

The Seven Pillars¹ of the SDA Faith

Jerry A. Stevens, 1/30/96 (rev. 2/20/10)

It is Saturday, December 20, 1845, and a teenaged girl, barely turned 18, is writing a personal letter to Enoch Jacobs, editor of *The Day-Star*, an early Cincinnati newspaper proclaiming new and startling Advent truths. Bear in mind that at this point in time, the establishment of the Seventh-day Adventist Church lies nearly 18 years in the future.

In her letter, the young woman records details of her very first prophetic vision, which she had experienced a full year before. Up until this time, the girl, Ellen Harmon, had only shared her literally out-of-this-world experience in oral form. Why did she wait so long? The simple but sad answer is that due to a very fragile state of health, she had a terrible time holding her hand steady enough to write it out. When only nine she had been injured severely by a rock thrown by an older schoolgirl, and with a pitifully rearranged face and in a permanently weakened condition she was forced to drop out of school before completing the fourth grade.

Ellen's letter was destined to be published in Jacobs's paper the following month, and fortunately has been preserved. It contains many thrilling details of what life in Heaven will be like, immediately followed by similar details of life on the New Earth when restored to its Eden state. Still in vision as the millennium in Heaven comes to a close, Ellen descends with Jesus and the saints inside the Holy City, New Jerusalem, on down to planet Earth (see Rev. 21:2), now re-created entirely new, perfect, and sinless, . . . and on the very spot from which Jesus had ascended (see Acts 1:9–12; Zech. 14:4):

Mount Zion was just before us, and on the mount was a glorious temple, and about it were seven other mountains, on which grew roses and lilies. And I saw the little ones climb, or if they chose, use their little wings and fly to the top of the mountains, and pluck the never-fading flowers. There were all kinds of trees [see Isa. 41:19] around the temple to beautify the place—the box [prob. cypress], the pine, the fir, the oil [prob. wild olive], the myrtle, the pomegranate, and the fig tree bowed down with the weight of its timely figs; these made the place all over glorious. And as we were about to enter the holy temple, Jesus raised His lovely voice and said, “Only the 144,000 enter this place,” and we shouted, “Alleluia!”

This temple was supported by **seven pillars**, all of transparent gold, set with pearls most glorious. The glorious things I saw there, I cannot

¹ Cf. SDAEn 10:895, 896, s.v. “Landmarks” and CW 30.2–31.0: “The Landmarks Defined.”

describe. Oh, that I could talk in the language of Canaan, then could I tell a little of the glory of the better world. . . .

[Ellen picks up her narrative:] After I came out of vision, everything looked changed; a gloom was spread over all that I beheld. Oh, how dark this world looked to me! I wept when I found myself here, and felt homesick. I had seen a better world, and it had spoiled this for me. [In another place she adds:] Then an angel bore me gently down to this dark world. Sometimes I think I can stay here no longer; all things of Earth look so dreary. Oh, that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away and be at rest! (Ellen G. White, RH July 21, 1851).

Did you catch that little detail about the pillars of the temple on Mount Zion? How many pillars will it have? That's right; **seven pillars**. Isn't that interesting? It will have an odd number of supporting pillars; maybe that's because it'll be shaped like a rotunda—round, without corners. And have you ever noticed how the Bible uses the number seven to express completeness and perfection?² We come to our houses of worship on the only day God declared holy, the **seventh** day. **Seven** churches, golden candlesticks, stars (or angels), lamps of fire, seals, trumpets, and thunders are all mentioned in Revelation. And as Solomon says, “Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her **seven pillars**” (Prov. 9:1).

In my research of the topic of pillars in connection with the number seven, I recently came to an astonishing and wonderful realization: The Seventh-day Adventist Church rests upon seven distinctive pillars that set it apart from all other beliefs or denominations. I'm not talking about the upstanding members who definitely are spiritual pillars of our local churches (God bless them, every one!). No, in this case I'm talking about those firm spiritual supports that undergird or make secure everything the worldwide remnant church stands for.

I'd like to share with you a very brief snapshot description of each of these seven distinctive pillars.

Pillar #1: *the sanctuary*. What makes this a pillar of Adventism? The Bible tells us that Christ is in Heaven right now, in God the Father's presence, ministering on our behalf (see Heb. 9:24). The work of atonement is only complete when mankind's great High Priest finishes ministering there (Lev. 16), and sin is forever eradicated from the universe. Most other folks sharing

² For Ellen G. White comments see, regarding completeness, AA 585.3; see also, regarding perfection, COL 243.1.

space on our planet either don't teach this Bible truth or else neglect it, whether consciously or otherwise.

Pillar #2: *death*. The Bible plainly teaches that when people die, they enter into a temporary state of unconsciousness, out of which God awakens them at one of the resurrections. Jesus declared that His dead friend Lazarus was asleep (read John 11:11–14), and from righteous Abel down to the last saint who will ever die, all sleep in Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:18). Let your fondest hopes overflow as you try to picture this: Jesus' silver trumpet sounds as He descends on a great cloud, wrapped in flames of fire. Looking on the graves of the sleeping saints, He raises His hands to Heaven, crying, "Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!" There is a mighty earthquake. Graves open, and the dead come up clothed with immortality. Hallelujah! (See DS 1/24/1846; 4SP 463.)

Pillar #3: *the Second Advent*. It's in the heart of our denominational name. We've always been about proclaiming Christ's advent **near**. Jesus Himself gives us many signs of His return in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, laying stress on its suddenness and the urgent need for His followers to be ready. Hebrews 9:28 tells us that He shall appear a second time, when His work to get rid of sin is finished in the heavenly sanctuary. One of Jesus' parting promises was, "I will come again" (John 14:3).

Pillar #4: *the millennium*. The 20th chapter of Revelation talks a lot about a period of 1,000 years, or a millennium, the time between two resurrections. The people who have loved Jesus are raised to life at the first resurrection, and the unrepentant, stubborn sinners resume their hateful habits at the second one. As we saw earlier, young Ellen referred to the millennium in relating her vision. This brings us to a related subject . . .

Pillar #5: *the three angels' messages of Revelation 14*. I can't think of another religious group in the world that teaches the importance of these three messages, which are an urgent call for every honest-hearted soul on Earth to worship our Creator, keep *all* His commandments, and pull away from those persons or institutions teaching a misdirecting Babel of untrue doctrines (see Rev. 14:6–12).

Pillar #6: *the Spirit of Prophecy*. The Bible's concluding book makes it plain that the Devil hates God's last-day church, symbolized in Rev. 12:17 as a pure woman, whose very last-born generation, or seed, keep all 10 of God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ, and that testimony is His special gift of the Spirit of Prophecy (see Rev. 19:10). We believe that Ellen Harmon (later White) possessed that gift.

Pillar #7: *the seventh-day Sabbath.* The Bible couldn't be clearer on any teaching than it is on this one: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: . . . In six days the Lord made heaven and Earth, . . . and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath, and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:10, 11). Together with the Second Advent, it's in the very heart of our name.

And so, that frail little 17-year-old who recorded what the Holy Spirit revealed to her in holy vision had it just right: The glorious temple on Mount Zion is to be supported by seven transparent gold pillars. These pillars are to have seven highly prized, lustrous inlaid pearls, which lend even more exquisite beauty to an already resplendent edifice. God certainly doesn't stint in His use of building materials, does He? We know that from the description John gives us of future glories in the concluding chapters of Revelation.

To conclude, the seven distinctive pillars of Seventh-day Adventism are as necessary as they are beautiful. As a faith system, they form a vital, complete whole. Not one pillar can be eliminated without the entire edifice collapsing. Do you sense the implications of this? We can't pick and choose! It's all or nothing!

Almost since I became an Adventist in 1977, the evil one has been working from *within* our beloved church to undermine, chip away, and finally tear down all seven pillars. This work is still going on through offshoot movements, confused or disaffected former Adventists, online bloggers, and a growing army of misguided scholars and other regrettably articulate agents of Satan.

We need to keep the pillars firmly in mind as these things continue to happen, and especially if family members or friends fall for the enemy's lies or we ourselves are even tempted to do so. So I say to all, including myself: Embrace the pillars of our faith. Spiritual termites, chisels, and even battering rams may appear to be bringing them to ruin and thus threatening the entire set of underpinnings, but "We should remember that the church, enfeebled and defective though it be, is the only object on Earth on which God bestows His supreme regard" (Ellen G. White, Lt 279, Aug. 1, 1904, in 2SM 396). As such, the remnant church will go clear through until Jesus comes to take His faithful ones home. Shouldn't we then hold on with all our might to these pillars, all seven of them, thanking God for His bountiful mercy and truth? Dear Lord, may You find each one of us ready when our Saviour returns.

Condensed Facts

Under the article “Landmarks” in *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (vol. 10, pp. 895, 896) mention is made of seven distinctive SDA pillars. Though similar reference does not appear under other intuitive headings such as Pillars, Waymarks, Special Points, Foundations, Pegs, Pins, or Platforms, all these terms are roughly synonymous with Landmarks. In *Comprehensive Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*, vol. 2, the entry for Pillar(s) on p. 2061 is cross-referenced to Landmark, the only term among the eight named here with a corresponding entry in the *Encyclopedia*.

Pillar	“S” Mnemonic
1. The sanctuary	S-anctuary in Heaven
2. The three angels' messages of Rev. 14	S-ummons to worship God, leave Babylon
3. The Second Advent	S-econd Advent nearness
4. The millennium	S-abbatical thousand-year rest for Earth
5. Death	S-tate of sleep preceding gift of immortality
6. The seventh-day Sabbath	S-abbath of God vs. all false sabbaths
7. The Spirit of Prophecy	S-pirit of Prophecy a gift to remnant church

The following table makes memorization even easier, so long as the order of pillars is rearranged.

Pillar	Acronym (read vertically)
1. The sanctuary	S (interchangeable with #7)
2. Death	D
3. The Second Advent	A (=Advent; interchangeable with #5)
4. The millennium	M
5. The three angels' messages of Rev. 14	A (=angels; interchangeable with #3)
6. The Spirit of Prophecy	P-rophecy
7. The seventh-day Sabbath	S (interchangeable with #1)

The seven pillars are embodied within Adventism's 28 fundamental beliefs
as follows:

- 13. The Remnant and Its Mission (the three angels' messages and Rev. 14)
- 18. The Gift of Prophecy
- 20. The Sabbath
- 24. Christ's Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary
- 25. The Second Coming of Christ
- 26. Death and Resurrection
- 27. The Millennium and the End of Sin

—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines*