically were also printed out on paper. All the paper approvals were stored in a secure file cabinet in the researcher's office for future reference.

The second phase involved a pre-study stage in which an online survey was conducted and in-person interviews were performed. The results were stored on the researcher's personal computer and backed up to a secure device. All paper forms used during this phase were stored in a secure filing cabinet.

The third phase involved delivering the seven training sessions. All sessions were recorded and will be stored by Zoom for one year. They are password protected, preventing access from anyone who does not know the password.

The fourth phase consisted of an online post-study survey and an in-person post-interview. The results were securely stored and backed-up in a similar manner as the pre-results were stored and backed-up.

The final phase involved collation of the data gathered during the study. The data was then analyzed to detect patterns. The data and patterns were then evaluated to discover insights and those insights were synthesized to draw conclusions. The results were stored in the same secure electronic locations as the other files and were backed up accordingly.

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<sup>16</sup> See IRB Approval Letter.

Following is the actual schedule for the intervention:

**Table 2 Schedule Details**

Date	Phase	Event
Feb. 14	Preliminary	IRB approval request submitted
Feb. 20	Preliminary	IRB approval gained
Mar. 25	Preliminary	Request approval from the JCOG7D board
Apr. 15	Preliminary	Announce intervention at church and pass out flyers
Apr. 22	Preliminary	Kick-off meeting and selection of candidates
Apr. 23	Pre-Study	Pre-survey and pre-interviews begin
May 1	Pre-Study	Last day to complete pre-survey and pre-interview
May 2	Training	Training session #1
May 9	Training	Training session #2
May 16	Training	Training session #3
May 23	Training	Training session #4
May 30	Training	Training session #5
June 6	Training	Training session #6
June 13	Training	Training session #7
June 14	Post-Study	Post-survey and post-interviews begin
July 9	Post-Study	Last day to complete post-survey and post-interview
July 11	Post-Study	Wrap-up meeting
July 9	Analysis	Analysis of data
July 23	Analysis	Record results and make conclusions



## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

This research project's goal was to answer the question: "Will instruction in the history and doctrines of the SDAC give JCOG7D members increased confidence to discuss SDA theology with current and former SDAs?" It was hoped that the training would result in JCOG7D members being more confident and able to engage in personal outreach and dialogue with the local SDA community.

### **Demographics**

Eleven members of JCOG7D participated in this research project. The participants' ages, length of membership at JCOG7D, educational background, ethnicity, sex, and racial makeup are as follows:

Ages:

18–34 – 1

35–64 – 7

65+ – 3

Length of membership at JCOG7D in years:

1–5 – 1

6–9 – 5

10+ – 5

## Educational background (highest completed):

High School	– 5
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College	– 3
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Post-graduate	– 3
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## Ethnicity:

Hispanic	– 2 (El Salvador and Puerto Rico)
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American	– 6
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Russian	– 1
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Jamaican	– 2
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## Sex:

Male	– 7
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Female	– 4
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## Race:

Negro	– 6
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Caucasian	– 3 (non-Hispanic)
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Caucasian	– 2 (Hispanic)
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The participants were informed that they needed to make every effort to attend all training sessions. All participants could not attend the initial kick-off meeting because several participants were out of town on that day. However, for those who were unable to attend, the researcher met with each of them individually to catch them up on the contents of that meeting. All participants completed both the pre- and post-surveys as well as the pre- and post-interviews.

All participants attended the seven lectures on SDA doctrines and the final closing meeting.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, attendance was strong.

In addition to the eleven participants from the JCOG7D, there was one silent observer who was a long-time member of the SDAC. His presence was not announced to the other participants so as not to influence their responses. His purpose was to provide private feedback to the researcher on the accuracy of the curriculum content and its effectiveness from an SDA perspective.

### **Pre-Training Evaluation**

The pre-training phase of the research was used to evaluate the participants' degree of knowledge of SDA doctrines, as well as their level of confidence in discussing those doctrines with SDAs. This phase included an anonymous online survey and a confidential one-on-one interview with the researcher.

#### **Pre-Training Evaluation: Background Questions**

Of the eleven participants, several knew little about the SDAC. Two participants were familiar with the SDAC by reading some of their publications. Several attended the SDAC for varying periods of time. One was a member for over ten years. Another was a Deacon in the SDAC. At least four of the participants believed the SDAC had impacted their current belief system to some extent. Thus, over half of the participants had some familiarity with the SDAC.

There was a high degree of interest in learning more about the SDAC. Nine of the participants felt it was important for them to learn more about the SDAC. One was uncertain

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<sup>1</sup> Some participants were not able to attend every live Zoom meeting because of occasional conflicts, but they were able to view the recorded Zoom sessions afterward.

about their desire to learn about the SDAC, and one expressed relatively little interest in learning more about the SDAC, remarking, “I do not really want to study another religion.”<sup>2</sup> On the pre-survey, a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the opinions of the participants. The participants rated their familiarity with the origin and history of the SDAC at 2.6, which indicates a moderate level of familiarity.<sup>3</sup>

#### Pre-Training Evaluation: Willingness

The pre-study interview revealed that none of the participants had what could be described as a burning desire to minister to SDAs. This was expected as the congregation, in general, is more interested in sharing the gospel with unbelievers rather than trying to convert believers from other denominations. Most members consider SDAs to be just another flavor of saved Christians. Nevertheless, some participants said they had a “strong” desire to dialogue with SDAs. Another participant described his desire as “tepid.” One felt it was important to minister to SDAs because the denomination was “drifting off into secular practices.” Another felt it was important to “open their eyes” to truths they might be missing. Some did not desire to dialogue with active members of the SDAC. However, they showed more interest in dialoguing with those who had left the SDAC and were currently unchurched. When asked about their level

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<sup>2</sup> This participant was aware of the purpose of the training and freely volunteered to participate in it. The researcher believed it was important for him to remain in the study, despite his lack of interest, to determine how the study would impact someone who was not particularly interested in the subject. In the post-interview he was more positive about the study and acknowledged that he had gained knowledge from the training.

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this section, average survey results will be expressed in the Likert scale, with 1 being the lowest score (very unfamiliar, very unconfident, very unwilling) and 5 being the highest score (very familiar, very confident, very willing). A score of 3 was considered neutral or not certain. The participants were required to supply an answer to every question on the survey.

of motivation to minister to SDAs, the pre-survey indicated the participants were somewhat motivated.<sup>4</sup>

As would be expected, those without a strong desire to minister to SDAs did not believe it was important to dialogue with them. Those who did feel it was important to dialogue with SDAs tended also to be more willing to dialogue. This was an important finding of the pre-interview, and the researcher tailored the first lesson to help the participants understand why it was important to minister to SDAs. When asked how they would feel if they could bring an unchurched SDA into a church fellowship, all the participants admitted they would feel good about that.

One of the most important goals of the pre-interview was to ascertain the participants' willingness to dialogue with SDAs about their doctrines. All participants indicated they were willing to dialogue with SDAs. Many of them indicated their willingness in very positive terms. For example, remarks included the following: "I really want to," "definitely willing," "ten on a scale of ten." Thus, when the subject of willingness rather than motivation was discussed, the participants all indicated a rather high degree of willingness to dialogue, despite a lackluster motivation to dialogue.

#### Pre-Training Evaluation: Knowledge

The pre-study sought to ascertain the participants' current level of knowledge surrounding five SDA doctrines. When asked about remnant eschatology,<sup>5</sup> most participants were not aware of the details of SDA teaching on this subject. Nevertheless, ten of the

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<sup>4</sup> Average group score was 3.5.

<sup>5</sup> The theology that only one group of Christians have "the truth" for the last days and all other Christians will be lost unless they convert to that truth.

participants verbalized their rejection of the idea that only one denomination had a lock-hold on “the truth.” One participant expressed uncertainty about it. When asked to rate their knowledge of SDA remnant eschatology on the pre-survey, the average score was 2.5, indicating some degree of unfamiliarity.

When asked about their knowledge of SDA prophetess Ellen White, six participants knew little or nothing about her. Several who had familiarity with the SDAC expressed a positive opinion of her. However, all but one of the participants were skeptical of her claim to be a prophet. The one who did believe she was a prophet expressed that there was “nothing special” about her because there have been many prophets throughout the history of Christianity. Therefore, it appears that one’s definition of “prophet” may impact whether they believe Ellen White was a prophet. If they accept a loose definition of a prophet as one who teaches the Word of God, they may be more willing to accept Ellen White as a prophet. If, on the other hand, they expect that prophet to deliver messages directly from God and to pass all the biblical tests of a prophet then they may be less likely to accept White as a prophet. On the pre-survey, the participants rated their knowledge of Ellen White with an average score of 2.1, indicating they were somewhat unfamiliar with her.

When asked about the SDA doctrine of the Investigative Judgment, ten of the participants knew virtually nothing about it. Answers included, “I do not know anything about it,” “minimal,” and “never heard of it.” Interestingly, this included those who attended or were members of the SDAC. This demonstrates that this doctrine may be considered challenging even for those who have studied it or heard about it in the past. This doctrine had the lowest level of familiarity among the five SDA doctrines that were discussed during the pre-study interview.

This doctrine also scored lowest on the pre-survey, with an average score of 1.6, indicating a substantial degree of unfamiliarity.

There was an even split when asked whether health teachings are a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Five felt health teachings were indeed part of the gospel message. Those who thought it was part of the gospel often quoted the passage about the body being the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). Five felt that while health teachings are important, they should not be considered part of the gospel message. Those who felt it was not part of the gospel message often quoted the biblical passage about the kingdom of God not being about food or drink (Rom 14:17). One person was uncertain about it. On the pre-survey, the average score was 2.8, which was the highest of all the doctrines. This could be an indicator that the SDAC has had some success in promulgating its health doctrines in North America.

Regarding the SDAC stance on abortion, none of the participants could definitively answer what the SDAC taught on abortion. This is not surprising. The SDAC does not actively promote its position on this subject. When asked about their own view on abortion, nine of the participants expressed the thought that abortion is either murder or a violation of the Sixth Commandment. Familiarity with SDA teachings on abortion scored the second lowest, with an average score of 1.9. This indicates most people were at least somewhat unfamiliar with the SDA teachings on this subject.

#### Pre-Training Evaluation: Confidence

When asked whether they felt confident that they could defend the doctrines they believed in, ten participants expressed confidence that they could do so. Only one was uncertain. It should be noted that this one person had been with the church for the least amount of time. Thus, overall the participants had a high degree of confidence in discussing and defending their

own beliefs. However, when asked how confident they would feel discussing SDA doctrines, half of the participants expressed misgivings about their confidence level. For those expressing a lack of confidence, the primary concern voiced was a need for more knowledge or understanding of SDA doctrines. A secondary concern expressed by multiple participants was about getting into an argument or debate. Some felt that this was contrary to their Christian values and could be counterproductive.

When asked what would make them feel more confident in dialoguing with SDAs, those with lower confidence levels universally said that more knowledge about SDA doctrines would help increase their confidence. On this question, the pre-survey showed a confidence level of 2.1, indicating a majority felt at least some degree of inadequacy in being able to dialogue with SDAs about their doctrines.

### **Seven-Week Training Course**

The purpose of the training was to familiarize the participants with SDA history and teachings to equip them to be able to minister biblical truth to SDAs more effectively. The first session focused on the SDAC's Millerite origins, key figures in the sect, overlap with the Church of God Seventh Day, and relevant points of history. The remaining sessions focused primarily on the five SDA doctrines designated for study. An open discussion was allowed during the question-and-answer period at the end of each of the sessions. There was also more limited discussion that took place during the teaching part of the sessions when participants were asked to comment on various Bible passages. Following is a synopsis of each of the training sessions which were conducted from May 2, 2023, to June 13, 2023.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a more comprehensive overview of the objectives and contents of these sessions, please see Appendix E.



### Training Session One: SDA History

Training session one started with a presentation on why the doctrines a person believes are important. An example was provided of a young Jehovah's Witness adherent who ended up dying because her beliefs did not allow her to receive blood transfusions. This demonstrated poignantly that what one chooses to believe can significantly affect their own life and the lives of their friends and family. After the importance of being anchored into biblical truth was reinforced, the teaching continued with an overview of the history and origins of the SDAC. Included in this was a discussion of how the history of the SDAC and the Church of God Seventh Day overlapped for a period of six years from 1852 to 1858. This was followed by an overview of how SDA doctrines differ from Protestant ones. The study concluded with an extensive review of Bible passages explaining the importance of adhering to the pure doctrine of Christ. Other Bible verses were read and discussed, which explained the dangers of believing false doctrines and false prophets.

### Training Session Two: Remnant Eschatology

This session explained how the SDAC identifies itself as the sole remnant church of Bible prophecy. The students learned that according to Revelation 12:17, the remnant is identified by the SDAC as those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. The SDAC interprets this as meaning that the remnant church will keep Saturday as the sabbath and adhere to the Spirit of Prophecy, which SDAs interpret as the writings of their prophet, Ellen White. Biblical evidence was then presented, showing that White did not fit into the biblical definition of "testimony of Jesus." Next, it was explained how SDAs identify Sabbath-keeping as the Seal of God. Finally, biblical evidence was provided showing that the Seal of God is defined in the New Testament as the infilling of the Holy Spirit, not observance of

Saturday as a day of rest. Feedback after this session indicated some people found it difficult to understand how the SDAs use the Bible verses in Revelation 12 and 19 to identify their church as the remnant.

### Training Session Three: Ellen White

A brief overview of Ellen White's life was provided to begin this session. This included a discussion of the serious head injury Ellen suffered as a child. It was explained that White claimed to have seen visions, but that other religious people have also made similar claims to have seen visions. In the latter case, some of those visions turned out to be false visions. Therefore, one must not blindly accept visions without some validation because there are many non-divine origins for visions. For example, hallucinations can be caused by drugs, psychiatric disorders, or medical conditions such as epilepsy. Even the devil could present a vision to an individual (Matt 4:8, Luke 4:5). The instructor re-emphasized that a person should not believe a person received a vision just because they or others say it was a vision. They should be diligent in testing the prophet to make sure they are not making a mistake. Next, five biblical tests of a prophet were presented. Evidence from the life of Ellen White was reviewed for each test showing that White failed all these tests. At the end of the study, an example was given of how White advised church members to avoid drug medicines, and how one African missionary took her counsel seriously and refused to administer quinine to his son after he contracted malaria. That boy later died of the disease. The class was warned that believing a person to be speaking for God when that person is not speaking for God could result in dire consequences.

### Training Session Four: Investigative Judgment

This session explained the SDA doctrine of the Investigative Judgment (two-phase atonement). It was explained how SDAs believe that in 1844 Christ moved from the Holy Place in the heavenly temple to the Most Holy Place to begin reviewing and deciding the eternal fate of every professed believer. Afterward, the traditional Christian understanding of Daniel chapter eight was presented to the class.<sup>7</sup> Significant biblical evidence was then presented from both the Old and New Testaments showing that the atonement was completed when Jesus died upon the cross. Further biblical evidence was presented to explain that God does not need to perform an “investigation” to figure out who should be saved. God, being an omniscient being, already knows who is going to be saved and who is going to be lost. Thus, there is no purpose in him performing an investigation.

### Training Session Five: SDA Health Teachings

This session reviewed SDA teachings on health and how they consider their health teachings to be an integral part of the gospel message. A brief history of health reforms of the 1800s was presented to show that Ellen White and other SDAs did not invent their health message or receive it from divine sources but simply adapted it from other popular health reformers of that era. Biblical evidence was presented showing that SDA teachings forbidding the eating of unclean meats are untenable from a New Testament and New Covenant perspective. Evidence from both the New and Old Testaments was presented debunking the idea that a vegetarian diet is more spiritual than a diet that includes meat. It was noted that spiritual leaders from both testaments partook of meat. Additional biblical evidence was presented to show that

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<sup>7</sup> Identifying the little horn of Daniel 8 as Antiochus Epiphanes.

the SDAC requirements of abstinence from certain beverages, like wine, coffee, and black tea, are unsustainable from a biblical perspective.

#### Training Session Six: SDA Teachings on Abortion

This session went into great historical depth of how the SDAC moved from a pro-life position before 1971, to a neutral position. Evidence was provided showing that after abortion was legalized in some states of the United States, the SDAC modified its stance to allow abortions to take place in SDA hospitals. This enabled those hospitals to capitalize on the lucrative abortion business. The participants were then familiarized with some of the SDA members who were in good standing with the SDAC when they were running some of the largest private abortion businesses in the world. Next, a review of all the Bible verses on the subject indicated that life begins at conception. The participants expressed more emotion during this session than in any other session. Many seemed shocked and disgusted by the SDAC's position of neutrality on abortion. They were also angered to learn that some SDA physicians performed a significant number of elective abortions and profited from the innocent lives taken.

#### Training Session Seven: Wrap-up and Role-Playing

This session started by outlining some of the other minor doctrinal differences between the JCOG7D and the SDAC that were not covered during the earlier sessions. This included the SDA teaching that the saints will be in heaven during the millennium rather than upon the earth. The class also discussed the SDA prophetic interpretation of the "end times" beginning in the year 1844, even though Jerusalem was still under Gentile rule at that time. Next, an interactive quiz was given where the participants answered true-or-false questions about SDA doctrines. After answering the question, the participants were asked to explain why the question was true or

false. Finally, there was a role-playing session where the researcher pretended to be an SDA, and the participant had to explain some of the challenges with SDA teachings. Arguments for and against the five doctrines discussed during the course were played out during the role-playing. At the end of the class, the researcher shared with the participants the most reliable Internet locations where they could find out more information about SDA doctrines. This session had the most verbal participation of all the sessions. At the end, many in the class expressed their thanks for the training.

### **Post-Training Evaluation**

During the definition phase of this study, it was proposed that a successful outcome for this project would be based on a combination of three criteria: Effectiveness, confidence, and willingness. The evaluation of success involved a post-training interview and a post-training survey. The data were then gathered and scrutinized to determine whether the research goals were met.

#### **Research Objective – Effectiveness**

To evaluate the effectiveness of the training, it was determined that effectiveness could best be gauged by evaluating whether the participants had gained what they believed to be a material increase in knowledge about the history of the SDAC and the five doctrines of the SDAC. In the post-interview, participants universally acknowledged they were better prepared to dialogue with SDAs regarding their doctrines. For example, one person expressed that “it prepared” him “to be bolder and more confident” in sharing his beliefs with SDAs. Another said, “I know a lot more about the church than before.”

In the post-interview, it is notable that those who previously had doubts about Ellen White seemed to have greater doubts about her. On the other hand, those who thought more positively of her before the training appear to have retained that positive feeling afterward. However, those participants also expressed that they felt better informed as to why JCOG7D does not regard her as a prophet. One person noted that he “learned more depth about her background, her teaching, and her methods.”

On the subject of the two-phase atonement, the post-survey indicated most participants obtained a greater understanding of the doctrine, but many still found it to be baffling. One participant who did not know anything about the doctrine before the training afterward called it “absolutely bizarre...completely fictional...the whole thing was just ridiculous.” Another called it “nonsense.” Another perceived that the doctrine had been concocted as a way for the SDAC to “explain away the failed 1844 event.” The post-training survey revealed that while their knowledge of this doctrine had increased substantially, many participants still did not feel they understood it well. Perhaps this is because of the cognitive dissonance this doctrine creates. Regardless, this finding is not surprising since this subject is a matter of great debate internally in the SDAC. In fact, many SDA pastors will not even preach the doctrine.

Regarding health teachings being part of the gospel, after the training, the post-survey revealed that three participants backed away from their prior belief that health teachings are a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ. One person who in the pre-interview thought there was something to the idea of health teachings being a part of the gospel message agreed afterward that there was no biblical merit to the SDA method of restricting certain foods and drinks from the diet. While all the participants acknowledged the importance of biblical health teachings,

such as not over-indulging and treating the body well, many expressed the opinion that the kingdom of God is not about “meat and drink” (Rom 14:17).

Regarding abortion, in the post-survey, many reaffirmed the same pro-life position that they had expressed during the pre-survey. One participant admitted that he was “depressed” by the SDA stance on abortion. He was disappointed that the SDAC evolved “the church to the trend of society” instead of standing firm on the teachings of the Bible. Another participant admitted: “I was really surprised. I thought they were like us. I was surprised their hospitals performed abortions. That makes me think this is not a true church.” One participant who was not certain of the morality of abortion prior to the study afterward concluded that abortion is wrong.

Overall, the post-interview remarks show increased knowledge of SDA doctrines, particularly in areas with little prior knowledge, such as the doctrine of the two-phase atonement and the SDAC’s stance on abortion. There were a small number of participants who seemed to hold out some reservations that the SDA health doctrines may be at least partially correct, so there may be room for enhancing the training to address these areas.

The survey results presented below show an overall increase in familiarity with all the subjects presented during the training:

**Table 3 Survey Results: Familiarity with SDA History and Doctrines**

<b>Familiarity with</b>	<b>Before Training</b>	<b>After Training</b>
SDAC History	2.6	4.1
Remnant Eschatology	2.5	4.1
Ellen White	2.1	4.2
The Two-Phase Atonement	1.6	3.6
SDA Health Teachings	2.8	4.2
SDA Stance on Abortion	1.9	4.4



Figure 4.1 Survey Results: Familiarity with SDA History and Doctrines

Significant gains were observed across the board on all subjects. The most significant perceived increase in familiarity was regarding the SDAC's stance on abortion. Perhaps the emotion evoked during the session helped to capture the attention of those who participated. Participants also appeared to have gained a significant increase in knowledge of the two-phase atonement doctrine. Perhaps one reason for this increase is the lack of knowledge on that subject beforehand.

A final evaluation of the training's effectiveness would only be complete with understanding whether the participants themselves believed it to be effective. In the post-survey, every participant acknowledged they were more prepared to dialogue with SDAs because of the training. The responses to this question, along with the survey results and the responses about individual doctrines, demonstrate that the training was effective in increasing the participants'



familiarity with the SDAC and its doctrines. One person added that the training made him bolder and more confident in holding discussions with SDAs.

#### Research Objective – Confidence

To be effective in equipping the saints to dialogue with SDAs, the training must not only impart knowledge to the participants but that knowledge must significantly increase their confidence in presenting their beliefs to SDAs. If a believer does not have confidence in their ability to discuss a subject intelligently, they will likely avoid dialoging on that subject. During the post-interview, one participant felt she still lacked the confidence to interact with SDAs. The other ten participants all responded affirmatively that they felt more confident. Two responded that they were “definitely” more confident.

The survey results indicate a measurable gain in the participants’ perception of their confidence in dialoguing with SDAs regarding their doctrines. The increase in confidence was nearly two-thirds higher:

**Table 4 Survey Results: Level of Confidence**

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Level of...	Before Training	After Training
Confidence	2.1	3.6



Figure 4.2 Survey Results: Level of Confidence

In the post-survey, ten of the eleven participants indicated they felt more confident that they could now dialogue with SDAs about their doctrines. Many of those who felt more confident pointed to the subjects they learned in the training as a factor that helped them feel more confident to minister to SDAs.

### Research Objective – Willingness

The third objective evaluates the willingness or motivation of the participants to engage in dialogue with SDAs on doctrinal subjects. The post-survey indicated that the level of motivation had not materially changed:

Table 5 Survey Results: Level of Motivation

Level of...	Before Training	After Training
Motivation	3.5	3.5



Figure 4.3 Survey Results: Level of Motivation

The level of motivation held steady. As with the pre-interview question on willingness, the post-interview revealed that ten of the eleven participants were still willing to dialogue with SDAs. However, there was some indication during the post-interview that at least two of the participants felt an increased level of willingness. One participant indicated that he was “more willing now” than before the study. Another answered the question on *willingness* by remarking that she was “more confident” now.

During the post-interview, several participants elucidated on what their willingness to dialogue meant to them. For example, one remarked that she was reluctant to talk to current SDAs but expressed a willingness to talk to those who had left or were leaving the SDAC. A couple of participants said they would be willing to dialogue so long as the discussion did not become argumentative, which they viewed as counterproductive. In conclusion, while the researcher had hoped for a more definitive increase in willingness on the survey results, it should

be noted that even before the training commenced, there was already a high degree of willingness to dialogue with SDAs.

### **Conclusion**

The intervention yielded the intended results of increasing the participants' knowledge. Most participants appeared to have been satisfied that their knowledge of Seventh-day Adventism and SDA doctrines had increased. Some acknowledged a substantial increase in knowledge. Evidence shows that those with little or no familiarity with Seventh-day Adventism experienced the most profound growth in knowledge, but even those familiar with the denomination also experienced an increased level of knowledge. The participants generally equated the knowledge with feeling better equipped to minister to SDAs.

The intervention also yielded the hoped-for results in terms of increasing the confidence of the participants to dialogue with SDAs. This is critically important because knowledge alone does not translate into an effective ministry. The soldiers must not only be equipped for battle but must be willing to take to the battlefield. When Goliath and the Philistines came against the armies of Israel, the soldiers of Israel were fully armed with swords and shields. However, they were reluctant to take to the battlefield because they lacked confidence (1 Samuel 17). It took David to inspire confidence in them. Likewise, the training combined with the roll-playing exercises appears to have been effective in inspiring the participants with not only knowledge but also the confidence to apply that knowledge in ministry.

Finally, it was somewhat disappointing to discover the post-survey yielded little increase in the willingness of the participants to dialogue with SDAs. This points to a potential opportunity to enhance the training to address this issue in the future. Despite this setback, it is important to recognize that before the training commenced, most participants had expressed a

strong degree of willingness. Perhaps the training could be enhanced to inspire a greater magnitude of willingness.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

This research was built on the premise that a training program could increase the confidence of JCOG7D members in ministering to SDAs. While it was easy enough to presume that training church members in SDA doctrines would improve their familiarity with the SDAC, there existed a gap in knowledge as to whether such a program could be effective. This research has demonstrated that a carefully planned and executed training program can increase the confidence of a local congregation in sharing biblical truths with SDAs. Even though this was undertaken on a small scale in one congregation, the methodology used can be repeated in other congregations. The success of this research has several implications, applications, and opportunities for increasing and enhancing ministry to SDAs within the greater body of Christ.

### **Research Implications**

Believers will be hesitant to engage in a ministry if they feel that lack confidence in performing that ministry. This research is significant in that it contributes to the Christian community's understanding of how a training program focused on SDA doctrines can positively affect participants' perception of their ability to engage current and former SDAs in biblical dialogue about their doctrines and beliefs. This investigation reveals that a properly constructed training regimen can make church members more confident and prepared to minister to SDAs. This research project has relevant implications for advancing the field of ministering to SDAs.

Furthermore, it has practical benefits in terms of fortifying the saints to be more resilient against false doctrines.

### Practical Ministry Applications

The insights garnered from this study could be implemented to address practical challenges that many Christian pastors face today. In 2022, 1,358,642 people joined the SDAC.<sup>1</sup> Since SDAs target Christians of other denominations, it can be assumed many of these people came from other denominations. The results of this study demonstrate that believers can be equipped and trained to retrieve the lost members back into the fold.<sup>2</sup> If equipped believers are able to dialogue successfully with current or former SDAs, they may be able to recover some of them back into active church membership.

One example of recovering a former SDA occurred after the completion of the training. The background of this individual is that he was an elderly member of the JCOG7D who left the congregation for undisclosed reasons more than five years prior to the study. He switched denominations and started to regularly attend the local SDAC. Meanwhile, his wife continued to attend the JCOG7D. After the training, two of our church members decided to visit the man. One of them had participated in the training. At the end of the visit, the man expressed his desire to rejoin the JCOG7D. In fact, without prompting, he got out an envelope and handed an offering to the visitors. This man has now been successfully retrieved back into the fold. When the

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<sup>1</sup> “Seventh-day Adventist World Church Statistics,” Dec. 31, 2022, <https://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/Other/SDAWorldChurchStatsSummary2022.pdf>. In the North American Division, 30,024 new members were added in 2022 by baptism or profession of faith. Since SDAs often require baptism from Christians who have already been baptized in other denominations, it is not possible to determine how many of the baptisms were from the children of SDAs versus members of other denominations versus non-Christians.

<sup>2</sup> Motivation is not mentioned here because the study interviews demonstrated that believers at JCOG7D are already highly motivated to share with SDAs. It is probable this is the case also in other churches.

researcher asked the lady who visited the man if the training influenced her visit with him, she credited the training with giving her the confidence to visit him and open a dialogue with him. It is hoped that this same success story can be repeated elsewhere.

In addition to equipping JCOG7D members to minister to SDAs, this study also demonstrated that the participants gained a better understanding of their biblical faith and the problems with the SDA faith. This could have the long-term ramifications for making them more resilient against being deceived by the doctrines of the SDAC. Thus, even if members never actually dialogue with SDAs after receiving this training, it could still yield benefits in terms of protecting them from being pulled away from the church.

### Theological Implications

Christians rightly consider outreach as sharing the gospel with the unsaved. Many would also consider it an important ministry to retrieve those no longer attending church back into fellowship. What is less understood in the Evangelical community is that outreach ministry can also involve reaching those in denominations that have teachings contrary to the Bible. This would include groups like Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-day Adventists.

Just because a person spoke a sinner's prayer does not mean they are in a good spiritual state. This research suggests that some SDAs are waiting to be released from Seventh-day Adventism, and believers must minister to them. Two of the four research participants who were former SDAs indicated the teachings of the SDAC diminished their spiritual experience. Since leaving the SDAC, both individuals have grown spiritually. One went to Bible school and became an elder in the JCOG7D. The other person stepped up to lead the JCOG7D prayer and women's ministry. It can be assumed that many who have left the SDAC have been able to grow



and flourish in an environment where the true Word of God is preached.<sup>3</sup> If believers can bless other believers by revealing greater truth to them, then it is their duty to do so. Jesus said, “all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them” (Matt 7:12). Thus, the theological implication is that outreach to SDAs can be considered a part of the theological definition of a church outreach ministry.

### Leadership Implications

Over the decades, many Evangelical leaders such as Walter Martin and John Ankerberg have warned the Evangelical community about the SDAC. There are several high-quality videos discussing Seventh-day Adventism on YouTube. There are also a few good books discussing SDA doctrines and practices. If the people in their congregations have questions or concerns about Seventh-day Adventism, local church leaders can always point their members to watch a video or read a book. However, what has been lacking is a training program that will thoroughly equip and prepare members to minister effectively to current and former SDAs. If a robust training program can be implemented by leaders in their churches, then it may be possible to recover souls from the SDAC. Furthermore, such a training program could also help to insulate church members from being siphoned off into the SDAC.

### Ethical Considerations

During the training sessions, there was a silent attendee who was a long-time member of the SDAC. During the second training session, when the topic discussed how it was wrong for

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<sup>3</sup> For example, in his book *Gospel Transformation*, former SDA pastor Dale Ratzlaff explains how Seventh-day Adventism can infect believers with legalism and how the Investigative Judgment robs them of their assurance of salvation. Through his ministry to SDAs, many have left and expressed gratitude in his magazine, *Proclamation*.

the SDAC to try to steal members from other Christian denominations, he responded via email after the meeting by turning that around and asking if it is not also wrong for JCOG7D to attempt to retrieve members out of the SDAC. In addition to this, one of the participants also stated during the post-interview that she would not attempt to retrieve members out of the SDAC unless they were unchurched. The question of whether disciples should expend effort trying to retrieve members from another Christian denomination could be considered by some to be an ethical dilemma. Could that time and effort not be better directed towards seeking and saving the lost? Could this battle be pitting Christ against Christ? How can this ethical tension be resolved?

In Jesus' message to the church in Pergamos, He rebuked them for holding false doctrines, calling upon them through His prophet John to "repent" (Rev 2:14–16). It is apparent that John had to expend his time and effort to retrieve people from believing in false doctrines. Likewise, Paul had to spend his time correcting false doctrines brought into the church by false teachers in Galatia. Christ provides similar examples of this in his ministry. He spent time and effort correcting false doctrines regarding Jewish traditions, divorce, the resurrection, and the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28, 7:1–23, 12:18–27; Matt 19:3–9; Luke 13:10–17). Thus, following the example of Christ and the apostles, the biblical believer has the authority in Jesus' name to call upon those believing false doctrines to repent or change direction from those doctrines. Furthermore, the fact that Jesus took the time and effort to call out the false doctrines in Pergamos is evidence that it is important to address and stop those doctrines before they propagate and infect other believers.

### Educational Implications

One possible application of this research is integrating it into ministerial training programs. This ministerial curriculum could be enhanced to include the training outlined in this

study. In addition, new ministerial courses could be developed to train students about the SDAC and other large denominations with unorthodox teachings such as the Mormons and Jehovah's Witness. This would place future leaders in a better position to protect their flocks and minister to the members of these groups.

### Community Implications

This research provides an opportunity for Christian communities to work together on solving a common problem. The SDAC targets all Christian communities in its evangelistic campaigns. Christian leaders from Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, Lutheran, non-denominational, and many other organizations can use this training to work together to strengthen their congregations and minister to SDAs. This can hopefully lead to a broader sense of brotherhood and cooperation within the community of believers in Christ as they work together on a common goal that benefits all of them.

### Research Applications

The question must be considered as to how this research fits into other research and publications on the same subject. In addition, this section will discuss the key observations made by the researcher during this project.

### Prior Studies

One of the major challenges of this research was finding other research on the effectiveness of programs that minister to SDAs. While there are ministries that minister to SDAs, there is no research on their effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> There has been some research on

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<sup>4</sup> One such ministry is Dale Ratzlaff's Life Assurance Ministries.

deprogramming and deconversion, but these are typically focused on religious cults like Hare Krishna. There is no research on deconversion from Seventh-day Adventism. Furthermore, while there is abundant material available on the problems with SDA doctrines, there was no documented research on the effectiveness of a training program to use that material to equip church members to minister to SDAs. This study, therefore, has served to bridge that academic gap. While it is certainly not the definitive study on this subject, it can serve as a starting point that future studies can build upon.

### Key Observations

During the implementation of this project, the researcher discovered that the members of JCOG7G had a keen interest in understanding more about the teachings of the SDAC. This was only apparent and recognized after the study. For some participants, the interest was primarily historical. They were interested in discovering how the SDAC fit into the puzzle of the history of the JCOG7D. Other participants had friends, colleagues, or family members who were currently members of the SDAC. For them, the study had a more personal aspect. Some hoped to use what they learned as a bridge to communicate more effectively with their SDA family and friends.

It should be observed that those participants who were motivated by a desire to communicate with people whom they knew or loved seemed to have a higher degree of participation and interaction during the training sessions. This would appear to indicate that those with a personal stake in the training were more likely to be involved at a deeper level and thus more likely to take away knowledge that would benefit them in their interpersonal dialogues. For those without that personal aspect, learning was likely more of an abstract experience.

The researcher also learned that some members had deep feelings about certain subjects that were closer to their hearts while they were more ambivalent about other subjects. This level

of emotional attachment seemed to drive their involvement. Many found the two-phase atonement doctrine difficult to understand and they were bewildered as to how people could accept it. Several mentioned that they found the doctrine to be confusing or so absurd as to be irrelevant. Perhaps more time should have been spent discussing why it was relevant to understand this doctrine. The future challenge will be to present it in a way that takes this relatively complex subject and makes it more meaningful and easier to digest.

The subject that drew out the most emotion was the subject of abortion. Many of the participants were shocked or disgusted with the SDAC's stance on abortion. This subject continued to generate some discussion among members even weeks after the training was completed. Thus, it may be observed that emotional attachments drove interest in some of the subjects.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This field is ripe for further research. More could be done to probe which SDA doctrines are the most vulnerable. If the most vulnerable doctrines could be analyzed, then the training could be focused to address those vulnerabilities. For example, in dialogues with SDAs, what doctrinal weaknesses are most effective in opening the heart of the SDA to consider that it may be best for them to separate from the SDAC? Which are the least vulnerable? What arguments resonate with SDA listeners? Which ones do not resonate? Are there any subjects that cause SDAs to stop listening and should thus be avoided? How can bridges be built to engage SDAs more effectively? Are there cultural differences that would need to be recognized when

ministering to SDAs of other cultures?<sup>5</sup> If these questions can be answered, then enhanced training can be developed that will be even more effective than the training used in this research.

There are several opportunities to expand upon this research to determine if the training can be made more effective. These training opportunities include both horizontal and vertical research. Horizontal research would seek to increase the breadth of topics included in the training. Horizontal research will also be needed to determine if similar results could be obtained in other geographic locations, in other cultures and languages, and other denominations outside of the Church of God. Vertical research, on the other hand, would seek to increase the depth and quality of the training itself and the training materials.

#### Horizontal Training Opportunities

One direction for further horizontal research is SDA prophetic interpretations. SDAs have produced and continue to produce a copious volume of prophetic interpretations and commentary on current world events from their unique prophetic standpoint. These interpretations of Bible prophecy and end-time scenarios provide a near-endless supply of research opportunities. In the pre-study interview, one of the participants noted that as a child, he attended meetings at the local SDAC where speakers expounded upon SDA understandings of Bible prophecy, some of which he found to be quite disturbing. The researcher recalls how when he was a young man, he attended similar prophecy seminars at the SDAC. These end-time teachings led him and other SDAs to harbor a paranoia regarding other Christians whom they suspected would be persecuting them in the last days for their observance of Saturday as a day of worship. The SDA

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<sup>5</sup> For example, vegetarianism is an important issue for many North American SDAs. However, many SDAs in Latin American nations are not taught by their leaders to become vegetarian so it may be less of an issue in those nations.

presentations on end-time events can have the unsavory effect of creating friction, fear, and distance between Christian believers. The SDA teachings are based upon “private interpretation” of certain biblical passages, primarily in the books of Daniel and Revelation (2 Pet 1:20). These interpretations are presented to prospective members in colorful multi-media presentations as if they are actual biblical facts. Thus, it is possible for a person receiving this instruction to develop a faulty view of end-time events, which may increase their personal stress levels and cause division between them and other believers. Training material could be assembled and tested to determine if biblical teachings can negate the effect of SDA prophetic teachings.

Another direction for further horizontal research involves contemporary trends in Seventh-day Adventism. As with many conservative churches, the issue of homosexuality is becoming problematic for the SDAC. While the SDAC retains a traditional stance on marriage, pressure is building within the SDAC, particularly in North America, Europe, and Australia, to adopt a position of acceptance of homosexual marriage. One SDA black civil-rights activist pushing for the acceptance of same-sex marriage within the SDAC is Juan O. Perla. Noting that “twenty-five percent of Adventists in the United States favor same-sex marriage,” he believes that “Adventists are learning to accept” the popular cultural view of homosexuality.<sup>6</sup> This acceptance appears to be gaining steam in West Coast SDA universities. For example, Ronald Lawson notes that in 2015, the prestigious Loma Linda University dropped all references to homosexual relations as being contrary to the university’s ideals, which Lawson interpreted as the university finally accepting married “sexual relations between same-sex couples.”<sup>7</sup> Lawson

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<sup>6</sup> Juan O. Perla, “The Adventist Civil Rights Movement: A Prophetic Voice for LGBT Adventists,” *Spectrum* 44, iss. 2 (2016): 35.

<sup>7</sup> Ronald Lawson, “The Adventist Church and its LGBT Members,” *Spectrum* 48, iss. 4 (2020): 83. According to Lawson, a further revision to the handbook in 2019 eliminated wording which described sexual relations within a heterosexual marriage as being God’s ideal.

adds that Loma Linda has become the first SDA university to establish an official LGBT group which gained official approval in 2020.<sup>8</sup> If the SDAC continues to follow the same tract as they did with abortion, that is bending to the pervasive beliefs of society, then this could become a substantive topic of research in the future.

Another mode of horizontal expansion involves replicating the research in other domains. One potential opportunity is to enhance the training into a course that could be presented throughout the evangelical community. Based on this research, there may be an appetite for this type of training in other churches. This appetite may be strongest among other Churches of God (seventh day) because of their shared doctrine of the Sabbath and shared history with the SDAC. The same results obtained at JCOG7D could likely be attained in these churches as well. The results could be translated into foreign languages. In the Church of God (seventh day) there are a large number of Spanish-speaking churches in Central and South America. Since there is a heavy SDA presence in this region also, there may be interest in the training amongst these churches. As for other denominations, the prevalence of literature about the SDAC among various denominations indicates there is curiosity about the SDAC among their members. That interest may be an impetus for some to take this training. In addition, because the SDAC spends considerable effort trying to proselytize other Christians, there is some awareness of the SDAC throughout the worldwide body of Christ, especially in countries with a large population of SDAs. As a proactive defense against being proselytized by SDAs, some Christian church leaders throughout the world may have an interest in having their members receive this training.

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<sup>8</sup> Lawson, "The Adventist Church and its LGBT Members," 83.



### Vertical Training Opportunities

Several research participants expressed the desire to have a greater depth of training. For example, one participant recommended longer sessions or more sessions to allow the subjects to be covered in greater depth. One participant found the study on SDA remnant eschatology challenging to understand. Most participants admitted they found the two-phase atonement doctrine complex and difficult to fathom even after the training. Overall, participants unfamiliar with SDA doctrines were surprised at the complexity of SDA doctrinal interpretations. One of the interesting facets of this study is that both the researcher and the participants found it difficult to unravel all this complexity in a single-hour training session. To improve the depth of the studies, the following opportunities could be explored:

- 1) Break up the training on remnant eschatology into two one-hour segments. The first session would provide a thorough background on the SDA concept of the remnant and the implications of that teaching. The second session would provide a more in-depth study on the biblical evidence, demonstrating how the SDA teaching contradicts the biblical understanding of the church of God.
- 2) Add substantial material to the training on Ellen G. White. A one-hour training session could address only the primary problems with Ellen White's writings. While this was effective, SDAs have developed counter-arguments for all the major problems with Ellen White. It is likely that participants who engage in conversation about Ellen White with SDAs will encounter these counter-arguments and will be unprepared to address them effectively. Thus, a second training session could be added to address the common defenses of Ellen White and expose the weaknesses of those defenses.

- 3) Break up the training on the two-phase atonement doctrine into three one-hour training sessions. The first section would address how the SDAC developed a theology around Christ's return in 1844. It would cover the meaning and relevance of 1844 to SDAs. The second section would address the complex subject of the SDAC's sanctuary doctrine and introduce the concept of the two-phase atonement. The third section would address the SDA doctrine of the Investigative Judgment and how it contradicts the biblical evidence of how God judges the saints.
- 4) Increase the depth of the role-playing exercises by expanding the role-playing from one to two one-hour sessions. In the post-survey, one participant believed he would have been better equipped for encounters with SDAs if the training included more in-depth role-playing interaction. To facilitate a more realistic engagement with SDAs, the training would involve a blow-by-blow explanation of how to dialogue with SDAs in a way that would be the most effective at winning them over. This would include providing opening lines that could be used to engage the SDAs in a doctrinal conversation. It would include succinct methods of presenting problems with SDA doctrines in ways that would be least likely to result in rejection. It would also include responses to the counter-arguments that would most likely be raised by SDAs. It would also include more role-playing exercises to build up confidence and skills.
- 5) Incorporate active ministry engagement into the training as a sort of "homework" assignment. During the week between the two role-playing trainings, the participants would be assigned the task of engaging an SDA in a doctrinal dialogue.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> The participants would be alerted at the beginning of training that they would need to find an SDA that they could engage in dialogue with near the end of the training program.

participant would be asked to take notes on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of their approach and arguments. They would be asked to take note of what worked well, and what did not work well. The whole group could discuss and evaluate these engagements at the beginning of the second role-playing training session. In this active learning model, effective methods would be identified by the group so that they could be adopted by others. Ineffective strategies could also be identified and discussed. Group members could suggest improvements to make the ineffective methods more effective. If that turned out to be infeasible, then the methods could be discarded from future training. In this manner, the students could use their own experiences to learn and increase their effectiveness in reaching SDAs.

Making the modifications listed above would increase the duration of the training from seven weeks to twelve weeks. Another way of increasing the depth of the training would be to allow the training sessions to exceed the one-hour limit. The original training sessions adhered to a strict one-hour timeline out of respect for the schedules of the participants involved. However, there may be some participants who would be interested in further dialogue or more opportunities for questions and answers. This opportunity could be provided by wrapping up the core training at the end of the hour, and then allowing whoever wanted to stay in the meeting to ask questions and dialogue with the researcher for up to thirty additional minutes. This would provide an opportunity for participants to ask deeper questions and clarify their understanding of the topic.

In addition to enhancing the depth of the training, the delivery mechanisms could also be enhanced. One of the participants said that if he ever engaged an SDA in dialogue in the future, he would have to look back at his notes to remember what he should talk about. Since

not everyone takes notes, this could be a potential problem for those who completed the training. To address this gap, one future direction would be to publish a book that would provide more detailed information on each of the five doctrinal topics presented in the training. Many people learn better by reading, and a book could provide much more material than could be reasonably presented verbally during a classroom session. If the participants had a book, they could have readily accessible material after their training. In addition, a written study guide could be prepared as a companion to the book and as an aid for small-group study. A teacher's version could be written with suggestions for guiding small group doctrinal discussions. Small group leaders designated by local church leaders could study the teacher's guide and then be prepared to present the training to church members during small group study sessions. The study guide would provide a handy place for students to record their notes and discoveries. Finally, high-quality video recordings could be placed on YouTube to facilitate further training among those who would not normally attend an organized training series.

### **Research Limitations**

One limitation of this study was time. In the post-interviews, it became abundantly clear that more time would have been helpful. Those with a background in the SDAC may have been able to digest the material more quickly, but the majority needed more background information. This lack of background likely left them with some blanks. With additional time, a much more robust training program could be implemented. For example, instead of seven one-hour lessons over seven weeks, a three-month program of twelve ninety-minute lessons would be more appropriate. With additional time, the participants would have been able to spend more time practicing role-playing. This practice may have improved their level of confidence even further.

Additionally, if more preparation time had been available, books, study guides, videos, and other learning aids could have been developed. These materials would aid in teaching and would have helped those who wanted to dig deeper into the subjects. Finally, the research was performed on a small congregation in a single church of a single denomination and single language. Ideally, research would be rolled out to multiple churches of different denominations and languages.

### **Conclusion**

Research on this subject is still in its infancy. The positive outcome of this research has encouraged the researcher to continue to broaden and deepen this research through the remainder of his life. Before concluding, it must be acknowledged that this research was a team effort. It would never have happened without the support of the faculty of Liberty University, Dr. Spotts, my wife, and the faithful members of the JCOG7D. Most importantly, thanks be to God who “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Eph 3:20–21).

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## APPENDIX A

## PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Title of the Project:** Implementing a Training Curriculum on Ministering to Seventh-day Adventists at the Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day in Jacksonville, FL

**Principal Investigator:** Dirk Anderson, Doctoral Candidate, Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

**Invitation to be Part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study at the Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, and a member of the church. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

**What is the study about and why is it being done?**

The purpose of the study is to implement training to equip Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day members to communicate biblical truth to the local Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) community. The goal of this research is to raise the participants' level of understanding regarding the Seventh-day Adventist sect and its doctrines. After completing this training, it is expected that the participants will be better able to defend their own beliefs and be better equipped to minister to and share biblical truth with SDAs and former SDAs.

**What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Attend a one-hour kickoff meeting to understand the overall project.
2. Complete an online survey during the first week of the project (15–20 minutes).
3. Complete a 30-minute phone interview during the first week of the project.
4. Attend seven 1-hour training sessions. These sessions will be video-recorded.
5. Complete an online survey in the week after the last training session (15–20 minutes).
6. Complete a 30-minute phone interview in the week following the last training session.
7. Attend a final one-hour wrap-up meeting at the end of the project.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include being better equipped to understand the history and doctrines of the SDA sect.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private.

- Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
- Participant responses to the online survey will be anonymous.
- Interviews will be conducted by phone in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group sessions. While discouraged, other members of the training session group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After seven years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Training sessions will be recorded and those recordings will be stored on a password-protected Zoom account. The recordings will be retained for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. At the conclusion of the project, those participants who have participated in both surveys, both interviews, and all seven training sessions will receive a \$100 Visa gift card.

### **Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?**

The researcher serves as pastor at Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, data collection on the surveys will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will

affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from the training session group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Training session group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the training group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### **Your Consent**

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

☐ The researcher has my permission to video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date



## APPENDIX B

## PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

## MINISTERING TO SDAs

A survey for Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day members assessing their knowledge of Seventh-day Adventism



\* Required

How familiar are you with the origin and history of the SDA sect? \*

Very unfamiliar      1      2      3      4      5      Very familiar

How familiar are you with SDA teachings on Bible prophecy and the remnant church? \*

1 2 3 4 5

Very unfamiliar ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Very familiar

How familiar are you with the life and teachings of SDA prophet Ellen G. White? \*

Very unfamiliar      1      2      3      4      5      Very familiar

How familiar are you with the SDA doctrine of the two-phase atonement? \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unfamiliar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very familiar

How familiar are you with SDA teachings on diet and health? \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unfamiliar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very familiar

How familiar are you with the SDA stance on abortion?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unfamiliar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very familiar

How confident are you in discussing SDA doctrines with current or former SDAs? \*

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not confident at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident

How motivated are you to minister to current or former SDAs? \*

1 2 3 4 5

Not motivated at all

☐☐☐☐☐

Highly motivated

Submit

Clear form

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## APPENDIX C

## PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FLYER

# Research Participants Needed

## Training on How to Minister Effectively to Seventh-day Adventists

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a member of the Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day?
- Are you interested in learning how to minister to Seventh-day Adventists?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to equip you to better understand SDA history and doctrines, enabling you to minister with greater effectiveness to current and former SDAs.

Participants will be asked to:

- Attend an informational kickoff meeting with an opportunity for Q&A (1 hour)
- Complete a pre- and post-project online survey (15 minutes)
- Complete a pre- and post-project interview (30 minutes)
- Participate in seven training sessions on Zoom (1 hour each)
- Study training materials prior to each class (1 hour)
- Attend a wrap-up meeting at the end of the project (1 hour)

Benefits include being equipped to minister more effectively to current and former SDAs.

If you would like to participate, please contact Pastor Anderson.

A consent document will be given to you at the kickoff meeting. Dirk Anderson, a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Pre-Interview Questions

1. What is your familiarity with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC)?
2. How do SDAs or SDA doctrines impact your life, if at all?
3. From your experience, can you share how a person's beliefs can impact how they conduct their lives?
4. From your experience, how can a person's beliefs impact how they relate to or view people outside their belief system?
5. Why do you think studying the SDAC and increasing your knowledge of the sect is important?
6. Or do you feel a need to minister to current or former SDAs? If so, would you describe it as a weak desire, a strong desire, a burning passion, or in some other way?
7. What do you think is fueling your desire to minister to current or former SDAs?
8. How do you feel about a "remnant eschatology" (i.e., the idea that only one group of Christians have "the truth" for the last days and all other Christians will be lost unless they convert to that truth)?
9. What do you think about SDA prophetess Ellen G. White?
10. What is your understanding of the SDA doctrine of the "investigative judgment" or the atonement?
11. Do you feel that health teachings are a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, why? If not, why not?
12. What do you know about the official SDA stance on abortion?
13. Can you describe what you think the Bible teaches about abortion?
14. Why do you think you are able, or unable, to defend what you believe about the Bible?
15. Why do you think it is important, or unimportant, to dialogue with SDAs or former SDAs about their doctrines?

16. How would you feel if you could minister to an unchurched SDA or former SDA and bring them into a church fellowship?
17. Today, what resources would you turn to acquire the information you need to minister to SDAs?
18. How do you feel about engaging in discussions with SDAs?
19. What, if anything, makes you feel reluctant, intimidated, or nervous to dialogue with SDAs?
20. What would make you feel more comfortable, relaxed, or confident in dialoguing with SDAs?
21. How would you describe your level of willingness to engage SDAs in a biblical discussion?
22. Have you had any prior interactions with SDAs? If so, describe any positive or negative experiences that stand out to you.
23. What do you hope to learn or gain from this research?

#### Post-Interview Questions

1. After this training, how would you describe your level of preparedness to dialogue with SDAs or former SDAs about their doctrines?
2. Now, what do you think about SDA prophetess Ellen G. White?
3. What do you think about the SDA doctrine of the Investigative Judgment or two-phase atonement?
4. Do you feel that health teachings are a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. What do you know now about the official SDA stance on abortion?
6. How would you describe your willingness to engage SDAs in a biblical discussion?
7. Now that you have completed the training, are you more confident in your interactions with SDAs because of what you learned?
8. Did you have any doctrinal discussions with SDAs or former SDAs after you started or completed the training? If so, please describe how those went.
9. What could be done to improve the quality, content, or effectiveness of this training?

10. Did you gain what you hoped you would from this training? If so, why do you feel that way? If not, why do you feel you did not gain what you expected?

## APPENDIX E

### CURRICULUM

#### **Lesson 1 – History of the SDA Denomination and the Importance of Sound Doctrine**

##### **OUTCOMES**

- Understand the origin of the SDA denomination
- Understand how early Adventists intersected with the Church of God (seventh day)
- Understand the importance of not deviating from the pure doctrine of Christ

##### **STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENT**

<https://www.adventist.org/who-are-seventh-day-adventists/history-of-seventh-day-adventists/>

[https://cog7jax.org/Differences\\_between\\_COG7\\_and\\_SDA.html](https://cog7jax.org/Differences_between_COG7_and_SDA.html)

##### **LECTURE TOPIC INTRODUCTION**

In the early 1840s, a man named William Miller preached that the return of Christ was imminent. He based this upon calculations that he made from Bible prophecies found in the book of Daniel and elsewhere. As many as 50,000 people joined what became known as the Millerite movement. Three of those people would later become the founders of the SDA denomination: Ellen Harmon, James White, and Joseph Bates. The Millerites eventually settled upon a date when they expected Christ to return: October 22, 1844. Many of the Millerites were severely disappointed when this date passed without incident. After the failure, Miller admitted he was mistaken, and the group dissipated relatively quickly. The vast majority returned to their prior churches. Some gave up faith in God altogether. Some were committed to mental institutions. A small group decided to remain separate. These began studying their Bibles, looking for some understanding of how they were mistaken. During this thorough search of the Bible, they adopted two unique beliefs:

- 1) Souls that die are not sent immediately to heaven or hell but exist in an unconscious state until the resurrection (soul sleep).
- 2) The wicked are destroyed in hellfire (annihilationism).

Joseph Bates began advocating the doctrine of keeping the seventh day Sabbath. He had adopted this doctrine from the Seventh Day Baptists. The Adventist group rejected the Sabbath, and some years afterward, they officially formed the church body known today as the Advent Christian Church. Meanwhile, Bates and a small group of followers split off from the main Adventist group to form their own group of Sabbath-keeping Adventists. This group adopted Bates' idea



that Sabbath observance was Revelation's Seal of God, and Sunday observance was the Mark of the Beast. Bates set a new date for Christ to return in 1851. He believed God had given the Adventist people seven years to accept or reject the Sabbath doctrine. This was a period of investigative judgment, where Christ determined to whom to apply His blood. Those Adventists who accepted it would receive the Seal of God, and the blood of Jesus would be applied to their sins, thus completing the work of Atonement that began at the cross. This doctrine is known today as the Investigative Judgment, or the two-phase atonement. Bates believed these same people would be translated at the return of Christ in 1851. Those Adventists who kept Sunday would receive the Mark of the Beast, would *not* receive the final phase of the atonement to blot out their sins, and thus their sins remained on the books of heaven, and they would be destroyed in hell fire. All non-Adventists who had rejected Miller's 1844 message were irretrievably lost and could not be saved. Ellen and James White linked up with Bates and eventually adopted his teachings on the Sabbath, the Seal of God, and the Mark of the Beast. Ellen had *visions* supporting Bates' doctrines. The sect was originally known as the "shut door" Adventists because they taught that the door of salvation was shut for all who rejected Miller's message. After 1851, the small sect distanced themselves from the shut door of salvation teaching, and James and Ellen became the most prominent leaders of the sect.

The SDA denomination and the Church of God Seventh Day share some common beliefs since they share a common history from 1853 to 1858. In 1858, Cranmer heard the preaching of Bates. Cranmer later met the Whites. For nearly six years, Cranmer was a minister for the Sabbath-keeping Adventist sect. Although Cranmer adopted the doctrines of the Sabbath, soul sleep, and the annihilation of the wicked in hell, he could not accept their other doctrines, which he believed lacked biblical support. Cranmer refused to preach unbiblical doctrines and rejected the authority of the sect's prophetess, Ellen White. These doctrines will be studied in later lessons.

Cranmer's ongoing doubts about the inspiration of Ellen White's visions caused a rift to develop between Cranmer and the Whites. In the mid-1850s, some Adventists began agitating for belief in Ellen White to be made a requirement for membership in the sect. This was a problem for Cranmer because he regarded Ellen's visions as contradictory to each other and to the Bible. Eventually, this led to his decision to sever his connection with the sect. Cranmer started out on his own to build a Sabbath-keeping church whose foundation was upon the Bible and the Bible alone. He raised up a half dozen churches in the state of Michigan. In the early 1860s, some churches in Iowa also rejected the inspiration of Ellen White and joined with Cranmer to form the Church of God (seventh day). Today, worldwide membership in the various Sabbath-keeping Churches of God is over one million.

The sect led by the Whites was formally organized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1863. Even before its inception, the group was rocked with controversies because of its unusual doctrines and reliance upon the visions and testimonies of Ellen White. Over the last one hundred and seventy years, many SDA leaders and ministers have left the church because of issues with the denomination's doctrines or their reliance upon the authority of Ellen White. In recent years, the departure of members from the denomination has become more pronounced. This reason for this, in part, is because of widely available information on the Internet

discrediting SDA doctrines or Ellen White's authority. Many SDAs are becoming disillusioned with the denomination because of the lack of biblical proof for some of the denomination's doctrines. Many are leaving the denomination. Currently, nearly fifty percent of the membership is leaving the denomination. This is far higher than most churches, and denomination leaders recognize it as a serious problem. Even after they leave the denomination, many of these people continue to hold onto some teachings that they learned while in the denomination, such as the Sabbath. Their continued belief in these doctrines makes it challenging for them to attend any Sunday-observing church with a clear conscience. Thus, many end up unchurched, and their spiritual life is weakened by disconnecting from the body of Christ. Others end up leaving the Christian faith altogether. As believers in Christ, it is important for us to be able to minister to these people.

The history of the SDA denomination is a lesson about the importance of embracing sound doctrine. False teachings cause many problems in the Church of God, including disunity, infighting, a focus on proselytizing other Christians instead of seeking and saving the lost, and spiritual injury. Throughout this course, the emphasis will be placed upon building a foundation for faith in God's Word.

### **INSTRUCTOR-LED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Read and discuss 2 Tim 3:16. What is the rule and standard of faith for Protestant churches?
2. Was "the faith" delivered to the Church of God in the first century? Read Jude 1:3. What does it mean to earnestly contend for the faith?
3. Will there ever come a time in human history when believers will turn away from the truth and adopt fables? Read 2 Tim. 4:2–4.
4. Did Peter have to contend with false teachings in the first-century church? Read 2 Pet. 2:1. Why did Peter call heresies "destructive?"
5. What type of damage does false doctrine do to believers who adopt them? Read Eph. 4:14.
6. Did Paul have to contend with false doctrines in the first-century church? Discuss the issues that Paul faced in the book of Galatians.
7. Does Jesus hate false doctrines? Read Rev. 2:15. Discuss why you think that God hates false doctrines. What kind of harm do they cause the church and individuals?
8. Does the devil create doctrines and attempt to insert them into the Church of God? Read 1. Tim. 4:1.
9. What is the best way for us to ground ourselves so that we will not be deceived by the doctrines of devils? Read 2 Tim. 2:15.

10. Read the parable of the house built on the rock (Matt 7:24–27). What is to be the foundation of the doctrine of the Church of God?
11. What doctrine does the Church of God teach? Read Acts 2:42.
12. Should the ministers of the church pay special attention to this doctrine? Read 1 Tim. 4:16.
13. Should any teaching contrary to the Apostles Doctrine be permitted? Read 1 Tim. 1:3,10.
14. How are believers to treat those who teach contrary to the Apostles' doctrine? Read Rom. 16:17, 1 Tim. 6:3–4, and 2 John 1:10.
15. Could the adoption of false doctrines damage the faith of a believer? Could it cause spiritual decline? Could it cause a person to underachieve what God intends for their life? Could it interfere with the proclamation of the gospel message? Could false doctrines cause disunity and confusion? How else are false doctrines destructive?
16. In your own words, why is it important to maintain the purity of the doctrine of the Church of God?

## Lesson 2 – SDA Remnant Eschatology

### OUTCOMES

- Understand the SDA doctrine on the remnant
- Understand the SDA meaning of the Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast
- Discover the biblical meaning of the Seal of God and the Mark of the Beast
- Understand the SDA meaning of the Spirit of Prophecy and Testimony of Jesus
- Discover the biblical meaning of the Spirit of Prophecy and Testimony of Jesus
- Discover who Christians are to share the gospel with

### STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENT

<https://www.adventist.org/remnant-and-its-mission/>

<https://nonsda.org/study2.shtml>

### LECTURE TOPIC INTRODUCTION

The SDA denomination identifies itself as the remnant church of Bible prophecy. This is based upon their understanding of Revelation 12:17. This verse describes a group that keeps the “commandments of God” and has the “testimony of Jesus.” According to the SDA interpretation of this passage, the “commandments of God” refers to the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20, which include the fourth commandment regarding observance of the seventh day as Sabbath. Thus, the first identifying mark of these people is that they keep the Ten Commandments, and the fourth commandment. This group has a second identifying mark, which is the “testimony of Jesus.” This phrase occurs several times in the book of Revelation, but SDAs point to Revelation 19:10 as being the key to unlock the meaning of “testimony of Jesus.” SDAs teach that Revelation 19:10 explains that the “testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” SDAs argue that the prophetic spirit was manifested in the life and ministry of Ellen White. Her writings are understood to be the “testimony of Jesus.” Therefore, SDAs use these two marks (obedience to all the Ten Commandments and adherence to Ellen White’s “inspired” writings) to identify themselves as the true remnant people of Bible prophecy. According to them, this remnant group will receive the “Seal of God” and be translated at the return of Christ. All others will receive the Mark of the Beast and will be destroyed in hell fire.

Where does this put the Church of God Seventh Day? Are they a part of this remnant? Those churches that keep the Sabbath but do not adhere to Ellen White’s writings do not qualify to be a part of the remnant. Only those who believe in Ellen White’s writings are part of the true remnant.

There are some problems with the SDA doctrine equating Ellen White with the Spirit of Prophecy. According to the Bible, the Spirit of Prophecy is the Holy Spirit—the one who gives

the gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12:10). Ellen White was not the Spirit of Prophecy any more than the Apostle John was the Spirit of Prophecy. Besides that, the angel speaking in Revelation 19:10 told John that the testimony of Jesus was held by John's "brothers and sisters" in the first-century church: "I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus." The Greek word for "have" is *échō* (ἔχω, Strong's G2192) which means to have, hold, own or possess. The imperfective form of the Greek word suggests it is an action that is currently in progress. If people in the first century had this "testimony of Jesus" in their possession, then how could it possibly be Ellen White's writings? If anyone's writings are the Spirit of Prophecy, then it is the writings of the Bible which were God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16).

SDAs teach that observance of the seventh day Sabbath is the Seal of God. The Sabbath was called by Ellen White, "the line of demarcation between the loyal and true and the disloyal and transgressor. ... It is the seal of the living God" (*Selected Messages* Book 3, 423). SDAs teach that all those who do not keep the Sabbath as a day of worship will, prior to the return of Christ, receive the Mark of the Beast. Direct biblical evidence linking the Sabbath to the Seal of God is lacking. To make up for the lack of biblical proof, SDAs use logic. According to SDAs, ancient seals contain the name and title of a ruler and the extent of their domain. They claim that Exodus 20:8–11 contains all these elements. Therefore, the Sabbath is the Seal of God.

A careful study of the Old Testament will reveal that many passages contain the name, title, and dominion of God (Gen. 14:22, 24:3; Deut. 3:24, 4:39, 10:14; Josh. 2:11, 1 Kgs. 8:23; 2 Kgs. 9:15; 2 Chron. 6:14; Isa 37:16, Jer. 32:17; Acts 4:24, 17:24). Why should Exodus 20 be chosen over all the others? The choice is arbitrary. The book of Revelation provides substantial information about the 144,000 who received the Seal of God, but it never mentions anything about them keeping the Sabbath. The biblical evidence in the New Testament suggests the Seal of God is the Holy Spirit, not Sabbath. More on this as we go through the questions later in this study.

Just as Sabbath-observance is the Seal of God, SDAs logically conclude that Sunday observance must be the Mark of the Beast. Once again, there is no biblical proof linking Sunday observance with the Mark of the Beast. It is based purely on speculation.

Because SDAs believe their church to be the remnant church of Bible prophecy, and because they believe all Sunday-keepers will eventually receive the Mark of the Beast and be lost, they spend considerable time and effort in evangelistic efforts aimed at other Christians. One example is Ellen White's book *Great Controversy*. This book teaches SDA remnant theology, the SDA two-phase atonement, the Mark of the Beast as Sunday observance, and the Seal of God as Sabbath observance. It portrays the idea that the SDA denomination is completing the unfinished work of the Protestant Reformation, and that true believers will leave their churches and join the SDA denomination. It is a book written for Christians, with the sole purpose of converting them over to SDA doctrines. In a sermon to a group of SDA workers in Sacramento, California, on August 12, 2011, he talked about how he was going to spend March 24, 2012, passing out *Great Controversy* books in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Their plans were to pass out three million books in that city, and eighteen million throughout the whole South American region. He reported that as of the time of his sermon, 127 million copies of *Great Controversy* had been delivered throughout

the world. This demonstrates that SDAs invest an enormous amount of time, effort, and funds to convert other Christians to their beliefs. These continual efforts create tension between the SDA denomination and other Christian faiths.

### INSTRUCTOR-LED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Jesus say were the “commandments of God?” Read Mark 12:28–30.
2. Did John have the “testimony of Jesus” in the first century? Read Rev. 1:2,9.
3. If John and his brothers and sisters had the “testimony of Jesus” in the first century, then is the “testimony of Jesus” the writings of Ellen White?
4. What is the “testimony of Jesus?” Is the “testimony of Jesus” the recorded prophetic words of Jesus? Or is it the believer’s testimony *about* Jesus?
5. How many Christian faiths are there? Read Eph. 4:5.
6. Should Christians dispute over minor doctrines whose understanding may be in doubt? Read Rom. 14:1.
7. Should Christians dispute over what day to worship upon? Read Rom. 14:5–6a.
8. Should Christians dispute with one another over the law? Read Titus 3:9. What should be done with one who likes to contend over the law? Read Titus 3:10–11.
9. How does the Bible describe the use of a seal? Read Esther 8:8.
10. Was Jesus sealed? Read John 6:27.
11. How was Jesus sealed? Read John 3:34.
12. How does Paul describe the work of the Holy Spirit? Read 2 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13, 4:30.
13. How does one know that an orange tree is *really* an orange tree? How does one tell if someone is *really* a believer in Christ?
14. SDAs spend considerable effort targeting their evangelism at other Christian faiths. Is this time well spent? Could it distract from the church’s goal of converting sinners by taking the gospel into all the world?
15. Does the SDA stance on having the “truth” place them in a position of contention with other churches? Is this good? Or bad? Why?

16. If the SDA church teaches one set of doctrines, and Evangelical churches teach another set of doctrines, does it cause confusion in the Church of God over which doctrines are right and which are wrong?
17. What is the biblical way of evangelism? Is it to convince other Christians that our set of doctrines is superior to theirs? Or is it to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10)?

### Lesson 3 – Ellen G. White: A True or a False Prophet?

#### OUTCOMES

- Discover the seven biblical tests used to identify true and false prophets
- Evaluate if Ellen White passes the biblical tests of a prophet
- Understand what could account for the physical manifestations in her *visions*
- Understand the danger of adding to the inspired Word
- Understand the authority of Ellen White in the SDA denomination

#### STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENT

<https://whiteestate.org/about/egwbio/>

[https://www.nonsda.org/egw/exhibits/Prophet\\_or\\_Pretender.pdf](https://www.nonsda.org/egw/exhibits/Prophet_or_Pretender.pdf)

#### LECTURE TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Ellen G. White was one of the three founders of the SDA denomination, along with her husband James, and their friend Joseph Bates. Although initially treated with some doubt and suspicion, Ellen White eventually came to be held in high regard by many SDAs. The SDA denomination considers Ellen White to be a prophet of God, inspired in a manner like that of the Old Testament prophets. According to them, she received visions from God and had conversations with angelic visitors. She claimed to receive her first vision when she was seventeen years old. The denomination teaches that her visions, dreams, and other inspired communications were written down by her to guide the remnant church through the last days of earth's history. Mrs. White was a prolific writer and left behind tens of thousands of pages of writing. SDAs view her writings as an authoritative source of truth, though not exactly on the same par as the Bible. The Bible is honored as the final authority, but many in the denomination interpret the Bible through the lens of Ellen White. She is viewed by some within the denomination as the infallible interpreter of the Bible. They look to her for guidance on a wide variety of spiritual subjects and other subjects such as physical and mental health.

Many who have left the SDA denomination have done so after concluding that Ellen White was not a true prophet. From the earliest days when the Whites began promoting Ellen's visions through to the present time, many have been critical of the content and accuracy of her visions. Mrs. White responded to her critics by claiming they that if they rejected her, they were rejecting "light from heaven." She placed her critics under the banner of Satan. Critics contend that Ellen's visions contradict known historical facts, contradict science, contradict the Bible, and even contradict themselves. They claim that some of the visions contain falsehoods that can be proven to be false. They claim that she failed the seven biblical tests of a prophet. They claim that if one attempts to follow all the rules she wrote, then they will end up in a legalistic quagmire. They claim that many of her health instructions were extreme, even for her own era.



In fact, she did not always follow some of the requirements she made for others, such as vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol. Finally, critics claim that she copied vast amounts of her writings from other Christian authors without giving them the credit they deserved. Because of these reasons, they reject Ellen White's claim of being a prophet. The SDA denomination is well aware of the problems with Ellen White. Still, it is difficult for them to acknowledge criticisms because their whole philosophy of being the remnant church of Revelation hinges upon them having a real prophet.

Many find it hard to believe that Ellen White was a false prophet because unusual physical signs were reported in a few of her earliest visions. These signs included seemingly not breathing, not sensing those around her, and her body being in a rigid state. People witnessing these signs had no explanation for them other than a supernatural act of God. However, as the medical field advanced over the next decades, it was discovered that people with catalepsy, hysteria, and temporal lobe epilepsy exhibited these same symptoms. These cases were well documented in medical journals. In fact, in her later years, her doctors diagnosed her as having catalepsy or hysteria. There are five theories about the cause of her visions, or some would say hallucinations:

- 1) Her health problems caused them. Many believe she had medical issues which resulted in periods of catalepsy or epilepsy. These problems may have been exacerbated by mercury poisoning in her childhood—her father was a hatter who used mercury in the preparation of the hats he made in the Harmon home.
- 2) Her visions were the product of mesmerism, which is a form of hypnotism. Mesmerism was popular at that time, and many victims of mesmerism exhibited the same symptoms as she did.
- 3) Her visions were the result of her involvement in events with a high degree of emotional and religious fervor. After the fervor of the early years died down, she stopped having visions.
- 4) Her visions were from the devil. The main reason for this is that she spoke of having a spirit guide.
- 5) Her visions were a pure fabrication. Some believe she fabricated visions on demand to support her husband's doctrinal positions or business ventures. Interestingly, most of the visions supported the leading men around her at the time. The truth may never be fully known, but it is likely a combination of some of the five reasons mentioned.

Gilbert Cranmer, the founder of the Church of God (seventh day) was associated briefly with the Whites in the mid-1850s. He rejected the inspiration of Ellen White. He claimed to have personally been familiar with a vision in which she claimed that those who rejected William Miller's 1844 message about the imminent return of Christ had the door of salvation shut to them. Cranmer rejected this idea, regarded it as a false teaching, and he refused to teach that doctrine to others. When belief in Ellen White's visions became a test of fellowship among the Sabbath-keeping Adventists in the 1850s and 1860s, Cranmer and many others left the SDA denomination to take their stand upon the Bible and the Bible alone.

## **INSTRUCTOR-LED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Who did God speak through in times past? Read Hebrews 1:1. Who does God speak through in the New Testament era? Read Hebrews 2:2.

2. What did Jesus warn about prophets? Read Matt. 7:15.
3. What did Jesus say would happen in the last days? Read Matt. 24:11,24.
4. What are we to do when we hear prophecies? Read 1 Thess. 5:20–21.
5. What does Paul mean when he says to “test all things” (1 Thess. 5:21)? Must effort be expended to uncover the truth about prophecies? Should prophecies be accepted merely because someone appears prophetic?
6. Do supernatural signs and wonders prove a person to be a true prophet? Read Exod. 7:8–10, 2 Thess. 2:9, Rev. 16:14.
7. Many prophets claim that Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared to them with a message for the world. Should we trust someone who says a being appeared to them?
8. What did John say about prophets in 1 John 4:1?
9. How do we know if Muhammad was a false prophet? What about the Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith? What about the Christian Science prophet Mary Eddy Baker? How can we determine whether or not a person is a true prophet? What are the criteria?
10. What are the seven biblical tests of a prophet? Discuss whether or not Ellen White passed each of these biblical tests:
  - a. Deut. 18:22
  - b. Jer. 23:22
  - c. Jer. 23:25,30
  - d. Isa. 8:20
  - e. Matt. 7:15–16
  - f. 1 Cor. 14:3
  - g. 1 Cor. 14:37
11. Why or why not should 2 John 1:7 be added to the list?
12. Is it dangerous to add to the Word of God? Read Deut. 4:2, Rev. 22:18.
13. What is the danger of believing in a false prophet? Can it cause spiritual harm or other harm? In what ways?
14. What was the result of people believing in the false prophet Jim Jones?
15. Does the Bible contain sufficient truth for those living in the last days of Earth’s history? Is another set of authoritative writings required? Read 2 Tim. 3:16.

16. Was “the faith” delivered to the saints in the first century? If so, does it need to be revised in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Read Jude 1:3.
17. Ellen White’s writings have been called a “lesser light” that points to the “greater light” (the Bible). Does one need a flashlight to locate the sun? Explain.

## Lesson 4 – The Two-Phase Atonement

### OUTCOMES

- Understand the SDA doctrine of the two-phase atonement
- Discover the biblical meaning of the cleansing of the sanctuary in . 8:14
- Understand the fallacies of the Investigative Judgment doctrine
- Recognize that believers can have the assurance of eternal life

### STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENT

<https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1959/02/the-atonement-in-adventist-theology>

<https://www.lifeassuranceministries.org/proclamation/2014/3/investigativejud.html>

<https://blog.lifeassuranceministries.org/2022/11/17/no-reason-to-exist-without-the-central-pillar/>

### LECTURE TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Most Christians believe that the atonement was completed at the cross. SDAs split up the atonement of Christ into two phases. According to them, the first phase occurred when Jesus died on the cross. At that time, Christ's death made *provisional* atonement for the sins of the believers. However, it was not yet made effective for everyone. According to SDAs, a second phase of the atonement began on October 22, 1844. On that date, Jesus began what they term as an Investigative Judgment. They believe Christ is investigating each believer's righteousness, starting at Adam, and progressing through human history until he reaches those who are currently living. In this Investigative Judgment, God examines individual actions and words and then decides if a person is worthy of receiving the *applied* atonement. If deemed worthy, then that individual has the merits of Jesus' atonement applied to them and their sins are blotted out. If that person happens to alive when the Investigative Judgment reaches their name, and if they are obedient to the Sabbath commandment, then they are sealed in the forehead with the Seal of God. On the other hand, those who are found to be unworthy during the Investigative Judgment will have their names blotted out of the Book of Life. Their sins remain on the books, and they will pay for their own sins in the lake of fire.

Ever since its inception, the two-phase atonement has been a source of constant consternation for SDA ministers and scholars. There is no solid biblical proof of it, and thus, proof for this doctrine must be supplied from the authoritative writings of Ellen White. The doctrine was originally concocted to explain to the world that something important actually did happen on October 22, 1844. On that date, instead of coming to the earth, Jesus moved from the Holy Place to the Most Holy place in heaven to begin the process of the Investigative Judgment. However, it is unclear why God needs so much time to ascertain who is saved and who is lost. Those that originated this doctrine in the 1840s did so not because they discovered any strong biblical proof

of it, but because it allowed them to claim there was some purpose in William Miller's time-setting debacle. Eventually, those who originally formulated the doctrine recognized it was untenable from Scripture, so they abandoned it. However, shortly after the doctrine was first espoused, Ellen White endorsed it. She reportedly had visions validating the doctrine. Thus, SDAs are stuck in a difficult position. If they were to admit that the doctrine is without merit, it would indicate that Mrs. White's visions were false. If Mrs. White's visions were wrong, she was a false prophet, which means the SDA denomination would lose one of its identifying marks. Since they cannot easily discard the doctrine, SDAs continue to teach it, even though it remains highly controversial.

The doctrine places SDA believers in a difficult position. They can never have the assurance that they are saved, because they are not sure if Christ has gotten to their case yet. Furthermore, Ellen White wrote that only those without spot or wrinkle would pass the Investigative Judgment. This high standard places a lot of pressure to perform well so they can earn Christ's approval. Many go through life with a constant dread and fear that they will fail to make the cut during the Investigative Judgment.

Perhaps no other doctrine has come under so much criticism, from within and without the SDA denomination. A substantial number of prominent ministers have taken a stand against this doctrine and many have been defrocked. It remains an explosive issue within the denomination. Many within the denomination regard it as unbiblical and a detriment to the denomination. Traditionalists argue for the belief, citing the authority of Ellen White as proof enough that the doctrine is valid.

Gilbert Cranmer, the founder of the Church of God (seventh day), rejected the idea of a two-phase atonement. He taught what the Bible teaches, that the atonement was completed at the cross. He believed the second phase of the atonement was created to explain away the failure of 1844 and that the doctrine has no basis in fact. In the 1950s, Evangelical scholar Walter Martin held a series of meetings with the leaders of the SDA denomination. He pressed strongly for them to discard the two-phase atonement. For a period of time, the denomination appeared to back away from the two-phase atonement, at least in discussions with Martin. In a document produced after those meetings, called *Questions on Doctrine*, it is claimed that the atonement was completed at the cross. Despite this admission, the denomination has never fully repudiated the doctrine. To do so would irretrievably damage the credibility of Ellen White. Rather than try to resolve the issue, the denomination remains divided. Meanwhile, the doctrine continues to be taught in SDA churches, schools, and in their literature.

## **INSTRUCTOR-LED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Was the atonement completed at the cross? Read John 19:30, Heb. 10:12–14, Rom. 5:9.
2. Did Jesus fulfill all of the types of the Day of Atonement at His ascension? Did Jesus ratify the New Covenant upon His ascension? Read Hebrews 9:11–14. Did Christ enter the Most

Holy Place after His ascension? Read Hebrews 9:23–24. If so, was there any work remaining for Him to do in the Most Holy Place in 1844?

3. Was the atonement already received by believers living in the first century? Read Rom. 5:11, 3:23–25.
4. From what is the Sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 being cleansed? The sins of the saints? Or the pollution of Antiochus Epiphanes?
5. Is Revelation 14:1–12 a description of the final judgment? Or an Investigative Judgment?
6. Does God *really* need to investigate to discover if His children are worthy? Read John 2:24, 6:64, 10:14, and 2 Tim 2:19.
7. Does God *really* need to investigate the lives of believers for hundreds of years to determine who will be saved? Explain why or why not.
8. When are transgressions blotted out? Read Isa. 44:22, Acts 3:19, 1 John 1:7.
9. When does a believer's eternal life begin? John 5:24, 1 John 3:14.
10. Does the Bible say that any of the cases of the righteous have been decided?
  - a. Thief on the cross: Luke 23:43
  - b. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: Rom. 4:2–5, Mat. 8:11
  - c. Enoch: Gen. 5:24
  - d. Moses: Jude 9
  - e. Elijah: 1 Kings 2:11
11. How does this doctrine rob a believer of their assurance of salvation?
12. How does Antiochus Epiphanes fulfill Daniel 8:13–14?

Note: Supplemental reading on this subject: <https://nonsda.org/study6.shtml>

## Lesson 5 – SDA Health Teachings

### OUTCOMES

- Learn about the SDA health message
- Evaluate whether the SDA health message is biblically accurate
- Learn if believers should make the kingdom about “meat and drink”

### STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENT

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-26/why-seventh-day-adventists-advocate-a-vegetarian-diet/12485284>

<https://nonsda.org/study11.shtml>

### LECTURE TOPIC INTRODUCTION

One of the unique aspects of the mid-1800s was an emphasis by Christians on health reform. This likely began in the 1700s as John Wesley had a sincere interest in health reform and taught it in the Methodist denomination. Joseph Bates practiced health reform. He did not use tobacco, alcohol, tea, or coffee. In the 1840s and 1850s, Christian health reformers toured the nation, touting health reforms, and warning against tobacco, alcohol, meat, spices, and condiments. Some of the more well-known reformers include Sylvester Graham, William Alcott, and Florence Nightingale.

Although raised in the Methodist denomination, Ellen White showed little interest in health reform in her younger years, despite her frequent illnesses. In the mid-1860s, after the death of one of their children, the Whites became much more interested in health reform. In 1864, the Whites visited the Dansville Clinic run by Dr. Caleb Jackson. Jackson advised against tobacco, alcohol, meat, and condiments. He advocated fresh air, vegetarian food, drinking pure water, getting natural sunlight, not wearing restrictive clothing, exercising, getting good sleep, and living stress-free. After visiting the Dansville sanitarium and reading the writings of popular health lecturers, Ellen began having “visions” about health reforms. Curiously, these “visions” contained the same health reforms that were being popularized by the authors she was reading from. Ellen White incorporated the teachings of other health reformers into a health message for the SDA people. The teachings she appropriated from others include some that have been proven to benefit health, like cessation of smoking. They also include many that science has shown have no negative impact on health, such as drinking tea.

Over the next several decades, the SDA denomination made health reform a part of their “gospel” message and admonished their members to adhere to Ellen’s reforms. Like many other health reformers of her era, Ellen advocated a vegetarian diet of vegetables, fruits, grains, and

nuts. She proscribed limited use of spices, sugar, salt, and condiments. She forbade the drinking of tea, coffee, and alcoholic beverages, along with using any form of tobacco.

Modern SDAs have been the subject of lifestyle studies to determine if their diet improved their longevity or reduced their chances of developing diseases. The evidence has been mixed. While SDAs in California outlive the average Californian by around a decade, it is uncertain what factors are involved. For example, Mormons also outlive their neighbors by nearly a decade, and yet they are not vegetarians. For Christians who do not smoke, do not drink heavily, and attend church regularly, there is little life-span difference between them and SDAs.

The main focal point of the SDA health message is vegetarianism. Ellen, along with other health reformers of her day, thought that eating meat would somehow make a person more animalistic. She went so far as to say that those preparing for translation should stop eating meat (*Counsels on Diets and Foods*, 63–64). Her restrictions on eating meat directly contradict the Bible teachings on that subject (1 Tim. 4:1–4).

## INSTRUCTOR-LED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it a “doctrine of the devil” to forbid believers from eating meat? Read 1 Tim. 4:1–4. How did Paul say that a believer should receive meat?
2. Did Jesus feed people meat? Read Matt. 14:17–19, 15:34–36, and John 21:9. Would Jesus feed people with something that was morally harmful to them?
3. Did Jesus eat lamb? Read Luke 22:15. Note: The traditional Passover meal required the eating of a lamb, per the instructions found in the Old Testament (Exodus 12).
4. Did Jesus teach that what goes into the stomach can defile a person? Read Mark 7:18–19. What is the significance of Mark’s comment about Jesus declaring “all” foods clean?
5. Was it Daniel’s normal practice to eat meat and drink wine? Read Dan. 10:3.
6. Did the wise king Solomon eat meat? Read 1 Kings 4:22–23.
7. Did God feed Elijah with meat? Read 1 Kings 17:6. Would God feed his prophet something that would harm him?
8. Were the Hebrew priests provided meat to eat? Read Exod. 29:32, Lev. 2:3,10, Deut. 18:3.
9. Was meat a part of Abraham’s diet? Read Gen. 18:8.
10. If Jesus and nearly all the holy men in the Bible, including prophets and priests, ate meat, then is it *really* wrong to eat meat? If eating meat was spiritually harmful, why would God not forbid it in His Word?



11. Did Jesus drink wine? Read Matt. 11:19.
12. Did Pastor Timothy drink a little wine? Read 1 Tim. 5:23.
13. If Jesus and Timothy drank a little wine, then is it wrong for a believer with self-control to follow their example and walk in their footsteps?
14. Is the kingdom of heaven about meat and drink? Read Rom. 14:17.
15. Should Christians make the kingdom, or the gospel, about meat and drink when Paul said otherwise? Why or why not?
16. What happens when we make the kingdom of God about something other than what Jesus made it?

## Lesson 6 – Abortion

### OUTCOMES

- Discover the biblical truth about abortion
- Learn how the SDA teaching on abortion differs from the Bible

### STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENT

<https://spectrummagazine.org/system/files/journal/47-3-spectrum-magazine.pdf> (pages 35–43)

### LECTURE TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Ellen and James White were pro-life, as were many of the early SDAs. SDA hospitals did not even permit abortions to take place in their facilities until 1970. In the early 1970s, SDA hospitals asked the denomination's leaders for permission to perform abortions in their facilities to compete with other hospitals offering such services. Permission was granted, and the SDA denomination began shifting away from a pro-life stance to more of a neutral stance on abortion. They allowed their hospitals to perform abortions, but only under certain guidelines. Elective abortions were discouraged, although they were permitted. After this policy change was implemented in SDA hospitals, there were some SDA nurses and doctors who were assigned to perform abortions and found the experience to be deeply disturbing, violating every principle of their conscience.

Members of the SDA denomination frequently espouse eating unclean meats and abstaining from alcoholic beverages and coffee under the assumption that it is bad for the human body. They often cite 1 Corinthians 6:19 which speaks of the body as the temple of the Holy Ghost. They are hesitant to drink a cup of coffee because that could possibly pollute their soul temple. However, they allow doctors to enter the womb and commit murder in the "temple of the Holy Ghost." It seems ironic that a denomination so intent on keeping their bodies free from impurity, and so intent on obeying the Ten Commandments, would allow their people to transgress the Sixth Commandment. It should be noted that there is considerable division upon this subject within the denomination.

Interestingly enough, although claiming to believe in the authority of Ellen White, and while claiming to believe in the Bible, the SDA denomination has pursued a course that is contrary to both the Bible and Ellen White's counsel. The SDA denomination is one of the few Evangelical denominations that has refused to speak out strongly against abortion. Furthermore, they allow abortions in church-owned health institutions and abortions are practiced in facilities owned by SDA members.

**INSTRUCTOR-LED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. In whose image is a baby made? Read Gen. 1:27.
2. Who forms the baby in the womb? Is it the parents? Or is it God? Read Psalm 119:73, 139:13–16, Job 10:11–12, 31:15.
3. Was Isaiah formed in the womb by God? Read Isa. 44:24
4. Was Jeremiah formed in the womb by God? Read Jer. 1:5. Was he called by God even before his birth?
5. Was Isaiah called before his birth? Read Isa. 49:1.
6. Did the Holy Spirit fill John the Baptist while he was in the womb? Read Luke 1:15.
7. Is it wrong to murder the innocent? Read Exod. 20:13, 23:7.
8. What does God hate? Read Prov. 6:17.
9. Are believers under obligation to help those being killed? Read Prov. 24:11–12.
10. What did Jesus come to bring? What does the thief (Satan and his followers) do? Read John 10:10.
11. Is it okay to permit abortion so long as the church can make a profit from it? Do not the “ends justify the means?”
12. What kind of religious people ignore justice for the weak? Read Matthew 23:23.

## Lesson 7 – Ministering to SDAs

### OUTCOMES

- Understand the motivation and reward for sharing biblical truth with SDAs
- Practice to gain confidence in sharing biblical truth

### STUDENT READING ASSIGNMENT

<https://zoella.co.uk/2021/07/26/i-was-in-a-cult-we-spoke-to-x-people-have-left-a-cult-like-organisation/> (read the story of Emily)

### LECTURE TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Many SDAs live typical Christian lives. Other than attending church on Saturday, one cannot discern much difference between them and other Christians. However, this is not always the case. Many of them experience varying degrees of trauma in the SDA denomination:

- Some follow the rules of Ellen White with such rigidity that it takes much of the enjoyment out of their life. Their rigidity can make them difficult to live with.
- Some separate themselves from non-SDA family members and friends and lose those valuable relationships.
- Others leave the denomination, and then find that their former SDA colleagues no longer want to associate with them because they are “under the banner of Satan.”
- Others spend an inordinate amount of effort trying to convert other Christians to SDA doctrines rather than seeking and saving the lost.
- For some, the SDA diet has harmed their health. The vegan diet left them weakened and without the proper nutrients for growth and development.
- For others, the two-phase atonement, with its lack of assurance has left them feeling constantly in fear of their salvation. The stress over whether they are perfect enough to stand in the last days without an Intercessor.
- Some women abort their children in SDA hospitals and then later regret it deeply.

There are many hurting SDAs and former SDAs who do not know there is a better way: The biblical way. That is where we can be the hands and feet of Jesus. We can minister to SDAs and share with them the biblical truths that will help them to lay aside false doctrines and commandments of men so that they can grow in spirit and in truth.

This evening we will be doing role-playing exercises in which one person will take on the role of an SDA or former SDA, and the other person will take on the role of a member of the JCOG7D.

This will provide us with an opportunity to practice the skills that we've been learning for the last six weeks. The SDA actor will start first, and then the JCOG7D actor will respond. Make sure your responses are made in a kind and gentle manner. Who would like to go first?

### **INSTRUCTOR-LED ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISES**

1. SDA actor: Will try to convince the non-SDA actor that the SDA denomination is the one and only remnant church of Bible prophecy.  
JCOG7D actor: How would you respond to this? Make sure and provide Bible verses.
2. SDA actor: Will try to convince the non-SDA actor that Ellen White is an authoritative prophet whose writings should be followed.  
JCOG7D actor: How would you respond to this? Make sure and provide Bible verses.
3. SDA actor: Will try to convince the non-SDA actor that the Bible teaches a two-phase atonement.  
JCOG7D actor: How would you respond to this? Make sure and provide Bible verses.
4. SDA actor: Will try to convince the non-SDA actor that the gospel message includes a health doctrine about vegetarianism.  
JCOG7D actor: How would you respond to this? Make sure and provide Bible verses.
5. SDA actor: Will try to convince the non-SDA actor that the Bible permits abortions.  
JCOG7D actor: How would you respond to this? Make sure and provide Bible verses.

Note: After each exercise, the instructor will ask the participants and the others in the audience to provide feedback and suggestions.

APPENDIX F  
PERMISSION LETTER

February 3, 2023

Church Board  
Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day

Dear Board Member,

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctor of ministry degree. The title of my research project is Implementing a Training Curriculum on Ministering to Seventh-day Adventists at the Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day in Jacksonville, FL, and the purpose of my research is to implement training to equip Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day members to communicate biblical truth to the local SDA community.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at the Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day facility and to use the church's Zoom service to facilitate the research training sessions. I am requesting that the church underwrite any expenses incurred during this study.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey before and after the training, complete a pre-training and post-training interview, and attend a kick-off meeting, seven training sessions, and a wrap-up meeting. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Dirk Anderson  
Pastor

## APPENDIX G

## DIALOGUE FOR INITIAL KICK-OFF MEETING

Thank you so much for participating in this research project. This project is a part of the coursework I am doing to obtain a doctor of ministry degree from Liberty University. The purpose of this project is to provide training that will equip you, the congregation's members, to better understand Seventh-day Adventism and the doctrines of that denomination. One intended benefit of this project is to increase your comfort level in discussing biblical truths with SDAs and former SDAs. No matter what level of knowledge you have of Seventh-day Adventism, this training will allow you to be better equipped to give SDAs a biblical answer for your faith.

As you may have heard, many SDAs are leaving the denomination. Nearly one out of every two that join the denomination eventually leave it. Sadly, many of these people end up unchurched. As a result of being unchurched, some of them struggling spiritually. This training will empower you to share the biblical truth with former SDAs in an effective way. After this training, it is expected that you will have the tools needed to engage unchurched former SDA individuals and bringing them into the Church of God, where they can find fellowship and grow to the stature of Christ. I need each of you to make a personal commitment of time over the next ten weeks. Let me share my expectations with you:

- 1) You will be required to complete opening and closing surveys. These will be done online and take approximately fifteen minutes. If you do not have a computer or phone, then I will assist you. It is critical that you be as accurate and honest as possible in answering these surveys.
- 2) You will be required to participate in thirty-minute opening and closing interviews. These will occur either over the phone or in person at the church. It is critical that you be candid and truthful in all your responses.
- 3) You will be required to attend seven one-hour training sessions, which will take place on Tuesday evenings at 7:30 p.m. These meetings will take place on Zoom.
- 4) You will be required to study the next lesson's material prior to each training session. The training material will always be provided one week in advance so that you will have a week to review the material. You will need to come to class knowledgeable of the subject and ready to discuss the subject in class. The training material will be provided to you weekly via email, or in printed form for those who do not have access to email. The material will be provided in English but can be translated into Spanish by request.
- 5) We will have a wrap-up meeting at the end of the training. In that meeting, I will share the research results with you, and you can share any lessons learned and ideas for improvement with me.

You are free to drop out from the project at any time, but I urge all who start this project to carry it forward to completion. I am telling you the time requirements upfront so you can plan your schedules accordingly. If any of you cannot commit to that level of involvement, please tell me

now so we can select another participant who can make that commitment. I know this is asking a lot, but I believe this training will help you to be a better gospel minister and will be a blessing to you. I believe that ultimately it will result in unchurched souls being brought into our fellowship. Once again, I thank you ahead of time for your diligent participation in this research. Now, let's have a question-and-answer time.



## APPENDIX H

### INTERVIEW RESPONSES

#### Pre-Interview Responses

1. What is your familiarity with the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDAC)?

Haven't heard about it.

I attended the SDAC for about 4 years. At one church I was a deacon.

I attended SDA services from time to time when I was growing up. We had SDA friends. I went to vacation Bible school as a child. My dad knew other SDA ministers. We did a Revelation study with them. They spent a lot of time in Daniel and Revelation.

I know they believe in the Sabbath. I listen to Doug Bachelor, and I have some of the Amazing Facts books.

Very familiar. I was a member for between three to five years.

Yes, I used to go in Jamaica.

I've read things here and there. I know they keep the Sabbath. I heard Ellen White was a prophetess to them, and she was there in the beginning of the SDAC. Church of God Seventh Day were one for a while and then split. They believe in other things that we do as well, such as soul-sleep. They do not keep the Lord's Supper on Passover.

Yes. I was a member of the SDAC for at least 17 years.

Not a whole lot. Not enough to talk to them.

A guy I worked with was an elder in the SDAC. I attended a children's day program at the SDAC. I met another lady who was an SDA.

I've heard of them and that they keep the Sabbath. That's about it.

2. How do SDAs or SDA doctrines impact your life, if at all?

Not at all.

They impacted my life by challenging me to seek the Word of God even more. A lot of the SDAs that I know they dealt with "present day truth." I studied to be on top of "present day truth."

They do not really impact my life.

Yes, I follow Bachelor and get good information and it is explained from the Bible.

I am impacted by the Sabbath doctrine. I learned about it from the SDAs.

Not really.

No, it hasn't impacted my life at all. When I was in my 20s, I met an SDA, but didn't know much about him. I met one who walked into church once—he used to be a member of the Church of God.

Very much. Knowing I can go to Jesus instead of a priest has impacted my life. I believe I am going to heaven instead of purgatory. Knowing about the soon return of Jesus has impacted my life.

No.

When my mother died at an SDA hospital, the people tried to minister to me. The receptionist shared some of their dietary teachings. I was humbled to learn about nutrition from them.

Not at all.

3. From your experience, can you share how a person's beliefs can impact how they conduct their lives?

Slowly but surely your life aligns with your beliefs.

People generally practice what they believe. If you believe in certain things, you'll follow those things, promote those things. They will order their steps by what they believe.

Their beliefs give them a direction in life. What they pursue in life, what fulfills them, has to do with their doctrinal beliefs.

If you truly believe the Bible is inspired, and if you truly desire to live by his Word, it changes you, and it helps you.

Beliefs govern how you do things. Certain things that you believe you adhere to.

Yes.

My belief system impacts how I live my life.

One example was the Sabbath. The SDAs made me aware of the Sabbath, so that changed my life. I started keeping the Sabbath from Friday night to Saturday night by not doing any work or housework or grocery shopping, and instead I went to church.

Definitely. Whatever you have on the inside will be what you demonstrate on the outside.

Faith should result in good works. Our beliefs should result in us taking action according to what we believe.

What you believe impacts how you go about living your life.

4. From your experience, how can a person's beliefs impact how they relate to or view other people who are outside of their belief system?

It doesn't really change.

I've seen that from many angles. Some people are aggressive towards others with different beliefs. Some believe they are the "remnant church," the ones going to heaven, and I have seen others who have the love of God. Some have beliefs that help them to seek the Bible more.

That depends on their denomination. Some are very exclusive and they do not try to reach out to others. Other denominations try to evangelize other denominations. Some are more inclusive, and others are more exclusive and shun others.

Sometimes it can cause people to be contentious because they like to argue. I believe long ago that God has many flocks. As long as you believe in God and Jesus Christ in your heart that it's true, then if you're a Baptist, I'm not here to judge you.

Hopefully, one of the beliefs is love, so you look at people outside of your beliefs through the eyes of love.

It's hard to change people from what they believe in. They naturally resist change.

Even though we do not believe what other people believe, we practice love and kindness and accept people where they are at. We know where to draw lines and boundaries between us and those who believe differently.

I wanted people outside of the SDAC to learn about the Sabbath.

If they believe in love, they'll understand everyone is not alike. Sometimes it makes people very judgmental. They criticize you or condemn you for not doing the same thing as you do. People can be very disrespectful if you do not imitate them.

Some people are intolerant of others' beliefs. It could lead to persecution. It can also lead you to be a blessing to others.

Yes, unfortunately, what we believe can sometimes make us feel negatively toward people outside of our belief system.

5. Why do you feel it is important to study about the SDAC and increase your knowledge of them?

Good question.

Being a part of leadership, it's always good to be abreast of other religions, because the people you oversee may have questions. So, it would be efficient for you to have the knowledge to be able to direct them in the right direction.

I think there's a lot to be learned from the SDAC. They have done a lot of in-depth study in Daniel and Revelation. Their interpretations were interesting and entertaining. They tried to apply it to today. It was food for thought even though we didn't agree.

We need to study other religions to find out what part is true and what part is not true. The more I study the more I learn. I get my information from more than one source. You take what's good and hold onto it, and what is not you let go.

Because we are a Sabbath-keeping church, and they are as well, and it's good to know the differences, so if I witness to someone who is an SDA I can share where we differ.

I do not really want to study another religion. If you try to study you might give up your faith in your original religion.

It's important because our church has had a close relationship with them. The similarities open the door.

So, I can learn more about SDA doctrines about the Sabbath and the Second Coming.

If you're going to talk to them (not debate with them), it's important to have knowledge.

It's good to study other religions because if you do not stand for something, you'll fall for anything. Comparing helps you to make better decisions.

To know more about them.

6. Do you feel a need to minister to current or former SDAs? If so, would you describe it as a weak desire, a strong desire, a burning passion, or in some other way?

Not right now. I'm not at that point yet.

Yes, over the last couple of years that denomination has drifted off to a lot of secular practices. So being able to minister to them to help them stay on the right track and not get caught up in the world is my desire.

I have a strong desire. My lawyer is an SDA, and we talk about religion on a light level. I have a tepid desire to talk to them.

I feel a desire to minister to everyone. It's not about their religion. It's about me giving out the word. SDAs are just individuals. My desire is strong.

Yes, as the Holy Spirit leads.

Not really. Because you cannot change people from what they believe.

Not a need, not an overwhelming desire, but it would be nice to be able to communicate with people who have similarities without being hateful.

Yes, a strong desire.

I would desire to do that only if I'm equipped. If I'm not equipped, no.

I do not have a desire to minister to them. But if we see an error in someone else's way, if we do not correct a brother or sister then their blood will be on our hands.

Not a strong desire.

7. What do you think is fueling your desire to minister to current or former SDAs?

Nothing.

Because I do not want to see anyone perish.

There is a desire to show them the COG xy has a better interpretation, and the SDA sect is misleading them. To impress upon them that there are other churches more in tune with whole Bible.

Knowing that everyone on this earth needs to hear God's Word.

The Holy Spirit.

I do not have a desire to minister to them.

Being able to talk to someone struggling or searching for a church home. We need the brotherhood of faith.

If they left the SDAC, I would like to understand why, and I would like to encourage them to return to their first love of Jesus.

I want to be able to communicate better with them.

I do not have a desire to minister to them, unless I have something to share with them to make their life better.

If I could help them.

8. How do you feel about "remnant eschatology" (the idea that only one group of Christians have "the truth" for the last days and all other Christians will be lost unless they convert to that truth)?

I'm not too happy about it.

I cannot truly say that I believe that one denomination is the remnant, because when we look at Scripture, you had the Philippian church, the Corinthian church. What separates us is what we believe. Jesus said he had other flocks. I do not think there is one church that is saved.

I think that's somewhat nonsensical. Who's going to say that Mother Teresa won't end up in heaven? Every church has arrogance, ego, and pride, that they are the best and most in tune with God. Churches are jockeying to see who is the best. There is good and bad in all churches. Some are more in tune with the Bible. All churches are part of God's family. God sees us as all disciples, but I do not think you can say that one is better than the others.

I do not think that's true. Jesus said he had many flocks. I do not think there is a single group with true knowledge. I believe he gives individuals knowledge. Moslems think that and want to execute everyone else.

I see that as "man." There is one Bible, one God, one Lord, and baptism, and an enemy that likes to see us divided. There are a lot of churches that say that if you're not with us you're against us.

No, I do not believe so. I think you serve God with your heart, and he will judge your heart.

In the World Wide Church of God that's what I used to believe, but I believe Christ said he had other flocks. Christ will reveal more when he returns. If they believe in Christ, I cannot say they're not part of God.

I do not believe in that.

That's not what Jesus said. I do not think people from other religions will be lost. Jesus is merciful and will prepare a place for every believer who obeys his commandments and lives for him. I do not think it's one set of people.

I believe there is a remnant. The 144,000 is mentioned in Revelation. I do not have a full understanding. If there is such a body who has spirit and truth, then we should see it out.

I do not believe that.

9. What do you think about SDA prophetess Ellen G. White?

Never heard of her.

She was a good pioneer like many of the other pioneers. I would not go as far as to put her in a category above anyone else that God has called. He has granted gifts to all of us. I do like some of things she wrote.

I do not know much about her. It's my understanding she added some things to Scripture that are not biblical. Any time someone does that it's a problem.

I do not know much about her or her doctrine.

I think it's problematic. Psalm 118:8 – Better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. Paul said follow me as I follow Christ. I do not believe in lifting up people because they're fallible.

There are a lot of prophets. Nothing special about her.

I do not know her. I am leery of those who take the title of prophet. I believe she was wise but I do not think she was a prophet.

Nothing.

I think she was a health innovator. I believe she believed herself to be a prophet. She was a highly effective person.

I know nothing about her.

10. What is your understanding of the SDA doctrine of the "investigative judgment"?

None.

I wouldn't rely too much on that. God was judging people way before 1844.

I do not know anything about it.

None.

My understanding is minimal.

I do not know.

No, never heard of it.

I do not believe in the investigative judgment.

I do not know about it.

I have no idea what it is.

Honestly, I do not know anything about it. I look forward to learning about it.

11. Do you feel that health teachings are a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, why? If not, why not?

Not sure.

I wouldn't necessarily say it's part of the gospel, because the gospel is about a spiritual change in a person's life. The gospel is a bridge back to God. The gospel message is to reunite us back to Jesus Christ. You cannot put health restrictions on the gospel. I would say it's part of healthy Christian living.

I think there's something to that. I think if you're taking care of your body as a temple of God, physical health will improve. Eating certain foods won't be a pro or con against your spiritual life. It's not what goes into the body, but what comes out that's important. Living a Christian life means you won't be a drunk, so that will be good for your health.

No, it's not part of the gospel. It's not what goes in a man, but what comes out. I think God created Adam and Eve to be vegetarian. Red meat is not all that good for you.

I think they are. Put a knife to your throat if you're a man given to appetite. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, because it's important to teach about health.

No, the gospel of Jesus Christ is about Jesus. Health teachings in the Bible are there for a good reason. However, the gospel is about salvation and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is not about food and drink.

Yes. Paul said we are to be the temple of the Holy Spirit and be temperate. Adam and Eve ate fruits and vegetables and they lived many years, but there could be other reasons for that. I do not think it's defined in the gospel, but I believe you are what you eat. I do not know if it's part of the gospel. It's more about health than the gospel.

Absolutely. God wants to prosper me and be in good health. Jesus healed people.

No, they're not part of the gospel.

12. What do you know about the official SDA stance on abortion?

Nothing.

The SDA church where I attended—they were against abortion.

I imagine they're anti-abortion, but I could be wrong.

I assume they think they know abortion is not good.

I do not know.

I do not know.

I do not know anything about their stance on abortion.

I thought they believed that they do not believe in abortion.

I do not know what their official stance is.

I do not know. I do not believe in abortion.

I imagine they believe what we believe, that it's murder.

13. Can you describe what you think the Bible teaches about abortion?

That it's not right.

It's murder.

The Bible teaches about life. It doesn't give us the right to take life. Unfortunately, people put themselves in bad situations. Abortion is against everything that God stands for.

It doesn't say a whole lot about it. In the Mosaic law, if a man hurts a pregnant woman, and she loses the baby, the man would have to pay a fine. It isn't the same as killing a person.

I believe God created life to live, but haven't studied it.

I believe it teaches that it's murder.

You cannot take life.

I cannot say, because abortion is not mentioned, but the Bible treats life as important. God knows us from the womb. I believe the Bible is against abortion in principle. For example, do not murder, and Jesus loves little children.

Do not kill is in the commandments of God, so that tells me that abortion is killing a human being.

Thou shalt not kill. That means not to do abortions.

It's murder according to thou shalt not kill.

It's taking a life, which is murder.



14. Do you feel confident to defend the doctrines you believe in? If so, why? If not, why not?

Not sure yet.

Yes. Because I stand behind the truth and I stand with the truth.

Yeah, I do. I feel confident, maybe not competent. That confidence comes from studying the Bible and questioning my beliefs repeatedly in my life.

Oh yes. Because of my life experiences and how Jesus worked in my life.

For the most part, yes. Through reading the Word.

Yes, because if you believe, you must believe in your religion.

Yeah, I feel confident I can defend them, because they are fundamental doctrines from the Bible and original Christianity.

Yes. I know the Bible well enough to defend what I believe.

Yes.

Yes. The things I have conviction on I believe I can defend.

Yes, I feel confident I can defend the tenants of the Christian faith.

15. Why do you think it is important, or unimportant, to dialogue with SDAs or former SDAs about their doctrines?

It's not my business to say what they believe.

I believe it's important because you never know how God will use you to open someone else's eyes. A lot of times, people use the Bible to direct their own agenda. I've listened to SDAs do that. So, I think it's important to show them the Scriptures and let the Bible speak for itself. This is to help them, not to act like you're better than them. That's part of planting seeds.

I think you should always get your belief system right. We want to reach out to others. If your doctrinal beliefs are not correct, you're not going to praise God as you should. We shouldn't have a shallow understanding of Christianity.

It's important to talk to everyone about their doctrines, so that you'll know how they got to that point. I like to talk to them.

I do not have an answer for that.

Teach others. Show others what's in the Bible. We can learn from others.

To make the comparison because how can we refute it if we do not know.

For them to stay in the faith, or come back to the Lord, to stay strong in their faith.

To help them understand the biblical truth versus what they were taught because sometimes you do not understand that the teaching is wrong. Letting them know there's a missing dimension that will open their eyes.

If you can help someone by showing them a more excellent way.

To learn more about them.

16. How would you feel if you could minister to an unchurched SDA or former SDA and bring them into a church fellowship?

I would feel happy about it.

I would rejoice that another soul was brought back home.

I think it would be a great thing. There are people like us who have been convicted in certain ways, they're looking for something. It's great to try and reach out to them.

I would feel all right about that.

Good.

I would feel good about it.

I would feel good about that. It would be a good thing. That would be like snatching one from the fire, or the Prodigal son.

Great!

I would feel good about that.

A wise son wins souls. That's what leading them to membership or a deeper walk with Christ.

Good.

17. Today, if you wanted to acquire information about SDAs, where would you turn to?

Stop at their church and ask.

I would go to the Bible.

Look online. Stop by and attend a church on Sabbath and ask for doctrinal handouts.

I would read their books or watch them TV.

Go to their web site.

I would turn to the Lord.

Pastor Anderson.

The Bible.

The pastor.

I would talk to my pastor. I would also ask those who work in Adventist hospitals.

The Internet.

18. How do you feel about engaging in doctrinal discussions with SDAs?

I'm not there yet.

I feel comfortable.

I've never done it. I do not know enough about the SDAC. I do not think they're far enough away to debate about right or wrong.

I would feel fine talking with them. When I was a Baptist, I sat down and studied with an SDA.

I'm okay with it.

I would pretend I was an SDA and get involved in a discussion.

Hasn't happened yet, but I think I would feel good about it if I'm equipped.

I feel they may reject what I have to say.

I do not know enough in depth to talk to them.

I feel a thousand percent confident. But I do not seek conflicts. I have had experience with tough conversations. I'm not trying to win arguments. I just know Christ and him crucified. I'm used to engaging people with different beliefs.

I'm open to it if it doesn't turn into an argument.

19. What, if anything, makes you feel reluctant, intimidated, or nervous to engage in doctrinal dialogue with SDAs?

Not sure.

I cannot say that anything would intimidate me because I've had many discussions.

Nothing, but perhaps ignorance about the doctrines of their church. It's easier to talk about your own beliefs.

Nothing.

My lack of knowledge.

Not know enough about the differences between us and them.

I cannot think of anything. I'm okay with it. I do not think I would feel intimidated.

I do not like to get into a debate.

I feel reluctant to talk to them since I do not know much about their religion.

Not having current knowledge about their beliefs, and not having a thorough conviction about my own beliefs, how can I defend something I do not believe in?

Not knowing much about their beliefs.

20. What would make you feel more comfortable, relaxed, or confident in dialoguing with SDAs?

Not sure yet.

I already feel comfortable, because I had a lot of discussions.

Knowing more about their doctrine.

I feel confident.

More knowledge, more information.

Learning more and studying about them and their teaching.

More knowledge of our teachings. I want to be equipped.

If they came to me and asked me to have a talk.

Knowing the truth.

Having the right method would make me more confident. Having the Holy Spirit lead.

More knowledge about their beliefs would be helpful.

21. How would you describe your level of willingness to engage SDAs in a biblical discussion?

Slight.

I really want to. I want to be ready give an answer like Peter said.

Definitely willing.

Ten on a scale of ten.

I'm willing.

I am willing if I have the time and the opportunity.

I have a willingness to do that.

Good.

Very willing.

Seven out of ten.

I'm willing.

22. Have you had any prior interactions with SDAs? If so, describe any positive or negative experiences that stand out to you.

No.

For the most part they have been positive, but a few experiences have been negative. The negative ones have been when SDAs will not bend on what they believe. They sometimes will not listen to reason, but I just leave it with God and hope a seed was planted.

There was another SDA family. We were good friends with them. The SDA people were very nice. The prophecy teachings stood out. I think there was an attitude of scaring people about the end of days to get them into the church. It was a gimmick.

I talked with an SDA when I was a Baptist. We would have conversations that made us closer friends.

I was raised as an SDA. I went to church every Sabbath. The greatest thing that I received was going to church as a child and learning memory verses, which helped me later in life. Also, learning the sacredness of the Sabbath was something I could not unlearn.

I knew some SDAs in Jamaica.

No significant interaction.

Yes. I enjoyed worshipping together with SDAs on Sabbath. I heard some SDAs say I am lost because I'm not an active SDA member.

I knew some SDAs that took my mother to their church. They do anything they want during the week and then try to be holy on the Sabbath.

The SDAs let me down because my mother died after her operation in the SDAC.

No, I haven't.

23. What do you hope to learn or gain from this training?

To find out how similar we are.

I hope to broaden my perspective on what I do not know about SDAs, because when a person is in leadership, it's essential to be able to answer questions from church members, and to discuss with SDAs who come into the church. If you can explain on both sides, it gives them more clarity.

More depth on the SDA doctrine. I'm intrigued by what they believe about abortion.

All that I can. I read a variety of books from different organizations. I like to learn and I like history.

I'm hoping to have a better understanding of the doctrine and be able to discern truth from error.

I would like to learn the true facts about the teachings of our church as compared to the SDAC.

Understanding to know what SDAs believe and an increase and confirmation for what I believe.

How to reach out to Adventists and former Adventists.

I hope to gain knowledge so I'll be confident to talk to SDAs or anyone about the true religion.

To be more loving and kinder and encourage others. I want to be equipped for every good work.  
To learn more about their beliefs.

### Post-Interview Responses

1. After this training, how would you describe your level of preparedness to dialogue with SDAs or former SDAs about their doctrines?

Yes, I'm more prepared.

After the seven weeks of studying my level of preparedness is higher regarding what I can explain or defend the faith. Overall, it prepared me to be bolder and more confident in explaining the church of God versus Seventh-day Adventists.

Definitely better. I know a lot more about the church than before, and things to bring up with SDAs as to why they are following that faith.

Fairly well-prepared.

I feel a little more prepared.

I am prepared.

Yes, I feel more prepared.

I feel like I'm much better prepared now than before.

Definitely more prepared.

I feel more prepared now. I like to seek to understand. Now I know more about the background and the dynamics of their doctrines, I feel better prepared.

I think I'm prepared, but might need to gather some reference notes. I know why their beliefs are not right from my perspective.

2. Now, what do you think about SDA prophetess Ellen G. White?

She's a false prophet.

My understanding is sort of the same, although I learned more depth about her background, her teaching, and her methods. Understanding and learning the history left me with the same judgment—I do not know that she is a prophet. She shared some encouraging things here and there.

It sounds like her visions were related to her brain accident. Her visions were obviously not divinely inspired. It seems phony. She may have thought she had visions, but it was probably psychosis related to her accident.

She was misinformed, because her prophecies did not come true.

The same as I thought before. Her writings are extra-biblical. Joseph Smith also brought in something extra. I believe God gave us the Bible, his Holy Word. We cannot stand on anything other than the Word of God.

They're doing their job to make her look like a prophet.

She is a false prophet who was sincerely deceived. I do not know her heart, and I do not want to judge her. She was false, regardless of her motivation.

I see her not as a prophet but as a teacher.

She was a false prophet.

I think she had great intentions. I do not think all her teachings are divinely inspired. Some things she taught were practical, but some things weren't biblically accurate.

I'm highly skeptical. I see she contributed to her church but she's not a prophetess and her doctrines shouldn't guide a church. How much did the accident or her medical condition contribute to her false belief in herself as a prophet?

3. What do you think about the SDA doctrine of the investigative judgment or two-phase atonement?

I have no comment about that one.

My impression of that is it is a false doctrine that I need to be aware of. I try to stay away from stuff like that. You can pick up a bad spirit, so if it's not aligned with the Word of God, it's not for me.

I thought the whole thing was absolutely bizarre. I never heard anything like it. It seemed completely fictional and certainly not biblical. The whole thing was just ridiculous.

I do not believe in that because Jesus Christ paid the price for all mankind. I do not believe in two phases. I understand there will be a phase in the millennium for those who did not know him to learn about him.

I do not agree.

I think it's a true doctrine.

I think it's nonsense. It makes no biblical sense.

I do not think it's biblical after taking this training with Pastor Dirk.

It's a false doctrine.

It sounds cool, but I believe in Christ crucified. I do not think it's a sound doctrine.

I do not believe it. I believe it's a way to explain away the failed 1844 event. It's a version of Santa Claus—not very believable.

4. Do you feel that health teachings are a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ? If so, why? If not, why not?

No, I do not think so.

No, that's not aligned with the gospel of Jesus Christ. I still believe the Bible has health teachings that can show you how to fix health challenges, but it's not a set of rules. The Bible is about edifying and teaching us, but when we set up a bunch of rules, that can be detrimental to your spiritual life.

No, I do not. It's not what goes into the body, it's what comes out of it. The body is a temple, but it doesn't dictate what you can eat and connect that to spirituality. It seems like Ellen White was more restrictive as time went on. Connecting the fad of vegetarianism to spirituality is unbiblical. They take some things too far. It was a fad in the 1800s, and it probably was used to get people into church. I do not think its scriptural.

I think the gospel of Jesus has more to do with the Spirit. He made all things good, so all things we eat are good.

I think yes, I think it's in the Word. Not as far as SDAs go, but God gives us some things in the Word.

Yes.

No, the gospel is about Jesus and salvation. It has nothing to do with food or drink.

No, but they are helpful in staying healthy, such as not eating pork.

No, but it's common sense to eat healthy to live a better life.

That's tough, man. Because if we are submitted to Christ and receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and Spirit says not to eat pork, then I won't. No, the dietary teaching is not part of the gospel, but taking care of the body temple is biblical. The kingdom of heaven is not meat and drink.

No. It's good to provide health resources because our body is a temple of the Holy Ghost, but it's not a salvation issue.

5. What do you know now about the official SDA stance on abortion?

I do not believe in it.

Corporately they speak of pro-life, but at the same time the things being practiced do not align with their belief.



I was depressed about the Adventists doing abortion in hospitals. It seems like the SDAs were folding to society, and evolving the church to the trend of society at the time, subtly changing their stance on abortion. They made their stance very lenient. The idea that some life is more important than other lives is a difficult thing. I do not think the SDAs dealt with this very well, taking the middle.

At first, they were against it, but then they allowed for certain conditions to get an abortion. The only one I would agree with is rape.

I do not agree with it. I understand it better, and my understanding is that life starts at conception.

They think that abortion is right.

I was really surprised. I thought they were like us. I was surprised their hospitals performed abortions. That makes me think this is not a true church.

I knew they were neutral but not to the extent that elective abortions were performed in SDA hospitals.

Abortion is wrong! The Bible states, "Thou shalt not kill."

That's tough, man. I think that they are pro-choice. I'm not sure of their exact stance. I cannot verify where I stand.

I know they're trying to take a middle ground which is pro-choice although not all-out. They seem to support elective abortions.

6. How would you describe your level of willingness to engage SDAs in a biblical discussion?

I'm not ready yet, I'm still trying to get the hang of it.

I'm a little more willing now, because I know a lot of them who talk about present-day truth, the three angel's messages, prophecy, and things of those nation, but at the same time they miss the whole salvation. I would be more willing to bring a focus and attention to what the Bible teaches rather than what they want it to say.

Pretty willing. I feel like I know the background of the church pretty well. There are some issues I could bring up with them. It's interesting to see how the church added to the Bible.

For sharing opinions without arguing and bitterness, I would be willing.

I'm willing to speak with them. I would be willing to talk with those who are leaving or left the SDA church.

60% willing.

I'm willing to stand firm on what the Bible says and defend it. I'm willing to share why I think some of their stands are wrong. I'm willing to have conversations.

I have a positive level of willingness to do that.

I'm more confident.

Seven on a scale of ten. There are a few things I could be more grounded on. If it came up, I do feel more comfortable now.

I'm willing to try if they're willing to engage in an honest discussion.

7. Now that you have completed the training, do you feel more confident in your future interactions with SDAs because of what you learned during the training?

No, because I feel like I need to learn more before I feel confident.

Yes, definitely, because the history shared in the class and the arguments presented will help when SDAs present their beliefs. Facts and truths are essential.

Definitely. I would have been "lost in the sea" talking to them before this training.

Oh yes, yes.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes, I feel confident.

Yes, especially in terms of the investigative judgment, because I was confused about that.

Yes.

More equipped than I did seven weeks ago.

Yes. There's a lot of things I learned, such as their stand on abortion, and the history of the church.

8. Did you have any doctrinal discussions with SDAs or former SDAs after you started or completed the training? If so, please describe how those went.

No.

Yeah, one of the gentlemen who's into "present day truth," who started his own SDA church, we started a dialogue two weeks ago. We talked about the feast days. I was able to share a little history on Ellen White with him, info I learned from the class.

No, I have not.

No, I haven't.

No.

No.

No, I haven't.

No.

Yes. I spoke to my nephew who believes that the foods you eat will defile you.

I talked with some, but more of a friendly conversation, not a doctrinal discussion.

No.

9. What could be done to improve the quality, content, or effectiveness of this training?

I do not know.

I didn't see anything that can be improved. Maybe more content could be shared with longer sessions, or a ten-week course, to give a better foundation.

Some were a little drier concerning the subject matter. The remnant church was challenging. I would have liked to hear more about their stance versus our stance. I thought the studies went into scriptures that didn't help me in talking to an SDA.

More practice talking with people.

I thought the training was really good. I was glad it was recorded so I could listen more than once. I thought it went well.

It's important to train members first, before they go out, on how to approach SDAs

I liked the way it went. I do not know if I could improve on it.

I cannot think of anything right now.

Nothing. It was well done.

More role-playing interaction would be helpful. In-person training might be better than zoom.

It was really good. If we wanted to make it more widely available, we could make it cleaner in terms of noise reduction, and showing the slides in presentation mode.

10. Did you gain what you hoped you would from this training? If so, why do you feel that way? If not, why do you feel you did not gain what you expected?

Yes, I learned a lot.

Yes, I definitely did, because it's been a good study, helping me to get more clarity on SDA beliefs, their structure. Some of the things I learned I had no idea about.

I gained more than I hoped. I had no idea it would venture into health, and the two-phase atonement. There were some very nice surprises. I got everything I wanted and some things on top of that.

Yes, because I learned about the history of the SDAs and their people and how their religion came to be what it is. I'm glad I learned about Ellen White and her husband and Bates.

I would say yes. Initially I didn't know what to expect. I gained knowledge.

Yeah.

Yes, I did, I enjoyed it every time we got on.

Yes, because it cleared up some points in my mind.

Yes.

I definitely think so. I feel privileged to have this training and to get acquainted with the resources on the web site. I think God for you as a resource.

Yes, I think so. I feel more knowledgeable about SDAs. I feel better about it now.

## APPENDIX I

## NOTES FROM SILENT OBSERVER

## Session 1

Hello Dirk, Good job, I learned a lot. Here were several questions I jotted down:

Slide 4:

How did Miller determine the date when Christ would return?

Who were the ones who felt churches were made to look foolish by setting dates for Christ's return and showed the fallacies of the Millerite teachings?

When the Adventists formed, why were they so focused on calculations?

Slide 6:

Which visions of Ellen White did Crammer believe were against the Bible?

Slide 14 (1 Tim. 2:15):

What is the original? There are multiple versions of the Bible, for example, the original Septuagint that contains the New Testament is lost, but there are surviving 4th century copies, such as the Codex Sinaiticus. However, ironically, the Catholic Vulgate (Codex Vaticanus) happens to be one of the oldest versions. Then there are multiple translations. Martin Luther freely admits to translating the Bible in a way that makes it understandable to the common people without confusing them by what it really says (Luther's deliberate mistranslation – Derrick John Phillips), which became a model for William Tyndale and others. Building on that tradition, there is then the "The Clear Word" translation which would seem to support SDA beliefs.

## Session 2

Hello Dirk, Good job, especially at the beginning, you made it very clear how the Adventists distinguished themselves and I liked the Wall concept. I also liked the idea at the end about them wasting time trying to convert other Christians, never thought of it that way before, but it's a very valid point.

As for the testimonies part, I think you lost people a bit. Here's my spin on it (Slide 13–15):

I believe your point is that if there was a Testimony of Jesus in the 1st Century (Rev. 1:2, 9) then wasn't that enough? And if so, how can there be a new testimony in the 19th Century THAT ADDS TO IT? That's the part you should probably make clearer. I do not believe the Adventists are arguing Ellen White has the ONLY testimony given by Spirit of Prophecy, they're saying a New Testament was given by Ellen White which should be believed equally with the prophets. Why is this New Testament a problem? Because it teaches unbiblical things that were not necessary to be saved by the testimonies up through the 1st century, and the Bible is complete without requiring anything to be added to it. In terms of the adds, you only mention Sabbath as the Seal of God and all others receiving the Mark of the Beast, but what about all the Thou Shalt Not's (do not eat meat, do not drink alcohol, do not dance, etc.) and the whole focus on salvation

by works using a rote formula? Isn't that just a regurgitation of the same formulistic idea that you could predict the day of Christ's coming? Isn't that the real problem of this New Testament? People are very gullible. They feel there should be a price to pay for their guilt. It's counterintuitive and hard for them to believe they can be saved by grace alone. It is therefore very beguiling when the Adventists come along promising a formula that you can follow and be saved. It was the Weight Watchers calorie-counting formula of its day. It felt right, people flocked to it. By doing the rituals, they felt they were earning salvation. "I'm paying the price for my guilt and therefore earning entitlement to salvation." But the weight doesn't stay off, does it? Neither do rituals erase guilt. Humans are doomed to make mistakes and cannot keep to the formula, which makes it ultimately unsatisfying, and then people leave in droves.

### Session 3

Hello Dirk, this is all very sound theology, but not particularly original because I've heard the same tests used many times to prove other prophets wrong as compared to Ellen White. However, the new aspect is focusing in on the parts of the Ellen White writings that the "Editors" have not whitewashed that still reveal the contradictions with the Bible, and I think you did a good job pointing those out, I especially liked the examples right from her own writings.

Some things to mull over...

What's interesting is that the Bible says it is the only source of infallible prophets who can predict future events with complete accuracy. And yet, the Bible is entirely written by people who are not the prophets writing many decades, centuries and even millennia after the events they're describing. Why wouldn't they be infallible when benefiting from the advantage of perfect hindsight?

In Luke 9:27 Jesus says, "But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God." Now, given the tests of a prophet, and applying the same rigor that you apply to Ellen White, where you do not tolerate any excuses, rationalizations or apologetics, how do you judge this statement while at the same time condemning Ellen White, because this sounds very similar to "...some will be alive and remain upon the earth to be translated at the coming of Jesus." (Testimonies, vol 1, p. 131)

### Session 5

Hello Dirk, Interesting topic you had last night. And I thought the biggest issue was serving beer to patients! That controversial topic got the most discussion of any you're covered so far. But to balance things out, related to your discussion on vegetarianism, if it's immoral to perform abortions, then it may also be immoral to eat animals. The same DNA that forms humans also forms animals, and the more we learn, the more we discover how similar they are to us.

### Session 7

Hello Dirk, Congratulations, you got it all done! There's only one thing I noticed that could be a bit of a paradox. You're proposing ministering to Seventh Day Adventists. But at the same, Seventh Day Adventists are criticized for spending too much time attempting to convert other Christians. This implies they are Christians, otherwise they wouldn't be criticized. Therefore, wouldn't ministering to SDA's, who are Christians, make you guilty of the same criticism?

SDA's are perfectionists because they believe following a formula will lead to salvation. The formula is supported by apologetics that fix everything wrong in the Bible with the new and improved prophecies of Ellen White. The apologetics are so crafty that anyone suggesting differently must be of the devil, and even goes so far as to say the devil planted false prophecies in advance of the true events to deceive people. The classic case is the Epic of Gilgamesh, clearly thousands of years prior to the biblical Noah's Ark story, which was obviously based on it. And yet, apologetics says only the Noah's Ark story is true, Gilgamesh was a false prophecy planted in advance to deceive people. This is extremely disingenuous, it goes against everything we know about how history works, where everything builds upon precedents. And yet, for those who choose to believe this, if anyone suggests otherwise, then suddenly they're of the devil for promoting the devil's false prophecy. How can you convince them to see the truth when their whole belief system is interpreted through the lens of apologetics which explains everything as the truth? In the end, truth must have its own appeal, and only those who desire it above all else will be willing to walk away from all the false interpretations, apologetics and prophecies. Your best way to persuade isn't trying to convince and convert them, it's showing them the truth, and letting them convince themselves.

## IRB APPROVAL LETTER

**LIBERTY UNIVERSITY**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 20, 2023

Dirk Anderson  
Thomas Spotts

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY22–23–1100 Implementing a Training Curriculum on Ministering to Seventh-day Adventists at the Jacksonville Church of God Seventh Day in Jacksonville, FL

Dear Dirk Anderson and Thomas Spotts,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your project is not considered human subjects research because it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word research with the word project throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP  
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research  
Research Ethics Office