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THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AS REMNANT

Seventh-day Adventists see themselves as fulfilling a unique part of prophecy for the end-times.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has, from its inception, seen itself as a movement prophetically identified as God's "remnant" for the last days. Is this in harmony with the biblical concept of remnant?

The concept of "remnant" may be defined basically as "the portion of a community which is left, in case of a devastating calamity."¹ The future existence of that community portion would depend on the remnant.

The Old Testament refers to the

remnant concept using mainly derivatives of six Hebrew stems that are translated: (1) "remain, be left over"; (2) "escape, get away"; (3) "escape, make for safety"; (4) "be left over, remain"; (5) "survivor"; and (6) "rest, remainder, balance."

Though the occurrence of any of these terms in the Old or New Testament may not necessarily designate

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the remnant motif or contrariwise, they generally connote a smaller group remaining or surviving after a calamity to ensure the continuity of the community. Where the terms have a religious connotation, they may refer positively to a faithful remnant or negatively to an unfaithful remnant.

Altogether the terminology of *remnant* in the Bible may be viewed as covering three categories or perspectives of the remnant concept: historical, faithful and eschatological.² According to Hasel, the historical remnant is “made up of survivors of a catastrophe.”³ These may not necessarily be faithful to God, as was Judah’s historical remnant from the Babylonian invasion who fled to Egypt against the command of God. They did not carry any covenant promises (Jer. 6:9, 29). The *faithful* remnant is set apart from the historical remnant “by their genuine spirituality and true relationship with God; this remnant is the carrier of all divine election promises” and responsibilities.⁴

Out of the faithful remnant arises the eschatological remnant who will “go through the cleansing judgments and apocalyptic woes of the end-time and emerge victorious” to receive the everlasting kingdom.⁵ The three categories may overlap. Noah was both a historical and a faithful remnant (Gen. 7:3).

Israel’s collective unfaithfulness to the covenant not only affected

their covenant relationship but also breached the apparatus for the fulfillment of God’s redemptive purposes for humankind. The remnant, therefore, is God’s solution to carry on the covenantal relations. The characteristics of the remnant are the critical element for the continuity of God’s plan of salvation and also the group that becomes the eschatological remnant.

Characteristics of the Faithful Remnant in the Old Testament

The remnant concept permeates the Old Testament, and certain characteristics emerge in relation to the faithful as well as the eschatological remnant. They are faithful to the commandments of God.

Noah, the remnant after the Flood (Gen. 7:23), “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (6:8),⁶ and was said to be righteous. This implies that he kept God’s commandments, though it should be pointed out that Ham, who was part of the remnant, displayed some unrighteousness. During Elijah’s time, God reserved a remnant of 7,000 in Israel (1 Kings 19:18), who had not bowed to or kissed Baal. Isaiah declares that the remnant shall have faith, trust, willing obedience, and holiness (Isa. 1:18, 19). In addition, they possess covenant promises of salvation (Isa. 28:5), preserve the faith of God (Dan. 7:25-27), are given a mission (Isa. 2:1-4), and are inclusive (Isa. 45:20).

Characteristics of the Remnant in the NT

In the New Testament, metaphors and imagery like “shepherd,” “sheep,” “few,” “the chosen” convey the remnant idea. The preaching of both John the Baptist (Matt. 3:2, 8) and Jesus (Matt. 4:17) put “the few,” “chosen” or “the little group,” who are saved, in contradistinction to the larger population who are lost. They are depicted as accepting the grace offered through the gospel as well as living by obedience inspired by faith.

Paul uses the remnant theme to propose the idea of the new Israel, which will comprise those of physical Israel and others who will accept the gospel and live a life of obedience induced by faith in Christ (Romans 9-11).

Generally, therefore, the faithful remnant in the Bible is characterized by its acceptance of the grace that comes through faith in God and the commitment to a life of obedience. Those of the faithful remnant who go through the end-time cleansing and persecution become the eschatological or end-time remnant, which would be expected to have the same characteristics. Seventh-day Adventists in their self-understanding identify with the end-time remnant.

Characteristics of the End-Time Remnant

The end-time remnant, prophetically the last in the history of salva-

tion, exemplifies the characteristics of the remnant of the people of God. These are explicit in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12. Revelation 12 begins with a woman ready to give birth to a child. The woman represents the people of God, while the birth of the child “is the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament in the incarnation, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.”

A dragon, the devil according to verse 9, stood before the woman ready to devour the child when born. She bore a male child who was caught up to heaven. The dragon, not able to get to the child, persecuted the woman, who fled to the wilderness and remained there for 1,260 days (vs. 6). Then “the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (vs. 17).

Revelation 12:17 delineates two identifying marks of the end-time remnant: (1) they keep the commandments of God, and (2) they have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The first, “keep the commandments of God” is repeated in 14:12. The question is: Which commandments are being referred to here? In these two cases are indicated that the “commandment” is given by God. In a number of New Testament texts, this word, “commandment,” clearly

refers to the Ten Commandments (e.g., Matt. 15:3, 6). In Revelation 12:17 and 14:12, the only two occurrences in the Book of Revelation, the possibility of the reference being to the Ten Commandments is heightened by the introductory vision in Revelation 11:19, which displays the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the Ten Commandments. This would depict the involvement of the Ten Commandments in the following events described in Revelation 12:1-15:4. This would establish that keeping the Ten Commandments is one of the characteristics of the end-time remnant.

Second, the end-time remnant is characterized by “the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17). The Greek phrase translated “the testimony of Jesus” lends itself to two interpretations: “our witness to Jesus Christ” or “the self-revelation of Jesus that moves Christian prophets.” The phrase in 12:17 must be taken as referring to the self-revelation of Jesus that He gives to the church through prophets.

The parallel passage, Revelation 19:10, offers further explanation to the phrase “the testimony of Jesus”: “I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, ‘See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.’” The parallelism between the expression “spirit of

prophecy” and the gift of prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12:10, as well as in Revelation 22:9, where the expression “prophets” substitutes for “spirit of prophecy,” points to the meaning of the “spirit of prophecy” as the spirit that inspires the words of the prophets.

The end-time remnant will also keep the faith of Jesus (Rev. 14:12), which is interpreted as the holding on to the doctrinal content of the Christian faith in its entirety. Furthermore, they possess patience. They have the resilience to remain committed and loyal to God and His Word while suffering persecution.

Finally, the end-time remnant arises after the 1,260 prophetic days’ wilderness experience of the woman (Rev. 12:6, 13-17). The 1,260 prophetic days, which symbolically represent 1,260 years, began in 538 A.D. and ended in 1798. The implication is that the end-time remnant arises after 1798. They are portrayed in Revelation 14:6-12 as given the mission of bearing the everlasting gospel during the last days to all nations. Furthermore, Revelation 18:4 specifically mentions that there are God’s people outside the remnant who should also be called into the fold: “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues.” These are part of the people of God who are scattered among the apostatized entities represented by Babylon.

They must be brought into the visible remnant church of God.

Seventh-day Adventists and the End-time Remnant

From the inception of the denomination, Seventh-day Adventists have understood themselves as a prophetic movement fulfilling the specifications of the end-time remnant identified in the Book of Revelation. Joseph Bates portrayed the church as the remnant in 1874,⁷ W. H. Littlejohn in 1883,⁸ Uriah Smith in 1891,⁹ and John N. Loughborough in 1892,¹⁰ among others. This understanding was based on the church interpreting and identifying with the characteristics specified in Revelation 12:17 and 14:12.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church upholds the entire Ten Commandments of God, including the Sabbath commandment. This is significant because the Sabbath commandment is rejected by most of the rest of Christianity. It also has within it the testimony of Jesus Christ, the Spirit of prophecy, recognized in the prophetic ministry of Ellen G. White. The Church keeps the faith of Jesus and proclaims the everlasting gospel in these last days. Furthermore, in harmony with the specification of prophecy (Rev. 6:6, 13-17), the church arose after 1798, the end of the 1,260 years.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church fulfills all the characteristics

outlined by prophecy for the identification of the end-time remnant. Significantly, it acknowledges that it is commissioned to call out God's people, who are part of the invisible, universal church, from Babylon into the visible remnant church. □

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