

Observing The Sabbath Day

Introduction. A well-known religious group is the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The group comprises almost 75,000 churches worldwide with a membership of approximately 18 million. They hold an odd mixture of beliefs: they believe in modern-day prophecy, they believe the world will end after a premillennial rapture, and they hold to the idea that the Ten Commandments are God's universal law for mankind.

In particular they believe that the Sabbath is to be the day of worship for all mankind. Adventists make the argument that the Sabbath is a part of God's moral law and has been binding since the beginning of man's existence. They confuse and convince those who have been taught that they need to keep the Ten Commandments. We will study what the Bible says about the Sabbath and consider its relationship to the gospel (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

I. The Origin Of The Sabbath

- A. The first mention of the Sabbath day appears in Exodus 16:4-5, 22-30.
 - 1. Notice that Moses had to explain to the people what the Sabbath meant and how to observe it. They had not encountered this rule before.
 - 2. Even though Genesis records 2,500 years of history, no mention is made of the observation of a day of rest.
- B. The next mention of the Sabbath is in Exodus 20:8-11 as part of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were actually the basis of a long series of commands listed in Exodus 20-23, and written down in Exodus 24:3-4.
- C. However, the command was not given to the whole world.
 - 1. This was between God and the sons of Israel (Exodus 31:16-17). No other nation received them (Ezekiel 20:5-12).
 - 2. The Sabbath was not only a time to remember God's creation, but it was also a time for the Israelites to remember their slavery (Deuteronomy 5:15).
 - a) This can only be for the Israelites.
 - b) No other nation was enslaved in Egypt.
 - 3. In fact, go back to 5:1-5, where Moses recounts the origin of the Law. The Law was for Israel, delivered to Israel, and it was not given to their ancestors.
 - 4. Note the command in Deuteronomy 5:16.
 - a) God wanted them to obey so "that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."
 - b) The only group to which God has given land is the Israelites.

II. The End Of The Sabbath

- A. Jeremiah prophesied that the Law given at Mount Sinai would end and would be replaced with a different law (Jeremiah 31:31-32).
 - 1. Christians have died to the Law of Moses (Romans 7:4-7). Paul used the example of the tenth commandment to show we are now dead to it.
 - 2. The sacrifice of Christ removed the handwritten ordinances with their special feasts, Sabbaths, and new moon celebrations (Colossians 2:11-17).
 - 3. To live under the Law is to live under a curse (Galatians 3:10-29), for we are not under the Law from Mount Sinai (Galatians 4:21-26, 31).

- B. Seventh-Day Adventists claim that sometime during the first five centuries after Christ, the Roman emperor Constantine and the Pope changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.
1. The first Pope did not exist until 606, which is over 500 years too late. History records that Christians were meeting on Sundays from the first century.
 - a) Catholics do claim they changed the Sabbath, but they also claim that Peter was the first Pope! Sabbatarians reject the Catholic claim that Peter was the first Pope, so they are in grave error for accepting the Catholic claim that the Pope changed the Sabbath to Sunday.
 - b) Catholics make claims that are neither true or supported by history! Just because the Catholics claim they changed the Sabbath does not mean they actually did. We reject claim that the Pope is infallible. Why not repudiate other claims unless first proven true?
 2. Sabbatarians claim that all early Christians worshipped on the Sabbath, and that the change to Sunday as a day of worship was only instituted as part of a plot of the then "Christianized" Roman emperor to corrupt the church to be more in line with Rome's pagan heritage.
 - a) Therefore, "Sunday" (the Sun's day), a pagan holy day, became the day of worship.
 - b) What Constantine did was make a civil decree in A.D. 325 stating that Christians should not work on Sunday since they had been assembling on Sundays for 200 years.
 3. The most recent attempt by Seventh-day Adventist Samuel Bacchiocchi, which is increasingly being adopted by the Seventh-day Adventist church, is that Christians in A.D. 135 were first to worship on the first day of the week. This rejects the traditional position of his church, and its founding prophet, Ellen G. White.
 4. W. E. Vine wrote, "For the first three centuries of the Christian era the first day of the week was never confounded with the Sabbath; the confusion of the Jewish and Christian institutions was due to declension from apostolic teaching" (III:311-312).
- C. Christians worship on the first day of the week.
1. This is the "Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10).
 - a) The Lord arose on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9).
 - b) The Holy Spirit fell on the apostles on this day (Acts 2:1-4).
 - (1) Pentecost occurred 50 days after Passover (Leviticus 23:15-16).
 - (2) This adds up to seven weeks and one day. This makes Pentecost occur on the first day of the week.
 - c) This is the time when the disciples regularly met to break bread (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
 2. The first day of week is never called the "Sabbath."
 - a) Remember, the word "Sabbath" literally means "cessation or rest." A rest was appointed by God for the seventh day, not the first.
 - b) There may be Christians who take this day to rest, but this is not the Christian "Sabbath." There simply is no command in the New Testament to keep the Sabbath.

III. Objections Answered

A. "Jesus kept the Sabbath."

1. Jesus also was circumcised and kept the Passover, yet this is not commanded of us today.
2. The law changed at Jesus' death, not at His coming (Ephesians 2:14-15; Colossians 2:14-15; Hebrews 9:15-17).

B. "You observe the other nine commandments."

1. True, we do not worship idols, lie, commit adultery, or any of the other nine commandments.
2. However, the reason we refrain from these is because of the New Testament laws, not the Ten Commandments.
 - a) Idol worship is wrong (1 Corinthians 10:7).
 - b) Lying is wrong (Ephesians 4:25).
 - c) Adultery is wrong (Hebrews 13:4).

C. "People were observing the Sabbath after Jesus' death."

1. People are still observing the Sabbath (Matthew 24:20), but that does not mean that Christians should be observing the Sabbath.
2. The passage refers to the fact that Jews closed the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath. There were still Jews in A.D. 70 who did not accept the teachings of Christ and His apostles.
3. It is appropriate to point out that those advocating the keeping of the Sabbath day today do not obey the rules of its keeping for they travel away from their homes (cp. Exodus 16:29; Leviticus 23:3).

Conclusion. The Christian's holy day is the first day of the week. It was on this day that Jesus arose, the church was established, and the church worshiped the Lord. The Christian does not serve under the Mosaic Law. Christians should heed the warning regarding going back to the Old Testament (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:21; 5:4). Will you join us as children of God, living and worshiping God in agreement with His word?