



Judaism and Adventism: Similarities and Differences

The objective description of similarities and differences appearing here will provide a clear and immediate overview of the nature of the Jewish-Adventist connection and will draw lessons not only for a better understanding of each other, but also of a better understanding of one's own religious identity, whether Jewish or Adventist. It will also implicitly suggest places where Jews and Adventists can in fact learn from each other and, beyond the human encounter, discover a hidden face of the Lord.

Similarities

1. Same **Day of Sabbath** keeping from sundown on Friday

to sundown on Saturday, including the admonition to rest from work and engage in religious and worshipful activities.

2. Same emphasis on **Creation**, with what it implies of valorization of matter, nature, and the flesh, versus the traditional Christian *contemptus mundi*, which despises Creation and the flesh.

3. Same accent on the **Wholeness of Human Nature** and the rejection of Christian (Platonistic) dualism. Importance of enjoyment of life: a sex life and food, for instance, are not evil, but beautiful gifts from God. Taking care of the human body is, therefore, a religious duty.

4. Same **Holy Scriptures**:

Adventism embraces the same Hebrew Scriptures (*Tanach*) which are highly regarded and not replaced by any other Holy Scripture or given a lower status of inspiration.

5. Same attention to the **Torah**: Adventism does not claim that the law of Moses (Torah) has been replaced by New Testament grace. God's requirements at Sinai are still normative to them.

6. Same respect of the Levitical **Dietary Laws** (no pork, etc.).

7. Same ideal of **Righteousness**: The importance of ethics in the daily life (sanctification) as they are illuminated in the pages of the Bible.

8. Same belief in the **Day of**

Judgment at the end of human history when every person will be evaluated and forgiven on the basis of his/her response and life.

9. Same hope in the **Redemption** of humankind at the time of the end, with the raising of the dead and the establishment of the Kingdom of God as historical and real events rather than just an abstract spiritual experience.

10. Same hope in the coming of the **Messiah**, the son of David as predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish tradition, who will come at the time of the end to redeem the world.

Differences

1. Different **Practices of Sabbath**: in Adventism, Sabbath is full of “missionary” activity. The average Adventist is more concerned with Sabbath as the right “seventh” day (in polemic with other Christians) than in the sacred content of that day (its meaning and rest). The average Adventist has not understood the “celebrating” character of the Sabbath; Adventists sometimes fast on Sabbath.

2. Different ideas of the **Afterlife**; Jews believe in the immortality of the soul (Platonistic influence as recognized by the *Jewish Encyclopedia*), which suggests that the soul will go to paradise or hell. Some Jews (more on the popular level and in mystic currents) even believe in the idea of reincarnation (transmigration). Adventists hold the biblical view of the unconscious state of the dead in the dust of the earth, waiting for the Day of Resurrection.

3. Different **Components of Torah**: Adventists are concerned with the biblical laws and more specifically with the written Torah

given on Mount Sinai (especially the Ten Commandments), whereas the Jews also submit themselves to the so-called oral 613 laws (*Torah be al pe*).

4. Different **Way of Kosher**: Jews do not mix dairy products and meat (which implies a different set of vessel), do not eat the hip socket of an animal (cf. Gen. 32), and do not eat meat with its blood (Gen. 9: 4), which requires a special way of slaughtering the animals. Adventists promote vegetarianism.

5. Different **Traditional Scriptures**: Jews have only the Hebrew Scriptures or *Tanach* as prophetic/inspired Writings; yet they also read traditional texts (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrash, and rabbinic commentaries) as a guide to their understanding of the Torah (written and oral). Adventists include in their canon the so-called New Testament (“Apostolic Writings”). They also revere the writings of Ellen G. White, who is heard as a prophetic voice—not one which replaces the light of the Holy Scriptures but rather emphasizes the value of those Scriptures and provides guidance for living according to those directions.

6. Different **Feast Days and Liturgy**: Jews celebrate numerous festivals following the instructions of the Bible (*Pessah, Shavuoth, Rosh Ha-shanah, Kippur, Sukkot*, etc.) and of Jewish tradition (*Purim, Hanukkah*, etc.). The Jewish life cycle is marked by two important ceremonies: 1) the circumcision (*Brith milah*) that signifies in the human flesh the covenant between God and Israel; and 2) the *Bar mitzvah*, for thirteen-year-old males, that signifies the commitment of the adult man to devote himself to the obedi-

ence of God’s commandments. The Adventist life cycle is marked by the baptism (immersion in water), a significant act reminiscent of the Jewish *miqueh* (ceremonial for converts) that recalls the event of Creation and signifies the commitment to become a new creature and live a new life with God. Jews follow the liturgy transmitted through the ages and pray in Hebrew traditional prayers. Adventists keep only the seventh-day Sabbath and celebrate the Lord’s Supper, reminiscent of the Jewish feast of Passover, signifying the memory of the sacrifice of the Messiah until He comes. Adventist liturgy follows the patterns of Protestant churches with personal and spontaneous prayers.

7. Different **Culture and History**: Jews identify themselves with Jewish history, the suffering of anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and the State of Israel. Jews hold a high view of learning. They are the people of the book. Adventists are generally indifferent to that history and that suffering and also to the state of Israel, sometimes being anti-Semitic. Adventists situated in the “evangelical” current do not hold a high view of learning and may even sanctify ignorance as a spiritual quality; their priority is in mission (soul gaining).

8. Different **Messianic Applications**: Adventists believe in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah predicted by the Hebrew Scriptures—the exact time of His coming, His suffering and death, His life of miracles, His resurrection, and His return at the time of the end to respond to the hope of His people from all the nations of the world. Jews believe in only one coming of the Messiah at the time of the end associated with

the establishment of peace and happiness under the total rule of God. For Jews, Jesus cannot be the Jewish Messiah since He has traditionally been associated with the Christian oppression and the Christian contempt of the Torah of Moses.

9. Different Time of

Judgment: Adventists believe, according to the indications of biblical prophecy (Dan 7), that the day of Judgment is cosmic and appears during the last moment of human history in the form of a heavenly *Kippur* (starting in 1844). Jews believe in judgment at death, an idea that is in discrepancy with their other belief of final judgment and resurrection. Although the date of 1844 has also struck a segment of the

Jewish community (Lubavitch) as a possible messianic moment, it is not central in Judaism. Adventists, therefore, focus on the time of the end (eschatological emphasis); their mission is to reach out to all the nations of the earth (universal outlook) and proclaim that the Judgment has come—urging humans to worship the Creator (Rev 14:7). Jews, on the other hand, focus on this life (existential and ethical emphasis); their mission is to survive as a witnessing people (particular outlook) and to live as an obedient people who “hear” God (*shema Israel*, Deut 6:4).

10. Different understanding of the Mechanism of

Redemption: Adventists believe that Redemption comes through

the sacrifice of God who offered Himself through the Messiah (Isa 53) in order to redeem humankind. Jews believe that they achieve redemption for themselves through the act of *mitzvoth* and prayers. Adventists, like other Christians, tend to view their religion as a set of theological beliefs on which they will base their actions (see, for instance, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe...: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*). Jews understand their religion as a set of deeds from which they derive their theological beliefs (see, for instance, the principle of Exod 24:7—*naasseh wanishma*, “We shall do, then we shall understand”).

Ellen White and the Jews

Considering the impact of Ellen G. White’s writings on Seventh-day Adventist theology, we have gathered here some of her key texts dealing with the Jews.

Against the Theology of Rejection and Replacement

God did not reject Israel:

“Even though Israel rejected His son, God did not reject them.” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, 375)

God did not replace Israel with the Church (since Israel was the Church):

“Through the Jewish nation it was God’s purpose to impart rich blessings to all people . . . He (God) purposed to give them (those peoples) opportunity for becoming acquainted through His church (the Jewish people). He designed that the principles revealed through His people should be the means of restoring the moral image of God in man” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, 286)

Israel is still God’s people until the last days:

“In the last days of this earth’s history, God’s covenant with *His commandment-keeping people* is to be renewed.” (*Prophets and Kings*, 298)

Against Christian Anti-Semitism

Christians associated with heathen brought suffering on the Jews:

“The heathen and those called Christians, in their zeal for Christ . . . thought that the more suffering they could bring upon them, the better would God be pleased.” (*Early Writings*, 212)

We should not despise the Jews:

“We are plainly taught that we should not despise the Jews.” (*Manuscript Releases* 137)

Why a Hebrew-Adventist Congregation?

In these times of religious and identity crises, it is important to rethink and reshape our worship services to make them more relevant, more meaningful, but also more in touch with our Hebrew roots. For Seventh-day Adventists this reflection and experience is all the more justified as they share so much in common with the Jews: the same Shabbat, the same affirmation of Creation and joy of life, the same reverence for the truth of the Torah, the same ideal of righteousness and justice, and the same hope for a better world.

The purpose of the Hebrew-Adventist service then is threefold:

1. To offer a special worship experience that combines the joyfulness and reverence, and the sense of community of the Hebrew tradition, with our distinctive Adventist identity.
2. To help Christians in general, and Seventh-day Adventists in particular, recover their Hebrew roots and enrich their emotional, intellectual, and physical adoration.
3. To create a spiritual and liturgical environment where Jews as well as Christians, both wearing kippah and tallith, can worship the same God of Israel—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who also was the God of Peter, John, and Paul—thereby relieving and transcending the Jewish-Christian tension.

In contrast to our modern society that tends to be a “gut-level” society emphasizing emotions and free (sometimes even “wild”) spontaneity, classical Judaism has followed a structure that saved order and harmony. As Jewish history testifies, however, Jewish liturgy has, within traditional fixed forms, left room for spontaneity and creativity. In fact, the whole Bible has preserved this vision: there is not only the requirement of structure and the remembrance of the past, but also the need to be relevant and the artistic urge to “sing a new song.” The Holy Scriptures are full of old and new songs, traditional and corporate hymns and recitations, and emotional and insightful new meditations. The root and the flower, the memory and the mood, have cohabited together, nurturing each other and thus maintaining the rhythm of life. It is in this breath, in the path of this inspiration, that we wish to place our liturgical steps.

The content and liturgical structure of the Hebrew-Adventist service has been shaped with the same tension. Basically it is patterned after traditional Jewish worship services (Ashkenazic, Sephardic). Additional prayers and songs from other sources (Reformed, Jewish, Messianic, Christian/Adventist, new songs and liturgical moods) have been included. Yet the new has been implemented insofar as it respects and conveys the spiritual meaning and lessons taught in the rhythm and flow of the Jewish liturgy for the Sabbath service.

A word of warning is in order. This formula and worship experience is not intended to function as the ideal and only worship model. It should

be understood and used with flexibility, as a modest illustration to inspire and enrich the worship experience of “any” Adventist (Messianic or traditional) and even other Christian communities at large. For those who are happy with the status quo and do not wish to change their worship service, they may wish to try the following:

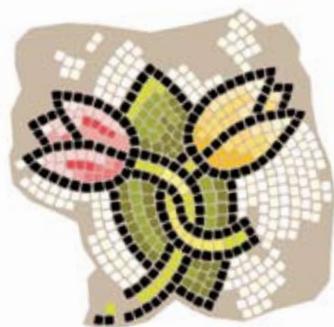
The “once-in-a-while” experience: Once a quarter or at least once a year give your community the flavor of this service. This change will bring fresh air into your community and will allow you to invite new guests (Jews, Jewish Christians, or even other Christians).

The “pick and choose” experience: Select a new song or a new liturgical line or paragraph and introduce them into your present service.

For those who have already ventured into the new worship experience of the Hebrew-Adventist worship, we suggest either take one of the composed liturgies and/or combine it with your own. You may also, of course, extend yourselves with the “pick-and-choose” experience.

Whatever choice you may make, we hope this experience will not only promote reconciliation between Israel and the Church, but also refresh our relationship with the God of Creation and Recreation, the God of the past, the God of remembrance, but also the God of the future, the God of hope, indeed the God of **the root and the flower**.

THE ROOT AND THE FLOWER



SIDDUR
FOR HEBREW-ADVENTIST
CONGREGATIONS

*A recommended reading
for Hebrew-Adventist
congregations*