

# **SHOULD CHRISTIANS OBSERVE THE SABBATH? [1]**

*By Denver Cheddie*

God in the OT set aside the Sabbath as the day His people should worship. God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day and commanded men to do likewise. The Jews observed the Sabbath from Friday 6 pm to Saturday 6 pm. Nothing in the NT explicitly teaches that any change was to occur. Why then do most Christians worship on Sundays?[2] Is this right or wrong? Does it really make a difference which day we choose? Considering that the Sabbath is part of the 10 Commandments, should we not observe it?

Seven Day Adventists (SDAs) are among the most vociferous of Sabbath keepers. Some even believe that Sunday worship will be part of the future mark of the beast. This, however, is not even worthy of comment. This article addresses the relevant scriptures addressing the question of worshipping on Sunday vs. Saturday.

## **The 10 Commandments**

Adventists believe that the Sabbath was instituted in the Garden of Eden and practiced ever since, but was only made official under the Law. God did rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, but there is no evidence that anyone observed it as a rest day until Moses. They appeal to the word "remember" found in Ex. 20:8,

claiming that God was trying to refresh the Israelites' memory of when the Sabbath was first initiated and practiced.

Exodus 20:8. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Deuteronomy 5:12. Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.

Observe that Deut. 5:12 which provides a parallel account of the 10 commandments, does not use the word "remember". Clearly the word "remember" is used synonymously with "keep" or "observe". Thus God was not reminding them of what happened in the Garden of Eden, but rather appealing to them to remember to observe the Sabbath every time Saturday arrived.

Adventists also distinguish between the moral law and the ceremonial law. Although nowhere in the Bible is such a dichotomy made, it is easily recognized that certain laws are moral in nature while others are ceremonial. However they claim that the 10 Commandments represent the moral law, and the rest of the Pentateuch, the ceremonial. The ceremonial law was temporary and no longer applicable, whereas the moral law is forever binding. This view does not explain why Jesus cited Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18 (ceremonial laws as far as SDAs are concerned) when asked which the greatest commandment was. Why didn't Jesus quote one of the 10 commandments?

Adventists place too high an emphasis on the 10 commandments. According to them this was God's law whereas the rest were Moses' law. 2 Tim. 3:16 makes no distinction between God's Word spoken or written directly by God,

and God's Word spoken or written via human means. They are equally inspired. The Bible never makes a distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws. The first 5 books of the Bible are collectively called the Law, and the terms Law of God, Law of Moses and their equivalents are used interchangeably in the Bible. According to the NT, the entire Law collectively has "passed away", since Jesus fulfilled it (Matt. 5:17,18). This includes the 10 Commandments. 2 Cor. 3:3 makes reference to laws given on tablets of stone - an obvious allusion to the 10 Commandments - calling it the administration of death. This verse teaches that NT believers do not live by such commandments but rather by the Spirit of God. This does not mean that the 10 Commandments are irrelevant, but they are not the means of godly living. When we live by the Holy Spirit we will fulfill the righteous requirement of the Law which is God's holiness. It is important to note that all 10 Commandments are quoted in the NT epistles with the exception of the 4<sup>th</sup> one pertaining to the Sabbath. Why would the writers of the Bible do such a thing?

Col. 2:13-17

13 ¶ And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 *And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 16 ¶ Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

Col. 2:13-17 states that we are not to be bound by the observance of any day including the Sabbath day. Because the KJV uses the plural "days", Adventists claim it was not referring to the weekly Sabbath, but some other ceremonial observance. Of course if that were really the case, Paul missed a really good opportunity to teach us to keep the Sabbath. The Greek word

used, **sabbaton**, is actually in the singular form, thus referring to the weekly Sabbath. Even if it were plural, its meaning could not be limited, but must include all Sabbaths. The Sabbath Day was abolished by Christ's death on the cross - plain and simple.

## **Apostolic Tradition**

Adventists tend to equate the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10) with the Sabbath. In Mark 2:28, according to the Adventist teaching, Jesus claimed ownership of the Sabbath (He is Lord of it), thus the Sabbath is the Lord's Day (his day). In the context what Jesus was really saying was that, as Lord, He could do as He pleased on the Sabbath. Also in Rev. 1:10 the possessive genitive is not used in the Greek i.e. the day was not the possession of the Lord, but a day set aside to worship Him. History reveals that the Lord's Day was Sunday, the first day of the week, the day in which He rose from the dead, and also the day on which the Holy Spirit came. Sunday was a day the Romans used to worship their sun god and later on, Caesar. As a result the Adventists accuse Evangelicals of sun worship when they choose to observe Sunday. However worshiping on a Sunday was a Christian tradition that dated back to the apostles. The Romans called it Caesar's day, since they honored him on that day. In protest the Christians called it the Lord's Day - the day in which they worshiped their risen Lord. Who cares what the Romans did? I certainly don't worship any idols on a Sunday.

From the inception of the church, the disciples gathered on Sundays. This was apostolic tradition. In 1 Cor. 16:2, Paul urged the believers to bring their offerings which would be collected on the first day of the week -

implying that people gathered on Sunday. Seeking to explain away this passage, Adventists claim that Paul wanted no "gathering", thinking that this meant a gathering of people, i.e. Paul wanted no gathering of people on Sunday. Paul, who had appealed to the Corinthians time and time again concerning their relief offering, was just about tired of their procrastination. He planned to come to them and on his visit he would pick up the money they would have already collected. What Paul did not want was a gathering or collection of **money** to take place when he got there. He wanted that taken care of in advance. The gathering which was to take place on the first day of the week was indeed a gathering of people, not a gathering of money. Simple. This is not a sleight of hand argument I'm using, it's simple English.

In Acts 20:7 we see Paul preaching on the first day of the week. So how do the Adventists handle this verse? Since the Jewish day ran from sunset to sunset, they claim that Paul started preaching on Saturday afternoon (still the Sabbath), but due to the length of his sermon, continued after 6 pm (the first day of the week) onto midnight. That would seem an adequate explanation if one really believed Paul could preach for over 6 hours, and if one were unaware of the Greek and Roman definitions of the day. The Greek day ran from sunrise to sunrise, whereas the Roman day, just like ours, ran from midnight to midnight. Which system was used in the NT? In Matt. 20:1-16, Jesus gave a parable where an employer hired people to work from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> hour. This only makes sense if Jesus used the Greek system. "This is just a parable", they counter. According to Luke 23:44, 45, an unusual astronomical event took place on the day of Jesus crucifixion. At the 6<sup>th</sup> hour, the sun became black dark. There is nothing unusual about the sun being darkened on the 6<sup>th</sup> hour of the Jewish day since at midnight the

sun only shines on the other half of the world. Luke was using the Greek system. Also in Acts 2:15, if Peter was using the Jewish system, what he said in effect was, "How could these men possibly be drunk? It is only 9 pm. People don't get drunk at 9 pm." Obviously Peter used the Greek system. The latter 2 passages were both recorded by Luke as was Acts 20:7. Thus Paul actually started preaching on Sunday night and continued till after midnight (all in the first day, sorry my Adventist friends).

To their credit the Adventists appeal to Acts 17:2, where Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath as was his custom. But Evangelicals have a better explanation of this verse than SDAs have of the previous verses mentioned. The synagogue was not open on Sundays, so Paul had to go whenever people were there. What was Paul's custom? Observing the Sabbath or becoming all things to all men (including the Jews) that he might win them (1 Cor. 9:20)? This is a rhetorical question.

## **Christian Liberty**

Rom. 14:4-6 give us liberty to choose our day of worship. The NT demands none. The Sabbath laws have passed away and Christian tradition has been to gather on Sundays. However we are free to worship whenever we desire. What we ought not to do is condemn others over differences in this regard.

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[1] Space would not permit a detailed treatment of this topic. For a thorough refutation of the Sabbath Day beliefs of the Seven Day Adventists, see Walter Martin, ***The Kingdom of the Cults***, Gen. Ed. Hank Hanegraaff (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 568-81.

[2] It is to be noted that there is no such thing as a Christian Sabbath. Sunday never was the Sabbath, neither did it become the Sabbath. Every NT reference to the weekly Sabbath day was a Saturday.