

The Foundation of God's Government



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rev. 14:6–12; Eccles. 12:13, 14; Prov. 28:9; Dan. 7:25.*

Memory Text: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (*Revelation 12:17, NKJV*).

Through intensive Bible study, Adventists came to understand the significance of the law in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Looking into the heart of God's law, they also discovered the significance of the Sabbath, the fourth commandment. In fact, this commandment more than any other clearly identifies God as our Creator, the foundation of all true worship—a theme that will be especially relevant in the final days of earth's history (*see Rev. 14:6–12*).

Satan's aim from the beginning has been to thwart the worship of God through undermining the law of God. He knows that to offend “in one point” means to be “guilty of all” (*James 2:10*); so, he encourages people to transgress God's law. Satan hates the Sabbath because it reminds people of the Creator and how He is to be worshiped. But it also is enshrined in God's law in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary. Because the law is what defines sin, as long as people seek to be faithful to God, then His law must continue to be valid, including the Sabbath commandment.

The aim of this lesson is to show the link between the sanctuary, God's law, the Sabbath, and the coming crisis over the mark of the beast. We also will explore the relevance of the Sabbath to an end-time generation.

* Study this week's lesson, based on chapters 25–27 of *The Great Controversy*, to prepare for Sabbath, June 1.

The Sanctuary and the Law

Read Revelation 11:19, Exodus 25:16, Exodus 31:18, and Revelation 12:17. What do these verses indicate was in the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary?

The Day of Atonement was a day of judgment. All of Israel was commanded to take part in this event by repentance, soul searching, and refraining from all work (*see Lev. 23:29–31*). On this day alone the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place to make atonement for sin. There, in the innermost apartment of the sanctuary, was the ark of the covenant. Within the ark was God’s Ten Commandment law, written on tables of stone. The golden cover of the ark was called the mercy seat, where blood was sprinkled to cleanse the sanctuary from sin. God’s presence was manifest in Shekinah glory above the mercy seat. Every sacrifice offered revealed God’s mercy toward sinful human beings, but the Day of Atonement shows that sin is remembered until the day of judgment (*Heb. 10:3*) and that it could really be removed only through faith in the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin (*1 Pet. 1:18, 19*). There, in the presence of God, mercy and justice beautifully combine.

Looking into the heavenly sanctuary, the apostle John saw “the temple of God . . . opened” and the “ark of His covenant” revealed (*Rev. 11:19, NKJV*). *The Great Controversy* adds this comment: “Within the holy of holies, in the sanctuary in heaven, the divine law is sacredly enshrined—the law that was spoken by God Himself amid the thunders of Sinai and written with His own finger on the tables of stone. The law of God in the sanctuary in heaven is the great original, of which the precepts inscribed upon the tables of stone and recorded by Moses in the Pentateuch were an unerring transcript. Those who arrived at an understanding of this important point were thus led to see the sacred, unchanging character of the divine law.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 434.

As the early Adventist believers studied the Bible’s teaching on the sanctuary, they realized the significance of the law of God and the Sabbath in the heart of God’s law. They reasoned that if the law of God was pictured in the ark of the covenant in the heavenly sanctuary, it certainly could not have been done away with at the cross.

Think about the Sabbath, which, at 1,000 miles an hour, comes to us every week without exception. What should that tell us about the importance of the doctrine of Creation? What other doctrine has such a powerful, and reoccurring, reminder?

The Immutability of God’s Law

Read Matthew 5:17, 18; Psalm 111:7, 8; Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14; 1 John 5:3; and Proverbs 28:9. What do these Bible passages teach regarding the Christian’s relationship to the law?

Seventh-day Adventists follow in the footsteps of the Protestant Reformers who upheld the sanctity of God’s law. Note this powerful affirmation of John Wesley: “The ritual or ceremonial law delivered by Moses to the children of Israel, containing all the injunctions and ordinances which related to the old sacrifices and service of the temple, our Lord indeed did come to destroy, to dissolve and utterly abolish. . . . But the moral law, contained in the Ten Commandments, and enforced by the prophets, he did not take away. It was not the design of his coming to revoke any part of this. This is a law which never can be broken, which ‘stands fast as the faithful witness in heaven.’ . . . Every part of this law must remain in force, upon all mankind, and in all ages; as not depending either on time or place, or any other circumstances liable to change, but on the nature of God and the nature of man, and their unchangeable relation to each other.”—“Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” Discourse V, John Wesley’s *Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1991), pp. 208, 209.

Compare Exodus 34:5–7 with Romans 7:11, 12; Psalm 19:7–11; Psalm 89:14; and Psalm 119:142, 172. What do these verses tell us about the relationship between God’s law and God’s character?

Since the law of God is a transcript of His character, the foundation of His throne, and the moral basis for humanity, Satan hates it. “None could fail to see that if the earthly sanctuary was a figure or pattern of the heavenly, the law deposited in the ark on earth was an exact transcript of the law in the ark in heaven; and that an acceptance of the truth concerning the heavenly sanctuary involved an acknowledgment of the claims of God’s law and the obligation of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. Here was the secret of the bitter and determined opposition to the harmonious exposition of the Scriptures that revealed the ministration of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 435.

What are the reasons people often give to argue that we no longer are obligated to keep the Ten Commandments? What do you think is really behind it?

The Sabbath and the Law

Read Revelation 14:6, 7; Revelation 4:11; Genesis 2:1–3; and Exodus 20:8–11. What is the relationship between Creation, the Sabbath, and the law of God?

Creation speaks of our value in God's sight. We are not alone in the universe—some speck of cosmic dust—nor are we a genetic accident. In other words, the common scientific scenario of life's origins, which has been picked up by the news media and popular culture, presents a view of our origins that is in every way incompatible with the biblical account.

We are here because Jesus created us. And He is worthy of our worship not only because He created us but also because He redeemed us. Creation and Redemption are at the heart of all true worship. Therefore, the Sabbath is vital to understanding the plan of salvation. The Sabbath speaks of a Creator's care and a Redeemer's love.

At the conclusion of Creation week, God rested in the beauty and majesty of the world He had made. He also rested as an example to us. The Sabbath is a weekly pause to praise the One who made us. As we worship on the Sabbath, we open our hearts to receive the special blessing He placed in that day only, and in no other day.

The Sabbath points us to a Creator who loved us too much to abandon us when we drifted from His purpose for us. The Sabbath is an eternal symbol of our rest in Him. It is a special sign of loyalty to the Creator (*Ezek. 20:12, 20*). It is a symbol of rest, not of works; of grace, not of legalism; of assurance, not of condemnation; of depending upon God for salvation, not on ourselves. True Sabbath rest is the rest of grace in the loving arms of the One who created us, the One who redeemed us, and the One who is coming again for us.

The message of Revelation 14, God's end-time message for the world, calls people to rest in His love and care each Sabbath. It calls us to remember the One who created us and give Him glory. Keeping the Sabbath also is a connecting link between the perfection of Eden and the glory of the new heavens and the new earth to come. It reminds us that one day the splendors of Eden will be restored.

Most Seventh-day Adventists have faced the charge of being legalistic, and that charge is usually connected with our keeping the Sabbath. Discuss the Sabbath as a symbol of Redemption and righteousness by faith. Why would obeying God's command to rest lead people to think we are trying to work our way to heaven?

The Mark of the Beast

Read Revelation 12:12, 17 and Revelation 13:7. How do these texts reveal Satan's wrath? Why is the devil so angry with God's end-time people?

Revelation 12 outlines the cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan down through the ages. It climaxes with Satan's final attack on the people of God. Revelation 13 introduces the dragon's two allies, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land. These two powers join him in making war on God's people.

Read Revelation 13:4, 8, 12, 15 and Revelation 14:7, 9–11. (See also *Rev. 15:4, Rev. 16:2, Rev. 19:20, Rev. 20:4, Rev. 22:9.*) What one key theme appears in all of these verses?

Note the contrast. Either people worship the Creator or they worship something else. The Creator is worthy of worship (*Rev. 5:9*). The controversy between Christ and Satan began in heaven over worship: "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (*Isa. 14:14, NKJV*). Satan wanted the worship belonging only to the Creator. According to Revelation 13, he succeeds through the activity of the sea beast (*Rev. 13:4*).

A comparison with Daniel 7 shows that this beast is the same as the little horn that "seeks to change times and laws" and exercises authority for 1,260 prophetic "days," that is, for 1,260 years (*Dan. 7:25; compare Rev. 13:5; see lesson 6*). The only part of God's law, the Ten Commandments, dealing with time is the fourth commandment. This church has attempted to change the day of worship from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day of the week.

For an earthly power to seek to change the day of worship, the seventh-day Sabbath, which God Himself gave as a sign of His authority (*Exod. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12, 20*), is an attempt to usurp divine authority at the most basic level possible. On this point, then, is the focus of the final conflict over true and false worship.

For this reason, Revelation identifies the people who are faithful to God as those "who keep the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17, Rev. 14:12*). This includes the seventh-day Sabbath, not Sunday. Those who refuse the final call of the three angels to worship God on His holy day (*Isa. 58:13*) and who worship the beast on his counterfeit sabbath, Sunday, will receive the mark of the beast (see lesson 11).

The Three Angels' Messages

In Revelation 14:7, the first angel cries with a loud voice, “ ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’ ” (*NKJV*). Heaven’s appeal is for us to give our supreme allegiance and heartfelt worship to the Creator in light of impending judgment.

The second angel declares, “ ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication’ ” (*Rev. 14:8, NKJV*). Babylon represents a fallen apostate religious system that has rejected the message of the first angel in favor of a false system of worship. That’s why Revelation 14:9–11 warns against worshipping “the beast and his image.” Two opposing choices are presented here—worship of the Creator or worship of the beast. Every person on planet Earth will make their final, irrevocable decision over who has their total allegiance—Jesus or Satan.

Read Revelation 14:12. What are the two identifying characteristics of those who refuse to worship the beast? Why are both vitally important?

God will have an end-time people who are loyal to Him in the face of the greatest opposition and fiercest persecution in the history of the world. Through the gift of Christ’s righteousness, they will live grace-filled, obedient lives. Worshiping the Creator stands in direct opposition to worshipping the beast and is expressed in keeping the commandments of God. This final conflict over allegiance to Christ or allegiance to the beast power centers in worship, and at the heart of this great controversy between good and evil is the Sabbath.

These committed followers of the Savior will not only have faith “in” Jesus but will also have the faith “of” Jesus. The faith of Jesus is a faith so deep, so trusting, so committed, that all the demons in hell and all the trials on earth cannot shake it. It is a faith that trusts when it cannot see, believes when it cannot reason why, and hopes when it cannot understand. This “faith of Jesus” is itself a gift we receive by faith. It will carry us through the crisis ahead. When the final crisis breaks and we face an economic boycott, persecution, imprisonment, and death itself, the faith of Jesus will carry us through earth’s final hours until Jesus returns.

How is God preparing your faith today for what is coming in the future?

Further Thought: “In the absence of Bible testimony in their favor, many with unwearied persistence urged—forgetting how the same reasoning had been employed against Christ and His apostles: ‘Why do not our great men understand this Sabbath question? But few believe as you do. It cannot be that you are right and that all the men of learning in the world are wrong.’

“To refute such arguments it was needful only to cite the teachings of the Scriptures and the history of the Lord’s dealings with His people in all ages.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 455

“Christians of past generations observed the Sunday, supposing that in so doing they were keeping the Bible Sabbath; and there are now true Christians in every church, not excepting the Roman Catholic communion, who honestly believe that Sunday is the Sabbath of divine appointment. God accepts their sincerity of purpose and their integrity before Him. But when Sunday observance shall be enforced by law, and the world shall be enlightened concerning the obligation of the true Sabbath, then whoever shall transgress the command of God, to obey a precept which has no higher authority than that of Rome, will thereby honor popery above God. He is paying homage to Rome and to the power which enforces the institution ordained by Rome. He is worshiping the beast and his image. As men then reject the institution which God has declared to be the sign of His authority, and honor in its stead that which Rome has chosen as the token of her supremacy, they will thereby accept the sign of allegiance to Rome—‘the mark of the beast.’ And it is not until the issue is thus plainly set before the people, and they are brought to choose between the commandments of God and the commandments of men, that those who continue in transgression will receive ‘the mark of the beast.’”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 449.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ The world is changing so quickly, so dramatically. Why must we always be vigilant so that last-day events don’t catch us unprepared?
- ❷ How does an understanding of the judgment and the law of God harmonize with the fact that we are saved by grace alone?
- ❸ What are ways you can witness to those who don’t grasp the significance of the true Sabbath and sincerely keep Sunday, the first day of the week?
- ❹ What dangers lie in the union of church and state powers? How as Christians are we to relate to the government?

Running From Church: Part 2

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

After two young refugees gave their hearts to Jesus in a European city, they began to plead with their mother to consider Jesus.

“Mother, don’t you want to be saved?” asked 20-year-old Rosen.

His mother, Aneliya, erupted like a volcano. “I will never leave my religion!” she yelled, pounding on a table. “I’ll keep my religion until I die!”

Her 22-year-old son, Sergei, spoke about how Jesus was crucified for people’s sins and resurrected on the third day.

“It’s impossible that He was resurrected,” Aneliya said.

“If you believe in Jesus, and die, you also will be resurrected,” Sergei said.

One day, he read John 3:36 to his mother: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him” (*NKJV*). “We die,” he said to his mother, “but when Jesus returns, we will be raised from the graves.”

“My son, how will we be raised from the graves?” she asked.

“We will live again,” he said.

It was a big question for Aneliya. It was the biggest question on her mind. How was it possible to be resurrected and live forever?

As she listened to her sons, Bible verses that had once confused her began to make sense. She began to understand what Paul, the man who had first invited the family to church, had read to them from the Bible and what she had heard about Jesus during her first church visit. Joy filled her heart. Aneliya later understood that the Holy Spirit had entered her heart. Soon Aneliya acknowledged Jesus as her Savior. When she did that, a desire filled her to spend time with Him and to attend worship services at church.

Then her 15-year-old daughter was baptized. Aneliya had skipped the baptisms of her two sons, but she went to her daughter’s baptism. She congratulated her afterward. “Mother, your turn is next,” her daughter said.

Sergei gave Bible studies to his mother, and she also studied the Bible on her own. A thirst grew in her heart to live for Christ. Then the day came, when she was 47, that she gave her heart to Jesus in baptism. “It was with great joy,” she said in an interview. “I cannot describe my joy. It was the first time in forty-seven years that I had such joy. I believed and accepted Jesus Christ.”

Today, Aneliya is 48 and a missionary to her people. Her husband has accepted the Bible, and even his parents back in their native country are keeping the Sabbath. Aneliya also gives Bible studies to her community.

“Once I had wanted to run away from church, but now a desire has filled me to run to church,” she said. “The Holy Spirit brought me to God.”

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