

# Sabbath, Sanctuary, and the Second Coming: Unpacking the Distinctive Doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism

Sayed Mahbub Hasan Amiri 

Department of ICT, Dhaka Residential Model College, Dhaka, Bangladesh

## Abstract

This article examines the interrelationship between the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, and the Second Coming within Seventh-day Adventist theology, arguing that these doctrines function as an integrated theological system rather than isolated beliefs. While each doctrine has received substantial scholarly attention independently, their functional interdependence has remained underexplored. Employing a qualitative document-based methodology, the study analyzes biblical texts, early Adventist writings, and contemporary theological scholarship through thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate that the sanctuary doctrine provides the theological mechanism for judgment and atonement, the Sabbath functions as a creation-based sign of divine authority and eschatological allegiance, and the Second Coming represents the culmination of the redemptive process. These doctrines are unified by the Great Controversy framework, which situates them within a cosmic narrative addressing questions of justice, authority, and restoration. By presenting these teachings as a coherent theological trilogy, the article contributes to Adventist studies and broader Christian theology by clarifying the internal logic, eschatological structure, and missiological implications of Seventh-day Adventist belief.

**Keywords:** Great Controversy, Sabbath, Sanctuary Doctrine, Second Coming, Seventh-day Adventist Theology

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

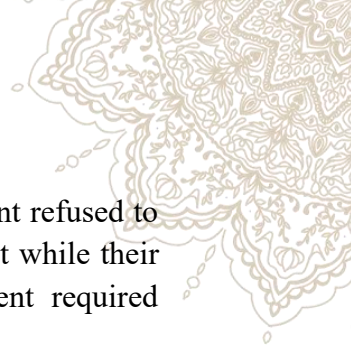
The Seventh-day Adventist Church, now a global denomination with over twenty-one million baptized members, traces its theological origins to a singular moment of profound disillusionment: the Millerite Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844 (Knight, 2000). Led by William Miller, a Baptist farmer and preacher, tens of thousands of believers across the northeastern United States had eagerly anticipated the literal, visible return of Jesus Christ to cleanse the earth. Miller's prophetic calculations, based primarily on Daniel 8:14 "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (King James Version) had convinced them that history would reach its grand consummation on that specific date. When the day passed without event, the movement fractured. Many abandoned their faith

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\*Corresponding author: Sayed Mahbub Hasan Amiri [amiri@drmc.edu.bd]



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entirely, while others returned to their former churches. However, a small remnant refused to relinquish their conviction that God had been leading them. They concluded that while their chronological calculations remained intact, the nature of the anticipated event required reinterpretation (Paseggi, 2019).

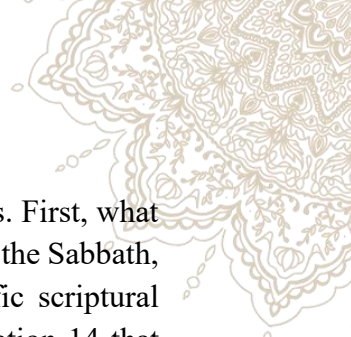
This hermeneutical crisis became the crucible in which distinctive Seventh-day Adventist theology was forged. Through intensive, prayerful Bible study, pioneers such as Hiram Edson, O.R.L. Crosier, and Joseph Bates began to piece together a new understanding. Edson famously recounted experiencing a revelation while crossing a cornfield on the morning after the Disappointment, concluding that Christ had not returned to earth but had instead entered the *second* phase of His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary (Froom, 1954). This insight did not merely salvage their faith; it reoriented it entirely. From this pivotal moment, three interlocking doctrines emerged as the foundational pillars of what would become Seventh-day Adventism: the heavenly Sanctuary with its attendant doctrine of the Investigative Judgment, the perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath, and the imminent, literal Second Coming of Jesus (Damsteegt, 1977). These three tenets, derived from a distinctive historicist method of prophetic interpretation, provided a coherent explanation for their recent history and a compelling roadmap for the future.

## 1.2. Problem Statement

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the individual doctrines of Seventh-day Adventism. Historians and theologians have meticulously examined the development of the Sanctuary doctrine as the church's response to 1844 (see Froom, 1954; Rodriguez, 2010). Others have explored the theological and ethical dimensions of Sabbath observance, tracing its roots to the creation narrative and its eschatological significance as the "seal of God" (Bacchiocchi, 1977; Davidson, 2014). Similarly, the Adventist understanding of eschatology, particularly the Second Coming and the millennium, has been analyzed within the broader context of American apocalypticism (Land, 2005). These studies have contributed invaluable insights into the denomination's belief system.

However, a significant gap persists in the academic literature. The majority of these works treat the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, and the Second Coming as discrete topics to be examined in isolation. While the church's official statements, such as the *28 Fundamental Beliefs*, list them as separate articles, there is a profound theological interdependence that remains underexplored (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2020). The Sanctuary doctrine provides the mechanism for salvation and the timing of the pre-advent judgment; the Sabbath functions as the sign of loyalty to the Creator who judges and redeems; and the Second Coming constitutes the ultimate fulfillment of the sanctuary's promise of restoration. Isolated treatment of these doctrines obscures the systemic coherence that undergirds Adventist theology and limits scholarly understanding of its internal logic. This paper, therefore, addresses this lacuna by investigating how these three doctrines collectively inform the Adventist worldview, arguing that they cannot be properly understood apart from their functional integration.

## 1.3. Research Questions



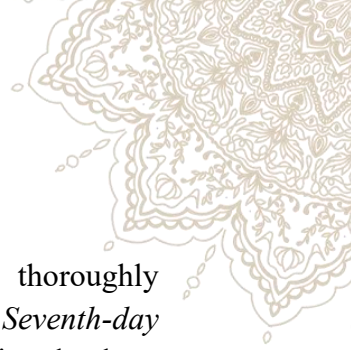
To achieve this objective, this study is guided by three primary research questions. First, what is the biblical basis for the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Sanctuary, the Sabbath, and the Second Coming? This question requires an examination of the specific scriptural passages such as Daniel 7–9, Hebrews 8–10, Genesis 2, Exodus 20, and Revelation 14 that Adventists identify as foundational for these beliefs, as well as the hermeneutical principles employed in their interpretation (Holbrook, 1989). Second, how did these doctrines develop historically in the post-1844 period? This involves tracing the intellectual journey of the early pioneers from the Great Disappointment through the formalization of these pillars in the 1840s and 1850s, drawing on primary sources such as early Adventist periodicals like *The Present Truth* and the writings of Ellen G. White (Schwarz & Greenleaf, 2000). Third, and most critically, how do these three doctrines function together to form a unified theological framework? This question moves beyond historical description to theological synthesis, exploring the conceptual links between the sanctuary's ministry, the Sabbath's memorial, and the eschaton's hope.

#### 1.4. Article Statement

In response to these questions, this paper advances the following thesis: The Seventh-day Adventist doctrines of the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, and the Second Coming are not independent tenets but an integrated theological trilogy that explains God's plan for humanity from Creation to Restoration, serving as the hermeneutical key to the denomination's identity and mission. This trilogy, it will be argued, is held together by the overarching meta-narrative of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan a cosmic conflict over God's character and law that began in heaven, manifested on earth, and will culminate in the final eradication of sin and the vindication of the divine government (White, 1888). Within this framework, the Sanctuary reveals *how* God resolves the problem of sin through Christ's high-priestly ministry and judgment. The Sabbath reveals *whom* we worship as the Creator and Redeemer, providing a weekly reminder of God's creative and redemptive power. The Second Coming reveals *what* we hope for the ultimate restoration of all things when Christ returns to take His people home. Together, they constitute a comprehensive answer to the most profound questions of human existence: Where did we come from? How are we saved? Where are we going? As L. E. Froom (1954, p. 843) famously asserted, the sanctuary truth is "the very pivot of Seventh-day Adventist theology," but it is a pivot that only functions properly when connected to the pillars of the Sabbath and the Second Coming. This study, therefore, aims to demonstrate that the strength of Adventist theology lies not merely in its individual parts, but in their remarkable integration into a single, coherent vision of the everlasting gospel.

## 2. Literature Review

This literature review surveys existing scholarship on Seventh-day Adventist theology, organized into five thematic sections corresponding to the major areas of investigation: historical foundations, the Sanctuary doctrine, the theology of the Sabbath, eschatology and the Second Coming, and the Great Controversy meta-narrative. The purpose is to identify key contributions, assess the current state of scholarship, and locate the gap this study addresses.



## 2.1. Historical Foundations of Adventist Theology

The historical development of Seventh-day Adventist theology has been thoroughly documented. George R. Knight's *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrines* (2000) remains the standard text, arguing that Adventist theology developed through "progressive revelation" as early believers studied the Bible in community following the Great Disappointment of 1844 (Knight, 2000, p. 27). Knight demonstrates that the hermeneutical shift from an earthly to a heavenly sanctuary, initiated by Hiram Edson, was foundational for all subsequent doctrinal development.

P. Gerard Damsteeg's *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (1977) complements Knight by focusing on how the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 shaped Adventist self-understanding and global mission. The role of individual pioneers has been examined in biographical studies: Knight (2004) presents Joseph Bates as the primary architect of Sabbatarianism, while Burt (2003) analyzes Edson's pivotal contribution to the sanctuary doctrine through his post-disappointment revelation.

## 2.2. Theological Analysis of the Sanctuary Doctrine

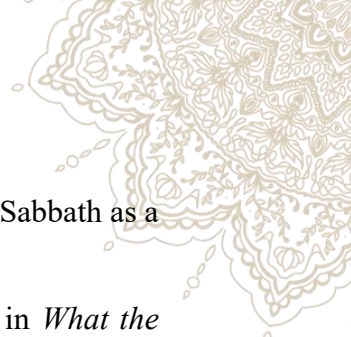
The Sanctuary doctrine has generated extensive scholarly attention. Le Roy Edwin Froom's four-volume *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* (1950-1954) provides the foundational historical documentation. In Volume 4, Froom (1954) declares the sanctuary truth "the very pivot of Seventh-day Adventist theology the veritable keystone of the doctrinal arch" (p. 843), demonstrating its continuity with historicist interpretation throughout church history.

Contemporary biblical scholarship has been advanced by Richard M. Davidson. In "Sanctuary Typology" (1992), Davidson provides detailed exegesis of the typological connections between the earthly sanctuary and Christ's heavenly ministry, demonstrating how the Day of Atonement rituals prefigured the final phase of His high-priestly work. Ángel Manuel Rodríguez's *The Sanctuary Doctrine: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Study* (2010) offers systematic exposition of the Investigative Judgment, arguing it demonstrates God's fairness in vindicating His people before the universe rather than threatening assurance.

Critical perspectives must be acknowledged. Evangelical scholar Anthony A. Hoekema (1963) argued that the Investigative Judgment undermines the finished work of Christ, a critique that has shaped evangelical perceptions. Former Adventist Dale Ratzlaff (1996) intensified this critique, arguing the sanctuary doctrine constitutes a "different gospel." Adventist responses have been substantial, including Roy Adams's *The Sanctuary Doctrine: Three Approaches in the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (1981), which defends the traditional position.

## 2.3. Theological Analysis of the Sabbath

The Sabbath doctrine has been the subject of extensive scholarship. Samuele Bacchiocchi's *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (1977), originating as a Pontifical Gregorian University dissertation, argues that Sunday observance resulted from pagan and anti-Jewish influences rather than apostolic origin.



Kenneth A. Strand's *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (1982) emphasizes the Sabbath as a creation ordinance rooted in the structure of time established at creation.

The eschatological dimension of the Sabbath has been explored by Jon Paulien in *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (1994) and *The Deep Things of God: An Insider's Guide to the Book of Revelation* (2004). Paulien demonstrates the connection between the Sabbath and the seal of God in Revelation 7 and 14, arguing the Sabbath functions as a sign of loyalty to the Creator in the final conflict. Richard M. Davidson's *A Love Song for the Sabbath: The Celebration of God's Gift of Time* (2014) offers a biblical theology emphasizing the Sabbath as a gift of grace rather than mere legal requirement.

#### **2.4. Eschatology and the Second Coming**

Adventist eschatology has been shaped by historicist prophetic interpretation. Uriah Smith's *Daniel and the Revelation* (1897) served for generations as the standard Adventist commentary, establishing patterns that influenced subsequent interpretation. Contemporary scholarship has been advanced by Hans K. LaRondelle, whose *The Israel of God in Prophecy* (1983) and *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (1997) apply nuanced hermeneutics emphasizing Christ-centered interpretation and the principle of "recapitulation" in Revelation.

The three angels' messages of Revelation 14 have been extensively analyzed by Ranko Stefanovic in *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (2002). Stefanovic demonstrates how these messages constitute the theological foundation for Adventist mission, combining the everlasting gospel with calls to worship the Creator and warnings against apostasy. C. Mervyn Maxwell's *God Cares: The Message of Revelation for You and Your Family* (1985) provides accessible exposition emphasizing the certainty of the Second Coming as the "blessed hope" animating Adventist faith.

#### **2.5. The Great Controversy Meta-Narrative**

The unifying framework for Adventist theology is the Great Controversy theme, most fully articulated by Ellen G. White in *The Great Controversy* (1888/1911). This work traces the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan from its origins to its final resolution, presenting history as a drama in which God's character is vindicated and His people ultimately delivered.

Scholarly analysis has been advanced by Herbert E. Douglass in *The Heartbeat of Adventism: The Great Controversy Theme in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (2010), arguing this theme is the interpretive lens through which all other doctrines must be understood. Woodrow W. Whidden's *Ellen White on Salvation: A Chronological Study* (1995) explores how the Great Controversy framework shapes Adventist understandings of salvation as cosmic reconciliation. Fortin and Moon's *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia* (2013) provides comprehensive coverage of the historical and theological dimensions of White's work.

#### **2.6. Synthesis and Identification of the Gap**

This review demonstrates extensive scholarship exists on each pillar of Adventist theology. Historians such as Knight (2000) and Damsteegt (1977) have thoroughly documented their development. Biblical scholars such as Davidson (1992, 2014), Rodríguez (2010), and Paulien



(1994, 2004) have carefully examined their scriptural foundations. Theologians have defended them against criticism and articulated their significance within the Great Controversy framework.

However, what remains noticeably absent is sustained treatment of how these three doctrines function *together* as an integrated system. Froom (1954) asserted the centrality of the sanctuary but did not fully develop its connections to the Sabbath and Second Coming. Bacchiocchi (1977) established the historical case for the Sabbath but did not explore its relationship to the sanctuary. Maxwell (1985) proclaimed the certainty of the Second Coming but did not systematically demonstrate its dependence on the sanctuary's completion.

The Great Controversy theme, as articulated by White (1888/1911) and analyzed by Douglass (2010), provides the potential framework for such integration, but the specific mechanics of how these three doctrines interlock within that framework remain unexplored. This study addresses that gap by demonstrating that the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Second Coming constitute an inseparable theological trilogy a unified system explaining God's plan from Creation to Restoration and providing the hermeneutical key to Adventist identity and mission.

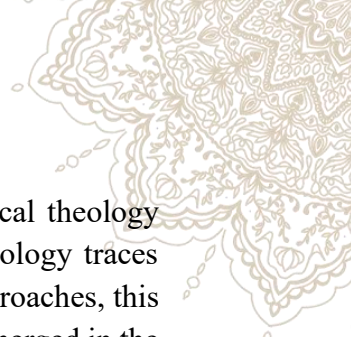
### **3. Methodology**

This chapter delineates the methodological framework employed in this study to investigate the theological integration of the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Second Coming doctrines within Seventh-day Adventism. The methodology section is organized into four subsections: research design, data collection, analytical approach, and limitations. Each subsection provides detailed justification for the methodological choices made, ensuring transparency and replicability.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employs a qualitative, document-based research design. Qualitative research is particularly suited to theological inquiry because it seeks to understand meaning, interpretation, and the construction of belief systems rather than quantifying variables or testing causal hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Theological studies, by their very nature, require engagement with sacred texts, historical documents, and interpretive traditions all of which are best approached through qualitative methodologies that privilege depth of understanding over statistical generalization.

The specific design adopted is that of a documentary analysis, which is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents both printed and electronic to extract meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Documentary analysis is particularly appropriate for this study because the Seventh-day Adventist theological system is textually mediated. Its doctrines are derived from biblical interpretation, articulated in official church statements, developed in historical writings, and defended in theological scholarship. As Tight (2019) notes, documents serve as "stable, rich, and recurring sources of data" that allow researchers to access the official positions and historical developments of organizations and movements.



This study also incorporates elements of historical-theological analysis. Historical theology examines how Christian doctrines have developed over time, while biblical theology traces themes across the canonical Scriptures (McGrath, 2017). By combining these approaches, this study can address both the historical development of the three pillars (how they emerged in the post-1844 period) and their biblical foundations (how they are derived from Scripture). This dual focus is essential for demonstrating not only that the doctrines are integrated but also that this integration was intended by their original proponents and is grounded in the biblical text.

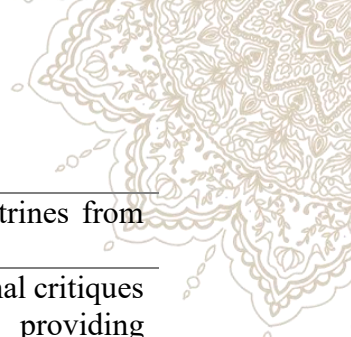
The research design is thus multi-faceted but coherent: it uses documentary analysis to gather data from primary and secondary sources, historical analysis to trace the development of ideas, and theological analysis to examine the conceptual relationships between doctrines. This approach aligns with what Swinton and Mowat (2016) describe as "theological reflection as qualitative research," wherein the researcher engages with texts in a disciplined manner to illuminate the meaning and significance of religious beliefs.

### 3.2. Data Collection

The data for this study is drawn from a carefully selected range of primary and secondary sources. The selection criteria included relevance to the three doctrines under investigation, authoritativeness within the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, and representation of diverse perspectives (including critical voices). Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the data sources organized by category.

**Table 1:** *Summary of Data Sources by Category*

| Source Category                                  | Specific Sources  | Justification for Selection  |
|--|---|--|
| <b>Primary Sources: Biblical Texts</b>           | The Holy Bible (Daniel 7-9; Hebrews 8-10; Leviticus 16; Revelation 14)  | These passages contain the foundational prophetic and typological material from which the sanctuary, Sabbath, and Second Coming doctrines are derived (Davidson, 1992; Paulien, 2004).                                     |
| <b>Primary Sources: Ellen G. White</b>           | <i>The Great Controversy</i> (White, 1911); <i>Early Writings</i> (White, 1882); <i>Patriarchs and Prophets</i> (White, 1890) | White's writings are considered authoritative in Adventism and provide the most comprehensive articulation of the Great Controversy meta-narrative that unifies the three doctrines (Douglass, 2010; Fortin & Moon, 2013). |
| <b>Primary Sources: Official Documents</b>       | <i>28 Fundamental Beliefs</i> (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2020); <i>Church Manual</i> (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2015) | These documents represent the official, authoritative statements of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine as voted by the world church in session (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2020).   |
| <b>Secondary Sources: Historical Scholarship</b> | Knight (2000); Damsteeft (1977); Froom (1954); Burt (2002)  | These historians have provided detailed accounts of the development of Adventist theology, particularly the hermeneutical shift after 1844 and the role of the pioneers.   |
| <b>Secondary Sources: Biblical-</b>              | Davidson (1992, 2014); Rodríguez (2010); Paulien  | These scholars offer detailed exegetical and theological analysis of the biblical  |



|   |                                 |   |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Theological Scholarship</b>                  | (1994, 2004); Stefanovic (2002) | foundations for the three doctrines from within the Adventist tradition.  |
| <b>Secondary Sources: Critical Perspectives</b> | Hoekema (1963); Ratzlaff (1996) | These sources represent external critiques of Adventist theology, providing necessary balance and allowing engagement with counter-arguments. |

### 3.2.1. Primary Sources

The primary sources for this study include the biblical texts that form the exegetical foundation for the three doctrines. The book of Daniel, particularly chapters 7-9, provides the prophetic timeline and the sanctuary imagery that undergirds the Adventist understanding of 1844 and the heavenly ministry of Christ (Froom, 1954). The book of Hebrews, especially chapters 8-10, supplies the New Testament interpretation of the Levitical typology and establishes the reality of Christ's heavenly high-priestly ministry (Davidson, 1992). Leviticus 16, describing the Day of Atonement rituals, provides the typological background for understanding the cleansing of the sanctuary. The book of Revelation, particularly chapters 7 and 14, connects the Sabbath to the seal of God and presents the three angels' messages that culminate in the Second Coming (Paulien, 2004; Stefanovic, 2002).

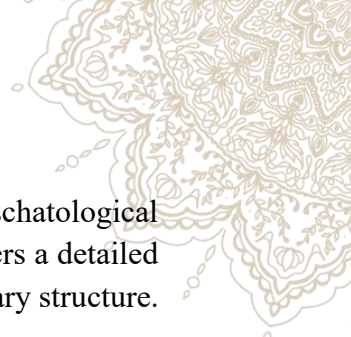
The writings of Ellen G. White constitute another crucial primary source. White (1911) *The Great Controversy* presents the cosmic conflict narrative that unifies the three doctrines, tracing the controversy from its origins in heaven to its final resolution. White (1882) *Early Writings* contains the earliest formulations of Adventist eschatology and sanctuary theology, while White (1890) *Patriarchs and Prophets* provides the creation context for understanding the Sabbath. These texts are accessed through the official Ellen G. White Estate website, which provides verified digital editions.

Official church documents serve as primary sources for understanding the denomination's authoritative positions. The *28 Fundamental Beliefs* (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2020), available on the official church website, articulates the church's official understanding of each doctrine. The *Church Manual* (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2015) provides context for how these beliefs shape church practice and polity.

### 3.2.2. Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include historical scholarship on the development of Adventist theology. Knight (2000) *A Search for Identity* is essential for understanding how the three doctrines emerged progressively in the early decades of the movement. Damsteegt (1977) *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* provides insight into how these doctrines shaped the church's self-understanding and global mission. Froom (1954) *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, Volume 4, documents the history of prophetic interpretation leading to the Adventist understanding of Daniel 8:14. Burt (2002) provides detailed analysis of the interconnected development of the sanctuary, Sabbath, and Ellen White's role.

Biblical-theological scholarship from within the Adventist tradition provides exegetical depth. Davidson (1992) offers detailed analysis of sanctuary typology, while Davidson (2014) explores the theology of the Sabbath. Rodríguez (2010) provides a comprehensive defense and



exposition of the sanctuary doctrine. Paulien (1994, 2004) elucidates the eschatological dimensions of the Sabbath and the three angels' messages. Stefanovic (2002) offers a detailed commentary on Revelation that situates the three doctrines within the book's literary structure.

Critical perspectives are represented by Hoekema (1963), whose analysis of Adventism within the context of "cult" studies has shaped evangelical perceptions, and Ratzlaff (1996), who offers a more recent and intense critique from a former insider perspective. These sources ensure that the study engages honestly with objections to the Adventist position.

### 3.3. Analytical Approach

The data collected from these sources will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is particularly appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to identify recurrent ideas across diverse texts and to trace how these ideas interconnect to form a coherent theological system.

Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a six-phase process for thematic analysis, which this study will follow:

**Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data.** The researcher will engage in close reading of all primary and secondary sources, taking preliminary notes on passages relevant to the three doctrines and their interconnections.

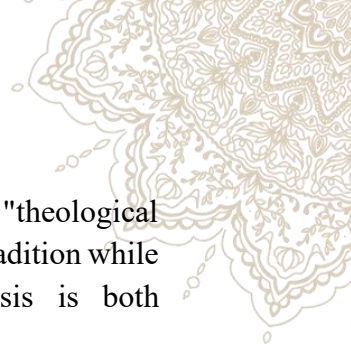
**Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes.** The researcher will systematically work through the texts, identifying specific units of meaning related to the sanctuary, Sabbath, and Second Coming. Codes might include phrases such as "heavenly sanctuary," "investigative judgment," "creation rest," "seal of God," "blessed hope," and "three angels' messages."

**Phase 3: Searching for Themes.** The initial codes will be grouped into broader themes that capture significant patterns in the data. Drawing on the work of Rodríguez (2010) and Davidson (2014), potential themes include "Atonement" (how Christ's sacrifice is applied in the heavenly sanctuary), "Judgment" (the pre-advent investigation), "Rest" (the Sabbath as creation gift), "Creation" (the foundation for worship), and "Hope" (the Second Coming as consummation).

**Phase 4: Reviewing Themes.** The identified themes will be reviewed to ensure they accurately represent the data and to refine their boundaries. This phase will involve checking that each theme is coherent internally and distinct from other themes, while also identifying how themes relate to one another.

**Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes.** Each theme will be clearly defined, and its significance for understanding the integration of the three doctrines will be articulated. For example, the theme of "Judgment" will be defined not as a standalone concept but as it relates to the sanctuary (where judgment occurs) and the Second Coming (which judgment precedes).

**Phase 6: Producing the Report.** The findings will be presented in the subsequent chapters, with thematic analysis providing the structure for demonstrating how the three doctrines interconnect.



This thematic approach is supplemented by what George (2020) terms "theological interpretation," which involves reading texts in light of the church's confessional tradition while remaining attentive to the biblical witness. This ensures that the analysis is both methodologically rigorous and theologically informed.

### **3.4. Limitations**

This study, while carefully designed, has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it is limited to English-language texts. While the majority of foundational Adventist theological works are available in English, and the official documents are published in English, this limitation means that non-English theological contributions from the global Adventist community are not represented. Given that the majority of Seventh-day Adventists now live outside North America and Europe (Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2020), this is a significant limitation that future research should address.

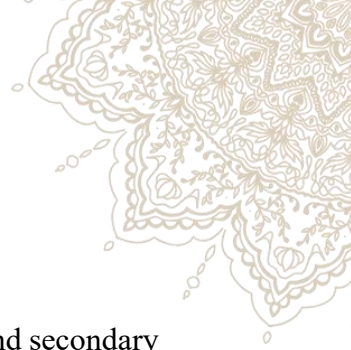
Second, this study focuses on official theology rather than popular piety. It examines what the church officially teaches and what theologians have written, but it does not investigate how ordinary church members understand or practice these doctrines. As McGuire (2008) notes, there is often a gap between official religion and lived religion. Future research might employ ethnographic methods, including interviews and surveys, to explore how the integration of these three doctrines functions in the daily lives and spiritual experiences of Adventist believers.

Third, this study is limited to the three doctrines of the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Second Coming. While these are central to Adventist theology, they do not exhaust it. Other doctrines, such as the state of the dead, the gift of prophecy, and health theology, also contribute to the distinctive Adventist worldview. A more comprehensive study might examine how these additional doctrines integrate with the three pillars.

Fourth, the study relies on the researcher's interpretation of texts. While thematic analysis provides a systematic approach, and while the researcher will strive for objectivity, all interpretation is shaped to some degree by the interpreter's presuppositions (Gadamer, 2013). The study adopts an interpretive framework informed by Adventist theological tradition, while engaging critically with external perspectives. Engagement with critical perspectives (Hoekema, 1963; Ratzlaff, 1996) is intended to mitigate this limitation by ensuring that alternative interpretations are considered.

Finally, the study is limited in its temporal scope. It focuses primarily on the foundational period of Adventist theology (1844-1900) and on contemporary official statements. It does not trace in detail the development of these doctrines through the twentieth century, a task that would require a separate study. Scholars such as Moon (2013) have begun this work, and future research might build on their contributions.

Despite these limitations, the study is designed to make a significant contribution to understanding the theological integration of the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Second Coming doctrines. By employing rigorous qualitative methods and engaging with a comprehensive range of sources, it aims to illuminate the inner coherence of Seventh-day Adventist theology and to address the gap identified in the literature review.



## 4. Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings derived from the thematic analysis of primary and secondary sources and discusses their significance for understanding the integration of the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Second Coming doctrines within Seventh-day Adventist theology. The chapter is organized into four major sections corresponding to each doctrine, followed by a synthesis demonstrating their unification within the Great Controversy meta-narrative. Each section presents the key findings and then provides theological discussion, drawing on the sources identified in the literature review and methodology.

### 4.1. The Sanctuary: Hermeneutical Reorientation and Theological Function

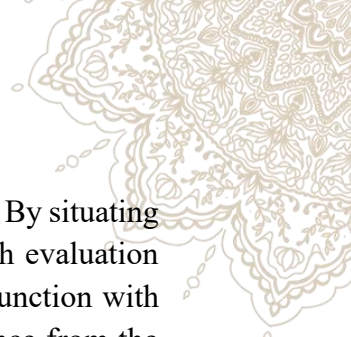
The reinterpretation of the sanctuary from an earthly to a heavenly reality constitutes a decisive hermeneutical shift in the formation of Seventh-day Adventist theology. Following the failed expectation of October 22, 1844, early Adventist interpreters concluded that the chronological framework derived from Daniel 8:14 remained intact, while the nature of the anticipated event required redefinition. This conclusion redirected theological attention away from an eschatological event on earth toward an ongoing priestly ministry in heaven.

Historical sources consistently identify this interpretive transition as foundational for the emergence of a coherent Adventist doctrinal system. The sanctuary doctrine provided an explanatory framework capable of preserving prophetic credibility while reorienting eschatological expectations. Rather than abandoning historicist interpretation, Adventist pioneers applied it more rigorously, distinguishing between the timing of prophecy and the ontology of its fulfillment.

Within this framework, the sanctuary doctrine functions as a theological mechanism for addressing the problem of sin beyond individual forgiveness. Drawing upon typological patterns in Leviticus and their interpretation in Hebrews 8–10, Adventist theology posits a two-phase heavenly ministry of Christ. The first phase emphasizes intercession and mediation, while the second often termed the Investigative Judgment is understood as a pre-advent evaluative process preceding the Second Coming.

Importantly, Adventist theologians do not frame this judgment primarily as a soteriological reassessment of believers' status. Rather, it is interpreted as a theodical process concerned with divine transparency and justice within a cosmic context. In this sense, the judgment addresses questions of moral accountability and divine governance rather than introducing uncertainty regarding salvation. This distinction is central to understanding how the doctrine functions within the broader Adventist theological system.

Critics have argued that the Investigative Judgment compromises assurance by postponing final atonement. Adventist scholarship responds by distinguishing between the completeness of Christ's sacrificial act and the historical application of its effects. Within this view, the sanctuary framework does not extend the atonement itself but explicates its cosmic and eschatological dimensions.



The sanctuary doctrine also provides temporal structure for Adventist eschatology. By situating judgment prior to the Second Coming, it establishes a logical sequence in which evaluation precedes restoration. This sequence becomes intelligible only when read in conjunction with the Sabbath and the Second Coming, both of which derive theological significance from the sanctuary's role in defining divine authority and eschatological completion.

In this way, the sanctuary functions not merely as an isolated doctrinal claim but as the interpretive center around which Adventist theology organizes its understanding of judgment, worship, and hope.

#### **4.2. The Sabbath: Creation, Authority, and Eschatological Identity**

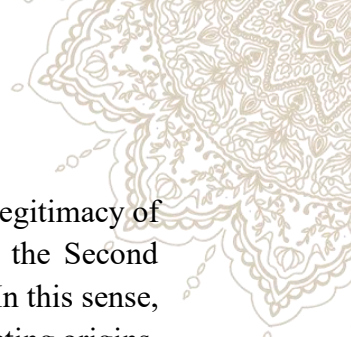
Within Seventh-day Adventist theology, the Sabbath occupies a foundational role that extends beyond ethical practice into the domains of creation, authority, and eschatological identity. Rather than functioning merely as a legal requirement or denominational marker, the Sabbath is interpreted as a creation-based institution that anchors worship in the identity of God as Creator and sustainer of the cosmos.

Biblical scholarship within the Adventist tradition consistently locates the origin of the Sabbath in the creation narrative of Genesis 2:1–3, prior to the existence of Israel or the introduction of Mosaic legislation. This placement is interpreted as establishing the Sabbath as a universal temporal structure embedded within the created order rather than a ceremonial ordinance limited to a specific covenantal community. Consequently, Sabbath observance is framed not as cultural inheritance but as participation in a divinely instituted rhythm of time.

The Sabbath's inclusion within the Decalogue further reinforces its theological significance. Unlike ceremonial laws, the Sabbath commandment is embedded within a moral framework that articulates divine authority over both time and human activity. Within Adventist interpretation, the commandment's explicit grounding in creation (“for in six days the Lord made...”) functions as a rationale for divine sovereignty, establishing the Creator's legitimacy as lawgiver and judge.

In eschatological contexts, the Sabbath assumes an additional layer of meaning. Apocalyptic texts particularly Revelation 7 and 14 are interpreted as reframing worship as the central issue of the final conflict. Within this framework, the Sabbath functions as an outward expression of allegiance, symbolically distinguishing worship directed toward the Creator from alternative claims of authority. Importantly, Adventist theology does not present Sabbath observance as salvific in itself; rather, it is understood as a visible sign of loyalty within an eschatological narrative centered on worship and obedience.

This interpretation allows the Sabbath to function simultaneously as a memorial of creation, a sign of sanctification, and an eschatological identifier. Its theological role is therefore integrative rather than isolated. The Sabbath derives its authority from creation, its ethical force from divine law, and its eschatological relevance from its placement within the broader narrative of judgment and restoration.



When read in conjunction with the sanctuary doctrine, the Sabbath reinforces the legitimacy of divine judgment by affirming God’s identity as Creator. When read alongside the Second Coming, it anticipates the restoration of divine rest within the renewed creation. In this sense, the Sabbath operates not as a peripheral practice but as a theological bridge connecting origins, authority, and eschatological hope.

### **4.3. The Second Coming: Eschatological Resolution and Theological Telos**

Within Seventh-day Adventist theology, the doctrine of the Second Coming functions as the eschatological culmination of the redemptive process rather than as an isolated expectation concerning future events. From its earliest historical formation, Adventism has been defined by an orientation toward imminence, yet the post-1844 theological reconfiguration reframed this expectation within a structured sequence of judgment, restoration, and consummation.

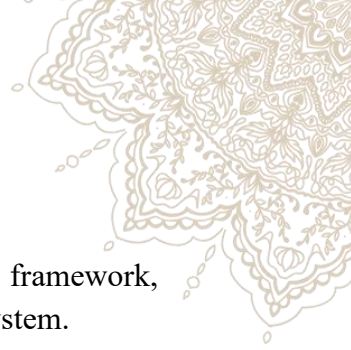
The Second Coming is interpreted as the necessary conclusion of Christ’s heavenly ministry. Within the sanctuary framework, judgment precedes restoration, establishing a logical progression in which moral evaluation gives way to eschatological resolution. As such, the Second Coming is not understood as an abrupt interruption of history but as the final phase in a coherent theological process already underway. This sequential logic distinguishes Adventist eschatology from approaches that detach the return of Christ from prior redemptive activity.

Adventist interpretation consistently emphasizes the literal, visible, and public nature of the Second Coming, a position grounded in New Testament eschatological texts and reinforced by apocalyptic imagery. However, the theological significance of the event lies less in its phenomenology than in its function. The Second Coming represents the transition from mediation to restoration, from judgment to renewal. It marks the point at which unresolved moral and cosmic tensions are brought to closure.

In this framework, the Second Coming also provides interpretive coherence to Adventist ethical and missiological commitments. Eschatological expectation is not framed as passive anticipation but as an orientation that informs present identity and responsibility. The call to endurance and faithfulness in apocalyptic literature is understood as integrally connected to the certainty of Christ’s return, situating ethical perseverance within a future-oriented horizon.

When read in conjunction with the Sabbath, the Second Coming anticipates the restoration of divine rest within a renewed creation. The Sabbath functions as a temporal sign pointing forward to the eschatological rest that the Second Coming inaugurates. Similarly, when read alongside the sanctuary doctrine, the Second Coming completes the narrative of judgment by translating evaluative outcomes into historical resolution.

Thus, within Adventist theology, the Second Coming operates as the telos of the doctrinal system. It resolves the questions raised by judgment, confirms the legitimacy of divine authority affirmed in worship, and actualizes the hope toward which the entire theological framework is directed. Removed from this integrative context, the doctrine risks reduction to speculative futurism; situated within it, the Second Coming emerges as the necessary conclusion of a coherent theological narrative.



#### 4.4. Synthesis: The Unifying Thread of the Great Controversy

**Finding:** The three doctrines are incoherent without the "Great Controversy" framework, which provides the meta-narrative that unifies them into a coherent theological system.

The thematic analysis reveals that the sanctuary, Sabbath, and Second Coming doctrines, while individually significant, achieve their full meaning only within the overarching framework of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan. White (1911) provides the most comprehensive articulation of this framework, tracing the cosmic conflict from its origin in heaven through its manifestation on earth to its final resolution. Douglass (2010) argues that this theme is not merely one doctrine among many but the interpretive lens through which all other doctrines must be understood.

Fortin and Moon (2013) demonstrate how the Great Controversy theme permeates all of White's writings, providing a coherent narrative that integrates every aspect of Adventist theology. Within this narrative, the sanctuary, Sabbath, and Second Coming each play essential roles in answering the cosmic questions raised by Satan's rebellion.

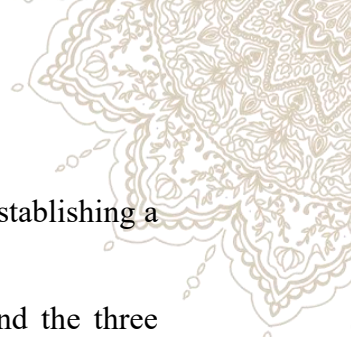
**Discussion:** These doctrines are positioned within Adventist theology as responses to questions of authority, justice, and eschatological resolution. God's character is vindicated by the Sanctuary, God's authority is acknowledged by the Sabbath, and God's ultimate victory is secured by the Second Coming.

The Great Controversy framework addresses the fundamental issues at stake in the cosmic conflict. When Lucifer rebelled in heaven, he challenged two things: God's character and God's law (White, 1911). He accused God of being arbitrary, unjust, and self-serving a tyrant who demanded obedience but did not deserve it. He also challenged the justice of God's law, arguing that it could not be kept and was unnecessarily restrictive.

Within Adventist theology, the sanctuary doctrine functions as a response to perceived challenges regarding divine justice and transparency. Through the sanctuary service both its earthly type and its heavenly antitype God demonstrates that He is not arbitrary but follows due process. The Investigative Judgment reveals that God saves only those who have genuinely responded to His grace, and that He does so in a manner that is transparent to the universe. As Rodríguez (2010) argues, the judgment vindicates God's character by demonstrating His fairness and His respect for human choice.

The Sabbath doctrine answers the challenge to God's authority and law. The Sabbath, as the memorial of creation, acknowledges God as the Creator and thus as the rightful Lawgiver. By observing the Sabbath, God's people affirm that His law is just and that obedience is possible through His grace. The Sabbath becomes the visible sign of loyalty in the conflict a weekly declaration that God's authority is legitimate and His law is good (Paulien, 2004).

The Second Coming doctrine answers the challenge to God's ultimate victory. Satan's rebellion raised the question: Will God's purposes ultimately prevail? The Second Coming functions as the eschatological resolution of the Adventist theological narrative. When Christ returns in glory, it will be evident that His kingdom has triumphed and that the forces of evil have been



defeated. The millennium and the final destruction of sin complete this victory, establishing a new earth where righteousness dwells (Maxwell, 1985).

Table 2 presents the relationship between the Great Controversy challenges and the three doctrinal responses.

*Table 2: The Great Controversy Framework and Doctrinal Responses*

| <b>Challenge Raised by Satan</b>                                 | <b>Doctrinal Response</b> | <b>Mechanism of Response</b>  | <b>Source</b>                     |
|--|---------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| <b>God's character is unjust and arbitrary</b>                   | Sanctuary                 | Investigative Judgment demonstrates divine fairness                         | White (1911); Rodríguez (2010)    |
| <b>God's law cannot be kept and is unnecessarily restrictive</b> | Sabbath                   | Sabbath observance demonstrates the possibility and joy of obedience        | Davidson (2014); Paulien (1994)   |
| <b>God's purposes will ultimately fail</b>                       | Second Coming             | Christ's return demonstrates divine victory and establishes eternal kingdom | Maxwell (1985); Stefanovic (2002) |

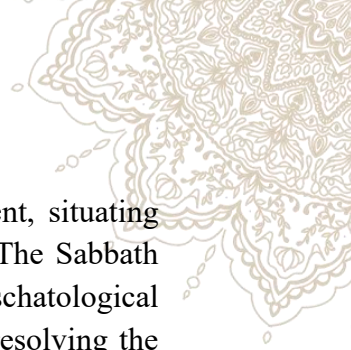
The integration of these three doctrines within the Great Controversy framework provides a comprehensive worldview that addresses the most fundamental questions of human existence: Where did we come from? (Creation, memorialized by the Sabbath). How are we saved? (Through Christ's sanctuary ministry). Where are we going? (To the Second Coming and the new earth). This integrated system gives Adventist theology its coherence and its explanatory power.

The Great Controversy framework also provides the motivation for mission. If the cosmic conflict is real, and if its resolution depends on the proclamation of the three angels' messages, then the church has an urgent responsibility to share these truths with the world. As Damsteegt (1977) demonstrates, the Adventist understanding of mission is fundamentally shaped by this eschatological urgency. The church exists not merely to nurture believers but to prepare a people for the Second Coming.

In conclusion, the findings of this study demonstrate that the Sabbath, Sanctuary, and Second Coming are not isolated doctrines but an integrated theological trilogy. They find their unity within the Great Controversy framework, each addressing a distinct aspect of the cosmic conflict. Together, they constitute the distinctive contribution of Seventh-day Adventism to Christian theology and provide the hermeneutical key to the denomination's identity and mission.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has argued that the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, and the Second Coming constitute an integrated theological system within Seventh-day Adventist theology rather than a collection of discrete doctrines. Through historical, biblical, and thematic analysis, the article has demonstrated that each doctrine performs a distinct yet interdependent function within a coherent theological framework.

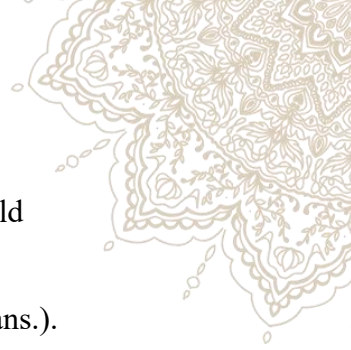


The sanctuary doctrine provides the structural logic of judgment and atonement, situating salvation within a cosmic narrative concerned with justice and accountability. The Sabbath anchors worship in creation, affirming divine authority and functioning as an eschatological marker of allegiance. The Second Coming represents the telos of this system, resolving the theological tensions introduced by sin through restoration and consummation.

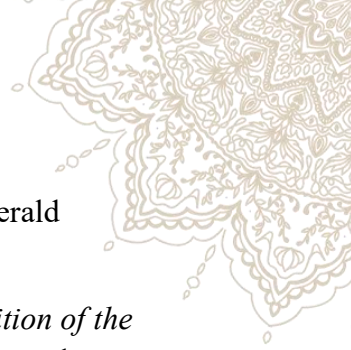
Unified by the Great Controversy framework, these doctrines collectively address foundational theological questions concerning origin, authority, judgment, and hope. Recognizing their interdependence clarifies the internal coherence of Seventh-day Adventist theology and strengthens its contribution to contemporary Christian thought. Further research may extend this integrative approach by exploring lived religious practice, cross-cultural interpretation, and ecumenical dialogue.

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