

Exploring the Heavenly Sanctuary

Understanding Seventh-day Adventist Theology

Marc Rasell

Copyright © 2009-2012 All Rights Reserved

Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the King James Version, 1611 (Authorized Version) Copyright status: Crown copyright (UK).

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked (GNB) are from the *Good News Bible* © 1994 published by the Bible Societies/HarperCollins Publishers Ltd UK, *Good News Bible* © American Bible Society 1966, 1971, 1976, 1992. Used with permission.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Introduction

There is only one doctrine that is unique to the Seventh-day Adventist church – the heavenly sanctuary. In order to understand Adventist theology one needs to delve into this topic. Other churches hold similar beliefs regarding the Sabbath, the state of the dead (asleep until the resurrection) and the second coming of Christ; however, none of them believe in the heavenly sanctuary in the same way. In fact anyone who observes Sunday could be said to be a Sabbath keeper, even though Adventists would not accept that Sunday is the day sanctified by God. There are very few denominations which state in their creeds or beliefs that they reject the Ten Commandments. Adventists hold very traditional beliefs, they endorse the Trinity and strictly adhere to the Bible which they believe is the inspired Word of God. They do not accept any writings above the Scriptures and all their fundamental beliefs are founded on the Bible. However, to be a true Seventh-day Adventist is more than accepting a set of doctrines, it is about adopting a certain way of life with the expectation that Christ is going to return soon.

The heavenly sanctuary is a fascinating study because it throws light on the gospel and helps us to better understand the work of Christ as our Priest in heaven. For many Christians the heavenly sanctuary is a mystery or something they have never previously considered. What is the purpose of the heavenly temple and how can we be sure it exists? This book will look at the issue of whether there is a real temple in heaven and what its purpose is. To do that, we will look primarily at the Book of Hebrews.

In the past, some theologians became so obsessed with individual verses in Hebrews that they lost sight of their significance in the wider context. Therefore the first two chapters of this book will look at the context of the Epistle to the Hebrews so we have a base on which to build.

The third chapter looks at the issue of the “sabbatismos” or Sabbath rest and how this relates to the weekly Sabbath. I’ve also taken a look at the Colossian Heresy because this is often referred to in association with the “sabbatismos” of Hebrews four; although in reality they have little in common because of the different contexts.

In chapters four and five I’ve looked at the reality of the heavenly temple, its purpose and function, and what Christ is doing there. The context would suggest that the author of Hebrews is primarily concerned with showing the superiority of the heavenly temple to counteract a desire to return to the ritual system. The reality and certainty of the gospel and

the merits of Christ's blood are presented in contrast to the blood of bulls and goats. The Book of Hebrews builds the foundation of our understanding of the heavenly temple but does not complete it, for that we need to look at the Book of Revelation.

In chapter six, I've looked at the Day of Atonement rite in the Book of Leviticus and how this relates to sins being transferred to the heavenly temple, which is later purified. In simple terms this can be compared to garbage collection and elimination which will be explained later.

In chapters seven to ten, I've looked at the apocalyptic visions of the Book of Daniel in order to establish a date for the commencement of the cleansing of the heavenly temple. In order to do this, it is important to progress through four visions in order to understand the parallels and links that exist between them.

In chapter eleven, we look at the place the sanctuary holds in the great conflict between good and evil and what future events still face God's people as depicted in the Book of Revelation. Finally, in chapter twelve we review the final purpose of the sanctuary – for the saved to dwell with God in the New Jerusalem.

My New Testament lecturer, Dr. Eric Metzger, advised us to examine our methodologies, so I will set out some of the basic principles I am working by: 1. Any doctrine that is based on only one verse is usually unsound; by looking at various passages in an epistle it is possible to reconstruct the context to gain a better understanding of individual verses. 2. The fact that an interpretation of a passage is held by the majority of commentators does not prove it is correct; in Bible history it was usually the minority that held the truth, while the majority were in a state of apostasy. 3. I have referred to the original languages where some modern translations have departed from the literal meaning of the text; there is always a danger that in obscure passages translators will try to read into the text their own interpretation. 4. In the apocalyptic prophecies, the meaning can be ascertained by looking at the interpretation given by the angel, comparing the visions with their historical fulfilments and noticing the parallels and links between the visions.

I've prayed that God will guide me as I write this book as without the Holy Spirit all our strivings end in confusion. I hope that you will find something meaningful in this book. My prayer is that it will help to clarify what Seventh-day Adventist really believe and give people a deeper understanding of the gospel, the heavenly sanctuary and the glory of God. At the heart of the heavenly sanctuary is Jesus who ever intercedes for us (Heb. 7:25).

Chapter 1 Enduring Persecution

The context of the Epistle to the Hebrews

To understand the heavenly sanctuary we need to delve into the Epistle to the Hebrews where this grand topic is explored in a theological masterpiece. The Epistle was written to Christians who were suffering persecution; some had given up meeting together (Hebrews 10:25), but in earlier days had endured persecution and sympathised with those in prison (Hebrews 10:32-34). During times of persecution and trials our faith in Christ is tested. We cannot see Christ visibly but we experience difficulties and may be tempted to forsake our beliefs or to question why Christ does not intervene. God is presented in the Bible as the all loving and all powerful Creator, yet in this world evil and suffering is on every hand.

Having recently suffered some personal setbacks, I've prayed to God about my troubles, one answer seems to be that God sometimes needs to refine us so we can learn to trust in Him and His Word. In the end everything works together for good for those who trust in God (Rom. 8:28). Job suffered the loss of all his children and property in one day and then was struck down with a seemingly fatal and painful disease (Job 1-2). There is no suggestion that he had done anything wrong, he had lived a righteous life. At first he maintained his faith but as the weeks of suffering went by, he had time to reflect and he grew increasingly despondent (Job 3), although he never gave up on God and remained faithful to Him. From his lowest ebb came some of the most sublime affirmations of faith recorded in the Bible. He said that even if the Lord should slay him he would still trust in Him; and one day after his death he would see the Lord in his own skin (Job 13:15; 19:26). Eventually Job was restored to health after praying for his friends, and ended up with more property and children than before his misfortune (Job 42:7-16). When God appeared to Job, He asked him if he understood the mysteries of nature. When faced with God's glory Job could make no reply (Job 38-41; 42:1-6).

The Apostle Paul likens the Christian life to a race (1 Corinthians 9:24; Hebrews 12:1). Many runners start off well, but not all finish the race. It is when we are at our weakest point that we are in most need of divine sustenance. Christ experienced this in the wilderness when after forty days of fasting, at His weakest moment the devil chose to attack Him (Matthew 4:1-11). The Hebrews were counselled to consider Jesus who suffered so much for them (Hebrews 12:3). When we are tempted to complain and ask why me, consider Christ

and how much He patiently suffered on our behalf and all the injustice He had to endure. When we consider what God's Son had to go through, our own problems begin to dissolve in comparison. We need to learn to love our enemies and pray for them as Christ did before we begin to find peace of mind.

The main bulk of the message to the Hebrews is that Christ provides a superior sacrifice and is our High Priest in the heavenly temple, with warnings against falling away. The problem was, not only were they wavering in the face of persecution, they also seemed to be considering returning to their former beliefs: animal sacrifices, the temple and the priesthood. They appeared to be looking back to these as a form of spiritual security, perhaps questioning whether Christ was really coming back, had it all been a delusion. They had committed all to Christ and now they were left with nothing or so it appeared, maybe it would be easier just to give up and go back to their old way of life. The context suggests that the Hebrews were most likely Jewish converts to Christianity.

The writer of the Epistle is traditionally considered to be Paul and I will be working from that assumption. There are different opinions among scholars about who the author was, some favouring Paul and others against. In favour is the fact that the author was well educated, some phrases are typically Pauline, and the thoughts mirror those of Paul. In the early P46 manuscript of the third century, it is placed among Paul's writings. We also know that Paul made use of literary scribes (Rom. 16:22; 2 Thess. 3:17) which would explain the different style of Greek to his usual writings¹. Whoever the author is, it certainly contains some deep spiritual truths and is an important part of the New Testament.

Christ the Eternal One and the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies

Paul cleverly paints a picture of something far greater than what the Hebrews wanted to return to. He presents Jesus as the One who is eternal, unchangeable, and superior to angels; whose reign will be victorious. He is seated at the right hand of God and fulfils the Messianic prophecies (Hebrews 1). When someone is clinging to the remnants of an obsolete faith, it is not always wise to demolish it without first giving them something new to hold on to, here is demonstrated the wisdom and grace of God.

¹ Ekkehardt Mueller, *Come boldly to the throne: sanctuary themes in Hebrews* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2003) p. 8

Christ is presented as the One having greater glory than the angels, for what angel is worshipped or is called God's Son? (Hebrews 1:5-6). At the time of the formation of the Talmud in the second century AD an expanded theology of angels had been developed². Angels were looked upon as mediators who could help you in your spiritual journey. The Scriptures indicate that such beliefs were present in the era of the Apostles. We find Gnostic thinking in the New Testament, a philosophy which viewed the material world as evil and inferior. I will go into more depth about this in chapter three when we look at the Colossian heresy. Because Jesus came in human flesh, He may have been seen as inferior to angels because they were spirit beings. The reality was that Jesus was greater than all these created beings because He had an indestructible life with no beginning and was worthy of worship.

While man was made lower than the angels yet he was made the ruler of creation (Psalm 8:4-6), this is applied prophetically to Jesus (Hebrews 2:6-9) who although coming to this darkened world and descending lower than the angels has now become creation's rightful ruler. Although Jesus was greater than the angels, He willingly was made lower than them in order to save us. The descent from heaven to hell, from light to dark, from purity to wickedness cannot be fully comprehended. Such condescension is unfathomable but its genius brought about the victory of Christ over the forces of evil. That the Son of God should descend to such depths for us reveals the mystery of the love of God (Philippians 2:5-8). We cannot understand this condescension because we have never been in heaven and known the perfect love and harmony that exists there. When Christ descended to this world, He faced a cruel death and an unfair trial. His trial broke almost every Jewish law and precept then established to protect those accused of a crime leading to a capital punishment³. He was arrested during the night, beaten before being proved guilty, condemned on His own testimony (Deuteronomy 17:6), His defence was not considered, He was struck for speaking, and after being declared innocent was condemned to die one of the most humiliating and cruel deaths (John 19:4-6). Jesus had been scourged twice, humiliated, beaten, and cheated out of a fair hearing. By the time of His crucifixion, He was too weak to carry His cross. He had also been rejected by His own people whom He came to save (John 1:11).

“Grasping priests denounced Him, false witnesses accused Him, judges of bad faith condemned Him; a friend betrayed Him, no one defended Him; He was dragged with every

² See Angelology in www.jewishencyclopaedia.com

³ John McArthur, The Illegal, Unjust Trials of Jesus--Part 1 <http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/sg2389.htm>; The Hebrew Trial of Jesus http://www.pathlights.com/theselastdays/tracts/tract_13c.htm

kind of contumely and violence to the malefactor's cross, where He spoke the last words of truth and brotherhood among men. It was one of the greatest and most memorable acts of injustice.”⁴

The Romans had designed crucifixion to be a cruel, lingering and humiliating death, usually in a public place as a deterrent to others⁵. Afterwards, the bodies were just thrown on a rubbish dump to be eaten by wild dogs. This punishment was usually reserved for the worst criminals, slaves and traitors. By taking away control of your own body and publicly humiliating a person it was meant to deter others from the same crime.

Dr. Frederick T. Zugibe (M.D., Ph.D.) believes that the traditional theory of death by asphyxiation (Badet) is incorrect because a person would not be able to raise his body on the cross⁶. He describes vividly the effect of scourging which could be so painful that the victim could faint and suffer convulsions. The crown of thorns would have added to the blood loss when struck repeatedly by a reed. And the nails in the hands and feet would have damaged the meridian nerve causing excruciating pain, like lightning bolts going down the arms, especially each time they were moved. He believed that death would be caused by physical trauma.

However, the Scriptures suggest another cause of death – despair. On the cross, Jesus suffered the accumulated guilt of the sins of the whole world. He partially experienced this in the Garden of Gethsemane when He began to sweat blood (Luke 22:44), something Luke the doctor made a note of in his Gospel. As we behold the Son of God shrouded in darkness on the hill of Golgotha, we recognise His superiority and majesty and our own unworthiness.

Christ fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of Psalm 45:6; 110:1-2. He is a king who has a throne and a sceptre (Hebrews 1:8). He sits at God's right hand until God puts His enemies under His feet (Hebrews 1:3, 13). The Psalms are Messianic because David is a type of Christ. David was God's anointed to become king, yet He was rejected and falsely accused, but finally came to the throne and was victorious over his enemies. In a similar way, Jesus had to suffer before becoming a king and being victorious. Having descended to the lowest place, He was destined to be exalted to God's side. In a number of places in the New Testament, Jesus is pictured as sitting at the right hand of God in fulfilment of the Psalms (e.g. Matthew 26:64; Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet 3:22). Jesus is the

⁴ Giovanni Rosadi, *The Trial of Christ* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1905) p. 1 (quoted in John McArthur, *The Illegal, Unjust Trials of Jesus--Part 1*)

⁵ Joe Zias, *Crucifixion in Antiquity* <http://www.centuryone.org/crucifixion2.html>

⁶ Dr. Frederick T. Zugibe, M.D., Ph.D. <http://www.crucifixion-shroud.com/Turin2000.htm>

fulfilment of the Messianic hopes and dreams, He came to deliver us from death and sin and usher in a new world of peace and harmony. One day the lamb will lie down with the lion and the people will beat their swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4; 65:25).

Jesus our High Priest

Jesus is not only a king but also a priest (Hebrews 5:6; chapter 7) in fulfilment of Psalm 110:4. The fact that this Psalm is Messianic is commented on in Mark 12:35-37, how could David call his son lord if he was his son? This was a question which puzzled the teachers of Christ's day. On the one hand they knew the Messiah would be the son of David as promised by God, yet how He could be David's lord they could not comprehend.

In the Levitical system the kingship and the priesthood were separated but now they came together in the person of Jesus. A picture is being drawn of Jesus in His High Priestly role at the right hand of God interceding for His people (Hebrews 7:25). A priest at the right hand of God is a powerful ally who can truly help us. What does it mean to have an intercessor when Christ has already paid the price for our sins (Hebrews 1:3)? Christ paid the penalty for our transgressions and applies their merits when we confess our sins. The idea of receiving the merits of salvation without accepting our need for salvation is incongruous. The way to life is narrow and only few find it because they are unwilling to travel the strait and narrow path. They wish to be saved and travel the broad way at the same time; they want to be free from the moral constraints of the law but do not see that this way leads to destruction. Like the chaff, the wicked are blown away in their freedom but the righteous stand planted like a tree next to a stream (Psalm 1)⁷.

In order to benefit from the merits of Christ's sacrifice we have to be willing to confess our sins (1 John 1:8-9). It is not easy for mankind to admit that they need help or that they are deficient, but sin is like leprosy which cannot be cured without medicine. Simply trying to cover our sins with our own righteousness will not suffice; there needs to be an inward change, a rebirth (John 3:5). This rebirth extends not only to our actions but also to our inner motives and thoughts (Mark 7:15). Jesus came not only to set us free from the condemnation of the law (John 3:18), but also to set us free from the power of sin in our lives

⁷ Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 3* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978) p. 631

(John 8:34-36). Such a change is only possibly by the working of the Spirit in our hearts (John 3:8).

As Jesus intercedes for us and pleads His blood on our behalf, we are set free from the condemnation of the law. By receiving this pardon we are transformed into His likeness day by day (Romans 12:2). We need daily to think about Christ, His life and death, and His ministry for us in heaven. In this way we will be eating the Bread of Life - His flesh, and drinking His blood (John 6:53-56). This was something the Hebrews needed; they had suffered persecution and needed the Bread of Life to keep them spiritually alive. Jesus was praying for them in heaven, they only needed to lift their eyes upwards to see their merciful High Priest interceding for them.

Chapter 2 The Danger of Drifting

Where are you going?

One of the greatest dangers when navigating a river is to do nothing and drift, which can often lead to rapids, waterfalls, hidden currents and other perils. It's important to be going in the right direction if we are going to reach the heavenly shore and avoid the rocks of error and destruction. When we don't have an anchor or know where we are going it's easy to follow the current, but the way of least resistance leads to the shipwreck of our faith.

In ancient times a city would usually be situated on a hill and at sunset the gates would be shut. The people would go out to work in the fields during the day, and it was a tiring climb back to the city before dusk. Jesus taught that the broad way is the one that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14). The path to heaven is an ascending one⁸ which goes through strait places, it's not the natural way to go but it leads to the city gates.

One of the most important rules of navigation is to know where you are and where you are going, only then is it possible to plan a route to your destination. I remember a time when a friend of mine at college was planning to go hiking in the mountains, I warned him that sometimes the clouds can descend and if you don't have a map and compass you could get into trouble. He told me on his return that on one particular day he had seen the clouds descending so they quickly came down from the mountain! When the fog of doubt and discouragement descends we need to know where we are and where we are going, to a city prepared by God (Hebrews 11:16; 13:14) which will endure into eternity. The way has been marked out by Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life, although it is a blood stained way. If we ignore such a great salvation (Hebrews 2:3) what hope is there for us? If someone throws you a rescue line and you ignore it then you are asking for trouble!

In ancient times the Lord tried to help Israel, but the more He tried the more they rebelled until their condition was like a person covered with bruises, they just simply would not learn their lesson. The prophet despaired at their condition and felt that any more punishment would be futile (Isaiah 1:5-7). Only the purifying influence of the exile to Babylon would bring them to their senses.

⁸ Ellen White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1896) p. 138

A rescue package

Jesus descended to this earth to share our humanity; He became flesh and blood even though He had once been omnipresent. Through His incarnation He provided a rescue package for those who had been ensnared by the devil that they might be freed from eternal death (Hebrews 2:14-15). This condescension was necessary so that He might become our High Priest (Hebrews 2:17), for the high priest was called upon to represent the people before God to make atonement for their sins.

Christ came to save those who cannot save themselves. In the wilderness tabernacle, one could not atone for one's own sins without the mediation of a priest (Leviticus 5:6). The sinner had no right to offer the sacrifice or to enter the Holy Place with the sacrificial blood. In a similar way, without Christ to mediate in our behalf we cannot be saved. We are drifting on the river of destruction and without outside intervention we are doomed, the good news is that God is willing and able to save us before we plunge into the abyss. God calls on the wicked to repent, "Say unto them, *As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*" (Ezekiel 33:11)

When someone is taken to court, a lawyer is usually appointed to represent the accused. He is able to make arguments and pleas that the accused would not think of, he knows the rules and regulations that are best suited to work in favour of his client. For Christ, His winning argument is His blood, the all availing sacrifice for sin. He paid the penalty for our sins by dying in our place (1 Corinthians 15:3); no one can argue with that, justice has been done.

A story is told of a king in Arabia who decreed that if anyone broke his law he must have both his eyes put out. Then it was discovered that his son, the crown prince had broken the law! The king was in a dilemma, he loved his son but also felt he had to uphold his law, so he had one of his own eyes put out and one of his sons' eyes put out! No one could say he had not upheld the law⁹.

In 1937 a man named John Griffeth had the job of operating a railroad drawbridge which spanned the Mississippi River. That summer he took his son to work with him. John would raise the bridge to let the boats through, and then lower it for the trains. At noon, John raised the bridge while they had lunch; suddenly he heard the sound of a train whistle, the

⁹ Story found in: Whistling Through the Graveyard, Amazing Adventure DVD No. 8 (Roseville, California: Amazing Facts, Inc.)

Memphis Express with four hundred passengers was coming! When John got to the control room he discovered with horror that his son had fallen into the massive gears below, to lower the bridge would mean the gruesome death of his son, but not to would mean the train would plunge into the river and hundreds of people would perish. He had to close the bridge to save the passengers at the cost of the life of his own son. Overwhelmed with grief he covered his eyes and lowered the bridge just in time for the train to cross. He paid a great price and carried the broken form of his son back home¹⁰. The Bible tells us that, “the Father himself loveth you...” John 16:27. With arguments such as these, Jesus pleads for our salvation while Satan seeks to accuse and destroy us (Zechariah 3). A great controversy is raging over God’s justice and our salvation (Rev. 12:7-9); while Satan seeks to accuse us and say we are worthy of destruction, Jesus pleads His blood on our behalf. Christ is our only hope of salvation for unless we are clothed with His righteousness we cannot be saved. Christ can sympathise with our struggles and weaknesses because He lived as one of us. He was tempted and suffered; He knew what it is like to be hungry, tired and rejected, and to struggle in prayer to overcome temptation (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15; 5:7). Yet there was a difference, He lived a perfect life and never sinned (John 8:46).

When Jesus cried out “it is finished” on the cross (John 19:30), those words carried great significance. In the Greek they are in the perfect tense which signifies a past action with present effects¹¹. It can be translated “it has been finished” or “it is finished”, both are correct. What Jesus did on the cross cannot be superseded or added to. By our works, we cannot add to the perfect work of Christ on the cross because it is already perfect. If we could add to it, it would no longer be grace but works; we would be earning our salvation (Romans 11:6).

The dangers of unbelief

Paul warns his readers against unbelief (Hebrews 3:12), there was a danger that because of the difficulties of persecution they would lose sight of Christ who was reaching out to save them. They were being tempted to doubt the all sufficiency of His atonement and trust in their own works.

¹⁰ Based upon: The Only Lifeboat, Amazing Adventure Bible Guide (Roseville, California: Amazing Facts, Inc.) p. 5

¹¹ Jeremy Duff, The Elements of New Testament Greek, Third Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) p. 178; James A. Brooks, Carlton L. Winbery, Syntax of New Testament Greek (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1979) p. 104

In the wilderness, when God ordered the Israelites to enter the Promised Land, the people would not believe that it was possible and refused to go forward. The way seemed too difficult, the spies had brought back an evil report of how difficult the way ahead was, and magnified the difficulties even claiming that the land swallowed people up! (Number 13:32; Deuteronomy 1:29-32). The result of the rebellion was the decimation of a whole generation, who because of unbelief could not enter into the Promised Land.

When evil reports are circulated which have a tendency to discourage the people, it is not wise to listen to them or circulate them. This was one of the reasons the Israelites were barred from entering the Promised Land, because they circulated the discouraging report of the evil spies. There is no telling how destructive gossip can be even if it is true. James likens the tongue to the fire of hell, which although small can start a great fire (James 3:5). It is the work of Satan to accuse and the work of Christ to defend. A story is told of a vicar who was falsely accused by one of his parishioners. She later realised that she was in error and apologised. The vicar took her up to the church tower where he emptied a bag of feathers into the air. He then asked her to go and retrieve them. When she protested that it was impossible, he said, that is what you have done to my reputation!

We may be tempted to believe the way forward is too difficult, that the Gospel Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) cannot be completed in our generation. The result of such reasoning is that we wander in the wilderness of this world instead of entering the heavenly Canaan. It behoves us to be looking for and hastening the day of God (2 Peter 3:12) by faithfully preaching the gospel. Our task is to be faithful and preach the message; we must leave the results with the Holy Spirit. We sow the seed but God is the only One who can make it grow. We do not know what will be the final result of our work, others may come and complete what we have started (Ecclesiastes 11:6; John 4:37-38). If only we would take God at His Word and advance forward, He would provide the power and work in ways mysterious to us. The Scriptures describe a great outpouring of His Spirit prior to His return to enable us to finish the work (Joel 2:28-32). Too often we are trying to push the bus up the hill instead of turning on the engine.

It is also dangerous to try to complete God's work in our own wisdom and by our own methods. When the Israelites had been told that they could not enter the Promised Land they then decided that they would go after all, but God was no longer with them. They met with a dismal failure and tried to blame Moses and eventually started a great rebellion because of their discontent, which led to the earth opening up and swallowing the ringleaders (Numbers 16:23-34)! God directs His servants how to proceed, which is not always according to human

wisdom. It is notable that Moses did not do anything without first consulting the Lord, except in the matter when he struck the rock in anger contrary to God's command, and although forgiven he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. His disobedience in front of all the people had to be punished. Humankind finds the lesson of obedience difficult to learn!

An example of fidelity was Noah who was directed to build an ark and preach of a coming flood. Before the flood, the ground was watered by a mist or dew (Genesis 2:6), so the idea of rain coming from the sky seemed peculiar. The people thought that Noah was a lunatic and didn't believe his warnings would come to pass; surely God would not enforce His laws and destroy the earth. Noah's message was faithfully delivered and the flood came as predicted (2 Peter 2:5). The message was not one to appeal to human reason or to seek popularity but rather to call people to repentance.

When we are in danger of drifting we need to fix our eyes back on Jesus, to repent of past sins and commit ourselves to follow God's commandments. The fate of the rebellious is a lesson of the results of disobedience and distrusting God. Those who break the least of God's commandments and teach others to do so are least worthy to inherit the kingdom! (Matthew 5:19). There is no room for compromise, we must stand firmly on the Word of God if our house is to survive the coming storm (Matthew 7:24-27). If we want to be saved we have to hold on to the rope Jesus has offered us with both hands!

The Israelites chose to follow their senses and perished in the wilderness, they had been given ample evidence of God's miraculous power but they were not willing to trust in Him. In the last days, when Satanic miracles will abound so as to deceive even the elect (Matthew 24:24), will we trust in scientific reasoning, spiritualistic appearances and miracles or in the Word of God which abideth forever (1 Pet. 1:23)?

God has exalted His Word above His name (Psalm 138:2), we must read His Word and make it part of our lives. We have been entrusted with the oracles of truth, and if we neglect these how can we escape (Hebrews 2:3)? The Word of God is a living thing (Hebrews 4:12) which can make us wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Because of this, we have confidence to approach the throne of grace. Let us now resolve to return to God, throw away our fears and replace them with the blood of Christ and His love. Let us turn away from the rubbish of this world to a much greater inheritance waiting for us in heaven.

Chapter 3 A Sabbath Rest

The origin of the Sabbath in Eden

The Hebrews needed to trust in Christ for salvation rather than trying to earn their salvation by their own works. Paul develops this thought by introducing the concept of a Sabbath rest. The origin of the Sabbath goes back to the creation of the world. After creating the world in six days, God rested, blessed and sanctified the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3). Adam and Eve's first complete day was a Sabbath. In their Eden home, Adam and Eve were assigned the duty of looking after the garden (Genesis 2:15). Without work, life would soon have become very boring; imagine spending eternity with nothing to plan, do or achieve! There is so much to learn from nature, and a feeling of contentment knowing a job has been well done; work is part of God's blessing to us. In today's world, work can be difficult and stressful so it is easy to imagine that there will be no work in paradise. However, Isaiah speaks of the redeemed building houses and planting vineyards in the New Earth (Isaiah 65:21). Things will be different in heaven; the work Adam and Eve had to do was pleasant, the atmosphere was perfect, and there were no thorns or weeds as sin had not yet entered the world (Genesis 3:17-19).

The Sabbath was given as a perpetual blessing for mankind. Without it man would be continually working, and never have a day to stop and consider the blessings of the week, or appreciate what God has done for him. Even in his un-fallen state there would be a danger that he would focus more on himself than on God, it would tend to make him glory in his own achievements and forget that everything he has is a blessing from the Lord. Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27) - it was given to be a blessing. God also gave other essential blessings such as food, air and water which we cannot do without. It is essential to learn to appreciate the blessings of the Sabbath if we want to hold proper communion with our Maker. People always find time for the things they are really interested in, and the money for the things they really want to buy. If we have no time for God it implies that He is not very high on our priorities. He has set apart the seventh day to be different from the other days of the week. The seven day weekly cycle began in Eden and has been observed ever since, even though most no longer observe the day that God set apart.

Spiritual rest lost because of sin but offered to each generation

Adam enjoyed spiritual rest in God which means he was at peace with his Creator. After the fall, he forfeited that rest and became alienated from God. Soon the earth became full of murder, unhappiness, and sorrow (Gen. 6:5, 11). In His mercy, God provided a way for man to return to Him through the sacrifice of His Son, as prefigured in the animal sacrificial system. By trusting in the merits of God's plan of salvation, man could be restored to His Maker and one day inherit eternal life (Genesis 3:15). It was no small sacrifice provided for our salvation. That the One who created all life would stoop to be tortured, abused and put to death by sinful men is beyond our comprehension. In love for His deceived and wayward sheep the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) devised a plan to save those who would be willing to respond. The Shepherd tirelessly seeks out those who are lost and carries them back to the fold. He travels on in the night, hungry and weary, with bleeding feet to rescue the lost. The invitation to the great supper (Luke 14:16-24) has been given in the gospel message. How sad that so many make excuses: sorry I've just bought a house, I just got married, I've got a new job, I can't come today. How sad the heart of God must be when He thinks of all those who could be saved but prefer to ignore His gracious initiation and the great sacrifice that has been made through the death of His Son. Imagine a party that cost you the life of your only son, and then no one bothered to show up! God yearns to have us come to the feast and have that spiritual rest but it is an individual choice that we are free to make.

God wanted to restore the rest of Eden, but successive generations failed to enter that rest because of unbelief (Hebrews 4:3, 7). In the time of Joshua the people refused to trust in God and enter the Promised Land, then again in the time of David this opportunity was still available. God's purpose for mankind is that they will enter His promised rest and have Eden restored to them. The problem is that mankind has freewill and the majority have chosen to reject God's offer of reconciliation and rebel against His divine laws. A few will accept the offer and be saved (Luke 13:23-24; Matthew 7:14), that is why "today" the door of salvation is still open. For every generation there is an opportunity to be saved.

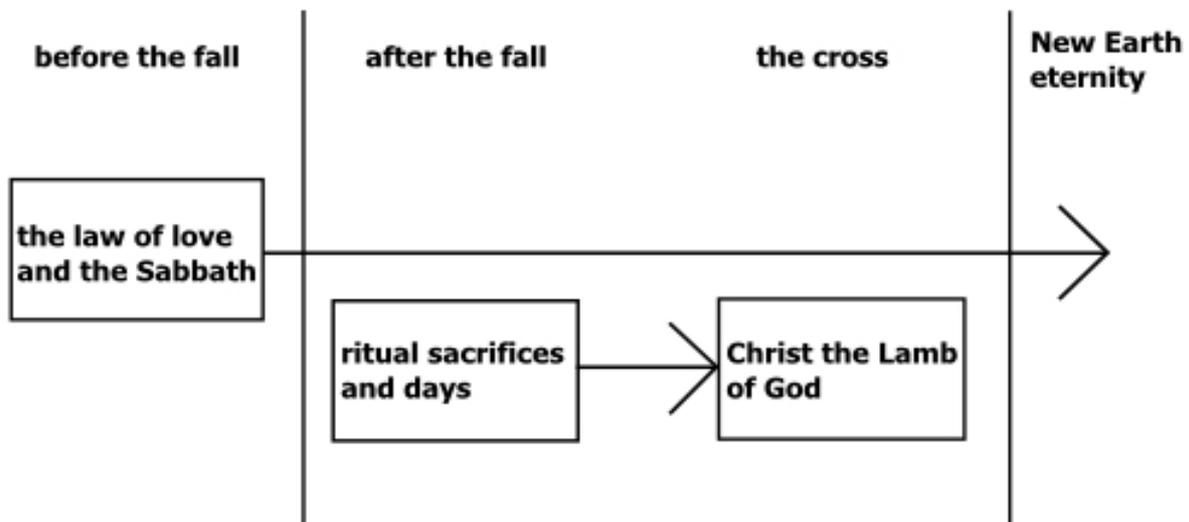
For the Hebrews, there was a danger that they would fall into the same trap as their ancestors by rejecting God's plan for their salvation and trusting instead in dead works, animal sacrifices and the ritual system. (Hebrews 9:12-14). To do so would be a rejection of the gospel which they had previously received. They were being called to trust in the invisible Jesus rather than the visible temple rites. Human nature wants to trust in its senses, but God calls us to trust in His Word and in the things which are invisible. Seeing is not

always believing; and trusting in the here and now can lead to a rejection of the hereafter. The Word of God is a powerful living force (Hebrews 4:12) which we can put our trust in. Through the Word the world was created and through it we are saved; none of its promises have ever failed. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for God's Word to fail because it is based on God's promises (Isaiah 55:11). Although we cannot see it, the priesthood of Jesus is a reality (Hebrews 4:14). Jesus is our High Priest who can sympathise with us and give us confidence to approach the throne of grace. When all around us things are going wrong or the way forward seems impossible, we need to hold on to our faith in Jesus. Heaven is of far greater worth than the things we can see. The things which are seen are passing away and will soon no longer exist (Hebrews 12:27).

Sabbath rest an illustration not a shadow

Paul used the original Sabbath rest as an illustration of that rest we can have in God, it symbolises perfect trust in God. For some this raises the question of whether the literal Sabbath has been replaced by a spiritual one. Is there still any need to observe a literal Sabbath? This issue is not addressed in the Epistle; the context is about whether we trust in Jesus for salvation rather than in ritual observances involving animal sacrifices. We need to look to other parts of Scripture to determine if the weekly Sabbath is part of the ritual law or the eternal moral law.

The term "shadow" is applied to the ritual parts of the law (Hebrews 10:1) because when Christ came as the reality they were no longer needed. This cannot be applied to the weekly Sabbath because it was instituted as an eternal memorial of Creation and will also be celebrated in the New Earth (Isaiah 66:22-23), a shadow cannot point to a shadow. The weekly Sabbath was given before the fall, so it does not require animal sacrifices and therefore is not part of the ritual law. The principles of the Ten Commandments existed before they were given in written form. Clearly, the Patriarchs knew the principles of the law: Jacob refused to commit adultery (Gen. 39:9), his brothers knew that stealing was wrong (Gen. 44:8), and when Cain murdered Abel it was regarded as a sin by God (Gen. 4:8-11). Abraham is said to have kept God's commandments (Gen. 26:5) which gives further evidence that the law existed before the time of Moses.



The fact that something is a symbol does not necessarily mean it is a temporary type. This principle applies to the institution of marriage which is a symbol of our relationship with Christ (John 3:29; Ephesians 5:25-27), yet is still a valid institution today. It is the temple services and the rituals that ended at the cross, not the moral codes which are the foundation of God's government.

Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17-19). The law points out our sins (Romans 3:20) and this should lead to an acknowledgement of our sinfulness and trusting in Christ for salvation. The law is a mirror which points out our sins but has no power to save us (James 1:22-25); however, the law itself is holy, just and good (Romans 7:12). The problem is not with God's moral code but with our own sinful hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus showed the depths of the law; it is a sin to murder but even being angry with someone can be a sin. This is why only love can fulfil the law (Romans 13:10). The Greek word "pleroo" used for "fulfil" in Matthew 5:17 can mean either to abolish or to fill something up. The wording, "I am **not** come to destroy, **but** to fulfil", shows it is being used in the latter sense. The common non-Biblical usage of this word was literally "to fill", for example to fill up a bottle¹²; it used in this sense in the New Testament about the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52) and of Jesus being filled with wisdom in childhood (Luke 2:40). Jesus filled up the law, showing its depths, He was not saying that we

¹² Kittel, Gerhard (Hrsg.) ; Bromiley, Geoffrey William (Hrsg.) ; Friedrich, Gerhard (Hrsg.): Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. electronic ed. Grand Rapids, MI : Eerdmans, 1964-c1976, S. 6:286

are free to murder or break the moral precepts of the law. Jesus Himself said that He had kept His Father's commandments (John 15:10).

When we learn to trust in Christ for salvation we will then have found our Sabbath rest and have confidence to approach the throne of grace because we know that our High Priest is there interceding on our behalf and our sins are forgiven. Let us not put off accepting Christ as our Saviour today because now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2). He is calling you today to follow Him, perhaps to give up the things which you can see for the riches you cannot see, how will you respond?

The Colossian heresy

It is worth taking a diversion at this point to consider Colossians 2:16-17:
“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” (NASB)

Some theologians have cited this verse to claim that the weekly Sabbath has been abolished; there are a number of problems with this claim:

a) The Greek does not use the definite article for the word Sabbath; it can be translated as “a Sabbath day”, or “Sabbath days” depending on whether it is a Greek plural or a singular Aramaic transliteration, which is determined by the context¹³. If Paul had wanted to refer specifically to the weekly Sabbath he could have used the definite article and said, “the Sabbath”.

b) The use of the term shadow cannot be applied to the weekly Sabbath because it is a memorial of Creation and will be celebrated in the New Earth (Genesis 2:2-3; Isaiah 66:22-23). The term shadow is only applied to the ritual Sabbaths which involved animal sacrifices. In the Jewish calendar there were seven ritual Sabbath days, such as the first and last day of Passover, and the Day of Atonement. These ceremonial Sabbaths were instituted in the time of Moses and ended at the cross. Albert Barnes a Presbyterian commentator wrote:

¹³ Kenneth A. Strand, *The Sanctuary, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000) p. 493

“There is no evidence from this passage that he [Paul] would teach that there was no obligation to observe *any* holy time, for there is not the slightest reason to believe that he meant to teach that one of the ten commandments had ceased to be binding on mankind. ... He had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law, and not to the *moral* law, or the ten commandments. No part of the moral law—no one of the ten commandments could be spoken of as ‘*a shadow* of good things to come.’ These commandments are, from the nature of moral law, of perpetual and universal application.”¹⁴

c) The term “a Sabbath day” does not have to refer to the weekly Sabbath as some have claimed because the Greek word for “festival” (*heorte*) was used only for those festivals which involved a pilgrimage to Jerusalem¹⁵. The Hebrews equivalent “chag” is related to the Arabic “haj” which is used for pilgrimages. The word “heorte” did not cover all the ceremonial Sabbaths, this was why the word for “a Sabbath day” was needed to make the expression complete. The Day of Atonement was called in Hebrew “an appointed time” (*moed*) but never a “festival” (*chag*); therefore the term “festivals and new moons” is incomplete. A further expression, “a Sabbath day” was needed to make the formula complete to cover all the ritual days.

d) By looking closely at the Epistle to the Colossians we can reconstruct the context, to better understand the meaning of Colossians 2:16-17:

One of the first elements points to a form of angelology. The Colossian heresy appears to have involved calling on angels as mediators between man and God (Col. 2:18). This is why Paul speaks of Jesus being over all principalities and powers (Col. 2:15), this kind of belief or angelology is known from Jewish writings of that era. Another element was strict adherence to certain diets and ascetic practices. In Colossians 2:16 the term “meat” is applied to all food, it is not confined specifically to unclean or clean foods; this appears to be an ascetic prohibition (Col. 2:21). The idea being if you punish your body enough you will get nearer to God. This stems from the Greek philosophy that material things are evil, so if you are very strict (Col. 2:23) and don’t eat certain foods and observed certain rituals and days you would

¹⁴ Albert Barnes, Notes, Explanatory and Practical, on the Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (New York: Harper, 1851) pp. 306, 307, on Col. 2:16. (In the Seventh Day Adventist Students’ Source Book: The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 9 (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1962) section 1475)

¹⁵ Francis D. Nichol, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 1 (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978) p. 800

become more holy and by calling on angel mediators in the spirit realm, they could help you in your spiritual journey. It sounds very similar to the modern New Age philosophy, but resulted in a religion that denied Christ as our personal Saviour. It was essentially an early form of Gnosticism, which focused more on knowledge but lacked true morality and in effect was salvation by works rather than in Christ. Given the context of this heresy, it seems unlikely that Paul was calling for the abolition of the weekly Sabbath. He was speaking against angelology, asceticism, and legalistic ritual practices. The solution was in Christ our Saviour, we don't need angels, ascetic practices or to observe ritual days in order to be saved. What we should do however is to live a moral life (Col. Ch. 3) something the Gnostics often failed to do. We should put our faith not in strict diets, animal sacrifices or angels but in Christ.

It is clear that Paul endorsed the moral law and godly living (Romans 7:12; Titus 2:12) but at the same time did not want believers trying to their earn salvation by keeping days which involved animal sacrifices which were a shadow of things to come. There is nothing in the Epistle to the Colossians to countenance the abolition of the weekly Sabbath.

Jesus and the Sabbath

By the time of Jesus, strict rabbinical rules had been formulated to regulate Sabbath observance, such as how far one could walk, what objects could be carried and so on. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for breaking God's law by their traditions (Matthew 15:3, 6; Mark 7:8-9, 13). Rather than protecting God's laws these rules had become a means of breaking them! According to these man made rules which were later codified in the Mishna, healing on the Sabbath was prohibited except in life threatening cases¹⁶. Jesus did not accept these rules and healed people on the Sabbath, so the Pharisees accused Him of being a Sabbath breaker. This was no truer than the accusation that He was a glutton and a drunkard (Luke 7:34). The Biblical concept of true Sabbath keeping is found in Isaiah 58 and is associated with helping the oppressed and the poor. After healing a man with a withered hand, Jesus responded to His critics by asking them if one of them had a sheep that fell into a pit, would they not pull it out on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:11)? The rabbinical rules allowed for that, but not for healing a

¹⁶

Kenneth A. Strand, *The Sabbath*, Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, p. 503

long term illness on the Sabbath. Jesus was challenging them to consider whether one should not have more compassion on a person than an animal!

The Pharisees became angry when they saw Jesus' disciples picking ears of corn on the Sabbath. Jesus responded by saying that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). He was not endorsing breaking the Sabbath by reaping a whole field or doing common labour that could wait until another time; picking a few ears of corn to satisfy hunger on the Sabbath was not a sin. The controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees was not about whether to keep the Sabbath, rather it revolved around the way it was kept. The Pharisees saw this as a threat to their authority and decided that Jesus must be done away with.

After the death of Jesus no explicit statement is made in the New Testament regarding a change or abolition of the Sabbath. The silence in regard to this matter is most likely because it was not a contentious issue at that time, both Jews and Christians were observing the Sabbath and there was no dispute regarding which day it was. The departure from the Sabbath began long after the era of the Apostles. The secular historian Socrates Scholasticus tells us that by the fifth century most Christians were keeping both days, although those in Rome and Alexandria had abandoned the Sabbath¹⁷. I will give some reasons for the change to Sunday observance in chapter eight. What is clear is that there was never a Biblical mandate to change the day of rest, God sanctified the seventh day and that has never been changed or altered. Man cannot change God's laws, to attempt to do so is to set oneself up as an antichrist.

[Chapters 4-12 omitted in the preview]

Chapter 4 The Immutability of Christ's Priesthood

Chapter 5 A Temple in Heaven

Chapter 6 Garbage Collection

Chapter 7 The Metal Man

Chapter 8 Beasts from the Sea

Chapter 9 An Attack on God's Sanctuary

Chapter 10 Biblical Mathematics

Chapter 11 History Repeated

Chapter 12 The City of God

¹⁷ Socrates Scholasticus, Ecclesiastical History, Book 5, Chapter 22 (in Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, p. 521)

To obtain a copy of this book, please go to

www.exploringtheheavenlysanctuary.co.uk or

www.amazon.com/author/mrasell