

Looking back at the seventh-month movement

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By Tom Roberts

WEISER, Idaho—In modern times the annual festival days have been a constant source of debate. Many people would be surprised to learn how various denominations through the years have been associated with the seventh-month movement.

Millerite Period

In the 1840s, during the Millerite Period, the seventh-month movement appeared. The foundations of this movement can be traced to studies surrounding the Day of Atonement and the controversies about how to interpret Daniel 8:14, which led to the Great Disappointment of Oct. 22, 1843, and Oct. 22, 1844.

Portions of the movement grew into the Midnight Cry subcategory but, as we shall see, the holy days were adopted by other related Sabbatarian groups.

The Millerite Period has been called by some The Movement of the Great Awakening. L.E. Froom reports in his *Movement of Destiny* that more than 70 denominations fed the Millerite movement.

But just how large the seventh-month movement actually became and the leaders it impacted are a matter of conjecture. Some have estimated that, at its peak, it may have had as many as 300,000 adherents. If this is true, it would not be surprising for other groups to be impacted by its teachings. (For more information see the *Seventh Day Adventist Encyclopedia*, Commentary Reference Series, Vol. 10, pp. 1337-1338.)

Mormonism and holy days

During the same period a movement within Mormonism emerged in 1848 led by James Strang, who founded the Hebrew Mormonism movement. They believed in one God, the annual holy days, the weekly Sabbath and the teachings of the Book of Mormon.

Later, in the 1970s, David L. Roberts would lead a breakaway group of more than 11,000 Sabbatarian and holy-day observers. (See *Latter Day Saints and the Sabbath*, Russell J. Thomsen, p. 24-33, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, Steven L. Shields, pp. 177-178.)

The Church of God Seventh Day connection

In 1858 Gilbert Cranmer, from the Marion Party, founded eight churches that would ultimately become the Church of God Seventh Day.

Out of this ministry arose the Remnant of Israel under the leadership of G.G. Rupert, who definitely advocated the meaning of holy-day observance ("Remnant of Israel," G.G. Rupert, Vol. 10, No. 11, September 1929).

Some today are suggesting that G.G. Rupert was a delegate at the 1888 Seventh-day Adventist conference that began the change of direction of the SDA Church from the ideals of its founders with the departure of Wagner and Jones.

This conference was significant because its theme was "Righteousness by Faith" and was needed to free Sabbatarians from legalism.

Unfortunately, as the years passed, many of the founding voices of Adventism who once gave support to the seventh-month movement were no longer influential.

Ellen White even stated that the Adventist camp meetings should replicate the Feast of Tabernacles. (See the booklet *Ellen White Speaks Out on the Work of the Jewish People*, Sanford Howard.)

Wagner and Jones argued that the holy days were not the subject of the "weak and beggarly elements" described in the writings of Paul but were indeed forms of fallen Judaism mixed with pagan observances. Today a growing number of scholars, such as Troy Martin, Mark Nanas and Paul Torazi, support this view.

It should be noted that in 1870 D.T. Niles and other scholars would begin to see the meaning of the holy days contained in the book of Revelation. This would later be enlarged by Frank Holbrook and expanded further by Lewis F. Were in the 1980s.

However, in the early 1900s many Adventist writers, such as F.C. Gilbert (*The Jewish Problem and Daniel and the Sanctuary*), tied Adventist prophecy to the Day of Atonement and other festival days.

The Methodist influence upon Sabbatarianism

From the 1840s until 1917, Methodism in the United States had three major Sabbatarian outgrowths. Teachings from Methodism that were adopted by the founders of these groups included:

- The doctrine of man as soul-ish being.
- The free agency of man, the eschatological Kingdom of God that will heal creation at the end of time.
- The doctrine of holiness and sanctification, vegetarianism and emphasis on healing through herbs and natural practices.

Gilbert Cranmer, who founded the Church of God Seventh Day in 1858, had been a Methodist. Ellen G. White grew up in the Methodist Church until she was a teenager.

Then, in 1917, a former Methodist bishop named Johnson founded with two Adventist leaders the denomination called the House of God.

He advocated the Kingdom of God on earth and the keeping of the annual festivals. The history of his ministry reaches back into the 1890s with missions to Africa and today has about 10 million members worldwide.

Non-Adventist writers such as Larkin with his book *Dispensational Truths* were also very influential in bringing the holy-day concept to Christian readers in the 1930s. Thus Herbert Armstrong would have had many sources from within the Church of God Seventh Day tradition such as A.N. Dugger and C.O. Dodd and G.G. Rupert on which to base his holy-day theology.

Adventism's attempts to whitewash their beginnings

By the 1950s Adventism was undergoing many changes. The church was attempting to be more evangelical in its emphasis on Christ with a grace orientation.

L.E. Froom, a fantastic historian, who problematically downplayed the role of the seventh-month movement as well as Mrs. White's fallen nature of Christ, met with Walter Martin and Donald Gray Barnhouse. The meetings resulted in the 1957 publication *Questions on Doctrine*. Not all Adventist scholars were pleased with this publication.

Even Zondervan, the evangelical publisher, questioned Mr. Martin on the lack of follow-up in several areas such as Froom's statements about 70 Trinitarian denominations participating in the formation of Adventist theology and the non-Trinitarian leanings of Uriah Smith, Wagner and Jones in the beginning of Adventist history.

Walter Martin simply touted his credentials as proof of the excellent scholarship for his part of this publication as a defense of its legitimacy. (See *The Word Was Made Flesh: One Hundred Years of Seventh-day Adventist Christology 1852-1952*, Ralph Larson, pp. 292-300.)

As the years progressed, Adventist scholars such N.L. Andreason, Raymond Cottrell, Ken Richards, Desmond Ford and many others began to question the classical Adventist positions taught about the history of their beginnings and the direction the church was taking. There were those who wanted to go back to the non-Trinitarian, holy-day, Kingdom of God on earth positions of the church.

Others, such as Desmond Ford, wanted the church to move in an evangelical direction, while some at La Sierra University have tried to place the church on a more progressive path.

Ethos of feast-day movements

Once again the Adventists are beginning to denounce all feast-day keepers. Angel Rodriguez, and others have denounced the entire feast-day movement.

In spite of this, the ethos of feast day movements is still behind the thinking of much of Seventh-day Adventist theology.

One such example is Leslie Hardinge's *In the Shadow of His Sacrifice*. He does an absolutely brilliant job of teaching Christianity the meaning of the holy days and the lessons that should impact their thinking about the Messiah.

Today there are a growing but small number of small groups of Adventist holy-day keepers who are attempting to resurrect the seventh-month movement in the Adventist Church.

Dr. John Vandenberg is leading the charge with a few scholars and pastors by showing that the seventh-month movement should never have been buried in Adventist history. Rather, it should have been modified to exclude its theological errors.

It should have retained the spirit of holy-day keeping in the worship and the life of the church.

Let us all pray and support members of this movement and fellowship with them as we offer our love and service.