**The Sabbath**

Genesis 2:2

“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.” V3 “And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it:…..

In the beginning, God took six 24-hour days to create the world and all that was in it. The Bible then declares that on the seventh day God rested (or ceased to create) from His complete work. The Bible goes on to say that God both blessed and sanctified the seventh day. The Bible clearly states this blessing and sanctification is based on the fact of the six days of creation and the fact God did not create anything on the seventh day.

Today we refer to the seventh day as the “Sabbath”. The Sabbath is a serious issue in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. For our purpose in this study, we will isolate our investigation to the various Christian groups who lay claim to the Sabbath. In so doing, we will look at the Sabbath in relation to Old Testament Israel and the Law surrounding the Sabbath.

Today the nominal Christian church takes one of three positions on the Sabbath. The first is that Christ changed the Sabbath from the seventh day (Saturday) to the 8th day (Sunday) in memorial of the resurrection and the new creation in Christ. The second view is that the Sabbath is always on the seventh day with no change from the Old Testament. They also state that the Church is not bound by the Law, and as a new creation the worship on they worship on the 1st day. The third group consists of doctrinal positions on the Sabbath which originate with modern day prophets. Their prophets’ views and “revelations” completely govern every aspect of the Church and they alone decide what is truth and what is not truth. They teach that salvation and peace with God can only be found by following them and their visions. Anyone who rejects them or worships in a time or manner different from their dictates is reduced to an apostate at best or a pagan at the worst.

Did God change the Sabbath? Did God change the “law of the Sabbath” to accommodate the modern world? Is the “Sabbath” required for salvation and peace with God? Has God sent modern “prophets” to alter or set aside the Bible? We look at these things as we proceed in our study. First we should state the rules or doctrines which will govern our study.

Sola Scriptura

First, we accept the doctrine of “Sola Scriptura”, “only the Scripture” as our base for all beliefs. That would include only the 66 books of the English Bible as it stands today. Any writings which contradict or set aside the Bible are to be rejected. Secondly, we will follow a literal interpretation of the Bible. Any attempt to “spiritualize” the text will be rejected. Third, and most important, salvation and peace with God is obtained solely by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Any attempt to diminish or add to this work will be rejected.

The first misconception about the Sabbath is the very meaning of the word. Most people think that “Sabbath” means seven. This is not true. The Hebrew word for seven is “shebiyty” and translates as seven, or as in Genesis 2 “the seventh time”. The English word “Sabbath” is a translation of three Hebrew words. It is from these we can arrive at an understanding of the word we call “Sabbath”.

The first word used in Hebrew is “Mish-Bawth”, which means to “cease or stop all forbidden things”. It is absolute in meaning and allows no exceptions. The second word, “Shab-bath” means to “desist from all things”. This word requires that a person, by act of will stops not only all physical work, but also all mental or thoughts associated with the forbidden things. The third word used is “Shab-Bawth’”. This word translates to an “intermission” and deals with time.

From the words, we can define the word Sabbath in its Biblical use. We define it as; a period of time prescribed by God, with a specific beginning and end, in which no one in the land of Israel was allowed to do any type of work. Following the definition we see that the Sabbath had to do with the work schedule allowed in Israel. This governs not only the “seventh day” but also governed the Feast Days in Israel.

The Reason for the Sabbath

In Genesis 2:2, 3, we are told that on the 7th day God rested or ceased to create, and because His work in creation was complete, God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. This relates directly to Exodus 20:8-11:

“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 shall not do any work thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, 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.”

From these passages we see the seventh day is a memorial of God’s creation. Men are being given one day in seven to cease work and refresh themselves. This is stated in Exodus 16:29; “See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore He giveth you on 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”. Although we will address the subject of Sabbath worship at length as we consider the Feasts, it should be noted here that no one is commanded to worship or attend any religious service at the Tabernacle on the “seventh day” Sabbath.

The second reason given for the Sabbath is found in Exodus 31:13: “Speak thou also unto the children of Israel saying, verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that does sanctify you.”

We see in this verse that God ties the Sabbath to the separation of Israel from all other nations. Exodus 31:16 says that the Sabbath (seventh day) is a covenant between God and Israel, and in verse 17 it says it is a sign between God and Israel forever. Also, we again see the reference to creation.

The last passage concerning a purpose for the seventh day is found in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. This passage starts as a recounting of the Law found in Exodus chapter 20. In Deuteronomy 5:15 we see a difference. The passage does not speak of creation but of their Egyptian bondage. The seventh day was a day of rest in deliverance. The labour of Egypt was without end, but God would bless the labour of six days to allow enough surplus for the seventh day. This day was to be for rest and refreshment.

From the above we can conclude the three-fold purpose for the Sabbath. They can be stated as follows;

1. A memorial of creation and the power, authority, and duty owed to God as Creator.
2. That just as God sanctified the Sabbath, He also sanctified Israel. As the seventh day was separate from the six days before, Israel was separated and apart from the nations.
3. Israel would keep the Sabbath as a memorial of God bringing them from unending labour into blessing and rest.

The Law of the Sabbath

The first mention of the seventh day Sabbath outside of Genesis is found in Exodus 16. Here it concerns God sending manna to feed the people. Manna was provided for six days. On the sixth day a double portion of manna and anything else prepared for food (Exodus 16:23) was to be used for both Friday and Saturday. They were forbidden to: one, gather anything; 2, cook or bake anything, or, 3, leave their tents. It should be noted that these restrictions are given before the Law at Sinai.

The next mention of the seventh day is found in Exodus 20:8-11. This passage is the Ten Commandments. Here we see that the people are forbidden to do any work, and this extends from master to family to servant and even to the livestock. We should also note this includes Gentiles living in the land or passing through the land. \*(See note A)

The last prohibition is found in Exodus 35:3. Here we find that no one could kindle a fire in their habitation. (This would be on or in their property. The ovens for baking were separate from the living quarters and would be included in this prohibition).

In conclusion, the Law of the Sabbath was as follows: 1) No family member, servant, non-Israelite, or livestock (camel, mule, cattle, or ox) could do any work on the Sabbath. This would include planning the next weeks work. 2) No fires or cooking was to be done on the Sabbath. 3) No one was to travel on the Sabbath. The people were to stay home. Later the Rabbi allowed that a person could not go more than 2,000 feet or 1 kilometre from their own door. 4) Anyone who broke the Sabbath was to be put to death. This included everyone with no exceptions. Even the stranger, Gentile, passing through the land was bound by the Law and its penalty.

The Four Sabbaths of Israel

In the Bible, Israel was given four separate periods of rest (to cease secular work) which were declared “Sabbaths” by God. Although there were exceptions which we will look at in detail as we proceed, the above mentioned Laws of the Sabbath applied to most Sabbaths and defiling the Sabbath meant death.

The first Sabbath is the weekly Sabbath. Every six days there was to be one day of rest. Following the Roman calendar now used in most of the world, Saturday is considered the last day of the week, and therefore the Sabbath. How this compares to the calendar in the time of Moses does not matter. After six days of work \*\*(Note B) the seventh day becomes the Sabbath. After the first seventh day the cycle should continue forever.

We can note that acts of compassion were not to be considered to be work (Matthew 12:1-14). The Lord Jesus allowed that even saving the life of an animal did not break the Sabbath.

The next Sabbaths which we see in Scripture are the Festivals of Israel. The Festivals (or Feasts) of Israel are given in order as follows: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Weeks (Pentecost), Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Booths (Tabernacles). Each of these Feasts were at a set date based on the new moon on the first day of Nisan in the calendar God gave to Israel. Because of the way the date was chosen for each Feast in its order, a Feast could begin on any day of the week. With each of these Feasts the Law of the Sabbath came into effect.

Because Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits came one after the other (Nisan 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 20, 21) and consisted of eight days total, there would be at least one seventh day in the Feasts. During this time you could have as many as four days upon which the Law of the Sabbath was in effect. We find this is the only time you could have more than two days which are governed by Sabbath Law.

The primary distinction between the regular seventh day Sabbath and the Feasts was that the Feasts had requirements that are not associated with the weekly Sabbath. Some of the requirements were that all males of 13 or older had to travel to the location of the Tabernacle, or later the Temple in Jerusalem. Also on these days, the Priests offered special sacrifices in addition to the regular offerings made daily, first at the Tabernacle and later at the Temple.

Other Feasts did not have the requirement of travel. Although there were special offerings made by the Priest at the Temple, the families stayed home and the worship required personal reflection and confession. Also, the last Feast was another memorial to the days in Egypt and wandering in the wilderness.

The Seventh Year

In Leviticus 25:2, we are introduced to the Sabbath year. For six years the Israelites were instructed to work their fields, prune their orchards, dress their vineyards, and to gather the harvest of all the land (Lev. 25:2-7). In the seventh year there was to be a Sabbath of the land. The people could not plow or sow their fields, or prune the grapes or orchards. They were also not allowed to gather in bulk anything which grew of itself. Anyone or any animal could freely gather of any field or vine what was needed for that day.

This Sabbath had a different set of laws governing it. The only thing restricted to the Israelite in the Sabbath year was working fields or vineyards. He was not allowed to harvest whatever grain or fruit came up on its own. Instead, anyone could freely take of any field or vine their daily needs.

The only other requirement for the “seventh year” was on the Feast of Tabernacles (Deu. 31:10-13). The people were to come together at a place of God’s choosing and they were to be read and instructed in the whole Law. This included all men, women, children, and Gentiles living in the land. This reading was to guarantee that following generations who did not know Egypt, the years of wandering, or Moses, would know the Law and how to obey and fear God.

Beyond the reading of the Law there were no special religious duties imposed on Israel. There were no special sacrifices or additional Feast days. The people had to keep the weekly seventh day Sabbaths as normal, and they had to keep the Sabbaths of the regular Feast days. During these Sabbaths the “Law of the Sabbath” remained in force.

The Year of Jubilee

In Leviticus 25:8-23, we read of the last Sabbath mentioned in the Scripture. After a period of seven “Sabbath years”, or 49 years, the 50th year was the Jubilee. In this year no one was allowed to plow or sow their fields. Also, it was forbidden to prune the vines or trees. With the exception of reading the Law, the Year of Jubilee was governed by the same law as any Sabbatic year.

In the 50th year all debts were cancelled, and all slaves went out free. Anyone who had sold or lost land to debt received the land back free of debt. Every loan of money or transfer of land in Israel was to be governed by the requirements of the year of Jubilee. If any of the Sabbaths of Israel could find ay association with the Church it would be this “Sabbath”. It is held in the 8th year and marks a new debt-free life for all the people of God.

I personally do not see this as some reference to the Church, but to the 8th day of the new creation found at the end of the book of Revelation. The new heaven and earth will be populated by the children of God who have no debts or burdens of the past, only an unblemished righteous future in the presence of God.

Worship

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Moses taught the Israelite to constantly keep the Word of God before his eyes (or in his mind), and bound to his hand (Deu. 11:8 God’s word was to govern all work), in order to truly worship and serve God. This has never changed. The only way to know or serve God is by His revealed Word.

Concerning worship on the Sabbaths, we see there are four different Sabbaths, and each has its own requirement. The first Sabbath to consider is the regular “seventh day” which came every week. By Law no one was to leave his place from 3 p.m. on Friday until after 9 a.m. on Sunday. No one was allowed to offer sacrifices at the Tabernacle, and later this was true of the Temple in Jerusalem. The only sacrifice allowed on the Sabbath was the Sin Offering for all Israel. At 9 a.m. every morning and 3 p.m. every afternoon a single lamb was offered. This was done every day including the Sabbaths. This was God’s gift to Man. Anyone could repent, look to the altar and that sacrifice, confess their sin and find forgiveness. We see this in Luke 18:13-14. The commands concerning these offerings can be found in Exodus 29:38-42 and Numbers 28:2-10. These were the only sacrifices on the Sabbath and were performed and witnessed.

On each of the Feast days the Law of the Sabbath was enforced concerning secular work, but the morning and evening offerings continued. Also, at set times during these holy days God commanded very specific sacrifices to be offered. On these days no other sacrifices were accepted or made.

The fact that on seventh day Sabbaths no single person could approach the Temple with his personal sacrifices demonstrates that the seventh day was not set aside for worship. Indeed, worship and service to God was then as it is now; a 24 hour, 7 day a week command for all Believers.

Who Kept the Sabbath?

In Genesis 2:1-3, we see that God rested, or ceased to create, on the seventh day. This rest refers to the act of creating “out of nothing” and to the fact that after the sixth day no new thing was called into existence. This does not infer God ceased all activity. In Hebrews 1:1-3, we see that God continually “sustains all things by the word of His power”. From the command for light until this moment, the creation is held intact by the power of the word of God.

We have no information given concerning Adam and the seventh day. There was no right or wrong nor was there any sin in the world. Keeping a Sabbath was not in the commands of God given to man in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:28-29; Genesis 2:15-17).

After the introduction of sin and death entered into creation, God judged man. He pronounced a death sentence, drove them from Eden and cursed the ground. The woman would conceive and bear children in pain, and growing food would become a labour. In all of the judgment, there is no command or statement about keeping a Sabbath. (Genesis 3:3-19) Again, we note that in God’s dealing with Cain and Abel, that although there was worship and sacrifice (Genesis 4:1-16), there is no mention of keeping a Sabbath nor in His condemnation of Cain does God say anything about a Sabbath.

In Genesis 6:1 – 9:29 we read the history of Noah. God pronounced a death sentence on the world. He said violence had filled the earth, and man’s imagination was on evil continually. At no point before the flood does the Bible indicate Noah or anyone else kept a Sabbath. After the flood God blessed Noah and his sons, established a covenant with them, and defined changes in what was allowed to man. At no point does God speak of or command any Sabbath.

Throughout the book of Genesis we see the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We see God’s covenant being made, defined, and repeated, but not one mention of any one of these people keeping or even knowing about a seventh day Sabbath.

We do not see a Sabbath of any kind until God leads Israel out of Egypt and starts the daily supply of manna (Exodus 16). From that point on, the nation of Israel, any Gentile converting to “Judaism”, or any traveller passing through the land of Israel had to keep the seventh day Sabbath and the High Sabbath (Feast days). The seventh day Sabbath was a ***perpetual covenant between God and the children of Israel (Exodus 31:16; Leviticus 24:8).***  No other people or nation was given a Sabbath nor were they commanded to keep one.

Christ Kept the Sabbath

We see in the New Testament Christ kept the Sabbath. In Mark 6:12, we see Christ teaching in the Synagogue on the Sabbath. This was 1200 years after Moses, and the people living within 2000 feet or one kilometre would come together to read the Scriptures and pray. This practice became normal during the time Israel was in bondage in Babylon. With no priests or a functioning Temple the practice is still in effect today. We should note that Christ accepted this as within Sabbath Law and read often in the Synagogue. (Mark 1:21, Luke 4:16, Luke 4:31). We also see Christ performing miracles of healing on the Sabbath in the Synagogue, (Luke 13:10-16).

Even at His death, His disciples followed Sabbath law and did not prepare His body for burial until after the Sabbath of Passover, the first day of Unleavened Bread, and the seventh day. It was dawn of the first day of the week that they came to prepare His body.

The Early Church

In the book of Acts, we see the Church come into being on the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a High Sabbath in Israel. It was always held on the first day of the week seven Sabbaths after the offering of First Fruits. In Acts 2:1, the Church was born in Jerusalem and all of its members were Jewish. In Acts chapter 3, we see the first miracle performed by an apostle, done in the Temple at Jerusalem. In Acts 9:1-2, we see Paul being given letters to purge the Synagogues of Damascus of Christian Believers. From these and other passages we see that the early Jewish Church met in and with non-believers on the Sabbath, and in the Synagogues. They maintained this until the last Jews forced them to separate. The final separation came in 70AD when God used Rome to destroy Jerusalem, the Temple, and the priesthood of Israel.

We also see in Acts that Paul, when trying to reach the Jews of Asia, went into the Synagogues of the cities. As a trained Rabbi he was allowed to teach and preach. He used this as a means to reach a new crowd of Jews. When he was expelled he would go into the houses of Gentile Believers and preach and teach there. We should note that all of the references to the Church meeting in Synagogues or on the Sabbath were before the writing of the New Testament, and the distinct revelation of the local Church away from the apostate Synagogue (and the doctrine which governed it).

In answer to the question, “did Christ change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday?”, we have to state from the Bible that the seventh day (Saturday) is unchanged. There is no evidence of any change of day. In answer to the question “is Sunday a Sabbath?”, there is no place in the book of Acts or the Epistles where any Christian is taught to keep or teach a Sabbath. In Acts chapter 15, the first Church in Jerusalem was the place of the first Church Council. In this Council, about 45AD the Apostles, including Peter and James, along with Church Elders were with Paul and Barnabas concerning the obligations of the Gentile Church under the Law of Moses. The whole chapter from verse one deals with the Church and the Law. In verse 29 we see that the Church was told to abstain from meat offered to idols; from blood; from things strangled; and to keep from fornication. No other restrictions were placed on the Church. No Sabbath is mentioned.

The Church and the Sabbath

The question is asked today about the Sabbath and the Church. There are a number of groups which teach that the Sabbath pertains to the Church. There is also division among the cults as to the degree the Law of the Sabbath is to be enforced today. Depending on the teaching of the prophets, some keep a strict Sabbath, never leaving their home. Others say that only church attendance is required and other portions of the Law can be ignored. There are several passages of Scripture which deal with this subject. We will examine each in order to determine what our obligations are to our faith.

In Exodus 20:8, we see the first command to keep the Sabbath. This command was given to Israel through Moses at Sinai. This was given before the Church was revealed or brought into existence. It should be noted that of the Ten Commandments, only the commandment to keep a seventh day Sabbath is not repeated in the New Testament.

The second passage bearing on this subject is Exodus 31:16;

“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath

throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.”

This command concerning the Sabbath states without any confusion that the “children of Israel” are to keep the Sabbath as a “perpetual covenant”. You can say you believe the Bible and change a clear statement about “Israel” and try to apply it to the “Church” made up of “Gentiles”. At no point in the Old Testament is there any Scripture to apply the Sabbath to anyone other than the nation of Israel.

In the New Testament we have the Epistles of Paul. It was given to this Apostle to reveal the Church, and the doctrine which orders our life and service. In Romans 14:1-12, the Church is instructed not to judge anyone based on dietary rules, and in Romans 14:5 we read that the Church is not to judge based on “days”. Each man is to decide the degree to which he holds one day above another Taking this chapter in context, we see that the Hebrew Law is good, but not binding on Christian Believers. We are to live in and for Christ daily, not just on one day.

The last passage we will examine is Colossians chapter 2. In Colossians 2:16 we read;

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an

holy day, or of the new moon, or of Sabbath days: Vs 17; which are a

shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

In Colossians 2:11-17, Paul warns the Church to reject the Jewish legalists who were trying to bring the Church back under Mosaic Law, and the Temple controlled by Jewish priests. In verse 16 Paul tells the Church to not allow Jewish law into the Church. He forbids the Church to adopt rules concerning meat, any holy day, (the Jewish Feast days or Sabbaths), new moons (Jewish calendar), or Sabbaths (seventh days). This is a clear statement that the Jewish law and Sabbaths are not only not binding on the Church, but to be rejected by Believers.

All must now decide either to accept the clear teaching of Paul that no Jewish Sabbath is binding on the Church, or reject the Bible as the Word of God. Any group or person who attempts to impose a “Sabbath” on any day as a requirement for salvation or for favour with God has committed heresy and is to be removed from fellowship. Anyone claiming to be a prophet who tries to impose a “Sabbath” or any Jewish law concerning the clean and unclean meats or Jewish Sabbaths has contradicted the clear teaching of the Apostles and is to be declared a false prophet. They are not to be received into the Church or allowed to teach under any conditions.

The only command given by the Lord to His Church is in I Corinthians 16:2:

“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as

God has prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come.”

This command concerns personal giving and is required to be placed in “store” on the first day of the week (Sunday). We know that this is a day of collection by the “Church”, because Paul wants all to be ready when He “comes”. This at least implies some assembly was conducted on Sunday.

Overall, we as Believers are required to regard every day as the “Lord’s day” and to serve Him and each other according to our gifts and opportunity.

\*Note A

The law concerning the seventh day Sabbath and the Sabbaths of Feast Days was absolute in its restrictions concerning work. No one in the land was allowed to do regular work. There were things which did not fall under the law against work. If an animal was in distress you could save it. Christ himself acknowledged that in the Gospels. Also, stranded travellers could “harvest” a field for a single meal on the Sabbath without breaking the law.

One other exception is found in Exodus 12:16. Here we see the people were allowed to do what was required to feed the family on the “Sabbath” of the first day of Unleavened Bread. This exception was allowed because the Day of Preparation followed by Passover proceeded the third Sabbath in a row. No leaven could be eaten from Passover until seven days were complete. This would mean each day’s meal had to be prepared fresh. Only by allowing baking on that one Sabbath could the people keep the Feast without breaking the law.

\*\*Note B

The Sabbath was a day to cease all work. Every person in Israel, along with all beasts of burden, were to be allowed one full day of rest.

In our modern world this idea has been expanded beyond what God permitted to man. If we read the Bible in a literal fashion, we would see the law of the seventh day Sabbath also commands six days of work before the Sabbath.

The emphasis on amusement in our world today flies into the face of God’s intent for man. While we don’t want to say God would not allow some leisure time, it was to be limited at best.