
Should the Seventh-Day Sabbath Be Observed?

Published and Distributed by

BIBLE ADVOCATE PRESS

A ministry of the
CHURCH OF GOD (Seventh Day)



BIBLE ADVOCATE PRESS
Post Office Box 33677
Denver, Colorado 80233

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This literature has come to you because of the willing support of our contributors. Freewill offerings make possible the free literature program of this ministry.

Bible Advocate Press
P. O. Box 33677
Denver, Colorado 80233
U.S.A.

In Canada correspondence and contributions may be sent to: Church of God (Seventh Day), Box 305, Station G, Calgary, Alberta T3A 2G3.

SHOULD THE SABBATH BE OBSERVED BY CHRISTIANS TODAY?

In the beginning, God gave man a tremendous blessing, designed to keep him ever in the TRUE knowledge of his Creator.

But mankind as a whole has chosen to deprive itself of this blessing. Throughout history, people have fought over, argued about, ridiculed and ignored the sabbath day.

Even in our time, opinions vary widely on this subject. Many claim the Sabbath was changed from the seventh to the first day of the week. Others insist it is still the seventh day, but can't seem to agree which day that is — whether Saturday or Sunday. Still others maintain that we can't really know for sure, since time may have been lost over the thousands of years since creation. And there are those who say it doesn't make any difference which day it is, just as long as we are sincere in our observance of the day we choose.

What, then, is the truth about this important question? Is God's revelation on this matter so vague as to permit all these differing opinions to be right? Or is there complete and satisfying proof as to which day should be kept?

Let's notice what the Bible says about the Sabbath.

Who Made the Sabbath Day?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and founder of New Testament Christianity, told the Pharisees of His day:

The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the Son of

man is Lord also of the sabbath (Mark 2:27, 28).

Did you notice that? The Sabbath did not just "happen." Jesus said it was made. It did not merely "evolve" as a result of the "need" of human beings to have a day of rest. God made it!

To find out who made the Sabbath, let us go back to the account of Creation as given in the book of Genesis. There we read:

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 (Genesis 2:2).

So it was God himself who made the Sabbath. He did so by resting after six days of diligent, physical work.

Notice further that He "*blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it*" (verse 3). The Hebrew word for "sanctify" means to "make clean." God commands Christians, for example, to be "sanctified" — to be separate from the world around them (II Corinthians 6:17). In like manner, He separated the seventh day from the preceding six, thus making it His day, to be used as He directs.

But why was the Sabbath made? What was its purpose — then and now?

For the answer, turn back to the account of a special covenant which God made with ancient Israel — entirely separate from the "Old Covenant" which has since been replaced by the New. In Exodus 31:13, God instructed Moses:

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.

So the Sabbath is a sign — a sign by which we can know who the true God really is. But how is the Sabbath a sign of this? Verse 17 has the answer:

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.

Do you see? The Sabbath identifies God as Creator of all things. No other day of the week could have such deep significance.

This is why Israel of old was commanded to observe this sacred memorial. This is why we, today, are likewise admonished to keep it.

Not a "Law of Moses"

Many, today, believe that the Sabbath was "Jewish" — that it was a part of the ceremonial "law of Moses" and therefore should not be observed by Christians. But the Sabbath existed long before the time of Moses. We have shown that it was established by God at creation — over two thousand years before Moses was born.

Notice Exodus 16. This was before God's people, the Israelites, had reached Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were to be given and the Old Covenant proposed. In verse 4, God told Moses:

Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

Does this mean that God had laws before Mount Sinai? Indeed it does! Abraham, for example, lived centuries before Moses. Yet we read in Genesis that "*Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*" (Genesis 26:5).

The Sabbath had always been a part of God's Law. Therefore when He wanted to see if His people would obey Him, He used the Sabbath as a means of testing their obedience.

Here was the test. On the first six days of every week, God promised to provide the Israelites with a type of food called "manna."

And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily (Exodus 16:5).

Why twice as much on the sixth day? The obvious answer is so that they would not have to do the work of gathering it on the seventh day — the Sabbath.

And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man; and all the rulers of the congregations came and told Moses. 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 seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept unto the morning" (Exodus 16:22, 23).

Surely this proves that the Sabbath is a particular day — and not just "one day in seven."

Surely this is evidence that it makes a difference to God which day it is.

Apparently some of the people felt it didn't make any difference.

And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none (verse 27).

Now these people may have been sincere, just as many are today. But did God accept their sincerity in lieu of obedience to Him?

And the Lord said unto Moses, HOW LONG REFUSE YE TO KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS AND MY LAWS? See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day (Exodus 16:28, 29).

After this thundering rebuke, notice what happened: "So the people rested on the seventh day" (verse 30). They finally realized that God meant what He said.

The Ten Commandments Given

In the third month after leaving Egypt, the Israelites came to Mount Sinai to experience one of the most earth-shaking events that has ever occurred — the giving of the Ten Commandments by God Himself. The fourth point of this great Law was directly concerned with the keeping of the Sabbath:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sab-

bath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work (Exodus 20:8-10).

Notice that it is not called "the sabbath of Israel," but rather the "sabbath of the Lord thy God." This was not a "law of Moses." This was a Law of God — given by God's own powerful voice.

In Deuteronomy 5, after listing these Ten Commandments a second time, Moses said:

These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly [not just to Moses] in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me (verse 22).

The very fact that God "added no more" to this Law serves as evidence that the Ten Commandments were entirely separate from those carnal, fleshly laws which were later given through Moses. Notice what He says through the pen of Jeremiah:

For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices [the ceremonial laws given through Moses]: but this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice [the Ten Commandments which God gave orally to the Israelites] and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you (Jeremiah 7:22, 23).

Why the Jews Were Taken Captive

Perhaps you have heard of the "Babylonian Captivity" which befell the Jews around 600 B.C. But did you know that this disaster came upon them largely as a result of Sabbath-breaking?

In the hundreds of years that had followed the giving of the Ten Commandments, the people had become careless in their attitude toward the Sabbath and what it stood for. Finally, God sent His prophet, Jeremiah, with this message:

Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers (Jeremiah 17:21, 22).

Jeremiah expressly warned them of the dire punishment that was sure to come if they did not heed:

But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched (verse 27).

This was extremely serious. Their whole welfare as a nation was at stake. But did they listen? Did they repent? No, they did not. They were like many today who can't "see" where it really makes any difference. You can read how

this terrible calamity came to pass exactly as prophesied.

And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. And them that had escaped from the sword carried he [King Nebuchadnezzar] away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years (II Chronicles 36:19-21).

Not until seventy years were fulfilled were these Jews permitted to return to their land and begin the task of rebuilding (Jeremiah 29:10). Certainly they had learned their lesson by now. Surely they would keep the Sabbath holy.

But no! God's servant, Nehemiah, saw the people beginning to go back to their old attitude of callous disregard for this Commandment:

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath (Nehemiah 13:17, 18).

Christ's Attitude Toward the Sabbath

After the Sabbath reforms instituted by

Nehemiah had been put into effect, human nature swung to the opposite extreme. Instead of keeping the Sabbath holy the way that God had instructed, the Jewish religious leaders began to be so overly strict, adding so many human restrictions, that the original purpose of this day was almost entirely overlooked.

Into such a state of affairs came Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Lord of the Sabbath. He removed all these man-made regulations and observed the Sabbath in the way it was meant to be observed.

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).

Notice that it was Christ's custom to keep the Sabbath. Of course, He was perfectly obedient to all the Commandments of God.

The scribes and Pharisees, however, loved their traditions more than they loved God's Law. They just could not bear to see a genuinely obedient person. Over and over again they watched Him, whether He would heal on the Sabbath day, that they might find an accusation against him (Luke 6:7).

You will search your Bible in vain for any law prohibiting the prayerful act of asking God to heal on the Sabbath or any other day. Yet the religious leaders of Israel attempted to use this and other excuses like it to impugn Christ's character.

Jesus, however, often capitalized on such episodes to teach His disciples how to observe the Sabbath properly. This was the sort of thing which caused Him to remark, "*The sabbath was*

made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27b). By this He meant that the Sabbath was made to be a blessing for all mankind to enjoy, and not a "yoke of bondage" as the Pharisees had made it. But these words of Jesus have been cleverly "interpreted" by many religionists to mean just the opposite of what He really said.

People today generally regard the Sabbath as being one of the "least" of the Commandments. But in His "Sermon on the Mount," Christ plainly stated:

Whosoever therefore shall break one of these LEAST commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:19).

This "sermon" has since become known as the very heart and core of New Testament Christianity. But how many people live by it? How many people actually "do and teach" these least commandments — including the Sabbath?

Christ did. He said, ". . . I have kept my Father's commandments . . ." (John 15:10). And Peter wrote: ". . . Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

Jesus kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Isn't it plain, then, that we should follow His example and do the same?

The Sabbath in the Early Church

The book of Acts is the inspired history of God's early Church. In it we shall find absolute,

incontrovertible proof as to which day was at that time being observed.

Note which day the apostle Paul kept:

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down (Acts 13:14).

On this particular Sabbath, Paul preached a powerful sermon proving that Jesus was the Christ (verse 16-41). Here, indeed, was a golden opportunity to show that the Sabbath had been "nailed to the cross." But notice what happened:

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath (verse 42).

Did you catch that? There were Gentiles present, as well as Jews. And they specifically asked Paul to preach the same sermon to them again the next Sabbath.

Now consider, if, as so many believe, the Sabbath was merely a "Jewish" institution, and Sunday was now the day for Christians, why did not Paul inform these Gentiles of this fact?

He did persuade them "to continue in the grace of God" (verse 43) — but there was no mention of any change of the Sabbath:

And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God (verse 44).

If the Sabbath was "done away," certainly Paul did not know of it.

A few years later, Paul was instructed by God to bring the Gospel into Philippi. Notice which day he chose to preach to the people there:

And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither (Acts 16:13).

Again we find the true Sabbath being observed.

This should come as no surprise. The New Testament plainly reveals that it was Paul's regular habit to worship on the Sabbath.

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures (Acts 17:2).

Notice also the account of Paul's visit to the city of Corinth:

After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth . . . and he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks (Acts 18:1, 4).

Verse 11 states that Paul remained in Corinth a year and six months. This means that Paul spoke in the synagogue on 78 Sabbaths while he was in Corinth.

The evidence, then, is conclusive. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was a Sabbathkeeper. In this matter he certainly followed the example of Christ (Luke 4:16). And he instructs Christians today:

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ (I Corinthians 11:1).

The New Testament Sabbath Command

Many people today have the idea that the Ten

Commandments were "done away," and that nine of them — all except the Sabbath — have been reinstated in the New Testament. But this is not true! For even if these laws were "taken out of the way" by the death of Christ, Christians would still be responsible to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Why? Because it, too, is commanded in the New Testament.

Open your Bible to the book of Hebrews. You will be amazed to see how it applies to us today.

Beginning with chapter three, the writer draws an analogy between the Israelites under Moses and New Testament Christians. In verses 8 through 11, he quotes God as saying:

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.

The author then goes on to warn his readers, including us who are Christians today:

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (verse 12).

Thus we are warned not to commit the same sins the Israelites committed.

Sabbathkeeping Remains Today

In Hebrews 4, he continues to apply these lessons of history to us:

Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise

being left us of entering into his rest, any of you seem to come short of it (Hebrews 4:1).

Yes, even though we may be Christians, living in the hope of eternal life, we can "come short" — how? By disobeying as the Israelites did.

"For we which have believed do enter into rest" (Hebrews 4:3). Now the writer of Hebrews begins to get specific. Instead of enumerating the sins to avoid, as in chapter 3, he begins to instruct in the things Christians must do in order to obtain the "rest" God has prepared.

For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works (Hebrews 4:4).

This is a direct quotation from Genesis 2:2 — the original account of the establishment of the Sabbath. Christians of all ages, past and present, are reminded that the Sabbath was made by God — not man. No wonder, then, that the Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land by breaking His command.

But is the Sabbath still in effect today? Hebrews gives the answer to this question in verses 9 and 10:

There remaineth therefore a rest [Greek: Sabbatismos — observance of the Sabbath] to the people of God. For he that is entered into his [God's] rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Do you grasp the meaning of these two verses? They make clear that anyone wishing to inherit eternal life must cease from his job or occupation exactly as God did from His work of

creating the universe. And how did God rest? Recall verse 4. “. . . *And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.*”

Here, then, is a plain, clear, forthright, obvious New Testament Sabbath command. Those who observe a day other than the one originally made holy are without excuse. They do not rest “as God did.”

Of course, Sabbathkeeping does not “earn” salvation. Salvation is by the grace of God. It cannot be earned. It is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). But grace does not rule out the validity of obedience to the Laws of God. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul shows that obedience is a part of God’s plan:

For we are his [God’s] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

The good works which Paul identifies as having been “before ordained” must refer to God’s Commandments.

How to Keep the Sabbath

Very often, questions arise concerning the manner in which the Sabbath should be kept. Those who have proved this truth realize that it is sin to break the Sabbath. No one wants to be unnecessarily strict, as the scribes and Pharisees were. What, then, is the proper balance for Sabbath observance?

Basically, we are told, in the fourth commandment, to “*Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8). The Sabbath is to be kept holy in at least three categories — the physical,

the mental, and the spiritual. Violate any one of these, and you may break the Sabbath.

First, the physical aspect: God tells us that *"the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work"* (verse 10). So, as a rule, we are not to be engaged in our occupations on the Sabbath.

We are not to be idle during the rest of the week. *"Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work"* (Exodus 20:9). It is part of the observance of the fourth commandment that we be diligent workers. Solomon wrote: *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might . . ."* (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

A full week of fruitful labor readies us to worship God on the Sabbath.

The second major aspect to consider is our mental attitude on the Sabbath. Mere physical rest is not enough! God says through the pen of Isaiah:

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

Here we find that the Sabbath is to be more than a cessation from work. We also are to refrain from those leisure-time activities, such as hobbies and recreation, which we might normally be engaged in at other times. This is because our thoughts are to be centered upon God and His ways.

This leads directly into the third major aspect

of Sabbath observance — the spiritual.

God says we are to “*call the sabbath a delight*” (Isaiah 58:13). What a far cry from the “yoke of bondage” so many religionists falsely picture it to be. The Sabbath was meant to be a day of complete spiritual rejuvenation.

One of the ways we can delight in the Sabbath is to meet with other Christians. In Leviticus 23:3, the Sabbath is called a “holy convocation” — a day of commanded assembly for the people of God.

We are reminded in Hebrews that Christians should assemble for purposes of worship and exhortation in the ways of God: “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . but exhorting one another; and so much the more as ye see the day approaching*” (Hebrews 10:25).

So begin to observe the Sabbath. Make it a time of Bible study and prayer. Keep it honorably — and experience the special blessings God has promised to those who delight in observing this holy day.

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