

Christ *and the* Sabbath



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:1–3, Heb. 1:1–3, Acts 13:14, Mark 2:23–28, John 5:1–9, Isa. 65:17.*

Memory Text: “‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV*).

The vast majority of Christian denominations observe Sunday as the day of “rest” and worship (even though the vast majority of Sunday keepers don’t really rest on Sunday). Sunday “keeping” is so prevalent among modern Christians that many believe the day to be the “Christian Sabbath.”

This was not always the case. On the contrary, as a continuation of the Israelite faith, Christianity did not discard all of the symbols of its parent religion, including the seventh-day Sabbath. For a time, the only Bible that early Christians had to guide them was the Old Testament. No wonder, then, that the issue of an alternative day of worship was not introduced into Christianity until more than a century after Christ ascended to heaven. Furthermore, it was not until the fourth century, with the edict of Constantine, that Sunday observance became the policy of the dominant church. Unfortunately, even after the Protestant Reformation, almost all Christianity has adhered to keeping Sunday, despite the Bible teaching that the seventh day remains the true Sabbath.

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

* *Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 3.*

The Jewish Sabbath? *(Exod. 20:8–11)*

Although many refer to the seventh day as the “Jewish Sabbath,” the Bible reveals that the Sabbath predates the Jews by many centuries. Its roots go back to the Creation itself.

Genesis 2:1–3 declares that after God had completed His acts of creation in six days, He rested on the seventh day and then “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 applied some of His own qualities to this monument in time.

Compare the two Sabbath commandments in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. In what ways do these relate to the theory that the Sabbath is not only for Jews?

The most notable difference between the two commandments is the rationale for Sabbath observance. Exodus makes a direct reference to Genesis 2:3 as it elevates the fact that God both “blessed” and “made holy” the Sabbath day. On the other hand, Deuteronomy 5:15 points to Israel’s divine deliverance from Egyptian bondage as being a rationale for Sabbath keeping. On the basis of the Deuteronomy text, many believe the Sabbath is only for the Jews. However, this argument totally ignores the fact that the Exodus text points to the Creation, when God established Sabbath for all humanity.

Furthermore, the Deuteronomy 5:15 reference to deliverance from Egypt is symbolic of the salvation we have in Christ. Hence, the Sabbath is a symbol not only of Creation but also of Redemption, two themes that are linked with each other in the Bible (*Heb. 1:1–3, Col. 1:13–20, John 1:1–14*). Only by the fact that Jesus is our Creator could He also be our Redeemer, 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?

A Time for Rest and Worship *(Luke 4:16)*

According to Colossians 1:16 and Hebrews 1:2, the preincarnate Christ was directly involved in the creation process. These texts declare that all created things came into existence through Him. Paul further expresses that Christ had a part in creating “invisible” things (*Col. 1:16, 17*), which would, of course, include the Sabbath. Although Christ was central in the creative process, when He was transformed into human flesh, He subjected Himself to His Father’s commandments (*John 15:10*). As earlier lessons showed, Jesus was opposed to certain traditions and used every opportunity to correct religious behavior that was not grounded in the will of God. If Jesus had intended to abolish the Sabbath commandment, He had plenty of opportunities to do just that.

Most of the Sabbath texts 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 generally relaxing. While we can definitely enjoy these activities on the Sabbath, the true meaning of *rest* is “cessation,” “stop,” or “pause.” The Sabbath is a time when we can take a break from the routine labor of the first six days and spend special time with the Creator.

By the time of Christ, the Jews were holding a weekly divine worship service on the Sabbath (*see Luke 4:16*). Those who lived in Jerusalem would attend special prayer services in the temple, where the liturgy 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 as a place of social gathering and worship. On Sabbaths, as long as a minimum of ten males was present (a *minyan*), a divine worship service could take place.

What do the following texts inform us about Sabbath keeping among the earliest Christians? What does this tell us about those who claim the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in honor of the resurrection? *Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4; Heb. 4:9.*

Given their Jewish roots, it was only natural for early Christians to worship on the day prescribed in the Old Testament. Yet, almost twenty years after the ascension of Jesus, it was still Paul’s “custom” to attend a synagogue on the Sabbath (*Acts 17:2*). Thus, no biblical evidence shows 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 Sabbath keeping entails. As did some of the Pharisees in Jesus' time, people even today have imprisoned the Sabbath behind rigid walls of rules and regulations (while others have almost made it a day no different than 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 surrounded the Sabbath with 39 other commandments. They reasoned that if people could keep the 39 laws, then the Sabbath would be perfectly kept. As a result of this well-intentioned law-making, the Sabbath—which was intended to be a joy—did, indeed, become a yoke to many.

Carefully read Mark 2:23–28. Why did the disciples pluck grain? Does the text indicate that Jesus participated with the disciples? What biblical laws were being violated, if any?

As Jesus and His hungry disciples walked through a field one Sabbath, the disciples decided to satisfy their hunger by plucking grain. Although it was not their field, their actions were permissible under the law of Moses (*see Deut. 23:25*), even if the Pharisees interpreted it as a violation of another Mosaic law that forbade plowing and harvesting on the Sabbath (*see Exod. 34:21*). Apparently, Jesus did not partake of the grain; nonetheless, 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 hungry.

In Mark 2:27, 28, Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humans, not vice versa. In other words, the Sabbath was not made *to be* worshiped, but rather to provide opportunities *for* worship. As God's gift to *all* humans, the Sabbath is not meant to oppress but to provide release and liberation. 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 can't so easily do other days of the week? Think through this question, and bring your answers to class on Sabbath.

A Time for Healing *(Luke 13:16)*

When God created the world, He pronounced that everything was “very good” (*Gen. 1:31*), no doubt perfect in every way. However, with the advent of sin, the creation has been corrupted with evil, an impact seen everywhere. Humans, though created in the image of God, became subject to sickness, deterioration, and death. We often say that death is part of life; death, though, is the negation of life, not part of it. Death was never meant to be something that we experience.

Given God’s original plan for humanity, it is no surprise that some of Jesus’ most dramatic healing miracles took place on the Sabbath.

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

Each of the Sabbath-healing miracles is spectacular and serves to demonstrate the true meaning of Sabbath. Before Jesus healed the man with the withered hand (*Mark 3:1–6*), He asked the rhetorical question, “‘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 liberation, why shouldn’t he do it? In fact, the miracle with the woman who had a bent back powerfully demonstrates the liberating purpose of the Sabbath (*Luke 13:10–17*). When criticized for the healing, Jesus asked, “‘Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?’” (*Luke 13:16, NIV*).

The theme of liberation is also present in the accounts of the healing of the man by the pool of Bethesda, who had been sick for thirty-eight years (*John 5:1–9*), and the healing of the man born blind (*John 9:1–14*). In response 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 allow the healing, it would not have happened. When it comes to relieving human misery, God does not rest.

What should we learn from the mistakes of these religious leaders about how preconceived notions can so blind us to even the most obvious of truths?

A New Creation

Sabbath not only reminds us of God’s creative ability, but it points to His restorative promises. Indeed, with every healing of a person on the Sabbath, the promise of eternal restoration was powerfully reinforced. In its own unique way, the Sabbath provides a view that reaches back to earth’s earliest history and stretches forward to humanity’s eventual destiny. Again, we can say that the Sabbath points both to Creation and to Redemption.

God created this world once already. Due to sin, however, His creation has been defiled, but this defiling will not last forever. A key element of the plan of salvation is restoration—not just of the earth but, even more important, of people, beings made in His image who will be restored to that image and who will live on the new earth. The same God who made the first earth, whose work we celebrate every seventh day, will create the earth again. (Think about how important remembering our creation must be that we are commanded to do it once a week in a special way.)

Read the following texts. What message does each one have that can be linked to the meaning of the Sabbath?

Isa. 65:17 _____

Isa. 66:22 _____

2Pet. 3:9–13 _____

Rev. 21:1 _____

2 Cor. 5:17 _____

Gal. 6:15 _____

Rev. 21:5 _____

The Sabbath “declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God. . . . The Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 288, 289.

What practical things can you do to allow the power of God to sanctify you? That is, what choices do you make on a daily basis that either help or hinder this creative process in you?

Further Study: “From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan’s purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God’s law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends ‘in one point,’ manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes ‘guilty of all.’ James 2:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Look at the Ellen G. White statement in Friday’s study, a fuller rendition of the reference used in the introduction to this quarter. How does the Sabbath and what has happened to the Sabbath in Christendom help us to understand Satan’s attack on the law of God?
- 2 In the following texts (*Mark 3:2, Luke 13:14, John 5:18, 9:16*) Jesus is charged with breaking the Sabbath. Review Exodus 20:8–11 and evaluate the merit of this charge. What do you say to those who claim that these passages provide evidence that Jesus broke the Sabbath?
- 3 In class go over your answer to the final question at the end of Tuesday’s lesson. That is, what are some things that the Sabbath frees you up to do that on other days of the week you might not be able to do because of worldly obligations?
- 4 Review your own Sabbath experience. Is the Sabbath for you a day of liberation, rest, and freedom or a day of foreboding, bondage, and stress? How can you learn to enjoy the Sabbath, to make it a delight, as we are told to do in this verse: “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” (*Isa. 58:13*)?

Sharing the News

I've done a lot of things I'm not proud of. Although my mother didn't attend any particular church, she prayed for me. And because of her prayers, God took hold of my life. I was in the army when I first felt God's presence leading me. I began visiting churches, from large, influential ones to some pretty strange ones.

One day as I walked down the street in the capital city of Bulgaria, I saw a sign for a church I had never heard of. I felt the Lord pointing me to it, so I stepped inside and sat down to listen to the pastor's sermon. It was a Seventh-day Adventist church. The members' warm welcome touched my heart. After the service, I went searching for a Bible.

I attended the Adventist church occasionally, but I still drank and visited discos. One day while drunk, I broke into a car and was arrested. I realized that drinking would lead me to prison—or worse—so I quit.

I asked the Adventist pastor to study the Bible with me, and a year later I was baptized.

One day two members of the church invited me to visit a man they knew. I learned that this man, Simon, was a former leader in the Mafia. He was an alcoholic and was paralyzed. The men introduced me as a friend of theirs and a former alcoholic. Simon perked up and started asking me pointed questions such as how God led me to Himself and the Adventist Church and how He saved me from alcoholism. Before I left, I gave him a couple of small books to read.

Two weeks later, I visited Simon again, this time alone. Simon had read the two books I had given him and had started reading the Bible. He asked me question after question and wouldn't let me go. I suggested that we study the Bible together.

It wasn't logical, but I started with Daniel 2. I learned that Simon knew a lot about world history and the countries of the prophecies included in Daniel. He was excited by the study and later told me that he had studied my notes and his history books until two-thirty in the morning. "And it all fits!" he said, amazed.

Simon stopped drinking and smoking and is recovering from his paralysis. Now he no longer needs his wheelchair. He has given his life to Jesus and is looking forward to baptism.

I thank God for my mother's prayers and for God, who saw potential in an alcoholic whose life was going nowhere. And thank you for giving to mission so that others in this world can know that our wonderful Savior loves them.



KAMEN PAVLOV *shares his faith in western Bulgaria.*