

The Sabbath

Creation reached its climax when God made Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. Six days had passed since God began to make the world, and every detail was complete and perfect. The Creator surveyed His work and saw that it was “very good.” Genesis 1:31. Then God rested.

“Rested” in Genesis 2:2 is from the Hebrew *shabath*, which means literally “to cease” from labor or activity. God is never weary (Isaiah 40:28); His rest was not occasioned by physical tiredness. He ceased the occupation in which He had been engaged—He “rested” on the seventh day. But God went further to make the seventh day one of special significance—He “blessed” the day and “sanctified” it. ^oGenesis 2:3. As in sanctifying an individual, so also to sanctify a day means to declare it holy and to set it apart for a sacred purpose. The implication, borne out by later evidence, is that the blessing and sanctifying pertained not alone to that single day, but that each recurring seventh day would be similarly distinctive. In this chapter we shall note the history and the significance of seventh-day observance in Old Testament times.¹

I. The Seventh-Day Sabbath

^oGenesis 2:2, 3 does not call the seventh day the Sabbath. But the later title comes from the noun form of the Hebrew verb translated “rested” in Genesis 2:2. The Lord no doubt had strong reasons for emphasizing His rest on the seventh day rather than making a reference to a sabbath or rest day. His blessing is based not merely on any day that might be called a sabbath, but on the specified seventh day.

¹ “After resting upon the seventh day, God sanctified it, or set it apart, as a day of rest for man. Following the example of the Creator, man was to rest upon this sacred day, that as he should look upon the heavens and the earth, he might reflect upon God’s great work of creation; and that as he should behold the evidences of God’s wisdom and goodness, his heart might be filled with love and reverence for his Maker.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 47:3. See further, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 47:2 to 48:3.

Identification of the seventh day with the Sabbath is clearly made in Exodus 20:11, where it is said that God “rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” God’s blessing was bestowed on the seventh day as the rest, or Sabbath, day.

God had already blessed man (Genesis 1:28), and now He blessed a day for man’s particular benefit. Centuries later Christ declared that “the Sabbath was made *for man*.” Mark 2:27. What God did in hallowing and setting apart the Sabbath was not for His own benefit, but for man’s good. And through the centuries since creation the Sabbath has occupied a pre-eminent place in the lives of those who have worshiped God most faithfully.

II. The Sabbath Through the Centuries

The Sabbath is not mentioned in Genesis after the creation account of its origin. This has been taken by some persons to mean that the Sabbath was not observed during the following centuries. However, none of the other commandments are mentioned there, though it is obvious that the commandments forbidding false worship, killing, stealing, and adultery were known. There is no enumeration of commands in the narrative material in Genesis; yet the Sabbath holds a distinct place in Genesis. This book records the institution and observance of the Sabbath by the Creator Himself. Because of this, the Sabbath holds pre-eminence over all the other commandments. It could hardly have been given greater prominence or honor.

1. The Sabbath before Sinai. Following creation, the next recorded incidents involving the Sabbath took place beginning a month after the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. The account is given in Exodus 16. °Note there:

- (1) The situation, verses 1-3.
- (2) God’s plan to provide food, verse 4.
- (3) God’s purpose in the plan, verse 4.
- (4) Extra provision on the sixth day, verse 5.
- (5) Instruction regarding the extra provision, verses 22, 23.
- (6) Designation of the seventh day, verse 23.
- (7) The disobedient few, verses 27-29.

Mention of the sixth day and the seventh day recalls the story of the first Sabbath. There is no hint here that this is a new institution with which Israel was unacquainted. The people were acquainted with the weekly cycle and the Sabbath before the Ten Commandments were formally given on Mount Sinai, as recorded in Exodus 20. For the next

forty years the double portion of manna on each sixth day and the absence of manna on the seventh day kept Israel’s attention focused on the Sabbath.²

2. The Sabbath at Sinai. Exodus 19 tells of the children of Israel’s arrival at Mount Sinai, God’s introduction of His covenant with them, their preparation for the coming announcements, and Moses’ first ascension of the mountain to meet with God. The Ten Commandments were spoken by God and later given to Moses on tables of stone. Exodus 20:3-17; 32:15, 16.

Note carefully the Sabbath command as it related to creation and to the experience of Israel. °Is any distinction made between the fourth and the other commandments that would lead us to believe that the fourth commandment applied especially to the Jews while the others are of general application for all men?³

3. The Sabbath after Sinai. Study the following passages carefully, looking especially for the thoughts here suggested:⁴

Ezekiel 20:13-15—Reasons why the adult generation who left Egypt did not enter Canaan.

Amos 8:4-10—Attitude of some in Israel toward the Sabbath and the threatened consequences.

Isaiah 56:1-7—The kind of people who might join God’s people in worshipping Him, and under what circumstances. What this indicates as to those for whom the Sabbath was intended in ancient times.

Jeremiah 17:19-27—The result of persistence in Sabbathbreaking.

Ezekiel 20:12-20—The intended purpose of the Sabbath. Compare Exodus 31:13-17.

Nehemiah 13:15-22—Need for reform after the return from Babylonian captivity, and Nehemiah’s steps to bring about changes.

God intended that His people, both before and after He called Israel

² See *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 80:3 to 81:0.

Prophets and Kings, pages 180:2 to 182:0 (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 258:1).

³ “The Sabbath is not introduced as a new institution but as having been founded at creation. It is to be remembered and observed as the memorial of the Creator’s work. Pointing to God as the Maker of the heavens and the earth, it distinguishes the true God from all false gods. All who keep the seventh day signify by this act that they are worshipers of Jehovah.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 307:2. See further, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 307:1 to 308:0.

⁴ See *Prophets and Kings*, pages 182:1 to 183:0.

Prophets and Kings, pages 671:1 to 673:0.

Prophets and Kings, page 372:0.

as a nation, should keep the Sabbath holy as a memorial of His creative power and a sign of their spiritual experience. Sabbathkeeping is not intended to be a mechanical abstention from ordinary labor; it is closely related to the spiritual life. °Find three experiences in the Old Testament that reveal the spiritual significance of the Sabbath in ancient times.

TOPICS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Why was it necessary in ancient times for the people to be continually reminded of creation? What benefits could come to them? (For a suggestion see *The Great Controversy*, page 438:0.)
2. Why is not *any* one of the seven days acceptable to God as a day of worship?
3. What is there about the origin of the Sabbath that makes it impossible for the day to be changed?
4. Show fully that the Sabbath was not intended for the Jews only.
5. Various ceremonial sabbaths are mentioned in the Old Testament. How can we be certain that the seventh-day Sabbath serves a purpose distinctly different from these? When "sabbath" is mentioned, can you distinguish between a ceremonial sabbath and the weekly Sabbath? See Bible concordance under "sabbath" and look up a group of these texts. Make a list that will show distinctions between the two types of sabbath.
6. What reasons can you give why God so often mentioned Sabbath-breaking as the cause of the invasion and captivity of Israel by foreign nations? Were there not other important reasons?

The Sabbath in the New Testament

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:1, 3, 14. God the Son is presented in the Scriptures as the active divine agent in creation. He pronounced the finished work good and He rested on the first seventh-day Sabbath. It is to be expected that in His incarnate state He would observe the Sabbath He had instituted.¹

I. Christ's Sabbathkeeping

That Christ recognized and observed the Sabbath is clearly indicated in the accounts of His life and teachings. He declared His true relation to the Sabbath. °What is revealed in each of the following texts regarding Christ's attitude toward and relation to the Sabbath?²

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| *Mark 1:21 <small>→ 400, 122</small> | *Luke 6:6 <small>→ 400, 122</small> | *Mark 2:27, 28 <small>→ 400, 122</small> |
| *Mark 6:2 | *Luke 13:10 | *Luke 6:5 <small>→ 400, 122</small> |
| *Luke 4:16 | *Matthew 12:8-10 <small>→ 400, 122</small> | |

Christ disagreed with the Jewish teachers and leaders regarding the Sabbath. However, their disagreement was not regarding which *day* was the Sabbath, but regarding the manner in which the day should be observed. Christ's customary attendance at the synagogues on the Sabbath and His statement that He was Lord of the Sabbath reveal His approval of the day of worship observed by the Jews. However, one of the chief sources of complaint by those opposing the Saviour stemmed from the works He performed on the Sabbath. °Note the contrast

¹ "Christ, during His earthly ministry, emphasized the binding claims of the Sabbath; in all His teaching He showed reverence for the institution He Himself had given."—*Prophets and Kings*, page 183:1.

See *The Desire of Ages*, page 281:3.

² See *The Desire of Ages*, pages 236:1 to 237:2.
The Desire of Ages, pages 288:1 to 289:1.