

The Sabbath:

A Delight, A Gift From
God



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The Sabbath controversy is one that has been an ongoing debate for many years and carried on among a plethora of scholars. There are those that suggest that the fourth commandment has been nullified, that its principle time frame and meaning has been changed. The idea put forth that only nine of the Ten Commandments are still valid is misleading.

God's principle instructions for a wholesome lifestyle has not changed and could only be modified by Him. I would suggest that the entire Decalogue was given to be a guide and boundary for living a wholesome and godly life. The instructions given by God for God's people came from the loving heart of God. Just as a parent instructs their child not to play in traffic, it is not to restrict their ability to play and enjoy childhood, but to ensure that the child remains safe and enjoys a wholesome, and productive childhood. Likewise, the Lord has given instructions (commandments) that are for our good.

Often the instructions given by the Lord are taught and received in a negative, prohibitive and unappealing manner. It is God's love for us that prompts Him to give us instructions (commandments, laws) and it is our love for God that prompts us to obey. Obedience of the Lord's instructions is never legalism (John 14:15). In 1 John 5:3 it says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." The word grievous in the text is the Greek word *barys*, meaning heavy in weight and metaphorically it suggests something severe, stern or burdensome. God's instructions do not put us in bondage, but they allow us to live in liberty as the children of God.

The welfare of man is *not restricted* but *guaranteed* by the proper observance of the Sabbath. (See Reference 1). I submit that there is no biblical basis for the discontinuation of the weekly seventh day Sabbath. I submit this writing as my apologetics for the seventh day Sabbath and its biblical validity for all believers. It is not the intent of this writing to indict those believers who presently worship on the first day, Sunday, but this is my humble gesture of bringing clarity to some misunderstood concepts about the Sabbath. My desire is that we always delight in obedience to the

Father's will, enjoying His favor and blessings abundantly. My prayer is that we gain understanding and insight into the essence of this gift of God, given to man for our good (Mark 2:27).

The Hebrew meaning of the word Sabbath (Shabbath) is intermission, cessation, to stop working, to rest. The Greek word for Sabbath is Sabbaton, meaning the seventh day of each week, a sacred festival which one was required to abstain from all work (Leviticus 23:1-3). The double "B" in Sabbath intensifies its meaning of cessation. There are two main words in Hebrew used for "rest" in the Bible, they are Sabbath and Yanach. The Hebrew word "yanach" means to rest, settle down and remain, give rest to, to dwell.

The Sabbath was sanctified by God at the beginning of creation and its greatness and sanctity is not dependent on any other factor. There is a rhythm to all creation. The Sabbath is a major part of the rhythm of creation, six days to work, and the seventh day to rest. In Genesis 2, God works for six days bringing order to chaos, creates mankind in the sixth day and he rested. God rested because He was finished, Genesis 2:1-3. God creates man and places him in the garden, Genesis 2:15. In this verse, the phrase "and put him" is the Hebrew word *yanach*, meaning to dwell, to rest. God then exemplifies the rhythm of creation by resting from His work and dwelling with man. God's rest expressed and reflected His delight in creation (Genesis 1:31). The scripture points out that the Sabbath predates the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) and is older than Israel or the Hebrew / Jewish people and is relevant to all mankind.

The creation record highlights the uniqueness of the seventh day in at least three ways: (1) the seventh day is the very first thing the Bible records as being "made holy", sanctified by God. (2) In Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 the first six days of creation are each mentioned once, while the seventh day is mentioned three times: "By the seventh day", "on the seventh day", and "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy". The repetition emphasizes the importance of the day in the divine economy. (3) Genesis 2:1-3 avoids the phrase "there was evening, and there was morning", which was used in conjunction with the other six days of creation to conclude the activities of the day and as transition to the creating activities of the following day. The seventh day breaks that pattern. The divine resting concludes creation – Sabbath belongs to the created

order; it cannot be legislated or abrogated by human beings. God sovereignly chose and sanctified the seventh day as a treasured gift and blessing He bequeathed to humankind – a sign of His covenantal protection and love. (See Reference 2).

Dr. William Meade Jones compiled a chart of the week showing the position of the true Sabbath. (See Reference 3).

Even today more than 100 languages worldwide use the word “Sabbath” for Saturday. The world’s languages vastly differ but the word for the seventh day of the week has remained fairly recognizable. The Babylonian language which predated the Hebrew language by hundreds of years, designated the seventh day of the week as “Sa-ba-tu”, meaning rest day. This further suggest that the Bible “Sabbath” had been woven into creation for all mankind.

Arabic – As-sabt – The Sabbath

Armenian – Shapat – Sabbath

Polish – Sobota – Sabbath

Latin – Sabbatum – Sabbath

Russian – Subbota – Sabbath

Spanish – Sabado - Sabbath

Coptic (Egypt) – Pi Sabbaton – The Sabbath

Swahili – Assubu - Sabbath

Congo (West Africa) – Sabbado – Sabbath

Hausa (Central Africa) – Assebatu – The Sabbath

Pasto (Afghanistan) – Shamba – Sabbath (pleasantest day of the week)

In Exodus 20:1, “God spake all these words, saying,” then He gives us the Ten Commandments as the basic framework for a wholesome life. It is in verse eight that He introduces the idea of “remember” which implies that this is not something new. The word “remember” in Hebrew used here is the word “*zakar*”; it means to remember, recall, and call to mind. This word is almost always translated remember in the King James Version of the Bible. The word “*zakar*” implies more than a casual awareness of the Sabbath, but to be knowledgeable of the essence, principle, and

purpose of the Sabbath in order to truly benefit from obeying the fourth commandment. Zakar implies both thought and deed.

Let's take a look at the Sabbath concept throughout the centuries. It should be noted that Sunday is never called "the Sabbath" by ancient fathers and historians.

2nd Century – Philo, M'Clatchie, "Notes and Queries", Vol. 4, 99 "Declares the seventh day to be a festival, not of this or of that city, but of the universe." bequeathed to humankind – a sign of His covenantal protection and love.²

3rd Century – "Dissertation on the Lord's Day", pp. 33-34

"The seventh-day Sabbath wassolemnised by Christ, the Apostles, and primitive Christians, till the Laodicean Council did in a manner quite abolish the observations of it."

4th Century – O'Leary, "The Syriac Church and Fathers", pp.83-84

"They despise our sun-god. Did not Zoroaster, the sainted founder of our divine beliefs, institute Sunday one thousand years ago in honour of the sun and supplant the Sabbath of the Old Testament. Yet these Christians have divine services on Saturday."

5th Century- Africa – Dr.Peter Heylyn, "The History of the Sabbath", p. 416

"Augustine deplored the fact that in two neighbouring churches in Africa one observes the seventh-day Sabbath, another fasted on it."

Lyman Coleman, "Ancient Christianity Exemplified", Chap. 26, Sec. 2

"Down even to the fifth century the observance of the Jewish Sabbath was continued in the Christian Church."

14th Century – Waldenses, "Luther's Fore-Runners", p. 38

"That we are to worship one only God, who is able to help us, and not the Saints departed; that we ought to keep holy the Sabbath day."

15th-16th Century – Abyssinia – A.D. 1534, “Church History of Ethiopia”, Gedde pp.87-88 (Abyssinian legate at court of Lisbon) “It is not therefore, in imitation of the Jews, but in obedience to Christ and His holy Apostles, that we observe that day.”

Philip Caraman, “The Lost Empire, The Story of the Jesuits in Ethiopia”, pp.9,54,67
“Ethiopian Christians...detested smoking. Abstinence from pork, hare and non-scaly fish.

... and the holiness of the Sabbath. On the Sabbath hunting, fishing and traveling were forbidden and no work was done in the fields.”

A. Ross, Historian’s List of Churches (16th Century)

“Sabbatarians, so called because they reject the observance of the Lord’s day as not commanded in Scripture, they consider the Sabbath alone to be holy, as God rested on that day and commanded to keep it holy and to rest on it.”

The 350 AD Apostolic Constitutions stated in the book “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles”

“Be not careless of yourselves, neither deprive your Savior of His own members, neither divide His body nor disperse His members, neither prefer the occasions of this life to the word of God; but ASSEMBLE YOURSELVES TOGETHER every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord’s house: in the morning singing the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but PRINCIPALLY ON THE SABBATH DAY.” (See Reference 4).

Jesus in Matthew 5:17 says he did not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it. Let’s take a look at the three central words in this text.

1) Destroy –katalyo – 1. To dissolve, demolish, disunite. 2. Metaph. render vain, deprive of success, to bring to naught.

2) Law – nomos – 1. A custom, a law, a command. 1A. a law or rule producing a state approved of God.

3) Fulfil – pleroo – 3. To carry into effect, bring to realization. 3C. to cause God’s will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be.

This should give us insight into the fact that Jesus was not here to nullify or dismiss God's order, commandments or instructions but to bring clarity to the law.

Jesus, His disciples and Paul, who is credited with authorship of 13 or 14 books out of the 27 New Testament writings observed the seventh day Sabbath. The Lord Jesus referred to Himself as the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5) when He was questioned about the actions of His disciples. This was a major concern of the Pharisees, because the Pharisaic beliefs and teachings were a system of works, self-righteousness, merit and the attainment of spiritual relationship with God through rituals, ceremonies and the external appearance of righteousness that found its apex in the Sabbath with all the rules and restrictions they appropriated to the Sabbath. The Pharisees which set themselves up as the guardians of the law questioned Jesus about conduct on the Sabbath, not the validity of the Sabbath. Jesus' response was to let them know that He would not do anything to undermine the principle of the Sabbath and knew the proper protocol for the Sabbath. He is Lord even of the Sabbath day, the word for "Lord" used in the afore mentioned texts is *kyrios*, it is defined as, he to whom a thing belongs, the possessor and disposer of a thing. Here Jesus is simply reiterating Exodus 20:10 "But the seventh day is the *Sabbath of the Lord thy God*:"? This makes the Sabbath, the Lord's Day and not Sunday (Selah). The Sabbath is undeniably connected to Jesus the Christ, "The disciples' actions were clearly not a breach of the Biblical, but of the Rabbinic Law," (See Reference 5). Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for the extra regulations and instructions they had attached to God's instructions that became a burden to the people (Matthew 23:1-4). The Sabbath played a meaningful role in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus begins His public ministry teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Luke 4:16-21).

Jesus' resurrection was at the end of the Sabbath (Matthew 28:1) and there are seven healings by Jesus on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21-28, 29-31, 3:1-6, Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6, John 5:1-18, 9:1-16).

I differ with those that suggest that Jesus did things to go along with "Jewish customs" in violation to the will and order of God. Remember Matthew 5:17.

Jesus being the greatest theophany found in scripture remembered the Sabbath day and kept it holy. Jesus understood the heart of the Father and His original intent for the Sabbath and his response to the Pharisees was to bring clarity and give insight to the Sabbath. In Luke 4:14-16 Jesus teaches in the synagogues and it was his “custom” to do it on the Sabbath day. The word *custom* is the Greek word *etho* meaning habit. In like manner Paul was committed to obeying the order of God. In Acts 17:1-3, Paul is following the same pattern of the Messiah of being in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In verse 2 the word *manner* is used and this is the same word *etho* that is also translated as the word *custom*. Paul did not abandon the commandments of God to follow Jesus, but understood that righteousness came by faith through Jesus and not by works (Philippians 3:1-9).

Now let’s look at the time frame of the seventh day Sabbath, from Friday evening to Saturday evening. In the Genesis order of creation the days began with evening then morning to constitute a day. In the first chapter of Genesis the word translated *evening* is the Hebrew word *ereb*. Evening is the period that ends the afternoon and starts the beginning of night. Today, a day is considered to begin and end at midnight, but before clocks, it was not possible to start or end a day at midnight.

There is no Astronomical sign of midnight and the Astronomical clock was first recorded in 1855-60. It was not possible for ancient days to start at midnight, and neither did God’s Sabbath.

In the Strong’s Concordance it gives a chart showing how time was calculated in the times of the Bible writings and in particular in the New Testament era. (See Reference 6). The twenty-four-hour day was divided into eight, three-hour segments called watches. There was four watches of the night time period and four watches of the day time period.

<u>Night</u>		<u>Day</u>
6:00pm - 9:00pm	1st Watch	6:00am - 9:00am
9:00pm - 12:00 midnight	2nd Watch	9:00am - 12:00 noon
12:00am - 3:00am	3rd Watch	12:00pm - 3:00pm
3:00am - 6:00am	4th Watch	3:00pm - 6:00pm

In John 11:9, Jesus raises the question, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? This question has been used by some to suggest that Jesus is saying there are only twelve hours in a complete day, thus reducing a twenty-four-hour day to just twelve. The Greek word translated day is *hemera* meaning distinguished from and contrasted with night. When one puts verses nine and ten together it gives a clearer understanding to what Jesus is saying. Many of the modern translations use the word *daylight* for the word *day* in verse nine.

In Mark 13:35 the four watches of night are listed, they are even (6 pm - 9pm), midnight (9 pm -12 am), cockcrowing (12 am – 3am), and morning (3 am – 6 am). The Greek word translated *cockcrowing* is the word *alektorophonia* and is used of the third watch of the night (Midnight – 3:00 am).

The word translated *even* is the Greek word *opsios*, meaning evening – late in the day, at evening from 6 pm, the beginning of night. This is also found in Mark 1:32. The term corresponds with the 1st Watch of the night, which starts at 6:00 pm.

The division of time into watches gives us insight into biblical time keeping and also establishes the integrity for the Sabbath day recognition of 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. For this reason, I choose to adhere to a Friday 6:00 pm to Saturday 6:00 pm observation of the Sabbath. There are many things that can complicate the simple desire to obey the Lord and keep the weekly Sabbath.

The modern-day aspect of measuring time from region to region and from continent to continent differs. There are time zones, established in 1833 in the United States, there are the global time zones established in 1884 at the International Meridian Conference. A new federal bill, known as the “Sunshine Protection Act” first passed the Senate in March 2022, recommending that permanent daylight saving should be the standard for all U.S. States. The Sunshine Protection Act is presently awaiting review by the U.S. House of Representatives, where it needs to be passed by a majority before making its way to President Biden for a final signature. This bill was written to take effect in November 2023.

There are some that declare the Sabbath has begun after a designated person is able to count a certain number of stars in the night sky. The KJV of the scriptures does not use the term sundown to reflect night time, but uses the term “even” or “evening” to refer to the start of the night time period of a day. Even today the Television broadcasting of the “Evening News” begins at 6:00 or 6:30 pm. In the area of the Arctic the sun can set very early, very late, or even not at all. It is therefore suggested that the Sabbath be observed from 6 p.m. to 6 p.m. according to the equatorial sunset time. This method preserves the integrity of the sixth working day, is compatible with the sunset time of Bible lands, and respects the working schedule of most people living in these regions. (See Reference 7).

We do not want to operate in “bad faith”. The process of falsification, the creation of a false consciousness, brings about bad faith. (See Reference 8). Practicing our own interpretations of the Holy Writ rather than seeking understanding and then submitting to obedience to the plan of God is a formula for heresy. There is no “choosing for one’s self” (a loose translation of the Greek *hairesis*, from which the word *heresy* comes) about the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. The Kingdom of God is a theocracy. The Lord is not interested in our man - made superficial piety. He is interested in our obedience.

From the beginning the instructions were to “remember the Sabbath and keep it holy”, so what does that mean and how does that look? The universality found in Isaiah 56:1-8 reveals the heart of the Father to be gracious to all that join themselves to him. We are advised not to *profane / pollute* the Lord’s Sabbaths.

The Hebrew word for *profane / pollute* is the word *chalal*, it means to make common, to dishonor (not give it the reverence / respect due it). Polluting the Lord’s Sabbath is to allow the distractions of the world to take us away from God’s plan of communion with Him, a time of intimacy, worship and a period of rest (cessation from the busyness of the world). Some will say “any day” or “every day” can be kept holy as a result of the misapplication of Romans 14:5. The context deals with foods and verse five speaks to fast days not the Sabbath. Paul never diminished the authority of God’s instructions in the life of God’s people, neither did he have the authority to change or modify God’s instructions. In Ezekiel 22 you find the abominations of God’s people.

The prophet gives them the list that the Lord gives to him, shedding blood, making idols, contempt for parents, oppressing the foreigner, mistreating the fatherless and widows; and they had profaned His Sabbaths. An important aspect of the Sabbath is to provide physical and spiritual “release” (aphesis). The term “release” (aphesis) is used to translate the Hebrew designations for Sabbatical and Jubilee years. The same term is used in the NT, almost always meaning “forgiveness” a redemptive quality.

In the thirteenth chapter of Nehemiah, we find Nehemiah reforming the practices of Jerusalem and its people. One of the things that he deals with is the Sabbath, the actions and attitude of the people regarding the Lord’s Sabbath. In verses 15-22 Nehemiah rebukes the children of Judah, the merchants and the nobles for carrying on “business as usual” on the Sabbath. They had made the Sabbath “common” just like the other six days. Selah!

In Isaiah 58:13 we are admonished not to seek our own pleasures on the Sabbath and to call the Sabbath a delight. The word “delight” used here is the Hebrew word *oneg* it means to take exquisite delight, pleasantness. As believers there is nothing more satisfying to our soul than spending quality time with our Heavenly Father. Our focus is not on what we don’t do, but is on what we get to do. We readily dismiss, delay and postpone those things that may interfere and lessen the benefit of this special appointment and divine gift of God. We plan events and organize our schedules in preparation for the delight of the Sabbath. The benefits of this glorious time immersed in the will of the Father and the things that He takes pleasure in cannot be measured. Our motivation is to please the Lord, and is based in our love for (and not fear of) Him (Psalm 40:8, 119:77).

There is nothing wrong or sinful about many of the activities that we may find ourselves involved in, but it is a matter of allowing these things to interfere with our appointment with God, poor timing. God has hallowed, sanctified and blessed the Sabbath especially for (you) His people as a covenant (Ezekiel 20:19-20).

There are wonderful, soul nourishing and spirit edifying things that can be done in the Sabbath time frame. The Sabbath is called a “holy convocation”, a convocation is a public meeting or gathering, therefore a time of corporate gathering for worship, prayer and community is in order, but this is not the entirety of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a great time for ministry, service to others, to visit those who are shut – in, out – reach to those in need, going into the places of incarceration. This is a great time to activate Isaiah 61:1, touching lives and advancing the Kingdom of God. Selah! The Sabbath is a great time to follow the Acts 10:38 pattern of ministry to the world around us. It can be a spiritually enriching time for our families, a bonding time for family and brothers and sisters in Christ. We keep the Sabbath holy by maximizing spiritually enriching activities on this day. We can have more uncluttered time for meditation, study of the Word and simply enjoying our loving relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Of course there is the element of rest, cessation, this is a physical rest, mental rest and emotional rest. A time to put the “cares of life”, the normal routines of the day on pause and allow the times of refreshing to come from the presence of the Lord.

The Father can minister and revive the trichotomy (body, soul, and spirit) of every one of us. The Sabbath is an opportunity to rehearse for that rest that remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9). It is an intentional act of obedience that allows us to get in and stay in sync with the rhythm of God’s created order.

Remember, the Lord’s Sabbath is an expression of God’s love for mankind. The gift of God. The Sabbath was made for the man. Let us find great delight in that which the Father has created for us. Isn’t it just like God to give us a gift and then be the essence, the very center and substance that makes the gift worth having?

Selah!

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** All Hebrew and Greek word definitions are from the Strong's Concordance

*** All Scripture texts are from the King James Version of the Bible