

Seventh Day Adventists

by Sebastian R. Fama

The main difference between Seventh Day Adventists and other Protestants is their adherence to Sabbath worship. They reason that since Exodus 20:19 establishes Saturday as the Jewish Sabbath, Christians ought to worship on Saturday. They rightfully claim that the Catholic Church changed the day of worship from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the Lord's Day (Sunday). However, they wrongfully claim that such an act was illicit.

Scripture speaks of an Old Covenant and a New Covenant. The Old Covenant was in effect until the coming of the Messiah [Jesus]. Once Jesus came, He established a New Covenant. In Matthew 16:19 Jesus gives Peter the power to legislate in Church matters: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Under the New Covenant many things would change. For example, baptism would replace circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12), divorce would no longer be permitted (Mark 10:2-12), and animals would no longer need to be sacrificed (Hebrews 9:1-14). The day of worship would also change.

At first, the main day of worship for Christians was on Saturday. That's because the first Christians were Jews. At some point the Christians were expelled from the temple because they were seen as being divisive. Consequently, they began to meet in their homes. Eventually Church leaders decided that Sunday would be the Christian day of worship in honor of our Lord's resurrection.

While the New Testament doesn't explicitly command Christians to meet and worship on Sunday, it seems to indicate that such was the practice. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 16:2 we read: "**On the first day of every week**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come." And in Acts 20:7 we see that the early Christians gathered to break bread on Sunday. "**On the first day of the week**, when we were gathered together **to break bread**, Paul talked with them..." The term "to break bread" refers to the Eucharistic celebration or the Mass.

One thing the New Testament is clear on is that Christians are not to be judged for not observing the Jewish Sabbaths and feast days. "...having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross... Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a **festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.**" (Colossians 2:14-16). And that is because: "When there is a change in the priesthood [Jesus], there is necessarily a change in the law" (Hebrews 7:12).

Paul actually considers adherence to the Jewish days of observance as possible evidence that the Galatians have strayed from the faith. He writes: "but now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain" (Galatians 4:9-11). Paul says this because Christians are no longer bound by the Jewish ceremonial law (Romans 6:14).

There are many early Church writings that confirm Sunday as the Christian day of worship. Two are notable because of their early date. The first quote comes from "*The Didache*." It reads in part: "But every **Lord's Day** . . . gather yourselves together and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned" (*Didache* 14 [A.D. 70]).

Next was Ignatius of Antioch who was a contemporary of the apostles. He wrote: "[T]hose who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e., Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, **no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day**..." (*Letter to the Magnesians* 8 [A.D. 110]).

Another belief that separates Seventh Day Adventists from other Protestants is their view of the afterlife. They believe that upon death we go into an unconscious sleep. At the final judgment we will all be resurrected. The just

will go off to eternal life with God. Those consigned to hell will burn until they die. At this point they will cease to exist. Adventists believe that the fires of hell are eternal. However, they do not believe that the punishments received there are eternal. To support their claims, they will appeal to various Old Testament verses. For instance:

I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beasts. For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. **Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth** (Ecclesiastes 3:18-21)?

For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10).

All the ideas expressed in Ecclesiastes are not necessarily God's. Even the verse used in chapter three to promote the Adventist view begins with the author saying: "I said in my heart." Also, look at what verse 21 says: **"Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth."** Obviously, these are the musings of the author and not biblical doctrine. God knows all. He does not need to wonder about anything. Elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, Solomon acknowledges that God has a plan but that he does not know exactly what it is. Consider the following:

He has made everything beautiful in its time; also, he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

The purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes is not to reveal the mind of God but to show us that earthly solutions are inadequate. For Solomon, the obvious answer to all our problems is God. The book of Ecclesiastes anticipates the coming of the Messiah. The lesson for Christians is that one should rely on Christ rather than self.

Many of the things that were not so clear in the Old Testament become clear in the New. The Bible itself tells us this: "... our savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and **brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel**" (2 Timothy 1:10).

And what does the Gospel say about the nature of hell? Matthew 25:46 says: "And they will go away into **eternal punishment**, but the righteous into eternal life." If the damned cease to exist, the punishment would not be eternal. Incidentally, if the occupants of hell are not eternal why would the fires of hell be? Once everyone who was destined to go there went off into nonexistence the flames would no longer be needed. The fact that the fires of hell are eternal indicates that the punishments received there are eternal. That there might be no doubt as to the true nature of hell; Peter borrows a word from Greek mythology to describe it. In 2 Peter 2:4 the word rendered as hell is Tartarus (Τάρταρος). Tartarus, is a place of eternal torment.

The early Church had no problem understanding the nature of hell. Justin Martyr wrote:

No more is it possible for the evildoer, the avaricious, and the treacherous to hide from God than it is for the virtuous. Every man will receive the **eternal punishment** or reward which his actions deserve. Indeed, if all men recognized this, no one would choose evil even for a short time, knowing that he would incur **the eternal sentence of fire**. (*First Apology* 12 [A.D. 151]).

Luke 16:19-31 addresses the Adventist claim that the dead are unconscious in the grave until the second coming. In verse 22 both men die. In verse 23 we see that Lazarus is conscious and in heaven. We also see that the rich man is conscious and in hell. Adventists may be sincere in what they believe. But the evidence does not support their claims.