

Why the Seventh-day Sabbath?

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Because ours is a non-Sabbathkeeping world, one who observes the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath is continually asked, "Why?" Volumes have been written on this subject, volumes that give numerous proofs from Scripture, history, and logic, volumes that answer all objections. But when all the words are boiled down, there are six basic and compelling reasons for keeping the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath.

Reason 1 — The Sabbath Was Given at Creation

The Sabbath was instituted by God's own example on the seventh day of creation week.

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 (Gen. 2:2-3).

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How significant!

The very God of the universe chose to cease from His labor—not because He was tired (Isaiah 40:28), but because He wanted to set an example for all mankind. He specifically blessed and

made holy the seventh day as a Sabbath, a day of ceasing, well over two millennia before the time of Moses and the Old Covenant. Exodus 20:11 corroborates this fact:

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.

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Jesus Himself, during His earthly ministry, declared that the Sabbath was made for man (that is, mankind), not just for the Hebrews (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath was not a mere Mosaic statute given only to Israel under the Old Covenant. It was set apart at the beginning, as a memorial of God's creative power; it was ordained by God's own example as a blessing for all mankind. This reason alone should be sufficient for those who seek to do God's will.

An interesting footnote to the early origin of the Sabbath and its universal application is that in over one hundred languages, ancient and modern, the name for the seventh day of the week is a variation of the word *Sabbath*.

Reason 2 — The Sabbath is Included in the Decalog

When asked in casual conversation why he keeps the Sabbath, a Sabbath observer might respond, "For the same reason I honor my parents"! It's an answer that cannot be easily dismissed—because both Sabbathkeeping and honor-

ing parents are required by the same law, the Ten Commandments. And it's a rare Christian who will speak negatively toward this law, even though most ignore the Fourth Commandment, which states:

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..." (Ex. 20:8-10).

The importance of the Ten Commandments is shown by the fact that God gave them with His own voice and inscribed them in stone with His own finger. He must have chosen very carefully the ten spiritual precepts to be included in this law, which was to serve as a constitution of sorts for the nation of Israel. Keep in mind, these were not new laws; they all go back to Creation, though they probably were not codified as ten commandments. For example, murder, lying, and adultery are all condemned from the beginning (Gen. 4:8-16; 20:3-6; 39:9; cf. Rom. 5:12-14). And as we've already seen, the Sabbath originated at Creation. Very possibly the Israelites did not observe it while

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they were slaves in Egypt, but when God gave them the Fourth Commandment, He was not introducing some new law. In fact, He'd begun reminding them of the Sabbath some weeks earlier when He sent the manna only six days each week (Exodus 16).

In the New Testament, the Ten Commandments are consistently upheld as reflecting God's will for mankind. Jesus reinforced the Ten Commandments (Mark 10:17-19). So did Paul and

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James (Rom 2:13, 21; 7:7-14, 21; Jas. 2:8-12). Even most modern Christians claim to esteem the Ten Commandments as God's moral code, yet they ignore the Fourth.

Some argue that only nine of the commandments are repeated (at least in principle) in the New Testament, but that the Sabbath commandment is not. Yet Jesus' statement, "The sabbath was made for man," certainly repeats the principle of the Fourth Commandment (Mark 2:27).

The Ten Commandments continue to stand as God's will for all mankind. The seventh-day Sabbath is part of that law. Should not those who claim God as their Father obey His laws, including the Ten Commandments, including the Fourth Commandment!?

Reason 3 — Jesus Upheld the Sabbath

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus observed the Sabbath. Luke records:

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read (Luke 4:16).

On many occasions Jesus incurred the wrath of the Pharisees because He did not live according to their manmade

Sabbath regulations. He healed on the Sabbath; He allowed His disciples to

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shell out kernels of grain to eat; He told a man to pick up his bed roll—all contrary to the Pharisees' traditions—but never once did He speak negatively about the Sabbath itself. On the contrary, He observed it and showed in a positive way how it should be kept; He proclaimed Himself Lord of it.

And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath (Mark 2:27-28).

Jesus was indeed Lord of the Sabbath; He was there in the beginning with God in creating it (John 1:3; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:1-2). He showed by His example how it was to be kept as a blessing for mankind, as a day of freedom and delight. He showed that doing good, taking care of animals, handling emergencies, shelling out grain to eat, were all permissible on this day of rest (Matt. 12:11-12; Luke 14:5). He objected to the inhumane traditions of men that turned the Sabbath into a burden, but He upheld the rest, the rejuvenation, the freedom enjoined by the Fourth Commandment (Mark 3:1-5; Luke 13:11-17).

Even at the end of His ministry, a few days before He died to pay for the sins of the world, Jesus indicated that the Sabbath command would continue after His death. In prophesying the destruc-

tion that was to come on Jerusalem in A.D. 70, Jesus told His followers,

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day (Matt. 24:20).

If the Sabbath command was to have been nullified by His death, Jesus' statement makes no sense at all. On the other hand, His statement indicates that the Sabbath would continue as a holy day for God's people. Hence, an emergency flight, while not strictly prohibited, would not be in keeping with God's purpose for this day of rest.

Throughout His ministry Jesus affirmed the Sabbath. Do those who call Him Savior and Lord need any further reason to keep it?

Reason 4 — Apostles Continue to Keep the Sabbath

Following Jesus' death, His most intimate followers continued to observe the Sabbath. Contrary to popular belief, there is no evidence that they abandoned the seventh day of the week for the first day.

While Jesus lay in the tomb, the women prepared spices for His body and then "...rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). Of course, one could argue that they didn't know yet that the Sabbath was done away; but the interesting point is that Luke, undoubtedly a Gentile writing to a Gentile,

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wrote this account several decades after the event; yet he in no way qualified the commandment the women obeyed as being "old," or "Jewish" or "done away." It was still, simply, "the commandment."

Paul consistently used the Sabbath for teaching both Jews and Gentiles, "as his manner was" (Acts 17:2; 18:4). In Pisdia, on the Sabbath, Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue, where they were asked to speak (Acts 13:14-15). When they had finished, some of the listeners asked them to return the *next Sabbath*, at which time "...came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God" (v. 44). Had the Christians been observing Sunday, they could easily have met the next day after their first Sabbath meeting. But people had to go back to work on the first day of the week; and apparently both Jews and Gentiles, even "the whole city," were oriented to the seventh-day Sabbath.

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Acts 18:3,4 describes Paul's stay in Corinth, where he worked as a tentmaker during the week. When did he rest from his physical labor to teach Jews and Greeks? On the Sabbath, not on Sunday.

There is no evidence that the early church began worshiping on Sunday; in fact the term "first day of the week" is used only eight times in the New Testament, and none of these mentions anything about its being a special day in any respect. One, 1 Cor. 16:2, even suggests that the day was to be used for work, for taking an inventory and laying aside an offering *at home!*

Reason 5 — Sunday Adopted for Political Reasons in Postapostolic Times

History reveals that it was because of political and social pressures that the Sabbath was gradually abandoned for Sunday—long after the time of the Apostles. Severe anti-Jewish attitudes developed in the Roman world during the first and second centuries. As acts of repression, the Romans outlawed circumcision, sacrificing, Sabbathkeeping and other Jewish practices. Consequently, Christians, particularly at Rome, found it expedient to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the Jews, to demonstrate to the Romans that they were not Jewish. One way they did this was to work on the Sabbath. Sunday, which was already used by many Romans as a holiday, was a convenient substitute. For a detailed account of this substitution, see the book *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi (Gregorian Pontifical University Press, 1974, available from The Bible Sabbath Association).

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When Constantine officially recognized Christianity in the fourth century, he put the power of the empire behind Sunday observance. In the centuries that followed, the first day of the week became so firmly entrenched as the "Christian Sabbath" that even Protestant reformers could not dislodge it, though they claimed their authority from the Bible and Bible only.

Sunday observance was adopted for the sake of political expedience and is based solely on church tradition. The seventh-day Sabbath, on the other hand, is rooted firmly in the authority of God's Word! Which is your source of authority?

Reason 6 — Man Needs Rest

Modern science is learning more and more about the effects of stress on human beings. We do need time to recuperate from the physical, mental, and emotional pressures of life. Each night we need sleep; and each week we need a day to cease from our daily labors, a

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day to relax, to rest, to reflect on who we are and where we're going; we need time to contemplate God's creation, His love, and our need for His redemptive powers.

God, in His consummate wisdom, set aside at Creation a day just for those purposes.

Surely we can kid ourselves that we have to work seven days a week to "get everything done." But wise men have come to see that they get more done in six days if they rest on the seventh; they enjoy working days more if they observe a day of ceasing at the end of each week. Of course, it's not easy to get off the treadmill of life's everyday pressures. It takes faith, wisdom, and courage to quit the "rat race" and to climb into a "time capsule of refreshment," the seventh-day Sabbath commanded by God.

Properly understood, the Sabbath is not merely an Old Covenant legal requirement; rather, it is a day of liberty from stress and toil, it is a day when Christians are free to rest, free to do good, free to be rejuvenated, free to worship and fellowship with others. As Jesus Christ offers rest for the spirit through the forgiveness of sins, so His Sabbath offers rest for the body and the mind; it offers 24 hours of a different kind of time: special time, sacred time, time that has been waiting at the end of every week since Creation.

There have always been Christians who rejected the traditions of men and were faithful to the Fourth Commandment. There are now millions around the world, Christians of many different persuasions, who rest from their work on the Sabbath according to the will of God. These are Christians who enjoy the freedom and blessings of celebrating God's creation, His rest, and His redemption by resting on the day He set aside. You, too, can experience this freedom and these blessings—by observing the Sabbath!

For further information —

The Bible Sabbath Association offers a wide variety of publications about the Sabbath; a partial list is given below. We invite you to write for a complete list with current prices. Sample copies of various tracts are available free if you send a self-addressed #10 envelope with postage for two ounces.

Books

History of the Sabbath & Sunday
by John Kiesz (64 pp.)

God's Sabbath for Mankind
by Richard A. Wiedenheft (42 pp.)

Sabbath at Sommerhase
by Lettie Siddens (128 pp.) Children's Sabbath story
book, lessons & activity packet

Booklets & Tracts

Why the Seventh-day Sabbath? (12 pp.) The Bible Sabbath:
Seventh Day or First Day ? (6 pp.) The Rest of Your Life (2
pp.) Whatever Happened to the Sabbath ? (2 pp.) Roman
Catholic and Protestant Confessions about Sunday (12 pp.)

Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups — Information
about different seventh-day groups around the world (115 pp.)

The Sabbath Sentinel — a magazine with information by,
for, and about the seventh-day Christian community. A free
sample copy is available on request.

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THE BIBLE SABBATH ASSOCIATION
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Dedicated to

- sharing the Sabbath as one of the first of God's great gifts to mankind;
- promoting communication, understanding, and cooperation among all seventh-day Christians.