

# The Sabbath

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Commanded for Christians *Today!*

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## **The Sabbath Commanded for Christians Today**

The Bible teaches that the seventh day of the week is the true Sabbath, from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. On this day Christians must rest from their labors, following the commands and example of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and the New Testament Church.

### **Christ Created the Seventh-Day Sabbath**

Jesus Christ was the God of the Old Testament. Of Him, John writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. . ." (John 1:1–3, 14). The Apostle Paul writes, "For by him [Christ] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Colossians 1:16). Jesus Christ was the Creator (Ephesians 3:9, Hebrews 1:10; 2:10). He was the God of the Old Testament. "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And all did eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1Corinthians 10:1–4).

As such, Christ created the Sabbath day. "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" (Genesis 2:2–3). The Sabbath was made by Christ for man's benefit. "And he [Christ] said unto them, 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). The true Lord's Day is the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, because it was the day that was created by Christ as a day of rest. The only day ever sanctified in the Bible as a day of rest is Saturday, the seventh day of the week.

### **Sunday—the Lord's Day?**

Catholic scholars readily admit that it was church authority and not the Bible that designated Sunday, the first day of the week, as a day of worship. In 1893, Cardinal Gibbons candidly acknowledged that the Church had changed the seventh day of the week, as a day of worship, to Sunday, the first day of the week. When asked if Christ changed the day, the Cardinal said no. The Catholic position was well stated by Catholic priest T. Enright, who

said that Protestants have no right to observe Sunday since it was the Catholic Church alone that changed the day of rest from Saturday to Sunday. Furthermore, he said, everyone knows Sunday is the first day of the week, while Saturday is the seventh day, the day consecrated as a day of rest. Sunday is not the Sabbath of the Bible or of the record of time, according to the priest. When Protestants keep Sunday, he added, they are acknowledging the power of the Catholic Church.

Even leading Protestants admit that Sunday, as a day of worship, is not authorized in the Bible. For example, Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, a Baptist, admitted that while there is a Biblical command to keep the Sabbath day and not Sunday, the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh day to the first day of the week. But, in answer to the question, Where is the record of such a transfer? he said it is not found in the New Testament. Dr. R. W. Dale, a British theologian and Congregationalist, said that the Sabbath was founded on a specific, divine command, but that we can plead no such a command for the obligation to observe Sunday.

References to the first day of the week in the New Testament show that Sunday is always a workday. Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, 9, Luke 24:1, and John 20:1 all refer to early Sunday morning when the women came to Jesus' tomb for the purpose of preparing His body for burial—hard work, to say the least. John 20:19 shows the disciples were hiding for fear of the Jews; they decidedly were not having a worship service. Acts 20:7–8 says the disciples gathered to break bread and Paul continued his speech until midnight. This was the first day of the week because Biblical days begin and end with the going down of the sun. The occasion here was the gathering for a meal on Saturday evening, then Paul preaching to them until midnight. Notice that the following day Paul walked from Troas to Assos, a distance of 19½ miles (vv. 11, 13–14). Clearly, this first day of the week was a workday. In 1 Corinthians 16:2 the brethren are admonished to "lay by him in store" on the first day of the week. Notice verse one, this is a collection for the saints. Scriptural references show collections were often made to needy saints and verses 3–4 show this collection was to be taken to Jerusalem. What Paul had in mind was that he and his company would take this collection to the needy saints in Jerusalem. See Acts 11:29–30 for an example of what was done in times of need. What the saints needed was food, not money from a Sunday morning collection plate. Paul admonished the brethren to "lay by him in store," that is, to store up at his own home what he planned to donate. It would then be brought to Paul when he arrived in Corinth. But why on the first day of the week? Obviously, Paul intended to arrive at Corinth during the early part of the week and to leave with or send the collection before the following weekend. Paul wanted no delay to hold up the delivery of this food to the needy brethren. This text, as well as all the above texts, shows the first day of the week is a workday, not a day of worship.

## Sabbath Revealed to Israel

The Sabbath was revealed to man at Creation. While the pre-Flood world as a whole rejected the Sabbath, there were some few who were obedient to God. Noah is a case in point. In the post-Flood world we find that Abraham was obedient to God's Law. God said, ". . . Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). After about a 250-year period of slavery in Egypt, the children of Israel had lost all knowledge of God's Sabbath. It was necessary for God to reveal the true Sabbath to them. Exodus 16 tells us:

Then said the LORD unto 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. 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. . . . 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 congregation 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. . . . Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. . . . 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. So the people rested on the seventh day (Exodus 16:4–5,22–23, 26, 29–30).

This command not only shows that God set aside the seventh day as the Sabbath, but that the sixth day, or Friday, is the preparation day.

When we come to Exodus 20, we find the Sabbath included in the Ten Commandments. "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: 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" (Exodus 20:8–11). The Israelites were commanded to "remember" the Sabbath day because it had been previously revealed to them and because the world as a whole had chosen to forget.

The command to keep the Sabbath is repeated many times in the Old Testament:

Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed (Exodus 23:12).

Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest (Exodus 34:21).

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death (Exodus 35:2).

Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. . . . Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:3, 30)

Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings. (Leviticus 23:3)

Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary. . . . (Leviticus 26:2)

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 thy maidservant may rest as well as thou (Deuteronomy 5:12–14).

Affirmations and admonitions to keep the Sabbath are seen in the following:

And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day. . . . (Nehemiah 10:31).

In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 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. And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates

should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath. . . . (Nehemiah 13:15–19).

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).

## **The Sabbath—A Sign**

The Sabbath was given as a sign to identify God's true people. ". . . Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore: for it is holy unto you. . . . Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. 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" (Exodus 31:13–17). Notice, not only is the Sabbath a sign between God and His people, it was given as a perpetual covenant for all generations. The notion that the Sabbath was given to the "Jews," while "Gentiles" keep Sunday as the Lord's Day, has no Biblical support. The *only day* ever commanded in the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, as a day of worship is Saturday, the seventh day of the week! Christians, whether Israelites (twelve tribes, not Jews only) or Gentiles, have only one day commanded as a weekly Sabbath. This is Saturday, which follows Friday, the preparation day.

It was because the Israelites refused to keep this identifying sign that they were driven into national captivity and lost their identity. Read it in Ezekiel: "Wherefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. . . . I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: . . . they polluted my sabbaths. . . . I lifted up mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries (Ezekiel 20:10–12, 19–21, 23). Sabbath-breaking became one of the national sins of the people of Israel. The Sabbath was given by Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament. If Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), then that same Sabbath command is in force today. And, indeed, Sabbath-breaking is one

of our great national sins today, just as in the days of old. We are a nation that has lost sight of the true God, just as Israel of old lost sight of God.

### **Importance of the Sabbath**

So important is the Sabbath that the Bible tells us:

Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain. . . . (Isaiah 56:2–7).

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 [pursuit, ardour, affair, matter, delight], nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (Isaiah 58:13–14).

And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcases of the men that have transgressed against me. . . . (Isaiah 66:23–24).

### **Importance of God's Law**

The Sabbath is part of the Ten Commandments—the Law of God. What does the Bible say about God's Law?

The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure. They stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. . . . The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments (Psalm 111:7–8, 10).

Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever (Psalms 119:160).

Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. . . . For we know that the law is spiritual. . . . (Romans 7:12, 14)

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward (Psalm 19:7–11).

As noted earlier, Jesus Christ was the God who gave this law. What does the Bible say about the God of the Old Testament? "And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. For I am the Lord, I change not: therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed" (Malachi 3:5–6). Out of His mercy to Jacob, He does not consume the sons of Jacob, though as verse 5 shows, there is much evil among them that will be judged. Yes, indeed, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

## **Christ Kept the Sabbath**

There is no doubt from the New Testament that Christ kept the seventh-day Sabbath. This tells us two things: (1) Christ set the example for us to follow and, (2) time has not been lost, so that the seventh day of the week today is the same seventh day of the week that Christ kept. All knowledgeable people know that the seventh day of the week today is the same seventh day of the week given at Creation. Since Christ did not sin, He kept the very day He ordained at the time man was created. Notice Luke 4:16. "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." Not only did He attend services, He participated in them. Notice another example: "And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that he entered

into the synagogue and taught. . ." (Luke 6:6). And another: "And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath" (Luke 13:10). If that same Christ is living in you, He will be keeping, in you, that same Sabbath.

The religious leaders were aware that Jesus kept the Sabbath and the synagogue was one place where they watched Him in order to find fault. See one of these incidents in Luke 6:6–11. Also see Luke 13:11–17. On another occasion the Pharisees accused Jesus of Sabbath-breaking because some of His disciples ate a small amount of grain while walking through a field (Matthew 12:1–8). Jesus showed them the error of their thinking and stated that *He* was the Lord of the Sabbath. The implication is clear. Since He created the Sabbath He certainly knew how it should be properly kept. He summarized their problem in Mark 7: ". . . Well has Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. . . . Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition" (Mark 7:6–9). In John 9, the Pharisees accused Jesus of not keeping the Sabbath because he healed a blind man on that day—again, a demonstration of their inability to perceive the true purpose of the Sabbath day and to keep it properly. They added so many restrictions that they made the Sabbath a burden rather than the joy God intended His people to receive (Matthew 23:4). Jesus set the perfect example. He taught that the Sabbath was to be a day of rest and spiritual rejuvenation, a day on which to do good to others as opportunity arose. Jesus came to magnify the Law and make it honorable (Isaiah 42:21). He said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to [fill full]. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17–18).

### **Other New Testament Examples**

Church historians admit that the pagan element which crept into the visible church could not repudiate the Law of God from Paul's writings. They clearly recognized that Paul taught obedience to the commandments and Law of God. In fact, segments of the church in Asia Minor kept the Sabbath as late as the fourth century. A number of examples in the book of Acts show that Paul kept the Sabbath. Notice for example Acts 13. "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). If Paul were the apostle who supposedly repudiated the Law of God, what was he doing there on the Sabbath day? The very act of attending a Sabbath meeting proves Paul kept the Sabbath, for to have attended while not believing in the Sabbath would have generated endless confusion among the believers, and would have set a bad example as well. Sabbath-keepers today do not attend Sunday church services. And neither did Paul. In Acts 13:15–41, Paul preached to the congregation in the synagogue, 13:42. If Gentile believers are to keep Sunday, while the Sabbath is for the Jews,

they certainly missed a golden opportunity to repudiate the Sabbath. "And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. . . . And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God" (Acts 13:42, 44).

Another example of Paul keeping the Sabbath is found in Acts 17. "And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures" (Acts 17:2). What could be more clear? Paul kept the Sabbath. In Acts 18 we read: "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. . . . and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:1, 4, 8). Here we find Gentiles attending the synagogue on the Sabbath day, who believed and were baptized. So, here is proof New Testament Christians kept the seventh-day Sabbath.

What did Paul say about himself? "Be ye [imitators] of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). "Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample" (Philippians 3:17). "Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you" (Philippians 4:9). What did Paul say about the Gentile churches? "For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus. . ." (1 Thessalonians 2:14). The churches of God in Judaea kept the Sabbath. And so did the Gentile churches.

It is often argued there is no New Testament command to keep the Sabbath. Is this true? In Hebrews 4, Paul is comparing the rest Israel received upon entering the promised land to the rest Christians will receive in the Kingdom of God. The word "rest" in verses 1–8 is the Greek word *katapausis* (καταπαυσις), which means "a place of resting down" and symbolizes the promised land or salvation. But notice verse 9. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." "Rest" here is not *katapausis* (καταπαυσις), "a place of resting down." It is *sabbatismos* (σαββατισμος), which means "keeping the sabbath." Paul is saying here that since the Israelites depicted a type or example of salvation when they entered the promised land, the antitype or final fulfillment will take place when Christians enter into the Kingdom of God. Since the Kingdom of God is represented by a one-thousand-year sabbatical rest from sin, the weekly Sabbath day is a type or representation of this rest. Therefore, there remains the necessity for Christians to keep the Sabbath today. Thus, Paul says, "There remaineth therefore the keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God." Indeed, there *is* a New Testament command to keep the Sabbath. The translators of the Authorized Version were not accurate in translating *sabbatismos* (σαββατισμος) as "a keeping of the Sabbath," as they should have been. But this is the real meaning of Hebrews 4:9. God's Sabbath is to be kept today. It is a type and representation of the Millennial rest to come soon in the future.

It is not without reason we believe that from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, the seventh day of the week, is the Sabbath of the Lord our God. On this day we must rest from our labors, following the commands and example of the Apostle Paul, the New Testament Church, and Jesus Christ.

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