

SABBATH OBSERVANCE

Some Practical Considerations

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The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church teaches the following principles about observing the Sabbath: (1) The Sabbath is God's gift of time to all mankind given for the purpose of establishing relationships with Him, His people and one's family. (2) The Sabbath commemorates creation by the Creator; the seventh day is to be remembered and kept holy (sacred). It begins at sundown on Friday evening and ends the following sundown. (3) The Sabbath is eternal. Neither Jesus Christ, the Apostles, nor the Scriptures authorize changing the sanctity of the Sabbath from the seventh day (Saturday) to any other time. The tradition of worshipping on Sunday that most Christians follow today developed in the second and third centuries A.D. (4) The Sabbath is universal and can be kept in some manner in any circumstance of life. Sabbath means "ceasing, resting." Sabbath is a time for refraining from man's work and depending wholly on God. Temporal pursuits are replaced with worship, devotional study/ prayer, fellowship with family and church, and learning about the Creator by studying nature. (5) The Sabbath is a day for doing good; Jesus said, "It is lawful to do well on the Sabbath."

SDA church members in good and regular standing endeavor to practice the tenets of faith to the best of their understanding and ability. While a cardinal denominational doctrine teaches observance of the Sabbath, the SDA Church maintains no *Mishnah* of Sabbath rules. To intentionally violate the sanctity of the Sabbath is spiritually wrong (sin). With few exceptions SDAs do not pursue secular employment during Sabbath hours. Those who perform emergency/ necessary duties often voluntarily give any pay received to the Church as an offering. SDAs do not engage in business transactions (shopping), attend athletic events, or watch secular television shows, etc. during Sabbath hours. While individual church members vary in their interpretation and application of the principles listed above, most hold uniformly to these practices.

Though seldom mentioned in Adventist circles, the Scriptures mention the Children of Israel engaging in activities most Adventists today would not think "kosher." Joshua apparently marched the Children of Israel around Jericho during Sabbath hours (Joshua 6) and Jehoiada ordered armed Levites to guard the Temple on the Sabbath (II Chronicles 23). Essential secular type activities could be engaged during Sabbath hours for the following purposes: (1) Sustaining or saving life. (2) Relieving suffering. (3) Assisting victims of natural disaster. (4) Preventing imminent, serious threat to public health, welfare and safety. (5) Actual military combat. On those occasions when duties must be performed outside the norms of traditional Sabbath-keeping, Ellen G. White, an early Adventist pioneer leader, admonished medical workers in her day to remember to take time to pray and pray for co-workers sometime during the Sabbath. See Medical Ministry, pages 50 and 214-216. Likewise, SDAs should take similar steps to prevent their Sabbath observance from becoming casual, then careless. Neither

should Sabbath-keeping degenerate into sour legalism or some self-righteous mechanism of works that “earns” salvation.

The following questions can be helpful in determining Sabbath-keeping practices:

(1) What is the basis for my Sabbath-keeping? Why do I observe the Sabbath? Is my Sabbath observance hereditary or cultural, or is it the result of a relationship with God and my understanding of His will for my life?

(2) How do I differentiate between spiritual and temporal matters, the sacred and the secular, holy and worldly?

(3) What activities, practices or traditions give spiritual significance and meaning to the Sabbath hours? How would I keep the Sabbath as a patient in the hospital, or as a Prisoner of War? Could I still find meaning in Sabbath observance under austere or difficult circumstances, apart from sitting in a pew of a church at 1100 on Sabbath?

(4) What constitutes “work?” What activities would profane the Sabbath?

(5) What does “doing the Lord’s pleasure on His holy day” mean? Isaiah 58:13,14.

(6) What can I do during the Sabbath hours?

(7) What perceptions about the Bible Sabbath does my Sabbath observance give nonbelievers and/or Sunday-keepers?