

General Council

of the

Churches of God

Seventh Day



A BIT OF HISTORY

SOME INTERESTING FACTS

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE

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The General Council of the Churches of God 7th Day is not a schism or branch from any denomination. It was not raised up in these latter days to advocate a particular doctrine or ordinance. The General Council was brought into existence in response to a demand for an organization to conserve the work of the Lord and to form a fellowship for all those who accept the true Gospel and who desire to join in spreading it throughout the world.

BEGINNINGS

Toward the latter part of the eighteenth century there was much spiritual unrest, and the churches of America were dead in religious formality and certain Bible truths seemed all but lost. Then, as a breath from heaven, a notable revival took place in the eastern section of the United States during the early decades of the nineteenth century. The motivating power behind this spiritual revival was the rediscovery of the Biblical doctrine of the personal return of Jesus Christ to this earth and the establishment of His kingdom.

According to Dr. Lee E. Baker in his tract, **History and Teachings of the Advent Christian Church**, "the person through which the Spirit moved in this momentous revival was a self-educated man of keen intellect and oratorical powers, a patriotic and honored citizen of Hampton, New York, named William Miller. Giving up his earlier deism, he accepted the Bible as the Word of God, became a Christian, and subsequently a Baptist minister. Through a comparison of history with Biblical prediction, his faith in the prophecies concerning the second advent of Christ sent him forth on a crusade which resulted in the conversion of hundreds of infidels and skeptics and in turning thousands to a belief in the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ."

As the Advent (appearing of Christ) teaching spread, thousands accepted it as light in a dark place and, as a result, they were forced out of their recognized Protestant denomina-

tions. The Lord was again restoring truth to His church, and it is reported by 1858 that over eighty percent of the Adventist believers had embraced the doctrine of conditionalism (against the immortality of the soul theory).

Mr. Miller began his public ministry in Dresden, Vermont in 1831, and by 1844 Adventist publications really became widespread in America. The use of tracts and pamphlets were reckoned as one of the primary means of spreading this glorious message. In the February 22, 1860 issue of **THE WORLD'S CRISIS**, Elder Daniel T. Taylor reported there were 600 ministers in all Adventist groups. The membership in Adventist churches he computed to be 54,000. Of the six hundred preachers he reported 57 who observed the 7th Day Sabbath. Most of them were itinerant preachers; and only 87 reported as settled pastors. Salaries were nonexistent or shockingly low, and the general status of the churches, most meeting in houses, schoolhouses, etc., was primitive.

These pious folk never neglected the spreading of the truth, however. In fact, by 1844 no less than 5,000,000 copies of Adventual papers, pamphlets, tracts and books had been published. As brethren continued communicating the truth and added light, the Lord continued to reveal light. The Advent message caused a great stir in the church circles of the last century. It was not being welcomed into the churches of that day, and this caused dozens of independent congregations to arise as individuals embraced the truth. The early pioneers of the Advent message had no desire to start another denomination. They sought only to recapture Bible truths lost during the dark ages and not questioned by the Protestant Reformation. Some of these congregations had more light than others; yet, all of these congregations were anxious to spread the good news of the coming Kingdom of God. Some of the independent churches joined associations of various types that were dedicated to the Advent message.

Because of some misunderstanding of certain Biblical prophecies, some of the Millerites (as many of the Advent people were known) had a great expectation of "the cleansing of the sanctuary (earth)," which would take place at the second advent of Jesus Christ. This great event was due in a period between

March 1843 and March 1844. When this failed to materialize in the spring of 1844, hundreds left the movement and returned to their former churches. It should be pointed out, however, that not all of the Advent movement were in agreement with Miller on this point.

Several small groups came out of the great disappointment and a loose Adventist church organization came into being at a conference held in Albany, New York in 1845. It was known first as the American Millennial Association and later as the Evangelical Adventists. In 1860 a larger group formed the Advent Christian Church in Boston, and the Life and Advent Union was formed in 1863. Many Adventist churches remained independent of all religious groups.

It is interesting to note that there were churches in Great Britain prior to 1800 who called themselves Church of God and were Adventist in viewpoint. Many of these independent Churches of God were organized under the name, "The Church of God in Christ Jesus." There seems to be some fraternal relationship between them and Dr. John Thomas, founder of the Christadelphians. A national conference was held in 1888 in the city of Philadelphia to unite these scattered churches, and it met again the following year. Because of strong convictions on questions of congregational rights and authority, the national organization ceased to function. In 1921 many of the Adventist churches became a part of this particular group of the Church of God, formed a general conference, and are known today as the Church of God General Conference or the Church of God (Abrahamic Faith).

All of these Adventist groups observed the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath or Lord's day. Yet, as early as 1844, several brethren began observing the 7th Day Sabbath near Washington, New Hampshire. Elder Joseph Bates was one of the first to write a pamphlet on the subject in 1846. It received wide publicity and helped to create a great interest in this Bible truth.

Among the Sabbath keeping Adventists there was no general organization or, for that matter, complete unity on doctrine and practice. Many of the Sabbatarians embraced the revised position on the "sanctuary" doctrine, believing the cleansing

referred to the heavenly and not the earthly as taught by William Miller. At first the vast majority of Adventist refused to advocate this theory; however, Mrs. White and her followers did. The Adventist congregations (and they were known locally by various names: Church of God, Advent Christian, Church of Jesus Christ, Adventist and others) were plagued with dissention over doctrinal questions such as: What is the state of the dead? Who will arise at the resurrection? Is there eternal punishment for the wicked? When should the Christian Sabbath be observed? and many related subjects.

The Sabbatarian wing of the Advent movement itself was divided into two main camps; those who were followers of the Adventist prophetess, Ellen Harmon White, and those who opposed the so called "Spirit of Prophecy" with her many visions and writings. In 1855 the followers of Mrs. White established their headquarters at Battle Creek, Michigan, with a publishing house known as "The Review and Herald Publishing Association." They published their church magazine **THE REVIEW AND HERALD** here. In 1860 they officially organized under the name **SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST GENERAL CONFERENCE**. With the adopting of this name several Sabbath keepers who had been known as the Church of God and fellowshipped with the loose fellowship at Battle Creek, remained outside of the newly formed denomination. However, a large number of Churches of God and their ministers joined the new 7th Day Adventist Church, changed their church name, accepted the visions and claims of Mrs. White, and were lost to the Church of God. Formal organization of the Church of God was effected in 1865 in the state of Michigan. The first general conference was held in 1883, and the conference was incorporated in 1899 in Gentry County, Missouri.

During the early sixties, the Churches of God in Michigan and the East were conducting conferences. It was in 1865 that Enos Eaton began publishing **THE HOPE OF ISRAEL** at Hartford, Michigan, and later H. S. Dille became the editor. It ceased publication for about six months and in 1865 the **HOPE** was resumed, but this time the new publishing center was at Marion, Iowa. A former S. D. A. minister, Elder W. H. Brinkerhoff, became the editor of the revived publication. These were

perilous times for the Churches of God (then known in Iowa as the "Churches of Jesus Christ") and historical records inform us that "Churches of God" in Missouri and Iowa both suffered along with churches in Michigan, Ohio and other states because of the new form of church government called "a more perfect one" by the 7th Day Adventist. It called for submission to the General Conference and the accepting of the visions of Mrs. Ellen G. White.

It is also interesting to note that in 1870 the Church of God at Marion, Iowa adopted feet washing and communion to be observed at least once in three months, but the first report of a yearly Lord's Supper appeared in 1899. This is an indication of how truth gradually came to the Church of God during this time of the restoration of God's Church. The HOPE later became the BIBLE ADVOCATE and the press was moved to Stanberry, Missouri. This truth advocating voice became the official voice of the united Churches of God.

With the blessings of Almighty God, the Churches of God that emerged from the great Advent movement, continued to grow and overcome the problems forced upon them by the visions of Mrs. White and her 7th Day Adventist Church. Progress was made under local autonomy and the Church emerged a united church and so remained until the year 1933 when a group of ministers and churches brought about a second withdrawal from the Churches of God. The dissenters divided the Church into two warring factions by advocating what they termed a "Bible" or "Apostolic" type of church polity which taught that the twelve apostles had modern day successors who directed the spiritual affairs of the Church, with a council of seventy and a board of seven (business stewards). This was in no way in accord with the historical or New Testament teachings concerning church government. The newly formed organization located its headquarters at Salem, West Virginia.

The division of the Church brought heartache to families and friends separated by the schism, and the cry on the heart of the people was for a united church once more. The two conferences sent delegates to a unity meeting in Fairview, Oklahoma, in 1948 to discuss the reuniting of the Church of God. During the years that the two factions had been separate some changes had been

made in doctrine as well as practices. This called for a compromise, which was forthcoming and known as the "Fairview Agreement." Due to this agreement the brethren convened in 1949 at Stanberry, Missouri for a joint vote by two factions. The results were that the two factions would unite under the name THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE CHURCH OF GOD-7TH DAY and thus form a new organization with headquarters at Denver, Colorado. After the 1949 Merger several of the former Salem ministers launched their "Back to Salem" movement and returned there to reorganize their work and at the present time they still maintain their organization headquarters there. The newly Merged Church continued to use the former Stanberry publishing house in Missouri until 1972 when it was moved to Denver. Later in 1976, Midwest Bible College was closed and a graduate training school was opened in Denver. The administration of the General Conference program is conducted from the Denver offices.

However, several of the ministers and members of the former Stanberry General Conference could not accept the compromise in doctrine and practice that their church had made, forsaking the principles so dear to the members of God's Church. They had remained faithful to congregational government and other Biblical truths when the division came in 1933, they reasoned that now was no time to forsake those same principles and truths. The brethren desired to continue the work of the "united Church of God" as it was prior to the fateful division of '33. The need to conserve the work of the Lord compelled the calling of a meeting at Meridian, Idaho during the summer of 1950. The results were the establishing of a general organization that was to serve the former Stanberry churches and members scattered across the country. This organization was and remains dedicated to spiritual liberty granted us in the Scriptures and in the truth as taught in the Word of God. The present constitution and by laws are patterned after those of the original General Conference organized several decades prior to 1933 and the spirit of the General Council of the Churches of God-7th Day has remained the same, too.

Many have justified the compromise in view that the Church needed progress and willingly left congregationalism, but the

General Council founders could not see how progress could be merited by the forsaking of Bible truth and principles that our forefathers have preserved for us and we have long cherished. As change is needed, the General Council is most willing to move forward. It does not fear change or progress, but it does fear the forsaking of our "landmarks". The Churches of God emerged during the last century in humble surroundings. Problems had seemed impossible to overcome. Yet, it had made great progress. Again in humble surroundings the Church has emerged, small and scattered, yet aggressively dedicated to the promotion of the Gospel of the Kingdom. With renewed dedication we feel that we have a clear conscience that we are continuing without apology the faith restored during the last century, the results of a notable revival sent from God.

ACTIVITIES

From a very small group of ministers and members, the Churches of God have spread until now congregations are located in many American states and in several foreign countries of the world. Many of the new congregations are compelled to sacrifice, often meeting for worship in humble places such as store buildings, tents, homes and old and abandoned churches or in a rented church building belonging to another denomination.

The Church is developing a strong missionary program on several fields, and it likewise plans to enter others, as calls are constantly coming from mission fields unoccupied by an American missionary worker. Workers are presently maintained in Canada, England, India, Jamaica and the Philippines.

The general offices of the Churches of God-7th Day are located at Meridian, Idaho with a headquarters building and a publishing house from which several thousand pieces of literature are issued each year. The general assembly grounds at which the annual General Council meets is also located here. Maranatha College, a four year Biblical arts college for the training of young men for the ministry and other Christian vocations, is located off Cherry Lane at 1827 West Third. The official church organ, **THE ACTS** is published at the publishing house, along with the **FELLOWSHIP HERALD** (reporting church

news and organizational activities for the church membership), Sabbath School quarterlies, children's papers, religious tracts, booklets and a youth magazine, **THE CHRISTIAN YOUTH**.

Thus, through missions, publications, evangelism, education and other agencies the Churches of God attempt to reach around the world with the blessings of the present truth.

ORGANIZATION

The General Council of the Churches of God 7th Day has a regularly organized church government which is congregational. The founders of the General Council believed that the Church at large was too much restricted and overburdened with a top heavy and clerical controlled general organization and that it should be "more directly under the rule of God" and at the pleasure of the membership. Yet, it was also recognized that the aid of human personalities were quite necessary.

The General Council consists of all ordained and licensed ministers, missionaries and the general church membership. When not in session the work of the Council is done by a seven member Board of Directors, made up of ministers and laymen. The President and Vice President of the Council are also members of the Board of Directors (elected yearly) and the officers are elected yearly (but on a staggered basis). The General Council while in annual session elects all general officers, plans and approves all programs for the extension of the Church in general, sets up all doctrinal standards based upon the Scriptures and credentials all ministers and missionary workers. Because of the strong congregational nature of the church's government the general organization exists primarily as a means of mutual cooperation and for the development of general enterprises.

OUR LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

The local congregations offer church homes for those who agree with the doctrine and spirit of the Church of God 7th Day. All services are on Saturday, the Sabbath. Bible studies and prayer meetings are to edify the Christians to bring the lost to

Christ and to establish the believers in the faith of Jesus.

Many of the local churches maintain auxiliary organizations such as active youth groups, women's meetings and Sabbath Schools. Most congregations are under the oversight of duly elected elders, some with a full time minister and others with part time ministers. Yet, all officers in the local congregation are elected by the local church membership.

The local church also determines to what extent it will cooperate with the General Council program. There are no overseers, bishops, presbyters, supervisors or any such officer over the local churches, nor is there a conference, synod, council, convention or any other church organization that the local church is responsible to in matters of church polity. The Churches of God recognize Jesus Christ as the spiritual head of the Church and the ministry as chosen servants of God to preach and declare the truth of God. However, in matters of church government, all local churches are encouraged to respect the General Council and its leadership and to cooperate in the general work for a more united effort which can result from such mutual cooperation.

Every local Church of God offers a place in which to labor and sacrifice in the service of the Lord. It is a place where earthly treasures may be invested for the promotion of the Kingdom Message.

DOCTRINE

The Churches of God 7th Day do not set forth a well-defined creed because they declare the Bible to be their only rule of faith and practice. Yet, they do have a "Declaration of Those Things Most Commonly Believed Among Us", which is available in printed form, free for those who request it.

These thirteen articles of faith, which set forth the fundamentals of the Christian faith, are the result of careful collaboration on the part of the ministers of the General Council of the Churches of God 7th Day. The ministerial association in turn presented them to the General Council for their consideration and they were adopted by the vote of the Council on July 3, 1963 at Meridian, Idaho. At the same time the Council

passed upon a statement on carnal warfare and certain standing resolutions. The Churches of God are ardently fundamental and reject all dogmas not taught in the Bible.

The following is a brief statement of faith appearing in each issue of the ACTS magazine.

WE BELIEVE the Bible to be the inspired Word of God. WE BELIEVE that God the Father is the supreme Deity, Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God, and the Holy Spirit the promised Comforter. WE BELIEVE in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death, in His bodily resurrection late on the Sabbath day, in His ascension to the right hand of God in heaven, and His personal return to earth to establish His kingdom and rule this earth in great power and glory.

WE BELIEVE the only means of being cleansed from sin is through repentance and faith in the precious blood of Jesus and obedience to our Lord's command to be baptized [immersed] in the Name of Christ for the remission of sins. WE BELIEVE that by faith we may receive healing for our bodies. WE BELIEVE the scriptures enjoy the observance of the Seventh Day Sabbath [commonly called Saturday] to be observed from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday. WE BELIEVE the Lord's Supper and foot washing should be observed once a year at the appointed time.

WE BELIEVE in the resurrection of the dead, both the just and the unjust, the just to eternal life and the unjust to eternal death. WE BELIEVE the dead are in a state of unconsciousness. WE BELIEVE the true church organization taught in the Bible is local autonomy and that the Bible name for the church is THE CHURCH OF GOD. That the test of Christian fellowship is the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

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