

The Bible Teaching about the Sabbath Day

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Reading Hebrews 4



This is a subject which has been asked about several times recently by friends especially in Africa. This is because there are churches there which are growing and quite popular, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, Seventh Day Baptists Church of God Seventh Day, True Jesus Church and so on, but elsewhere also the keeping of the seventh day, - the sabbath - has gained traction with the increasingly popular Messianic Hebrew movements in the United States and elsewhere such as Hebrew Roots Movement, Israelite Church of God in Jesus Christ and so on. Meanwhile other churches have imported the keeping of the sabbath to the first day of the week, such as the Reformed churches and Presbyterians. It has had a raised profile in some quarters as well by the late political activist Charlie Kirk who was assassinated September last year in the United States, but had a book posthumously published last year entitled “Stop, in the Name of God: Why Honoring the Sabbath Will Transform Your Life”.

These many churches and movements teach of course that the sabbath should be kept, even as God gave the commandments to Moses. That no work should be done, and that not keeping this seventh day of the week as holy is a sin, as it is breaking one of the ten commandments.

For a long time this idea of keeping the sabbath either on a Saturday or Sunday was a part of an English way of life. I remember even as a small boy being told by a lady who was once with us, when I asked why she was

peeling so many vegetables, was because she was doing tomorrow's dinner, as we shouldn't work on Sundays!

Seventh Day Adventists defend their position by saying that the Sabbath was established before the fall of man, before Adam and Eve sinned, and so therefore the keeping of the sabbath is eternally binding. They also teach that Revelation 14:9-12 indicates the restoration of sabbath keeping. But as you can see from a quick look at the quotation, we struggle to see any mention of the sabbath. Their defence is very dubious, so it is time to examine what does the Bible teach about keeping the sabbath.

Symbol of the heavenly rest

Sabbath in Hebrew is Shabbat derives from the Hebrew verb *shavat*, which means to cease, to stop, to rest. The first we learn of this is in Genesis 2 where God completed the creation, and stopped on the seventh day:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested

from all his work which God created and made.

It is true then, that God made the seventh day holy before the introduction of sin, before the fall of man. He made it holy, because it was to be a time of cessation of work. God rested we read. This is not because he had run out of energy or creative



ideas, or was simply tired. - Isaiah 40:28 *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.*

Of course, God was not tired, instead God stopped working to set a pattern of rest and enjoy the creation produced, with a pattern and process in mind prophetic of a grander scheme in mind. We can prove this, as the only time this passage is ever mentioned elsewhere in Scripture is in the New Testament where it explains exactly that. Hebrews 4:4 *For he spoke in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works...* and after expounding the subject he says in verse 9: speaking of the Kingdom of God: *Therefore, a Sabbath rest remains for the people of God.*

However, if God wanted the sabbath day to be kept by everybody every week for all time, he would have said so in those early chapters, however

Sabbath Keeping was not given as a Command for over 2000 years!

Nearly 2500 years passed, without any command recorded in the Scripture for the sabbath to be kept, or remembered in any way. It is not true to say then that the sabbath was given to mankind before the time of Moses, despite it being sanctified by God. There is no record of any such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob being under command to observe the sabbath, or that they would be sinning if they failed to keep it. As men of faith and deep affinity with the Creator, of course they would have been well aware of the seventh day of creation as being a type and shadow of greater things to come. It is why God sanctified and made that day holy, not for His benefit, but as a sign, for the benefit and sign for those who would be in Harmony with Him.

First commandment to keep the Sabbath was given to Israel in the wilderness

God made the sabbath Holy for man's benefit, not given in the form of command, but a record, and a type and shadow. Not until Israel were rescued from Egypt and underway on the wilderness journey nearly 2500 years later was any form of command given – and was actually to do with the collecting of the manna, the bread from heaven. No command before Exodus 16: 23. *And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that*

which ye will bake to day, and boil that ye will boil; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.

They were permitted to collect it for six days, but on the seventh day, the holy sabbath there would be no manna, the miraculous bread from heaven laying on the ground. They had to collect enough on the day before to make up for it. Of course, such was human nature, that they were not in harmony with God, and did not believe the Word of God, and went out looking anyway, to find none. This is the first record of the Sabbath being given to Israel, where it was described as Holy, and to keep it Holy, Israel were instructed to cease from their daily work. Furthermore this day of rest was designed to make them think.



Sabbath given as a Symbol

Further instruction and commandment was given, which gives the reason why they were to keep the sabbath day holy: Deuteronomy 5:14-15: *but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.*

And remember *that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: **therefore** the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day.* - That they had been in slavery, no freedom, working for cruel taskmaster, that they had no saviour, that they were enslaved not merely to Pharaoh but to King Sin, labouring with the sweat of their face to

eat bread, bound under the Adamic curse, with no let up. – That is what they had to remember. And that it was because of the grace of God, that they could be released and rest and cease toiling under that bondage.

Given as a Symbol of The Rest

So the command to keep the sabbath was included in the ten commandments: Exodus 20: 9. *Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.* – Israel as a nation under formation were being taught by God, with the giving of the sabbath commandment. After the Creation, God stopped and beheld, - and behold it was very good. In the same way, it was God's will that others - his nation - would also share in that glory, and stop, and behold and see the goodness of God. That in order to do this, they also should be released from their daily endeavours, and especially be released from their slavery to enter into that rest. Our president read Hebrews chapter 4. This chapter and the one before, is most helpful on this subject, and the Apostle expounds more about this time of rest, which God was promising. The Apostle described in chapter 3 how the nation being formed in the wilderness were in a time of probation, being proved, but they failed from the grace of God, because they failed to keep His commands, including of course remembering the sabbath day. Because they did not respect his simple request to keep the sabbath holy in honour of Him, God kept them from the main event – entering the place of Rest – the Promised land the embryonic kingdom of God- Hebrews 3:11 *So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.* That this was a type and shadow of the Kingdom of God to come, the Apostle goes on to show – verses 12,13: *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another **daily**, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ... chapter 4:1. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.* Here we can clearly see how the Apostle equates

the rest, with the Kingdom of God, and that every day, daily, “To day”, - not just the seventh day, must be holy, every day is a time of probation and testing. Let us read on: to prove the point - Hebrews 4: 2-3: *For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.* How is it possible to enter that Rest of which the Apostle is speaking then? Well, the Seventh Day Adventists and others will say, amongst other things – you have to keep the sabbath day every week ! But the Apostles does not say that here at all. Instead he simply says, - exactly what God was teaching all along: Verse 9: *There remains therefore a Sabbath rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.* So it is quite clear: As God rested from His work on the seventh day, so believers if they desire to enter into ‘that rest’ they should cease from their own works, that is the works of the flesh, not being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, a **daily** process, not just once a week.

This is the simple and straight forward teaching of the sabbath day given to Israel as a commandment.

Not possible to keep the Sabbath day properly

For those who say “you have to literally keep the sabbath day every week, by simply not working”, they are missing the point, and do not read all the Bible. It is not possible to keep the sabbath day as God commanded Israel anymore. It is literally impossible! Because to keep the Sabbath day holy under the Mosaic Law, two lambs had to be offered by the Priest on the Altar, every seventh day. It had to be in the



place which God would choose. – namely Jerusalem. Numbers 28: 9,10 . *And on the sabbath day two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth deals of flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and the drink offering thereof: This is the burnt offering of every sabbath, beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering.* Israel forgot to do this, and it displeased God, and so also those who have resurrected sabbath day keeping also seem to have forgotten.

It is no good saying you must keep the sabbath, if you forget the bits that are inconvenient. If Israel did not keep the sabbath day properly, then they would be condemned. An example is a man was caught gathering firewood on the sabbath. Under the Mosaic law, he was condemned to death, if he was not the whole nation would have been condemned for allowing it. He was publicly executed. Why do not the sabbath keepers do that then? It is not possible of course! But under the law, the nation were taught that if a man offends in one point, he is guilty of all. This is the truth, of human nature. Sin is sin, failure to obey God in anything he requires is sin. We cannot escape that.



If they failed in one point they failed in all. Deuteronomy 27:26 *Cursed be he that confirms not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.* James 2:9-11 *But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

Another aspect modern sabbath day keepers seem to forget, is that this command to keep the sabbath was not given to them. As pointed out the first command of keeping the sabbath was not until 2500 year after

creation, according to the Bible, and was to Israel. Not to all nations and peoples for all time –but we read: Exodus 31:13: *Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you*

It was part of the covenant given to Israel. But it was a sign. A token. Just a little further on: Exodus 31: 16 – 18: *Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. **It is a sign between me and the children of Israel** for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.* We will refer to the ten commandments shortly.

Sabbath command – part of the Law, Jesus fulfilled the Law

But as is becoming very clear, the command to keep the sabbath was given uniquely to Israel as part of the Mosaic Law, and was given as a sign. It was not an end in itself, to make people feel holy, or that God needed people to have a rest and relax. Or that God needed it in any way. It was just a shadow, a way of teaching, in a time of probation, of a lesson of greater things to come. This in fact was true of the whole Law of Moses, which was not an end in itself. Again the letter to the Hebrews teaches this

Hebrews 10:1 *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. The Sabbath was given to Israel as part of that law. The law was like scaffolding, while the main building was in preparation. When that main edifice was ready to be revealed, the scaffolding is removed. No longer having a purpose, as the real thing is now available. This included the Sabbath. Paul writes to the Galatians, explaining how these laws to Israel – which were impossible to keep, and thus condemned the whole nation, were removed when the real thing was ready to be revealed. However the Jews didn't like the comfortable covering of the scaffolding being removed,*

they had got used to its ugliness and were not prepared for the beauty that lay underneath. In the letter to the Galatians , Paul teaches that the nation was once under bondage to the elements of the old order of things, that is the law of Moses, and in verse 4,5 & 9,10: *But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons..... But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? – he is referring to the law of Moses - Ye observe days,- including the sabbath days and months, and times, and years.*

It was tough back in those days, for the Apostles to persuade many of the Jews that the scaffolding of the law of Moses was no longer necessary. There was no need to keep all the feast days, sabbath days, or the rituals of the law of Moses anymore in order for salvation to please God. Maybe to keep their rulers happy, but it no longer had any religious significance. Paul in a significant part of his letters is rebuking those who insist the law should be kept by Gentile converts. So Peter had to explain:

Acts 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, that is the new converts from the Gentiles and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knows the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

Thus we can see that all aspects of the law, which were not endorsed, or confirmed by Jesus, were rescinded, cancelled, fulfilled.. And the Gentiles, and indeed all Jews inwardly were free from that yoke of the law, including the sabbath. Instead, Peter insisted: *verse 19-20: Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to*

God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. And to keep the sabbath..Oh – no, it isn't there is it! The reason the specific aspects are there, is because the pagan way of life at that time involved worship of pagan gods, and rituals which included idolatry, prostitution, and eating meats offered to idols. So what they were commanded to do was to stop from the former way of life - the works of the flesh. And to enter into a Sabbath of rest, offered through Jesus Christ.

No longer a requirement

When Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath day, the Jews condemned him for working on the sabbath. But Jesus criticised them for only keeping bits of the law that were convenient: Luke 13:15, *Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?*

On another occasion, on the sabbath, as they went through the fields of corn the disciples began to pick the ears of corn and eat them... Again, the Pharisees criticised them for working on the Sabbath. Jesus reminded them of Old Testament examples where doing good on the sabbath was better than doing nothing!



Jesus then responded

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. The sabbath command had been given as a help not a hindrance, to guide to a better day. He then added the key words: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.

How was this? It was because he had fulfilled the law, every jot and tittle, every part. He was the sabbath – in the sense that He proclaimed and demonstrated and manifest the Rest, the Peace that God had envisaged and promised from the beginning. He was the way of salvation, he was the escape from slavery , the release from bondage, the *fulfilment* of the type

and shadow. As in Jesus' own words, he was Lord of the sabbath – He is the rest we can now enter – Matthew 11: 28 -30 *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. The way into the Land of Promise, the Kingdom of God, is only through Joshua, the Saviour.

So he was the one to have authority of whether the sabbath day ritual should continue. In the New Testament, all aspects of the ten commandments are endorsed and believers are commanded to still keep, not as part of the Mosaic law, but as part of the commandments of the law of Christ; Matthew 28: 18, 19: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever **I have** commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.* Believers today are obliged to keep the law of Christ, His commandments. Nine of the ten commandments given to the nation of Israel by God through Moses are confirmed specifically in the New Testament. Yet no where in the New Testament are believers commanded to keep, or remember the sabbath, nor to cease from work on the seventh day. Instead, the sabbath is to be every day for believers.

In fact, the Apostles specifically warned against keeping the sabbath as a ritual:

Colossians 2:16-17 *Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.*

What we have learned so far then, is that:

The sabbath day was sanctified by God and made Holy before Adam and Eve had sinned, as statement of intent, of what would come in the future for His Creation. That since that day, no commandment to keep the Sabbath was given until the birth of the nation of Israel. So prior to that, keeping the sabbath was not a matter of commandment. The Sabbath command was given uniquely to Israel as part

of the Mosaic law. The Sabbath keeping involved other rituals which also had to be kept and were just as important, and impossible to keep today. The Sabbath was given as a sign a symbol, and even a gift, to teach of the promise of Rest in the Kingdom of God. Jesus fulfilled that Mosaic Law – including the sabbath day. The Rest, spoken of by the Apostles is the promise of eternal life, where there will be a complete cessation, and stop from the works of sinners, and where there will be only works of righteousness, in the Kingdom of God to be established upon earth. When that day comes there will be aspects of the law re- instituted. This is not to diminish the achievements of the Lord Jesus, but to once again act as a guide and lesson to those mortals who will be also permitted to live in the Kingdom of God under the rule of Jesus and the immortal believers. Once again there will be animal sacrifices to remind people of how the victory over sin was achieved. And there will be a re-institution of the sabbath day- as Ezekeil 44 and 45 explain, not for the benefit of God, or of the immortals, but to teach those mortals of the Rest that will be there for them also, if they keep all the commands of Jesus Christ.

What about now?

We are called the Apostolic Ecclesia because we stand on the foundation of the Apostles and the Lord Jesus Christ. As such we follow their tradition.

The Lord Jesus rose from the dead on the First day of the week as Matthew 28:1 explains, and also the disciples began to meet together on the first day of the week, as we can read in John 20:19. It is evident that this custom continued as we can read in Acts 20:7:

And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. (We wont, and we are about to conclude) Moreover, it is evident that the custom was a weekly one, as Paul anticipated all the ecclesias meeting every first day, in order for him to give this Divinely inspired instruction: 1 Corinthians 16:2: Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

It is on the first day of the week therefore that we as an organisation, under direct command from Jesus Christ, and following the tradition of the Apostles that we likewise as often as we meet, we break bread and drink of the cup of wine remembering the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus until he come.

In no way is this the sabbath keeping, nor is it the Lord's day, as some claim. Instead, everyday, we as believers to remember to stop from the natural human reactions, cease from sinful reactions remarks, and thoughts. To mediate and think and look and behold the creation of God in all its wonder, to look forward to the time of the restitution of all things, of when we will enter into that Rest which has been promised, the seventh thousand years, the last day of the week of millennia, God has reserved for His Kingdom to the Glory of His Name.