

# Christ and the Sabbath



## SABBATH—APRIL 26

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Genesis 2:1–3; Hebrews 1:1–3; Acts 13:14; Mark 2:23–28; John 5:1–9; Isaiah 65:17.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘The Sabbath day was made for man. Man was not made for the Sabbath day. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’ ” (Mark 2:27, 28, NlrV).

**MANY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES KEEP SUNDAY AS THE DAY OF REST AND WORSHIP.** (But most of the Sunday keepers do not really rest on Sunday.) Sunday “keeping” is so common among modern Christians that many believe the day to be the true Christian Sabbath.

This was not always so. As an outgrowth of the Jewish faith, Christianity did not remove at first all of the symbols of its parent religion, including the seventh-day Sabbath. For a while, the only Bible that early Christians had to guide them was the Old Testament. So, it is no surprise, then, that another day of worship was not introduced into Christianity until more than a hundred years after Christ went to heaven. Furthermore, it was not until the fourth century, with Emperor Constantine's<sup>1</sup> law, that Sunday became the accepted day of worship of the predominant (largest) church. Unfortunately, even after the Protestant movement in the 1400s and 1500s, almost all Christianity has followed Sunday keeping while the Bible continues to teach that the seventh day remains the true Sabbath.

This week's lesson will cover Christ and the Sabbath.

### DEFINITIONS

1. Constantine—the eastern Roman emperor who established a law making Sunday the day of worship for all Christians throughout his empire instead of the biblical, seventh-day Sabbath.

## THE JEWISH SABBATH? (Exodus 20:8–11)

Many people speak of the seventh day as the “Jewish Sabbath.” But the Bible shows that the Sabbath came before the Jews by many hundreds of years. The Sabbath’s roots go back to Creation itself.

Genesis 2:1–3 declares that after God had completed His work of creating the earth in six days, He rested on the seventh day. Then He “blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (NIV). This clearly shows the high place of the Sabbath in God’s creation. In addition to the blessing, the Sabbath was also made holy. In other words, God added some of His own good points to this monument in time.

**Compare<sup>2</sup> the two Sabbath commandments in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. How might these verses be used to support the theory<sup>3</sup> that the seventh-day Sabbath is not only for Jews?**

The most important difference between the two commandments is the reason for Sabbath keeping. Exodus points to Genesis 2:3 for the fact that God both “blessed” and made “holy” the Sabbath day. But Deuteronomy 5:15 points to Israel’s freedom from Egyptian slavery as a reason for Sabbath keeping. From the Deuteronomy verse, many believe the Sabbath is only for the Jews. But this argument totally ignores the fact that the Exodus verse points to Creation, when God established Sabbath for all people.

We know that Deuteronomy 5:15 points to deliverance (freedom; rescue) from Egypt. This is also a symbol of the salvation we have in Christ. So, the Sabbath is a symbol of both Creation and Redemption.<sup>4</sup> These two themes are linked with each other in the Bible (Hebrews 1:1–3; Colossians 1:13–20; John 1:1–14). Because Jesus is our Creator, He also is our Redeemer.<sup>5</sup> And the seventh-day Sabbath is a symbol of His work as both.

**Anyone can claim to be resting in Christ. In your own experience, how does keeping the seventh-day Sabbath help you to find that rest?**

# SABBATH CREATION

The Sabbath’s “roots” go back to Creation itself.



The Sabbath is a symbol of both Creation and Redemption.

### DEFINITIONS

2. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.
3. theory—an idea that has not been proved.
4. Redemption—the payment God made for sin by sending His Son to die in our place on the cross.
5. Redeemer—Jesus paid the price for our sins with His death on the cross.

## A TIME FOR REST AND WORSHIP (Luke 4:16)



The true meaning of rest is  
“stop” or “pause.”

According to Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2, Christ was directly involved in the creation of earth before He came into this world. These verses tell that all created things came into life *through* Him. Paul further explains that Christ had a part in creating “invisible [unseen]” things (Colossians 1:16, 17, NIV). These things would, of course, include the Sabbath. Christ was the center of Creation. When He was changed into human flesh, He surrendered Himself to His Father’s commandments (John 15:10). As earlier lessons show, Jesus did not accept certain traditions. So, He used every opportunity to correct religious actions that did not follow God’s will. If Jesus had planned to remove the Sabbath commandment, He had plenty of opportunities to do just that.

Most of the Sabbath verses in the Old Testament speak of the Sabbath as a day of rest. The understanding of “rest” in many modern languages may lead some to believe that the Sabbath should be spent sleeping and relaxing. We surely can enjoy these activities on the Sabbath. But the true meaning of rest is “stop” or “pause.” The Sabbath is a time when we can take a break from the routine work of the first six days and spend special time with the Creator God.

By the time of Christ, the Jews were holding a weekly religious worship service on the Sabbath (read Luke 4:16). Those who lived in Jerusalem would attend special prayer services in the temple, where the “church” service was different from what it was on the other days of the week. Jews who lived in other parts of the world developed the *synagogue* (temple; a place of worship) as a place of social gathering and worship. On Sabbaths, as long as there were ten males (also called a *minyan* in Hebrew), a religious worship service could take place.

## DEFINITIONS

6. Resurrection—return to life from the dead; most Christians use Jesus’ resurrection on Sunday as the reason for keeping the Sabbath on Sunday instead of on the seventh day (Saturday).

**What do the following verses tell us about Sabbath keeping among the earliest Christians? What does this tell us about those who claim that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in honor of the Resurrection?<sup>6</sup> Acts 13:14, 42, 44; Acts 16:13; Acts 17:2; Acts 18:4; Hebrews 4:9.**

Given their Jewish roots, it was only natural for early Christians to worship on the seventh day of the week as the Old Testament commanded. Almost twenty years after Jesus’ return to heaven, Paul’s custom still was to attend a synagogue on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2). So, there is no proof from the Bible that the first Christians kept Sunday instead of Sabbath.

## A TIME FOR ENJOYMENT (Mark 2:27, 28)

Many who claim to keep the Sabbath do not always understand what keeping it really means. As some of the Pharisees<sup>7</sup> did in Jesus' time, people even today have imprisoned the Sabbath behind walls of strict rules. Others have almost made it a day no different from any other. The Sabbath is supposed to be a delight, not a burden. But it is still a day to be kept holy.

During the time when Jesus walked this earth, some of the religious leaders had added 39 other commandments to the Sabbath. They reasoned that if people could keep the 39 laws, then the Sabbath would be perfectly kept. As a result of these well-meaning laws, the Sabbath—which was intended to be a joy—became a yoke (burden) to many.

**Carefully read Mark 2:23–28. Why did the disciples pluck grain? Does the verse show that Jesus took part with the disciples? What Bible laws were being broken, if any?**

Jesus and His hungry disciples were walking through a field one Sabbath. The disciples decided to satisfy their hunger by plucking grain. It was not their field, but their actions were allowed under the law of Moses (read Deuteronomy 23:25). But the Pharisees interpreted it as breaking another law of Moses that did not permit plowing and harvesting on the Sabbath (read Exodus 34:21). It seems that Jesus did not eat the grain. But He took the time to defend the disciples' actions. Jesus reminded the Pharisees that even David and his men had eaten the “forbidden” sanctuary bread when they were hungry.

In Mark 2:27, 28, Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for the good of humans. In other words, the Sabbath was not made to be worshiped, but rather to give opportunities for worship. As God's gift to all humans, the Sabbath is not meant to make people suffer but to give rest and freedom. It is truly a way to experience our rest and freedom in Christ.

**What are some things that you can do on the Sabbath that you cannot do easily on the other days of the week? Think through this question, and bring your answers to class on Sabbath.**



**The Sabbath is supposed to be a delight, not a burden.**

### DEFINITIONS

7. Pharisee—a member of an ancient (from a long time ago) Jewish group that followed Jewish religious laws and teachings very strictly.

**A TIME FOR HEALING (Luke 13:16)**

When God created the world, He announced that everything was “very good” (Genesis 1:31, NIV). No doubt it was perfect in every way. But when sin arrived, the creation was spoiled by evil. Humans were created in the image of God. But they became sick and died. We often say that death is a part of life. But death is really not a part of life. Death was never meant to be something that we experience.

When we remember God’s original plan for humans, we should not be surprised that some of Jesus’ most dramatic healing miracles took place on the Sabbath.

**Review the stories in Mark 3:1–6; Luke 13:10–17; John 5:1–9; and John 9:1–14. What lessons do these miracles teach about the true purpose of the Sabbath?**

Each of the Sabbath-healing miracles is wonderful and shows the true meaning of the Sabbath. Before Jesus healed the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1–6), He asked a question with an obvious answer, “‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?’ ” (Mark 3:4, NKJV). If a person has an opportunity to relieve suffering on the day of freedom, why should he not do it? In fact, the miracle with the woman who had a bent back powerfully shows the healing purpose of the Sabbath (Luke 13:10–17). When He was criticized for the healing, Jesus said, “ ‘This woman is a member of Abraham’s family line. But Satan has kept her disabled for 18 long years.’ ” Then He asked, “ ‘Shouldn’t [should not] she be set free on the Sabbath day from what was keeping her disabled?’ ” (Luke 13:16, NIV).

The theme of freedom is also present in the story of the healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda who had been sick for 38 years (John 5:1–9). It is also present in another story about the healing of the man born blind (John 9:1–14). In answer to the Pharisees’ charge that Jesus broke the Sabbath with His healing miracles, He reminded them, “ ‘My father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working’ ” (John 5:17, NIV). If God did not want the healing to happen, then it would not have happened. When it comes to lessening human suffering, God does not rest.

**What should we learn from the mistakes of these religious leaders about how some of our own ideas can keep us from understanding even the clearest of truths?**



### A NEW CREATION (Isaiah 65:17)

Sabbath reminds us of God’s creative ability and also points to His promises of healing people. Every time a person was healed on the Sabbath, the promise of eternal restoration<sup>8</sup> was repeated. In its own special way, the Sabbath reaches back to earth’s earliest history and stretches forward to our future fate. Again, we can say that the Sabbath points both to Creation and to Redemption.

God created this world once already. Due to sin, His creation has been stained. But this stain will not last forever. A key (important) part of the plan of salvation is restoration—not just of the earth. But even more important, people who are made in His image will be restored (returned) to that image and will live on the new earth. The same God who made the first earth will make it new again. And His work is celebrated every seventh day. (Think about how important remembering our creation must be since we are commanded to do it once a week in a special way.)

**Read Isaiah 65:17; Isaiah 66:22; 2 Peter 3:9–13; Revelation 21:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; and Revelation 21:5. What message does each verse have that can be connected with the meaning of the Sabbath?**

The Sabbath “announces that He [Jesus] created all things in heaven and in earth. All things are held together by Him. He also is the head of the church. By His power we are brought back to God. . . . The Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And the Sabbath is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying [making holy] power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 288, 289.

**What useful things can you do to let the power of God sanctify you? What choices do you make every day that either help or slow down your growth in Christ?**

#### DEFINITIONS

8. restoration—the return to original condition; for example, the earth will be renewed and believers who have been faithful will be renewed too.

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “From the very beginning of the great controversy [war] in heaven, Satan has been trying very hard to overthrow the law of God. To succeed in this purpose, Satan started his rebellion [fight] against the Creator. He was cast out of heaven, but he has continued the same war upon the earth. To deceive men and cause them to break God’s law is his stubborn goal. Whether Satan succeeds in throwing out the whole law or destroying part of it, the result will be the same. A person who breaks God’s law in one part or all of it shows that he or she is against it. His or her influence and example are on sin’s side. And he or she becomes ‘guilty of all.’ James 2:10.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 582.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Look at the Ellen G. White statement you just read. It is a fuller explanation of the point made in the introduction to this quarter. How does the Sabbath and what has happened to the Sabbath in the Christian world help us to understand Satan’s attack against the law of God?
- 2 In the following verses, Jesus is accused of breaking the Sabbath: Mark 3:2; Luke 13:14; John 5:18; John 9:16. Review Exodus 20:8–11 and study what He is being accused of. What do you say to those who claim that these verses give proof that Jesus broke the Sabbath?
- 3 In class, go over your answer to the final question at the end of Tuesday’s study. What are some things that the Sabbath frees you up to do that you might not be able to do during the week because of worldly duties and other work or cares?
- 4 Review your own Sabbath experience. Is the Sabbath for you a day of rest and freedom? Or is it a day of sadness, slavery, and stress? How can you learn to enjoy the Sabbath, to make it a delight? Remember what Isaiah says: “ ‘Do not work on the Sabbath day. Do not do just anything you want on my holy day. Make the Sabbath a day you can enjoy. Honor my holy day. Do not work on it. Do not do just anything you want to. Do not talk about things that are worthless’ ” (Isaiah 58:13, NIV).