



Jews and Adventists: A Reflection on Their Common Heritage

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When comparing the similarities between Seventh-day Adventism and Judaism, many common points emerge. Having lived among Adventists as well as among Jews in Israel, I will try to give my personal view on the state of Adventist-Jewish relations.

Whenever such a discussion is held, Adventists are quick to point out their beliefs and observances of the Sabbath and certain laws of *kashrut* (what some Adventists usually call “dietary” or “health” laws). And so, it is not uncommon for many Jews to be surprised when they discover certain Christians keeping the Sabbath on the seventh day and refraining from

eating unclean animals such as pork. I witnessed this type of reaction several times when sharing some of the Adventist beliefs with Jewish friends.

Shabbat

The common observance of Shabbat is one of the most precious practices Jews and Seventh-day Adventists have in common, which has great potential to improve the connection between both. Many Adventists can feel comfortable in a Jewish home or synagogue during Shabbat. There, they can experience the rich Jewish customs that have been attached to this special day. Likewise, I believe that Jews can also be enriched by learning more about

the Adventist view on Shabbat. This kind of interaction is a special one that singles out Jews and Adventists from most other religious groups.

Kashrut

However, when Jews look closer at Adventist “*kashrut*,” they will also notice that Adventists only refrain from eating those animals which are prohibited in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Till this day there is no official teaching restricting the consumption of blood with meat within Adventism. Perhaps Adventists have ignored this question because many are vegetarian, and, therefore, automatically do not consume any blood.

But both the Hebrew Bible and the apostolic writings (New Testament) universally teach against consuming blood. God commanded the sons of Noah not to eat meat with its blood (Gen 9:4), a law henceforth applicable not only to Jews but to all human beings. Even during the Israelite theocracy, resident aliens abiding with Israel were not allowed to eat blood either (Lev 17:10). Most of all, Yeshua's apostles renewed the validity of this command to Gentile Christians during the Jerusalem council (Acts 15:20, 29). A similar decision can be found in the so-called Noahidic Laws found in rabbinic literature.¹ No Orthodox Torah-observant would ever dream of eating any animal blood.

Furthermore, many Jews do not mix dairy products with meat, an observance derived by rabbinic exegesis from Exod 23:19. Consequently, some Orthodox Jews have chosen vegetarianism as a safeguard against mixing both kinds of foods.

Certain rabbis also spoke of vegetarianism as the ideal diet.² Many Adventists have adopted a vegetarian lifestyle, mainly because they believe that the human body is a holy temple (1 Cor 6:19-20) and, therefore, seek to glorify God through a healthy lifestyle.

Religion and State

I believe that a third major point of contact that is unique to Adventists and Diaspora Jews alike is our common concern for religion and state issues. For instance, the majority of American Jewry till this day, like the Seventh-day Adventist minority, endeavors to keep a clear line between government and religion. This preoccupation is naturally understandable, since Jews have lived as a religious minority around the globe for millennia and have experienced persecutions from oppressive religious institutions linked to the rulership or government of their respective countries.

Due to the minority status of

Judaism and Adventism (there are about 11–14 million Jews worldwide; interestingly enough, Adventist membership is about the same), Jews and Adventists have also encountered problems with civil legislation due to religious matters. It is not uncommon for a Jew or an Adventist to experience conflicts with work or school attendance because of Sabbath observance. I particularly felt this type of tension when living in France, where many Jews and Adventists have had problems with school attendance, academic exams, and other important events that tend to fall on Saturday. The Adventist-Jewish connection can work together to confront these kinds of problems.

If Jews are actively involved with religious liberty because of persecutions in the *past*, then Adventists are engaged in this same battle because of expectations in the *future*. These expectations stem from Adventist eschatological belief, namely, that before the inauguration of the Messianic kingdom on earth, this world will first experience a final cosmic confrontation, where once again church and state, religion and government join together (e.g., as in the Middle Ages) and persecute those who differ from such establishment. Adventists have, therefore, carefully sought to avoid seeing such a scenario repeat itself. Beyond the theological differences that Adventism and Judaism may have about the end of times and the world to come, Adventists and Jews *need* to continue to strive together against any effort to unite state and religion. This is all the more true now, and particularly here in the United States where we see renewed



human attempts to shorten the gap between church and state. The memories of the past and the prophetic cries of the future should be a stirring reminder of how harmful this deadly combination can be.

Same God and Shared Scriptures

Besides these specific beliefs, we should not, of course, forget the more general ones. Both Jews and Adventists share the same Bible (although Adventists also include the writings of the apostles); Adventists and Jews accept the authority of the *Tanakh* (what Christians still persist in calling Old Testament). Obviously, both Adventists and Jews adhere to the same ethical principles of the Torah (i.e., the sacred value of human life and the moral principles and guidelines that are prescribed therein). Indeed, for Adventists, the Bible is more than just a reference to symbols or typologies that point to the Messiah. In addition to these Messianic signs and types that Adventists (like other Christians) find in the Hebrew Scriptures, Adventists also search for those laws and truths that are deemed necessary for everyone, and not only for Israel. Many laws are still binding for all of humanity, and it would be a mistake to only look in the so-called New Testament for authoritative *halakhah* (legal instruction). Adventism is not only a religion of faith, but faith with mitzvot (works), especially the *Aseret HaDibrot* (the Ten Commandments). Perhaps Adventism is closer to Judaism in this “legal” aspect because there is a great emphasis on

“faith that works.” Works flow out naturally from true *emunah* (faithfulness). Finally, I should not forget to mention that both Adventists and Jews worship the same God of Avraham, Yitzhaq, and Yaaqov.

What Lies Ahead?

With all of these mutual beliefs between Judaism and Christianity, Jews have sometimes crossed their religious border and “converted” to Christianity. Likewise, there are many former Christians within the Jewish community. As David Novak has suggested, “the greatest temptation for a Jew is Christianity, and the greatest temptation for a Christian is Judaism.”³ This may be even truer for Adventists and Jews where additional parallels can be found that are virtually non-existent in the rest of Christianity.

In spite of all these wonderful common points, there still remains a lot of work to be done in order to improve the Adventist-Jewish dialogue. The greatest obstacle that lies ahead is replacement theology, which certain Adventists still hold onto. Many adhere to this belief unconsciously or out of ignorance. Greater effort needs to be performed in order to correct this problem. But it seems that Adventism is on the right track. Certainly no serious Adventist biblical theologian today would accept the idea that God has rejected the Jewish people.

All the wonderful doctrines on Sabbath, faith and works, and health will be of no effect if special care is not given to this sensitive issue. No well-grounded Jewish person will be able to

accept any type of replacement theology. In fact, it is unbiblical. Throughout the Scriptures we can hear of God’s everlasting love for Israel and humankind. God *still* maintains His love for Israel: “Can a woman forget her baby, Or disown the child of her womb? Though she might forget, I never could forget you” (Isa 49:15). “Thus said the LORD: As surely as I have established My covenant with day and night—the laws of heaven and earth—so I will never reject the offspring of Jacob and My servant David” (Jer 33:25-26). Some Adventists need to remember the Apostle Paul’s statement: “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!” (Rom 11:1). Hopefully, Adventism will continue on the right path and embrace the Jews as His chosen people.

¹*Sanhedrin* 56a.

²See Abarbanel on Gen 9:3 and Isa 11:7.

³David Novak, “Introduction: What to Seek and What to Avoid in Jewish-Christian Dialogue,” in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, ed. Tikva S. Frymer-Kensky et al. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 5.