

The Sabbath Answering Objections

Seventh-day Adventists are well familiar with the doctrine of the Sabbath. They are generally quite well able to present it in its simple form: given in Eden, later written by God's own finger on tables of stone, and never revoked. While this statement is true, it is incomplete. Numerous objections have been raised against the Sabbath. These all rely on theories developed long after apostolic times to justify Sunday observance. Yet they are presented today as if they had Biblical validity. It is necessary to evaluate these theories so as to be able to properly defend the doctrine.

The Resurrection Memorial Argument

The most common argument against the Sabbath is that the apostles observed Sunday in honor of the resurrection. Several texts are presented to support this idea. Our task is to critically examine these passages to determine the truth of the assumption.

1. The story of the anointing with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) is commonly presented as being one of Sunday worship. What does scripture say about the purpose of the gathering? (Acts 2:1)

2. The day of Pentecost is commonly presented as being on Sunday. How may we determine which day of the week this gathering occurred? (Lev 23:10-11, 15-16)

3. Can we determine anything about the possibility of this assembly being the first evidence of a change from Sabbath to Sunday based on the way Pentecost is determined?

4. The story of Eutychus (Acts 20:7-11) is presented as an example of Sunday observance by the apostles since they gathered "to break bread." What may we determine from this expression, and on what day of the week did the event occur by modern reckoning?

5. Paul is suggested to have required the believers to meet every Sunday in 1 Cor 16:2. What does this text actually tell the believers to do?

6. The phrase translated "first day of the week" is "*kata mian sabbatou*", which literally translates as "every first after the Sabbath." Is there any inference we can legitimately draw from Paul's use of this phrase?

7. Rev 1:10 describes John as being "in the spirit on the Lord's Day." Sunday proponents say that this was the expression for Sunday. What day does the Bible describe in this way? (Isa 13:6, 9; *58:13, Ezek 13:5; 30:3, Joel 1:15; 2:1, *11, 31; 3:14, Obad 15, Zeph 1:7, 14, *Mal 4:5, Acts 2:20, 1 Thess 5:2, *2 Pet 3:10)

8. What was the pattern of observance of the apostles? (Acts 13:42-44; 16:13; 17:2, 17; 18:4, 11)

9. What are we commanded to observe with regard to the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection? (1 Cor 11:26) Is there any command to observe the resurrection?

10. The common secular term for the first day of the week in the Roman Empire was "the day of the Sun." Every book of the NT was written in the Roman Empire, and most were written to non-Jewish audiences.

Yet the term "day of the Sun" **never appears** in the NT. Further, the common secular term for the Sabbath was "the day of Saturn." Similarly, this term **never appears** in the NT. Instead, even to audiences who would not be expected to have any understanding of the Sabbath prior to conversion, the only term used is the Sabbath. What legitimate inference may we draw from this?

The Old/New Covenant/Fulfilling the Law Argument

The second common line of argument is that the Sabbath was instituted at Sinai (Ex 20:8-11) as part of the old covenant (Deut 4:13). When Christ "fulfilled the law" (Matt 5:17) with his death on the cross, the law was abolished. Therefore we are no longer obligated to keep the Sabbath which was part of the old covenant law (Heb 8:13).

11. When was the Sabbath established? (Gen 2:3, Ex 20:8-11, Mark 2:27, Heb 4:4) (Note that Mark 2:27 uses *ginomai* /created, not *zoso* /made in the Greek.)

12. Did the law exist before Sinai? (Gen 3:16-17; 26:5, Ex 16:4)

13. What is implied by the language of Ex 16:4 and 20:8 regarding the Sabbath?

14. If the Sabbath existed before Sinai, is the old/new covenant argument plausible?

15. What does Christ say will be the result of his "fulfilling the law?" (Matt 5:17-18)

16. The verb *pleroo* /fulfill (Matt 5:17) has a primary meaning of to "fill full" or "to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally." How may we legitimately interpret this term in the context of the succeeding discussion (vv. 19-32 ff.)

17. What is Paul's testimony regarding the continuing existence of the Sabbath commandment? (Eph 6:1-3)

Get Out of Jail Free

Several NT texts are argued as presenting the Sabbath as an obsolete commandment which is no longer binding on the believer. These must be examined and answered.

18. Col 2:16 is the only NT text which specifically addresses the issue of rules on Sabbath observance. Does this passage make any reference whatever with regard to a command of God, or with regard to our obligation (or absence of such) to observe the Sabbath?

19. Col 2:14 is often mentioned as "nailing the Sabbath to the cross." The term translated "handwriting of ordinances which was against us" is *chierographon ton dogmasin*, which means a written verdict of a court. What is the proper understanding of what was nailed to the cross?

20. Gal 4:10-11 is often said to free the Christian from the need to observe Sabbath, since it is a day, and Paul argues against observing days. Is there any content in this text which allows us to determine Paul's intent? (Gal 4:8-11) (Note that *stoicheia* /elemental things means planetary gods.)

21. Rom 14:5 is said, like Gal 4:10-11 to free the Christian from the need to observe Sabbath. What is Paul's point in this passage? (Rom 14:4, 10-12) Does this have any bearing on the validity of the Sabbath?

The Jerusalem Council Argument

In Acts 15, we find the apostles gathering in Jerusalem to discuss just what laws and regulations should be enforced upon new converts.

22. What was the subject matter of the Jerusalem Council? (Acts 15:5-6)

23. What letter was sent from the Council? (Acts 15:27-29)

24. If the ten commandments are part of the Law of Moses, how can we reconcile the Jerusalem Council argument with other NT statements? (1 Cor 8:4,6, Gal 5:19-20, Rom 2:24, Acts 4:24, Eph 6:2-3, James 2:11, Titus 1:6, Rom 13:9, Eph 4:25, Rom 7:7, 1 Tim 1:8-10)

25. What conclusions may we draw regarding those who actively oppose the Sabbath?