

## Sabbath

### *Prayer*

There are a lot of different theories floating around talking about what the Sabbath means. Many are contradictory, some are going in the right direction, some are simply out to lunch. I have decided to clarify what the sabbath is both in the context of the Old Testament and what if any changes there are in the meaning of the meaning and intentions of the sabbath as detailed in the New Testament.

In order to do this we will need to survey and understand several portions of scripture. This morning, I would like to start with Exodus 20:8-11 KJV

*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

*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:*

So these old testament believers in Jehovah, God the Father. Remember no Christ incarnate yet... were to set aside the 7<sup>th</sup> day as Holy unto God. The seventh day is Saturday... By this point you might ask yourself if the sabbath is Saturday, what are we doing here this beautiful Sunday morning? Well hold on, because we are going to answer that very question this morning.

*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.*

So why did they take sabbath on the Saturday? Because God did and he made that day holy. Pretty straight forward answer.

When we look at Deuteronomy 5:12-14 KJV we read:

*Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. Six days thou shalt 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, 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 they maidservant may rest as well as thou.*

*And remember that thou wast as 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.*

So we clearly see that the sabbath was important. God himself made it holy and insisted that mankind rested on this day. God intended rest and worship of him on this day. EVERYONE animals included were to do no labour on this sabbath day. It is because of this that the sabbath day became known as a day of rest and worshipping God.

Okay... let's take a short jump to Romans 14:5-6 NIV and see what the apostle Paul has to say:

*One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.*

Okay so at first glance it seems Paul is saying the actual day doesn't matter. But the context here is interesting... Why does Paul start talking about eating? He does this because some of the converts were afraid of eating meat that was offered to idols, but others customarily abstained from a particular food, kind of like a fast on certain days. For a current example we see that many devout catholic brothers and sisters abstain from eating meat of Fridays. Others regard all days as alike as far as eating was concerned.

The whole matter seems to move from abstention to food on particular days. If Shakespeare were hanging around he might say: "To eat or not to eat is the question that pervades our souls." In point of fact the Jews customarily fasted twice a week (cf Luke 18:12) It reads: I fast twice a week and give tithes of all I possess.

Jesus even weighed in on the issue. His comments were that we should fast before God and not let it be seen or known by others unnecessarily.

But what is he getting at?

In God's sight, it doesn't matter when one abstains or fasts, but you can rest assured he does care whether it is done in a proper attitude and for the right reasons. (CF Isaiah 58).

So Paul is telling us that whatever day is considered sacred, it must be with the right attitude towards God. I would go further to say that every day should be consecrated as holy and lived rightly before God. This does not mean that God has changed his mind on a day of rest. As we will soon discover there is also a new rest in the new covenant; it is a rest in Jesus.

Let's turn to Hebrews 3:18-19 NIV

Here we read:

*And to who did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.*

So here we find that with Christ on the scene and there is now both a physical rest in which to partake, but also a spiritual rest in Christ Jesus. Foreshadowing this we see In Psalms 95 David speaks of a promise of rest at a time which was long after Joshua led the second generation of the people of Israel into the promised land. So the rest fulfilled at the time of Joshua was simply a foreshadowing or a type of the rest to come in Christ Jesus.

Are you ready for some meat in scripture?

Turn with me to Hebrews 4:9,10 NIV

There remains then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God. For whoever enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

That's controversial but also NT

Here is what you need to see for yourselves... Every other verse in Hebrews 3 & 4 is the greek word: Katapausis. But the word translated in Hebrews 4:9 is Sabbatismos. It is the only New Testament occurrence of this word, and its meaning is fundamental to our understanding. In the Anchor bible dictionary the word Sabbatismos is explained as follows:

The words 'Sabbath rest' translate the Greek noun Sabbatismos, a unique word in the NT. This term appears for sabbath observance and in four post canonical (or writings after the bible) for seventh day 'sabbath celebration' Further the author of Hebrews affirms in Hebrews 4:3-11, through the joining of quotations from Genesis 2:2 and psalms 95:7 that the promised 'sabbath rest' still anticipates a complete realization for the people of God in the end-time which had been inaugurated with the appearance of Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-3) The experience of a sabbath rest points to a present rest (katapausis) reality in which those who believed are entering 4:3 and points to a future rest reality 4:11

So what does this all mean?

Physical sabbath keeping on the part of the new covenant believer as affirmed by 'Sabbath rest' epitomizes cessation from works (4:10) in commemoration of God's rest at creation in Gen 2:2 and manifests faith in the salvation provided by Jesus Christ.

So Hebrews 4:3-11 tells us that a physical sabbath rest is proscribed (sabbatismos) it is a weekly outward manifestation of the inner spiritual rest we find in Christ. We also find (katapausis) in which the final rest at Christs return is experienced

So summing up the technical here:

Sabbath rest combines honouring and keeping holy a commemoration of the creation, in encompasses the salvation experience, and our final end time rest and restoration at Christs return while also recognizing the mortal need for rest and spending time in worship of God.

So we see that in the new testament, that we keep the sabbath holy. The modern church has chosen to set aside the day Sunday in honour of Christ.

The sabbath day had become really heavily burdened with pharisee and sadducee introduced hedging rules. This was not what was intended. Jesus condemned these human traditions and rituals. He set an example of how to keep the sabbath as God's gift to mankind.

What we will see is that Jesus was saying, the fathers intention was not about ritual it was about a rest.

Turn with me to Mark 2:27-28

*..Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."*

*Screeech!*

*Wait a minute, I just thought of something... God is all powerful and didn't actually need a rest but he rested... why? This is what we just read in Mark. God wanted his people to take a rest. He didn't need a break, but WE do, we need rest. It gives us a chance for our mortal bodies to recoup. It is designed*

*to be a time for us to focus on God as we take a break from our labours. When we do this our spirits and our bodies are renewed. Pretty clever that God of ours eh?*

Well... It becomes increasingly clear that we are to set aside a day during the week to rest from our physical labours, but also that we are to set aside a day of worship and service to the Lord our God, which culminates in resting in Jesus." Paul has made it clear that it is not a matter of Saturday or Sunday but that a day should be set aside for rest and that the intention is to honour God. Is it Saturday that is holy or Sunday or is it that our intention to honour God regardless of the day is at issue here? It also seems obvious that the sabbath defined as a day of rest is to be continued and its purpose here is to honour God.

So what has happened to the Sabbath being set aside to do no work and to worship God? It has expanded to include our rest in Jesus Christ and our ultimate rest at the promise of his return.

The revelation of Christ has expanded the definition of sabbath, it has not abolished it.

The spiritual rest is relevant right now and right here in this place but it reach its final culmination in the resurrection to eternal life at the return of Christ as in Revelations 20:6.

I think it is important at this point to provide some context and historical fact...

The Jews set aside the sabbath as Holy and a commemoration of God's resting following his creation. They celebrated this on Saturday on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week. If you want to get really technical from sundown on Friday night to sundown on Saturday.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week, which was Sunday, We see in the new testament examples of the fellowship gathering on Sunday.

You see the book of Hebrews is very clever. It weaves together the three forms of rest. We see the rest of Israel from her enemies, we see the weekly sabbath rest and we see the spiritual rest through Christ. None of which would be evident if we didn't bother to look at the word Sabbath. The greek is specific in which word and intention is used. We like the author of Hebrews which I believe to be Paul, we must be just as diligent in our search for the context and meaning behind what the scripture is really telling us.

So we must keep a weekly sabbath rest as unto the Lord and yet also labour to enter the spiritual rest that is part of his great plan.

Hebrews 4:10

*For he who has entered His (meaning God's) rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did form his.*

Okay so we understand the intention of the Sabbath and why we need to keep it. We also understand that it persists to the new testament. We understand the context of how the Jewish people worshiped, but I also promised to tell you why Sunday and not Saturday...

So...

It was Jewish custom to cease work, and worship God on Saturday. We know this definitively and see many examples in Scripture. In fact, Jesus taught in the Synagogue on Saturday as we see in Matt 12:9 and John 18:20. So did Paul in Acts 17:2 and 18:4

Now Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-40

*Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. (notice it is not day or time bound) This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself' all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.*

We know that Jesus said that he was the Lord of the sabbath...

At this point we need to consider that the Sabbath was part of the overall moral, legal and sacrificial system by which the Jewish people satisfied God's requirements from behaviour, how they governed and what must be done for the atonement of sins. Not keeping the sabbath was punished as it was considered sin.

But Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath and in him we find rest and we are his priests.

Romans 6:14-15 *For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be.*

There is no more law of Moses, but rather Jesus summed it up as Love God, Love each other. The law is written on the tablets of our hearts. We follow the moral law of God. We are no longer condemned because of Christ's imputed righteousness.

We saw Romans 14:5-6 telling us that we must be convinced in our own minds about which day to observe for the Lord.

In Colossians 2:16-17 NASB we read *"Therefore let no one 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."*

Significant here is that a festival is yearly, a new moon is monthly and a sabbath is weekly. So Jesus is our Sabbath.

Further we see in Acts 20:7 *"and on the first day of the week (Sunday) when we gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight."*

The first day of the week was Sunday and this is the day the people gathered. They had communion and preaching

Some of you might be asking why midnight. To clarify... This is because Luke used the Roman system of counting days midnight to midnight instead of the Jewish method of sundown to sundown.

Next we see in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

Paul directs the churches to meet on the first day of each week and put money aside. This would indicate a tithe to the church. So then is Sunday the official day for church service? It is up to you to decide. Just know if you come on Saturday, you may be sitting alone...

In the second century the church decided that to honour Jesus and set aside a day as unto the Lord. That Sunday would be the day of worship.

I hope all of this helps point out that it is not the day, but our heart that is important. In my personal study I have found nothing that says we have to worship on Saturday in the NT. In fact Paul was quite clear. Romans 14:1-12 I believe makes it clear that we have the freedom to worship on the day that we believe we should. By convention the church has chosen Sunday to be our day of rest. It has officially been this way since the second century and it persists to this day.

Now on a personal note...

God established that mankind should have a day of rest. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath and made it clear to me that I am free to be convinced in my own mind and so I do take a day off and try to rest and worship God in the stillness of my labours. But I also take Paul's statement to heart and so for me personally. I worship God everyday, not just at the cessation of labour, but I enter into a rest in Christ that is absolutely fantastic and I look forward to that day when he returns and we enter into his rest eternally.

There are many theories about the Sabbath, some biblically based, some not. But the intention is that we take a rest from our labours and rest in Christ.

So on Sunday, I come to the Church resting in Christ and look forward to worshipping him and serving him. I get refreshed and renewed so that I can serve HIM through the rest of the days of the week.

In closing let's look at Matthew 12:5 NKJV

*At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!”*

*But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?”*

1 Peter 2:9 - *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

You are his priests called to serve God on the sabbath but also to honour God and take the rest in him he has provided for you. Let his joy be your strenght.