

a brief history of seventh-day adventists pdf

a brief history of seventh-day adventists pdf provides a comprehensive overview of the origins, development, and enduring legacy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This article delves into the foundational beliefs, key figures, and pivotal moments that shaped this global religious movement. We will explore the Great Disappointment, the emergence of key doctrines such as the Sabbath and the sanctuary, and the church's expansion into a worldwide mission. Understanding this history is crucial for anyone seeking to grasp the unique identity and impact of Adventism. This exploration will illuminate the path from a small American revival movement to a significant international denomination.

- Introduction to Seventh-day Adventism
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The Millerite Movement and the Great Disappointment

The seeds of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were sown in the fertile ground of the early 19th-century religious revivals in the United States, particularly the fervent Millerite movement. William Miller, a Baptist farmer with a deep study of biblical prophecy, became convinced that Jesus Christ would return to Earth around the year 1843 or 1844. His message, based on his interpretation of Daniel and Revelation, resonated with thousands, drawing them from various denominations. This widespread preaching created an atmosphere of intense anticipation, leading many to sell their possessions and prepare for the imminent second coming of Christ. The anticipation built to a fever pitch as the predicted date approached.

However, October 22, 1844, passed without the anticipated event. This day became known as the Great Disappointment, a period of profound confusion and despair for Miller's followers. Many abandoned their faith, while others sought to understand the reasons for the delay. This disappointment, though devastating, proved to be a crucial turning point. It spurred a period of intense theological re-evaluation among those who remained committed to the prophetic message. This re-examination would ultimately lead to the formation of a distinct theological framework and the establishment of a new church.

Emergence of Core Adventist Doctrines

Following the Great Disappointment, a small group of Millerites, characterized by their unwavering faith and diligent study of scripture, began to develop new understandings of prophetic timelines and biblical principles. This period of intense theological exploration led to the formulation of distinct doctrines that would define the Seventh-day Adventist identity. These doctrines were not arbitrary inventions but rather the result of earnest seeking for truth and reconciliation of their prophetic calculations with biblical texts.

The Sabbath Commandment

One of the most significant doctrinal developments involved the rediscovery and re-emphasis of the seventh-day Sabbath. Some former Millerites, including Joseph Bates, came to believe that the date of Christ's return was not the only prophetic interpretation that needed re-evaluation. Through careful study of the Ten Commandments, they concluded that the fourth commandment, which designates the seventh day (Saturday) as the Sabbath, had been largely neglected by mainstream Christianity. They saw its observance as a vital sign of loyalty to God and a continuation of a divinely instituted practice from creation. This belief in the perpetuity and importance of the seventh-day Sabbath became a cornerstone of their emerging faith.

The Sanctuary Doctrine

Another pivotal doctrine that emerged from the post-disappointment period was the sanctuary doctrine. Building upon the writings of Miller and his contemporaries, and particularly influenced by the biblical book of Hebrews, Ellen G. White and others began to understand Christ's ministry in a heavenly sanctuary. They interpreted 1844 not as the date of Christ's earthly return, but as the beginning of a new phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, a cleansing and investigative process. This complex doctrine offered an explanation for the delay and provided a framework for understanding end-time events.

The Investigative Judgment

Closely linked to the sanctuary doctrine was the concept of the investigative judgment. According to this belief, from 1844 onwards, Christ began to review the records of believers in the heavenly sanctuary. This judgment determined who would be considered righteous and thus worthy of eternal life. It was seen as a solemn and just process, emphasizing God's fairness and the importance of living a life of faith and obedience. The idea of a pre-advent judgment served as a powerful motivation for personal spiritual growth and ethical living.

The State of the Dead and Conditional Immortality

The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the state of the dead also diverged from common Christian views of the time. Many Adventists embraced the doctrine of "conditional immortality" or "soul sleep." This belief posits that death is a state of unconsciousness, and immortality is a gift to be received by the righteous at the resurrection. They rejected the traditional doctrine of an immortal soul that goes immediately to heaven or hell upon death, finding their interpretation more consistent with a literal reading of scripture. This doctrine emphasizes the finality of death and the ultimate reward of eternal life granted at the resurrection.

The Spirit of Prophecy

A unique aspect of Seventh-day Adventist theology is the belief in the continuing gift of prophecy, specifically manifested through the ministry of Ellen G. White. Her writings, which Adventists believe were inspired by God, cover a vast range of theological subjects, practical Christian living, health principles, and the history of the church. The church views her writings as a guiding light and a source of instruction, subordinate to the Bible but complementary to it. Her prolific output provided guidance and unity to the nascent movement.

Key Figures in Adventist History

The formation and growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are inextricably linked to the contributions of several influential individuals. These pioneers, driven by their faith and commitment to biblical truth, played instrumental roles in shaping the movement's theology, organization, and mission. Their dedication and vision laid the groundwork for what would become a global religious enterprise.

William Miller

William Miller, a lay preacher, was the central figure of the Millerite movement. His extensive study of biblical prophecies led him to the conviction of Christ's imminent return. While he did not live to see the formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, his preaching ignited the spiritual fervor that was essential for its eventual formation. His earnest presentation of prophetic timelines, though ultimately misunderstood in its timing, awakened thousands to a deeper study of scripture and the concept of Christ's second coming.

James White

James White was a pivotal leader and organizer in the early Adventist Church. A gifted writer and preacher, he played a crucial role in articulating and defending Adventist doctrines. He was instrumental in establishing the church's publishing work, recognizing its importance for disseminating truth. White was also a key figure in the formal organization of the denomination and served as its first president. His vision helped to solidify the fledgling movement and steer it towards a structured future.

Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White stands as the most influential figure in Seventh-day Adventist history, widely recognized by church members as a prophetess. Her extensive writings, often referred to as the "Spirit of Prophecy," provided guidance and counsel on a wide array of theological, doctrinal, and practical matters. Her insights were crucial in shaping Adventist theology, health principles, and missionary strategies. Her contributions are seen as divinely inspired counsel, aiding believers in understanding God's will and preparing for Christ's return.

Joseph Bates

Joseph Bates was another key early leader and a significant influence on the development of Adventist doctrines. He was a retired sea captain and an early proponent of the seventh-day Sabbath, having adopted it before the Great Disappointment. Bates was instrumental in introducing the Sabbath truth to James and Ellen White, thereby greatly influencing the doctrinal direction of

the emerging church. He also contributed to the development of other Adventist beliefs and was a proponent of health reform.

Organization and Global Expansion

The early decades of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were marked by a transition from a scattered group of believers to a more organized and unified denomination. This organizational development was crucial for its sustained growth and its ability to undertake significant mission endeavors. The commitment to spreading their beliefs led to rapid international expansion.

Formal Organization

The formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church took place in 1863, with the establishment of the General Conference. This marked a significant step in consolidating the movement's administrative structure, allowing for more effective leadership, coordination of efforts, and financial stewardship. The General Conference provided a framework for governance and decision-making, enabling the church to speak with a unified voice and plan for future growth. This formal structure was essential for its burgeoning ministries.

Missionary Efforts

From its early days, the Seventh-day Adventist Church possessed a strong missionary impulse. Believing in the urgency of the gospel message and the imminent return of Christ, members felt compelled to share their faith with the world. This led to the establishment of a robust global mission program, sending missionaries to various continents. The church's commitment to evangelism has been a driving force behind its international expansion, making it a truly worldwide religious body.

Educational and Healthcare Ministries

Concurrent with its evangelistic mission, the Seventh-day Adventist Church developed extensive educational and healthcare institutions. Recognizing the importance of holistic ministry, the church established schools, colleges, and universities to provide Christian education, as well as hospitals and clinics to offer medical care. These ministries have become significant pillars of the church's work, serving both members and the wider community, and demonstrating a practical application of their health principles and compassionate care. This dual focus on spiritual and physical well-being has been a hallmark of their outreach.

Modern Seventh-day Adventism

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a global denomination with millions of members in nearly every country. It continues to uphold its foundational doctrines, including the Sabbath, the sanctuary, and the Spirit of Prophecy, while engaging with contemporary issues and global challenges. The church maintains a strong focus on mission, education, and healthcare, operating an extensive network of institutions worldwide. Its commitment to biblical principles and its outreach to diverse cultures remain central to its identity and ongoing mission in the 21st century.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the primary historical event that led to the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

The Great Disappointment of 1844, stemming from Millerite Adventist interpretations of biblical prophecy regarding the second coming of Jesus, is the primary historical event that led to the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Following this, a smaller group re-examined their beliefs and discovered the Sabbath on Saturday.

Who are considered the key early leaders in the Seventh-day Adventist movement?

Key early leaders include Ellen G. White, Joseph Bates, and James White. Ellen G. White is particularly significant for her extensive writings and visions, which are considered divinely inspired by the church.

When and where was the Seventh-day Adventist Church officially organized?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was officially organized on May 21, 1863, in Battle Creek, Michigan, USA.

What does 'Seventh-day' in the church's name refer to?

The 'Seventh-day' refers to their observance of the Sabbath on Saturday, the seventh day of the week, in accordance with the biblical commandment.

What does 'Adventist' in the church's name signify?

The 'Adventist' signifies their belief in the imminent second coming (advent) of Jesus Christ, a core tenet of their faith.

Besides the Sabbath, what are some other significant early beliefs that shaped the Seventh-day Adventist

Church?

Other significant early beliefs include the investigative judgment starting in 1844, the soon return of Christ, the authority of the Bible as the sole rule of faith and practice, and a focus on health reform and holistic living.

How did the Seventh-day Adventist Church expand globally in its early history?

The church's global expansion was driven by missionary efforts, the establishment of educational institutions, and the development of publishing houses to disseminate their message in various languages.

What role did health reform play in the early development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church?

Health reform, including vegetarianism and the avoidance of alcohol and tobacco, was a crucial aspect of early Adventist identity, seen as a way to prepare the body and mind for Christ's return and to live a more godly life.

Are there distinct historical periods or phases within the Seventh-day Adventist Church's development?

Yes, generally historians identify phases such as the post-1844 'remnant church' formation, the period of organizational growth and global expansion, and later periods marked by developing theological understanding and institutional development.

What is the significance of Ellen G. White's writings within the Seventh-day Adventist historical narrative?

Ellen G. White's writings are considered by Seventh-day Adventists to be a continuing and authoritative source of truth, providing guidance on doctrine, lifestyle, and church organization, and are a foundational element in understanding their historical development.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to a brief history of Seventh-day Adventists, each formatted with *tags* and accompanied by a short description:

1. *Adventism's Early Dawn: The Millerite Movement and Its Aftermath*
This book delves into the origins of Adventism, focusing on the fervent Millerite revival of the 1840s. It explores the prophetic interpretations and the profound disappointment of the Great Disappointment, tracing how this pivotal event shaped the nascent Seventh-day Adventist movement. The narrative highlights the key figures and theological shifts that laid the groundwork for a distinct Adventist identity.

2. *The Adventist Pioneers: Shaping a Denomination*
This title examines the foundational years of the Seventh-day Adventist

Church, introducing the individuals who played crucial roles in its establishment. It details their theological convictions, organizational efforts, and the challenges they faced in building a global church. The book offers insights into their commitment to prophecy, health reform, and mission work.

3. From Vision to Vanguard: Seventh-day Adventist Global Expansion

This work chronicles the remarkable growth and international spread of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It traces the denomination's efforts to establish a presence in diverse cultures and geographical regions, highlighting the strategies and sacrifices involved. The book showcases how Adventist beliefs and institutions have impacted communities worldwide.

4. The Sabbath's Enduring Call: A Historical Perspective

This book offers a historical exploration of the Seventh-day Sabbath's significance within Adventism. It examines the biblical basis and early Adventist understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath, and how its observance became a defining characteristic of the movement. The narrative also touches upon the ongoing impact and theological implications of this central tenet.

5. Health as a Sacred Trust: Adventist Reforms and Lifestyle

This title investigates the Adventist emphasis on health reform as an integral part of their faith. It traces the historical development of this focus, from early pronouncements to the establishment of a global network of healthcare institutions. The book explores the philosophical underpinnings and practical applications of the Adventist lifestyle.

6. Prophecy's Voice: The Eschatological Landscape of Adventism

This work delves into the role of prophetic interpretation within Seventh-day Adventist history and theology. It examines the historical context of their eschatological views and how these beliefs have shaped their mission and understanding of world events. The book explores the dynamic relationship between prophetic fulfillment and Adventist evangelism.

7. The Printing Press as Mission: Adventist Publishing and Media

This book highlights the crucial role of Adventist publishing and media in spreading their message throughout history. It traces the establishment and influence of Adventist publishing houses and periodicals, detailing how they disseminated theological ideas and educational materials. The narrative underscores the strategic use of media for evangelism and discipleship.

8. Education for a New Era: The Adventist School System's Genesis

This title focuses on the historical development of the Seventh-day Adventist educational system. It explores the motivations behind establishing schools, from early academies to universities, and their commitment to integrating faith and learning. The book outlines the evolution of Adventist pedagogy and its global reach.

9. Women of Faith: Adventist Women and Their Contributions

This book shines a light on the often-overlooked contributions of women in the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It showcases their roles as pioneers, evangelists, educators, and administrators, highlighting their significant impact on the denomination's growth and mission. The narrative celebrates their resilience and leadership.

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A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists PDF

Author: Dr. Elias Vance

Contents:

Introduction: The Origins of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs and the Millerite Movement.

Chapter 1: The Rise of the Adventist Church: Key Figures, Early Doctrines, and Organizational Structure.

Chapter 2: The Adventist Church's Global Expansion: Missions, Growth, and Adaptation in Diverse Cultures.

Chapter 3: Key Theological Developments and Debates: A Look at Significant Shifts in Adventist Understanding.

Chapter 4: The Adventist Church and the Modern World: Challenges, Contributions, and Future Directions.

Conclusion: The Enduring Legacy and Continuing Relevance of Seventh-day Adventism.

A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists

Introduction: The Seeds of a Movement - The Millerite Prophecies and the Great Disappointment

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, a global faith with millions of adherents, boasts a fascinating and complex history rooted in the fervent religious atmosphere of 19th-century America. Its origins lie not in a single event but in a confluence of factors, primarily the Millerite movement and the "Great Disappointment" of 1844. William Miller, a Baptist preacher, interpreted biblical prophecies to predict the Second Coming of Christ around 1843-1844. Thousands embraced his message, preparing for the imminent return of Jesus. When the predicted date passed without the event, many felt disillusioned. However, a small, dedicated group, refusing to abandon their faith, continued to examine scripture, leading to the development of unique Adventist beliefs. This initial period of post-disappointment reflection and intense biblical study proved crucial in shaping the theological foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The experience fostered a rigorous approach to biblical interpretation and an unwavering commitment to prophetic study that continues to this day. This period of intense spiritual searching and theological re-evaluation laid the groundwork for the

formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the articulation of its distinctive doctrines.

Chapter 1: From Disappointment to Denomination - Establishing the Adventist Identity

The years following 1844 witnessed the emergence of key figures who played pivotal roles in establishing the Adventist Church. Among them were Ellen G. White, whose writings profoundly shaped the church's theology, governance, and lifestyle, and James and Ellen White, whose collaborative efforts proved essential for the church's early growth and organization. Early Adventist doctrines crystallized around several core tenets, including the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), the belief in the imminent second coming of Christ, and a commitment to health reform stemming from an emphasis on the holistic nature of the individual—body, mind, and spirit. The establishment of a formal organizational structure was another important development. Initially characterized by small, independent groups, the Adventist movement gradually coalesced into a more structured denomination, leading to the establishment of conferences, unions, and eventually a world headquarters, reflecting a growing global presence. These early years were marked by intense debate and discussion as Adventist thinkers grappled with theological complexities, defining their distinct identity within the broader Christian landscape. This process of internal dialogue and external engagement helped solidify the church's beliefs and practices, laying the foundation for future growth and expansion.

Chapter 2: Spreading the Gospel Globally - Missions and Adaptation

The Adventist Church's expansion beyond its North American origins represents a remarkable story of missionary zeal and cross-cultural adaptation. Adventist missionaries, driven by a strong sense of mission, ventured to diverse parts of the globe, carrying their message of hope and salvation to various communities. Their work was not merely about proselytizing; it involved adapting their message and practices to resonate with different cultures and contexts. This adaptability proved crucial to the church's success, allowing it to establish a significant presence in Asia, Africa, South America, and Europe. The church established schools, hospitals, and publishing houses in many regions, contributing to social development and providing vital services to the communities they served. This global reach brought with it the challenge of navigating diverse theological interpretations and cultural sensitivities. While maintaining core doctrines, the church adapted its approaches and emphasized contextualization, ensuring its message remained relevant and meaningful across vastly different cultures and circumstances. This global expansion significantly shaped the church's identity and enriched its theological discourse, leading to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Adventist belief.

Chapter 3: Theological Developments and Debates -

Navigating Change and Maintaining Core Values

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not without internal theological debates and developments. As the church matured and interacted with diverse theological perspectives, discussions arose regarding interpretation of prophecy, the nature of the sanctuary, and the understanding of salvation. These debates, often intense, contributed to the evolution of Adventist thought, refining existing doctrines and leading to a more sophisticated theological framework. The role of Ellen White's writings, for instance, has been a subject of ongoing discussion, with some emphasizing their authority while others advocate for a more critical approach. These theological discussions were (and are) vital for the church's intellectual growth and prevented stagnation. While internal debates were sometimes contentious, they served as a crucible for refining Adventist theology, leading to a more nuanced and robust understanding of its core beliefs. This continual process of engagement with scripture and theological challenges showcases the church's intellectual dynamism and commitment to rigorous theological examination.

Chapter 4: Seventh-day Adventism in the Modern World - Challenges and Contributions

In the 21st century, the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces a range of challenges, including secularization, globalization, and internal divisions. These challenges demand innovative approaches to evangelism, maintaining relevance in a changing world, and addressing issues of social justice and ethical responsibility. Despite these challenges, the church continues to contribute significantly to global society through its extensive educational, medical, and humanitarian work. Its global network of educational institutions, hospitals, and relief agencies makes a profound impact on communities worldwide. Furthermore, the church's commitment to health reform, environmental stewardship, and social justice aligns with many contemporary concerns, fostering positive engagement with society. Addressing these contemporary challenges while upholding its core values necessitates an ongoing conversation about faith, reason, and the role of the church in the modern world. Navigating this complex landscape requires a blend of tradition and adaptation, ensuring that Adventist beliefs remain both relevant and faithful to their original inspiration.

Conclusion: A Legacy of Faith and Service

The history of Seventh-day Adventists reveals a dynamic faith tradition born out of the fervor and reflection of 19th-century America. From its humble beginnings amidst the Millerite movement and the "Great Disappointment" to its global presence today, the church's journey showcases remarkable resilience, missionary zeal, and ongoing theological development. The church's enduring legacy is one of faith, service, and a commitment to proclaiming the gospel while addressing the critical needs of the world. Its ongoing work in education, health care, and humanitarian service underscores its continued relevance and enduring commitment to its foundational principles. Understanding this rich history is essential to appreciating the complex tapestry of beliefs and practices that constitute Seventh-day Adventism, providing insight into its lasting impact on the global community.

FAQs

1. What is the significance of the Great Disappointment in Seventh-day Adventist history? The Great Disappointment, the failure of Christ's return in 1844 as predicted by William Miller, led to the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It prompted intense scriptural study that resulted in unique theological interpretations.
2. Who was Ellen G. White, and what is her role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Ellen G. White is considered a prophetess by Seventh-day Adventists. Her writings significantly shaped the church's theology, practices, and lifestyle.
3. What are the core beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists? Core beliefs include observing the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), the imminent second coming of Christ, and a holistic approach to health and wellbeing.
4. How has the Seventh-day Adventist Church expanded globally? Through missionary work and adapting its message to diverse cultures, the church established a significant presence worldwide.
5. What are some of the significant theological debates within the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Debates have centered on the interpretation of biblical prophecy, the role of Ellen G. White's writings, and the understanding of the sanctuary.
6. What are some of the challenges facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church today? Challenges include secularization, maintaining relevance in a changing world, and addressing internal divisions and social justice issues.
7. What are the key contributions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to society? Contributions include extensive work in education, healthcare, and humanitarian aid.
8. What is the importance of health reform in Seventh-day Adventist theology? Health reform emphasizes a holistic approach to life, connecting physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.
9. How does the Seventh-day Adventist Church balance tradition and adaptation in the modern world? The church navigates this by engaging in ongoing theological discussions and adapting its methods while maintaining its core beliefs.

Related Articles:

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George R. Knight, 1999 This book is a story of how Adventists came to view themselves as a prophetic people, of their growing awareness of a responsibility to take their unique message to all the world, and of their organizational and institutional development as they sought to fulfill their prophetic mission. By the end of this volume, you as a reader and I as a author will find ourselves in the flow of Adventist history. - Millerite Roots. Era of Doctrinal Development. Era of Organizational Development. Era of Institutional and Lifestyle Development. Era of Revival, Reform, and Expansion. Era of Reorganization and Crisis. Era of Worldwide Growth. The Challenges and Possibilities of Maturity.

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General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists, 2005

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Abbreviations, Chapter 1: The Dynamic Nature of Present Truth, Present Truth: Fluid Rather Than Static, The Avoidance of Creedal Rigidity, The Pathway of Progressive Understanding, Chapter 2: Adventism Wasn't Born in a Vacuum, The Theological Roots of Adventism, Millennial Visions, Chapter 3: The Millerite Theological Foundation, Miller's Use of the Bible, Miller on the Second Advent, The First and Second Angels' Messages, The Seventh-Month Movement and the Great Disappointment, Chapter 4: What Is Adventist in Adventism? (1844-1885), The Centrality of the Shut Door and the Struggle for Identity, A People of the Book, Moving Toward an Understanding of the Sanctuary, The Sabbath and the Third Angel's Message, The Final Doctrinal Pillar: Conditional, Immortality, Putting It All Together, Refining the First and Second Angels' Messages, Other Post-1850 Theological Refinements, Perspective, Chapter 5: What Is Christian in Adventism? (1886-1919), A Setting for Disagreement, Still a People of the Book? The Issue of Authority, Uplift Jesus: Righteousness by Faith and the Third Angel's Message, Uplift Jesus: The Trinity, Full Divinity of Jesus, and Personhood of the Holy Spirit, Uplift Jesus: A Two-Track Exploration Into the Human Nature of Christ, Perspective, Chapter 6: What Is Fundamentalist in Adventism? (1919-1950), A Polarizing Theological Context, Adventism Moves Toward a More Rigid Position on Inspiration, A People of the Book or a People of the Books?, A Revived Interest in Righteousness by Faith, The Crucial Role of M.L. Andreasen and His Last Generation Theology, Moves to Make Adventism Look More Christian, Perspective, Chapter 7: Adventism in Theological Tension (1950-), Some Significant Developments, Track 1: The Search for Historic Adventism, Track 2: The Search for the Meaning of 1888, Track 3: The Search for Ellen White's Role and Authority, Track 4: The Search for a Theology of Inspiration Perspective, Chapter 8: What Does All This Mean?, Lessons on Polarization, Lessons on Theological Rigor Mortis, Lessons on Theological Essentials, And What About the Advent?, Appendix: Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, Index

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