

THE LORD'S DAY OR THE SABBATH?

(Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:23-28; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

INTRODUCTION

- God designed our bodies and minds to require regular seasons of rest, particularly one day in every seven.
- As Christians, we are careful to observe the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, not only as a day of rest, but a day of sanctified worship, devoted to the Lord.
- Henry Ward Beecher likened the other six days of the week to "valleys of care and shadow" we descend into, but the Lord's days, he says, "should be hills of light and joy in God's presence; and so as time rolls by we shall go from mountain top to mountain top, till at last we catch the glory of the gate, and enter in to go no more out forever."
- But some think it is the seventh day that God commanded us to rest on, not the first day.
- Many of these people think that their strict Sabbath observance will justify them before God and gain them an entrance into heaven.
- Which is the day of Christian worship?
- Did God change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday?
- Is the fourth commandment part of the moral law and still binding upon all mankind?

I. THE LAW OF THE SABBATH

A. It was sign given to the nation of Israel of the covenant

1. God made His covenant when He gave the law to the Israelites at Sinai (Romans 9:4)

2. The sabbath was an outward sign showing that Israel was Jehovah's covenant people, distinguishing them from the heathen nations around them (Exodus 31:13-17; Ezekiel 20:12,20)
 3. Note also that it is a sign between God and Israel *forever* (Exodus 31:17)
 4. It is presently observed by the Jews
 5. It will be observed during the tribulation (Matthew 24:20)
 6. It will be observed during the millennium (Isaiah 66:23)
- B. It was a remembrance
1. Of creation (Exodus 20:11)
 - a. Ellen White, founder of the SDA religion, taught that the sabbath was established at the creation, and that Adam and the patriarchs kept the sabbath.
 - b. Yet there is no record of any man observing the sabbath until Exodus 16:23
 - c. The account in Exodus 16:23-30 indicates that the concept of resting on the seventh day was new to the Israelites, and required them to adjust their behaviour
 - d. Genesis 2:2-3 is a *prolepsis* (an anticipation or representation of a thing as existing before it actually did so) written by Moses, showing the Jews *why* they were to keep the sabbath, not *when* the sabbath was instituted
 - e. The sabbath was not known before Moses (Nehemiah 9:13-14)
 2. Of redemption (Deuteronomy 5:15)
- C. It was for man's benefit (Mark 2:23-28)

1. "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:" (Mark 2:27)
2. The Jews codified over 1500 rules around the sabbath, turning it into a burden grievous to be borne

D. It was an obligation

1. Sabbath breaking was a capital offence (Exodus 35:2-3; Numbers 15:32-36)
2. Sabbath breaking brought God's judgment (Jeremiah 17:27; Nehemiah 13:15-22)

II. OUR LINK TO THE SABBATH

A. Three different positions

1. The Sabbath remains the same
 - a. The SDA religion teaches that the law of the sabbath was *not* nailed to the cross, contrary to Colossians 2:14
 - b. They claim that from 33-320AD Christians kept the sabbath, but in 320AD Emperor Constantine changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.
 - c. The SDA religion goes so far to say that sabbath-keeping is the "seal of God" (Revelation 9:4), and that "Sunday Sabbath keeping" is the mark of the beast in the future when they predict a Sunday keeping law will be passed.
2. The Sabbath has been changed to Sunday
 - a. This is the general protestant position which claims that the Sabbath was transferred to the first day of the week to commemorate Christ's resurrection.
 - b. They believe that the fourth commandment is still binding on the Christian

- c. Yet even John Calvin stated that “the sabbath is abrogated”
 3. The Sabbath is not binding on the Christian
- B. It is not for the New Testament believer
 1. God’s moral law is of perpetual obligation
 2. The ceremonial law of the Old Covenant is done away
 3. These ordinances are fulfilled in Christ
 4. The ceremonial law was abolished at the cross
 5. To go back to the old covenant is to go from freedom into bondage, as the Galatians did (Galatians 4:9-11)
 6. The church must be distinguished from Israel
- C. The New Testament nowhere commands Christians to observe the sabbath
 1. The ten commandments are all repeated in the New Testament, except the fourth
 2. Christ kept the sabbath because He lived under the law
 - d. Christ did keep the sabbath, as He kept the entirety of the law (Galatians 4:4)
 - e. The reason He lived under the law, was to redeem us from the law and its curse (Romans 10:4)
 3. The council of Jerusalem did not command it (Acts 15)
 - a. Those who condemn Christians for not keeping the sabbath are no different to the Judaizers that caused so many problems in the early church (Acts 15:24)
 - b. The sabbath is no longer binding for the same reason that circumcision is no longer binding (Galatians 5:2-3; 6:15)

4. The New Testament forbids imposing the sabbath on Christians (Colossians 2:16)
 - a. This reference to “sabbath” can *only* be referring to the weekly Sabbath as Paul is using a yearly (holyday), monthly (new moon), weekly (Sabbath) pattern common throughout the Bible. (Galatians 4:10; 1 Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 31:3; 2:4; 8:13; Nehemiah 10:33; Ezekiel 45:17; Hosea 2:11)
 - b. Colossians 2:16 indubitably states that the sabbath is part of the ceremonial law, not the moral law
5. The Christian has liberty regarding days (Romans 14:5)
- D. It is a shadow of the *rest* in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 4:3-4; Matthew 11:28)
 1. The sabbath was a prefiguring (or shadow) of the sabbath rest that we enter into at salvation
 2. Adherents of the Sabbath law are like those who would continue to offer animal sacrifices for atonement – observing the shadows instead of the Christ which they point to

III. THE LORD’S DAY FOR THE SAINTS

- A. The significance of the eighth day
 1. Eight portrays Christ
 - a. The gematria of Jesus (Ιησους) = 10 + 8 + 200 + 70 + 400 + 200 = 888
 - b. The name “Christ” has a value of 1480 (8 x 185), and the name “Lord” 800 (8 x 100)
 - c. There are exactly eight combinations of these three names used in the New Testament

- d. The title “Son of man” occurs 88 times in the New Testament and has a gematria of 2960 (370 x 8)
 - e. The vocabulary of the book of Revelation has 888 words
2. Eight is the number of resurrection and newness.
- a. There were eight people saved in the ark from the flood
 - b. Circumcision was performed on the eighth day
 - c. There are eight resurrections from the dead recorded in the Bible (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:34-35; 2 Kings 13:21; Matthew 9:24-25; Luke 7:15; John 11:44; Acts 9:40-41; Acts 20:9-12)
 - d. Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ is mentioned eight times in the New Testament
 - e. The phrase “the first day of the week” is mentioned eight times in the New Testament.
 - f. The eighth dispensation will be the new heavens and earth
 - g. The Lord Jesus rose on the eighth day of the week, and that is the day we meet for worship

B. The historical record

1. The New Testament

- a. The first day of the week became known as the Lord’s Day (Revelation 1:10) to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the first day of the week (John 20:1)
- b. The church fellowshiped and worshipped on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2)
- c. The apostles did go to the synagogues on the sabbath day, not to worship, but to dispute and reason with the Jews there (Acts 13:14; 17:1,2; 18:1,4; 19:1,8)

2. The early church

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE THAT EARLY CHRISTIANS WORSHIPPED ON SUNDAY

74AD	'We keep the eighth day (Sunday) with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose from the dead.' <i>The Letter of Barnabas</i> (15:6-8)
90AD	'But every Lord's Day ... gather yourselves together and break bread.' The Didache 14
107AD	'Those . . . possessing a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath , but living in the observance of the Lord's Day.' (Ignatius, <i>Epistle to the Magnesians</i> , Chap 9, <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , Vol. 1, p 62-63).
150AD	'the Gentiles, who have believed on Him, . . . even although they neither keep the Sabbath, nor are circumcised, nor observe the feasts. Assuredly they shall receive the holy inheritance of God.' Justin (<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> , <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , Vol. 1, p 267).
150AD	' Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly'. Justin, (<i>First Apology of Justin</i> , Chap 68)
150AD	'If there was no need of circumcision before Abraham, or of the observance of Sabbaths, of feasts and sacrifices before Moses; no more need is there of them now . . . after Jesus Christ.' Justin, (<i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> , <i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , Vol. 1, p 206.)
180AD	'He (Christ) abolished their Sabbath and fasts and festivals & circumcision.' Acts of Peter (1.1-2).
190AD	'The seventh day is proclaimed a day of rest, preparing by abstention from evil for the Primal day (first day) our true rest .' (Vol. 7, xvi, 138.1.) Clement of Alexandria.
200AD	'On one day, the first of the week, we assemble ourselves together.' Bardaisan (<i>On Fate</i>)
200AD	'We solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath.' 'As the abolition of carnal circumcision and of the old law has been consummated, so also the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary.' (<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i> , Vol. 3, p 155). 'To us Sabbaths are foreign.' (<i>On Idolatry</i> , 14:6). Tertullian.
220AD	'On Sunday none of the actions of the world should be done. Keep yourself free for spiritual things, go to church, listen to the readings and divine homilies, meditate on heavenly things.' Origen (<i>Homil. 23 in Numeros</i> 4, p 12:749).
225AD	'The Apostles further appointed: On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and the oblation, because on the first day of the week our Lord rose from the dead.' (<i>Didascalia</i> 2)
250AD	'The eighth day, that is the first day after the Sabbath, and the Lord's Day .' Cyprian (<i>Epistle</i> 58, Section 4).
300AD	'Lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews . . . which Sabbath he (Christ) in his body abolished .' Victorinus (<i>The Creation of the World</i>).
300AD	'They did not regard circumcision, nor observe the Sabbath ; neither do we . . . because such things as these do not belong to Christians.' Eusebius (<i>Ecclesiastical History</i> , Book 1, Chap 4).
345AD	'The Sabbath was the end of the first creation, and the Lord's Day was the beginning of the second. He (God) prescribed that they (Jews) should formerly observe the Sabbath as a memorial of the end of the first things, so we honour the Lord's day as being the memorial of the new creation.' Athanasius (<i>On Sabbath and Circumcision</i> 3).
350AD	'Stand aloof from all observance of Sabbaths ..' Cyril of Jerusalem (<i>Catechetical Lectures</i> 4:37).

C. The purpose for the believer

1. Corporate worship and fellowship (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:24-25)
2. Rest
3. Set apart for the Lord (Exodus 20:8,11)

CONCLUSION

1. The sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, who is the believer's rest
2. Have you responded to His invitation, and come to Him in repentance and faith to find life, peace and rest?
3. While Christians under the New Covenant are not under the Sabbath of the ceremonial law, God has blessed us with something even better – the Lord's Day, the first day of the week
4. Are you thankful to God for His kindness in granting us this day of rest and gladness?
5. Do you honour the Lord's Day by avoiding unnecessary labour and secular activities, and devoting the entire day to religious exercises, using it as the 'market day of the soul'?

"Before the next Lord's day I may be in eternity, and be fixed in heaven or hell forever. Let me then spend this day as if I were sure it would be my last. I am going where prayer is wont to be made; Lord, teach me to pray in the faith of the Gospel, with reverence, humility, earnestness of desire after the light of thy countenance, and confidence of finding mercy through the blood of Jesus. May I 'sing with the Spirit, and with the understanding also;' feeling in my heart what I sing with my lips, and rejoicing in the free love of Christ to guilty men, to me a sinner. O may I hear with seriousness, receive the truth in the love of it, and lay it to my heart; remembering, that by the word my soul must be profited and saved, or else be judged and condemned. O God of all grace, let not this day be spent in vain, for the sake of my precious soul, and for the glory of thy holy name, through Jesus Christ." (From a tract entitled, *On the Lord's Day*)