

Should We Keep The Sabbath?

Introduction. Seventh-Day Adventists maintain that the seventh-day sabbath is the only God-ordained day for rest and worship, and that Sunday worshipers have the mark of the beast. The origin of the Seventh-Day Adventists can be traced to the Millerite Movement of the 1800s. This movement was largely responsible for what has been called the Great Second Advent Awakening. William Miller (1782-1849) was a farmer who settled in upstate New York after the war of 1812. He was convinced that the Bible contained coded information about the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus. He concluded that Jesus would come sometime between two spring equinoxes in 1843-1844. That prophecy failed and many believers left the movement in what has become known as The Great Disappointment. Miller himself gradually withdrew from the leadership of the group and died in 1849. His followers called themselves Adventists.

Ellen Harmon (later known by her married name Ellen G. White) joined with other Adventists and formally organized the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in May of 1863. She believed that the 1844 prediction was correct, but that it referred to the start of an Investigative Judgment. This is a time when Christ will judge the dead and the living on earth for righteousness. She predicted that this would soon be followed by the second coming of Jesus.

Victor Houteff joined the SDA church in 1919 but left the church and formed a new sect in 1929 called the Davidian Seventh-Day Adventists. This group split further and eventually led to the organization of the the Students of the Seven Seals, popularly known as the Branch Davidians. In 1993, after a long standoff with the FBI, the Branch Davidian's compound burned.

Adventists make the basic 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 make prey of those who have been taught that we need to keep the ten commandments. When shown that the sabbath was indeed Saturday, some are persuaded that it needs to be observed as the "Lord's day."

W.E. Vine said, "The idea is not that of relaxation or refreshment, but cessation from activity ... 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). We need to study what the Bible says about the sabbath and consider the relationship of the gospel and the Law of Moses (1 John 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).

I. ***The Sabbath In The Old Testament***

A. The sabbath is not mentioned by name until Moses.

1. Genesis 2:1-3 states that God blessed the seventh day. However, this day was not ordained to be kept by man before the time of Moses.
 2. Seventh-Day Adventists claim the sabbath observance predated Moses, but they do so without biblical proof.
 - a) Genesis 2:2 says that God rested on the seventh day of creation, not man!
 - b) In Exodus 20:11, the day of rest at creation illustrated the rest God commanded Israel! Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or Joseph never kept the sabbath.
- B. There are several undeniable facts about the sabbath.
1. It was given after Israel left Egypt (Exodus 16:23-30).
 2. It was given at Mount Sinai (Nehemiah 9:13-14).
 3. It was given by the Lord to Israel (Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 15).
 4. It was given as a sign (Exodus 31:13, 17; Ezekiel 20:10-12)
 - a) It was a sign or distinguishing mark of Israel's faith in and relationship with God. Hence, it was a covenant.
 - b) It was a memorial to cause Israel to remember how God had delivered them from Egyptian bondage (Deuteronomy 5:15).
- C. The laws regulating the sabbath show it was for Jewish worship.
1. They could neither bake nor boil (Exodus 16:23).
 2. They could not go out of the house (Exodus 16:29).
 3. All of the people were to observe the day, even the cattle (Exodus 20:10).
 4. All who broke it must be stoned (Exodus 31:14).
 5. No fires were to be built (Exodus 35:3).
 6. It was to be kept from sunset to sunset (Leviticus 23:32).
 7. Priests must offer two lambs (Numbers 28:9-10).
- D. The sabbath was to be perpetual (Exodus 31:16-17).
1. It was as lasting as other commandments of the Law such as the Passover and burning incense (Exodus 12:14; 30:8).
 2. A "perpetual" and "forever" covenant is age-lasting in nature:
 - a) The same is said of the Levitical priesthood (Exodus 40:15).
 - b) Yet, that priesthood ended with the changing of the Law (Hebrews 7:11-12).
 - c) Therefore, what was "perpetual" and "forever" had an end.
 3. The sabbath observance could not be in force longer than the Law of which it was a part, nor could it be required of those other than to whom it was given.
 4. If it is binding on Christians today, then either the covenant in which it was given has never been abolished and is binding on all men, or it has been adopted into the new law that superseded the old.

II. ***The Sabbath In The New Testament***

- A. Jesus is Lord of the sabbath (Mark 2:27-28).
 - 1. As a Jew in the flesh He kept the sabbath as well as other commandments of the Law (Galatians 4:4; Luke 2:21; Matthew 26:17-25).
 - 2. His statement indicates His superiority to and authority over the sabbath (Matthew 12:11-12).
 - 3. Matthew 5:17-18 shows that He did not violate the Law during His life; however, Christ fulfilled the Law and therefore it was taken away!
- B. God promised a new covenant (Hebrews 8:8-13).
 - 1. The Law of Moses was not intended for all people or ages. Its purpose was to identify sin and bring men to Christ (Romans 7:7, 12-13; Galatians 3:21-25).
 - 2. This middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles was taken away (Ephesians 2:14-16).
 - a) Man can now be redeemed from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13; Hebrews 7:18-19).
 - b) Christ is of no effect to the followers of the Law (Galatians 5:4; 2:21).
- C. The Law, including both "moral" and "ceremonial" regulations, was done away (2 Corinthians 3:7-16).
 - 1. We are now dead to the Law because of Christ (Romans 7:4).
 - a) We are delivered from the Law (Romans 7:6).
 - b) But our deliverance included commandments specified by "thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7).
 - 2. Nine of the ten commandments are incorporated into the gospel. Only the observation of the sabbath was not commanded of Christians (1 Corinthians 8:4; 10:14; Ephesians 4:29; 6:1-3; Romans 13:9).
 - 3. The terms "moral" and "ceremonial" are man-made descriptions. In 2 Corinthians 3 the ten commandments were taken away as well as the rest of the Law!
 - 4. God did not divide the Law by using different terms; in fact, the Bible only speaks of two covenants God has given His people, not three (moral, ceremonial and spiritual).
 - 5. A distinction is made between the "Law of Moses" and the "Law of God." The reasoning which makes this distinction is invalid.
 - a) They conclude that only the "Law of Moses," which they say is "ceremonial," was done away.
 - b) They conclude that the "Law of God," which they say is "moral," is still binding.
 - c) The scriptures use both terms to describe the same law; there-

fore, if one is still binding then so is the other, and if one is done away then so is the other (Ezra 7:6, 12; Nehemiah 8:1, 8; Luke 2:22-23)!

- D. The Law, including the sabbath was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14-17).
1. The term "sabbath" is in the genitive plural in Colossians 2:16 which is the same identical form in Exodus 20:8 in the Septuagint.
 2. Since the other special sabbaths are obviously intended by the terms used, the apostle was including all sabbaths. The pattern is much like that used in the Old Testament when describing all the sabbaths which were kept.
 - a) Compare 1 Chronicles 23:30-31; 2 Chronicles 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Nehemiah 10:33.
 - b) In Colossians 2:14-17, sabbaths were taken away by the cross: "meat or drink" (daily); "holy day" (yearly); "new moon" (monthly); and "sabbath" (weekly).
- E. 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. However, they cannot produce reliable historical proof. They need to give the time, manner, place, persons, facts and reasons for so remarkable of an occurrence.
 2. 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 two hundred years.
 3. The first universal 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.
 4. If Catholics claimed this, it would not make it so.
 - a) We reject claim that the Pope is infallible. Why not repudiate other claims unless first proven true?
 - b) Catholics make all kinds of claims that are neither true or supported by history! Just because the Catholics claim they changed the sabbath does not mean they actually did.
 - c) If Sabbatarians had any actual historical proof that Constantine or the Pope "changed the sabbath," let them supply it to us and the world.
- F. 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 Ghost 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 met to break bread (Acts 20:7).
- d) Furthermore, a regular assembly is indicated in 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."
- G. The Christian still has a sabbath.
 - 1. The children of Israel failed to enter their rest because of unbelief (Hebrews 4:2).
 - a) The Hebrew writer argues that the apostate Jews did not enter, thus there remains a "rest" to be entered.
 - b) Israel was promised the antitype of the Christian's rest.
 - (1) The "rest" was the possession of Canaan. But it did not satisfy and was not a permanent rest. Therefore, David spoke of another day (Psalm 95:7-11).
 - (2) Furthermore, the Israelites did not believe that God would go with them and conquer the land (Numbers 13:1-33).
 - 2. A promise is left for us of entering into rest (Hebrews 4:1).
 - a) God rested on the seventh day of the creation week and continues in that rest (Genesis 2:2).
 - b) A parallel is made with Israel journeying to Canaan (Hebrews 3:11-19). We too can fall from grace and fail to enter the rest (Hebrews 3:12; 4:1, 11).
 - c) Therefore, we must labor to enter God's rest (Hebrews 4:10-11). The "rest" the writer speaks of is the one which a faithful Christian receives at the judgment.
 - (1) We will then cease from our work (Revelation 14:13).
 - (2) We will have finished our course (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Conclusion. When Christians keep the sabbath they are observing a day which was made holy only to the Jews. The Christian does not serve under the Law of Moses. In fact, Christians should heed the solemn warning concerning going back to the Old Testament (Galatians 2:21; 5:4; Romans 3:20).