

## SABBATH

Exodus 20:9-11, Matthew 28:1

By Raymond White

The idea of sabbath is central to Jewish and Christian religious observance. It has its roots in the Fourth Commandment:

*Exodus 20:9 Six days shalt thou labor and do all they work :10 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. :11 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.*

### [1] WHAT IS A SABBATH?

The English word sabbath is a transliteration of the Hebrew word Shabbat, which means rest. To modern believes it means day of worship, but that was not the original idea which was rest.

*Exodus 20:9 thou shalt not do any work.*

*Deuteronomy 16:8 Six days [starting with Passover] thou shalt eat unleavened bread: and on the seventh day [first Sabbath of the year] shall be a solemn to the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work therein.*

*Psalms 95:11 Unto whom I sware in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.*

So, what is the connection between rest and worship? It's not hard to see a new nation of newly freed slaves (as the Hebrews were) wanting, more than anything else, some well deserved rest. Slaves were forced to work constantly and didn't have days off. And now God gave them a day off. Why? Because life is to be enjoyed, life is not intended to be one long string of drudgery. With all that our work demands of us, there needs to be some time for rest and relaxation, even for a slave.

But just what did ancient peoples do for entertainment? They didn't have movies and restaurants. What they did have was religious worship. That was their diversion. It is said that a change is as good as a rest, and that's true. For them, going to the temple, actually the tabernacle, was what they needed and what they sought, and over the centuries, the idea of religious worship as the alternative activity stuck.

In the Diaspora, when Jews felt a desperate longing for their homeland, they created Synagogue to keep their faith alive with religious observance. And when they returned to their homeland, Synagogue returned with them so the worship became less temple centered and more local. And that has continued to our current day so that Sabbath "rest" has become Sabbath "worship." And for some people, particularly church leaders who attend meetings on Sunday, Sabbath has become more like work than rest.

## [2] WHY A SABBATH?

This is a fair question: why bother? All that real estate is taken up by churches that are used only one day a week, and all those Sundays (or Saturdays) is time that might better be spent working — it seems so extravagant, I mean economically speaking. Why should we have a Sabbath? Because —

### [2.1] SABBATH IDENTIFIES YOU AS HOLY

That you go to church marks you as different, apart. It identifies you as a believer.

*Exodus 31:13 My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you ...that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. :14 for it is holy [apart] unto you. :16 for a perpetual covenant.*

The words holy and sanctify both mean apart. Since that Sabbath day is apart from other days, that lets the world know and reminds you that *you* are also apart.

But does Sabbath still matter today? In **:16**, the word perpetual means on-going.

*Exekiel 20:12 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. :13 But...my Sabbaths they greatly polluted...:20 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.*

The sign between believers and God is the Sabbath day. That we go to church or to synagogue, is how God knows and how the world knows were really are the believers we say we are.

*Isaiah 56:6 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.*

When someone converts to Judaism or Christianity, how do you know that their conversion is sincere? What is the symbol, the sign of the covenant? Simple. It is Sabbath keeping. Do you go to church or synagogue, or not? Do you keep that day holy, do you reverence it, or not? That's it. That's the covenant. People know you are a Christian because you go to church. Simple.

### [2.2] WE NEED THE SABBATH REST

Think back 4000 years and imagine yourself a slave in Egypt. Slaves didn't rest. Their masters work them constantly. To a master, a slave was a financial investment and nothing more. For slave, life was one long misery with no hope for happiness.

Then one day, you are delivered by God and his prophet, Moses, and taken to a new land, to form a new nation, with a new constitution; the Torah, or law. And in that law, God what's you, for the first time in 400 years, to actually enjoy life.

That doesn't mean you don't work, but it does mean that now you can enjoy the fruit of your toil, and you can take days off; you can rest. God wants you to be happy.

*John 10:10 I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.*

Rest is a good thing. Not only does it make life a pleasure, but it also makes us more productive. So rest is good. And, after all, it was good enough for God,

*Exodus 20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.*

If God benefits from a rest (and there's no other reason why he should rest), then we must surely benefit from rest.

### **[2.3] WE NEED THE SABBATH WORSHIP**

The Sabbath is not just a day of rest, it is also a day of worship.

*Leviticus 19:30 Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary.*

### **[3] HOW SHOULD WE KEEP THE SABBATH?**

By resting, of course. Okay, so who should rest?

#### **[3.1] EVERYONE SHOULD REST**

*Exodus 16:29 Abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.*

On the Sabbath, just don't be involved with the busy chase-around things of the rest of the week. Don't go to the office. Don't go shopping. Don't do any of the things you usually do. Stay at home. And enjoy the day.

#### **[3.2] GOD RESTS**

God rested from creation of course, but he also rested from providing food for the Israelites, at least on one occasion.

*Exodus 16:26 Six days ye shall gather it [manna] but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none.*

God gave them manna every day, but not on the Sabbath. God wanted a day off too. On the Sabbath, he just didn't want to be bothered.

### [3.3] ANIMALS SHOULD REST

*Exodus 23:12* Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest.

Face it. If you're a farmer, who is putting food on your table? Your animals are. Don't you think they deserve some time off too?

### [3.4] LAND SHOULD REST

*Exodus 23:10* And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof :*11* But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of the people may eat.

This is not a silly thing to let land rest. I don't know what they understood about agriculture back then, but today we understand that land can be overused and become spent. It has to rest, to lay fallow so that it can rejuvenate.

Why does it say "that the poor of the people may eat"? Lying fallow doesn't mean that the land can't be used at all, it just means that it can't be used for its normal crop. If wheat is your normal crop, don't grow wheat that year. Instead, let the poor use it for something else, like carrots and tomatoes and other subsistence food. The idea "a change is as good as a rest" applies as well to the land.

### [3.5] SERVANTS SHOULD REST

You've heard the sermon: you shouldn't shop on Sunday. But where does that idea come from?

*Exodus 20:10* The seventh day is the *abbath* ... in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy *abbath* ant.

Who is your servant? Who serves you? Here's a short list: The checker at the grocery store. The attendant at the gas station. The waitress at the restaurant. The clerk at Macy's. A proper keeping of the Sabbath, then, is not just that *you* rest, but that you allow others to rest as well, those whom you would normally expect to serve you.

This is not to say that we believe in Blue Laws, that we expect everyone to shut down their business because of your Sabbath. That's not the point. The point is *your* faith and *your* covenant with God, a covenant which includes having a Sabbath rest and allowing others to rest on that Sabbath as well.

*Nehemiah 10:31* And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the *abbath* day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the *abbath*, or on the

*holy day: and that we would leave the seventy year, and the exaction of every debt.*

So we don't shop on Sundays, but that doesn't mean we should try to shut down other people's businesses. But it does mean that their business ought not to be conducted in our holy places, a kind of divine zoning.

***Nehemiah 13:15** In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the abbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses...and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. **:16** There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the abbath unto the children of Judah, **:17** Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, to profane the abbath day? **:18** Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye will bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the abbath. **:19** And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the abbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the abbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should be no burden [merchandise, wares] be brought in on the abbath day. **:20** So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.*

Nehemiah didn't put the merchants out of business, didn't arrest them, didn't fine them, didn't take away their wares, he just closed the gates and wouldn't let them sell in Jerusalem on the abbath. In other words, not here — a limited kind of blue laws that catered to religious neighborhoods. On the Sabbath, sell your stuff somewhere else.

### [3.6] REST AT HOME

Anything Else? We're not going to work, we're not going shopping we're staying home and enjoying our family. So, how about we cook a big meal? Well, maybe. You do recall the Manna episode?

***Exodus 16:23** Tomorrow is the rest of the holy abbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.*

I'm not saying that you can't cook on Sunday. I am saying that the more you can have ready before Sunday, and the less you have to do on Sunday so you can enjoy the day and not be harried by it, that's a good thing, isn't it?

Do remember that Jesus chided Martha a bit because she couldn't get herself away from the kitchen.

***Luke 10:40** But Martha was cumbered about much serving ... **:41** And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.*

Jesus wasn't really chiding her, I think he was giving her permission, encouraging her, to leave the kitchen and come join the group. Did this happen on the Sabbath? Don't know. Doesn't say. But it might have been. The point is sometimes work must be set aside for something that is at the moment more important,

### [3.8] EXCEPTIONS

But we can get trapped into thinking that on the Sabbath we can't do *anything*. That's the opposite problem and also misses the point, as Jesus pointed out.

*Luke 6:9* Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good or to do evil? To save life or the destroy it?

Then he answered his own rhetorical question by healing someone. And he gave a general guideline of what the Sabbath was really all about.

*Mark 2:27* And he said unto the, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.

But that doesn't give us carte blanche to go water skiing, to do whatever we want; God was really serious about his Sabbaths.

*Exodus 31:14* Every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death.

We certainly wouldn't want that, to execute people for violating the sabbath. That's what the Jews tried to do to Jesus. We, fortunately, have freedom of religion, so no more blue laws.

So, why was Moses and early Israel so stern? Back then, Sabbath worship identified them as a nation. It was actually sedition to violate their Sabbath because it was their national identity that was at stake.

The point here is not to impose Sabbath worship on others but to understand how important your religion and your Sabbaths are to *you*. It's part of your covenant with God so you should live as you claim to believe.

*Jeremiah 17:21* 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; *:22* 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. *:24* And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; *:25* Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. *:27* But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the

*gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.*

#### [4] DEBT

***Deuteronomy 15:1*** *At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. :2 And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor or his brother; because it is called the LORD's release.*

The Jews had a very interesting debt system. Any debt was good for only up to seven years. If it wasn't collected by then, it was cancelled. That put a ceiling on how much and how long any creditor would lend to a debtor. There were no 30 year mortgages, or lifelong credit card debt, or lifelong student loans. Our problem is that massive debt clings to us our whole lives which is its own kind of slavery.

America should long ago have headed this commandment. Instead, we granted unlimited loans —(which have become unavoidable because of unlimited currency from our thieving Federal Reserve Bank)— which drives up the price of everything so that we *have* to borrow massively and enslave ourselves for a lifetime to banks.

You may think: “But we can borrow more money and buy more stuff. Isn't that good?” No, that's not good. Paying more for the same stuff doesn't get more stuff, it gets you in debt. That's evil and enslaving. It's called inflation. What we think government gives us now, we pay a huge price for over our entire lives. That's economic slavery.

God had it right, seven years of debt is enough. We have it wrong.

#### [5] HOW DID THEY VIOLATE THE SABBATH?

There are many ways to violate a Sabbath. The most obvious is to just not go to church. But for the Jews, there was more to it than just that.

##### [5.1] OVERUSING THE LAND

***2 Chronicles 36:21*** *To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.*

The Jews spent 70 years in exile, the Diaspora. That's one year for each of the 70 sabbath years that the Jews *should* have let their farmland lie fallow but didn't. Then, when the 70 years were caught up, God let them return. And their land was fertile.

##### [5.2] HUMAN SACRIFICE

God forgives a lot. But the bridge too far was when they incorporated their worst evils into their Sabbath worship, trying to make their evils respectable by using God.

*Ezekiel 23:37 That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, who they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them. :38 Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths. :39 For when they had slain their children to their idols, they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of mine house.*

Killing babies was bad enough. But to make it part of their worship laid their murders at the feet of God insisting that God approved. Nothing could make God angrier than that, to, in effect, sign his name to a baby's death warrant.

Now, think about abortion and so-called women's rights, as though women's rights somehow justifies murdering a baby. Imagine. Killing a baby in the name of freedom. How blasphemous is that. Whose freedom? Certainly not the baby's.

#### **[6] WHEN IS OUR SABBATH? — SUNDAY OR SATURDAY OR NEITHER?**

Christians have always used Sunday as their Sabbath., but there are some Christians who believe that Saturday is the true Sabbath. There's nothing wrong with some friendly disagreement, but blue laws created religious discrimination so that those seventh-day Christians found themselves forced to observe Sabbath on the wrong day as they saw it.

So they brought legal actions to the attention of congress to nullify blue laws. Congress actually offered a reward to any scholar that could prove which day was the Bible's true Sabbath, and that reward was finally awarded to Samuel Gamble.

But of course that missed the point. The point was not which is the true Sabbath that we should force everyone to accept, but in a nation of religious liberty, people should be allowed to believe and worship as they wished.

When congress understood that, in the year 1900 congress decided, oh what the heck, let's have a two day weekend, then everyone will be happy. That was the right thing to do.

Speaking for myself, I love my two day weekend: Sunday to worship and Saturday to rest. And I have the seventh-day Christians to thank for it. And if it turns out that Saturday really is the true Sabbath and if it really matters, that let it be known that on Saturday, I, a Sunday worshipping Christian, am offering my best worship: I'm resting!

But now, let's get down to it. Which day is the bible's true Sabbath? Saturday, or Sunday, or neither?

*Leviticus 23:27 Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement :32 It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest.*

The real answer is neither, if by true Sabbath you mean Mosaic Sabbath. The Mosaic Sabbath was on the calendar as a fixed day of a particular month. So it was not a Saturday or Sunday or any fixed day of the week, just like Christmas, December 25<sup>th</sup>, cannot be a fixed day of the week. It rotates.

So, in any given year, what day of the week would it fall on? Can we know that?

**Isaiah 1:13** Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with it; it is iniquity, even the solemn meetings :**14** You new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

**Hosea 2:11** I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

So God destroyed their Sabbaths and all hope of determining which day of the week any particular Sabbath fell on is hidden from us. When the Jews returned to Israel from their Diaspora, their calendar no longer had the correct Sabbaths.

But wasn't it just as simple as the last day of the week? No.

**Nehemiah 9:13** Thou [God] camest down also upon Mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments. :**14** And madest known unto them thy holy Sabbath ..

We see here that Israel knew nothing of the God's true sabbath until God told them on Mount Sinai, so it's a silly argument to claim that people knew that the Sabbath was Saturday from the creation on. It was simply not true. God gave them a calendar on Sinai.

Now, in Jesus' time, the Jews kept their Sabbaths on Saturday. Why not? It was as good as any other day, and besides, God had said that on the seventh day he rested. It was not the Mosaic Sabbath but they had nothing better so Saturday did just fine.

But then something happened. Jesus was crucified, and on a Friday, the day before the Jewish Sabbath. Jesus was in the tomb across the entire Saturday Sabbath then rose the next morning, Sunday morning. Now, pay attention. This is the critical verse.

**Matthew 28:1** In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.

To understand it you must see the Greek, then its English transliteration, then its English translation, the *actual* translation, not the goofy translation that appears in your English bible which you just read. So here goes.

Ὅψε δὲ σαββάτων τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων ἦλθεν Μαριάμ ...

Opse de sabbatōn tē epiphōskousē eis mian sabbatōn ēlthen Mariām ...

After the sabbath it dawned toward first sabbath came Mary ...

Notice the critical fact: the word Sabbath (σαββάτων) occurs twice. Our English bibles translate the second occurrence as "first day of the week" which is wrong and misleads all readers. Yes, it was the first day of the week, a Sunday, but that misses the point: it was a Sabbath! A new Sabbath.

Why not translate it correctly? “When the Sabbath ended, as it dawned toward the first Sabbath, came Mary ... “ In other words, the sabbath that followed the sabbath. In other words, the Sunday sabbath followed the Saturday sabbath. That Sunday, Easter morning, is Matthew’s new Sabbath.

Now that we understand that verse, we can also understand this otherwise confusing verse.

***Colossians 2:16** Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.*

Why would anyone judge them in respect to the Sabbath days? The only reason imaginable is that they were keeping a different Sabbath day.

From these words of Paul’s, we learn that Christians kept a Sabbath day that was different from the Jewish Sabbath day, and that was controversial to the point where they had to defend it. Why would that be if the Christian Sabbath was the same as the Jewish Sabbath? But they weren’t. That’s Paul’s point.

And then there is this.

***Hebrews 4:8** For if Jesus [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day :**9** For there remaineth therefore a rest [Sabbatesmos, the great rest] to the people of God. :**10** For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.*

The point here is that Joshua’s Sabbath is not the *great* Sabbath (Sabbatesmos). A great Sabbath is coming, a great rest, and it will be different.

And also there are these.

***Acts 20:7** And on the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread ...*

Christians came together on Sunday and shared their communion.

***1 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.*

Christians came together on Sunday and gave their offerings.

And then there is this verse.

***Acts 13:42** And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.*

Once again there is something hidden in the Greek. “Next Sabbath” really is:

μεταξὺ σάββατον (metaxy sabbaton), which means “mid-sabbath”.

So the gentiles were asking the apostles to preach to them, not merely on the “next” Sabbath, but the “mid” Sabbath, that is, the Sabbath in-between.

That would make sense. These were gentiles. They had no reverence for the Jewish Sabbath, they didn’t need to wait until the next Jewish Sabbath — the day that the Christians revered as Sabbath was sooner and was just fine.

Now I’m not criticizing my seventh-day friends. Their arguments have merit too, but you’ll have to talk to them about that. My own church has meetings in Israel and there, out of respect for our gracious Jewish hosts, we have our meetings on Saturday. Everywhere else in the world we meet on Sunday.

But my point is that there are good biblical arguments for Sunday Sabbath. It’s not the Jewish Sabbath and not the Mosaic Sabbath, but it is our Sabbath. Other people revere another day and have their own biblical arguments which are probably valid too.

I don’t think it’s worth arguing about. Some of my best friends are Seventh-day Adventist and I have a high regard for them and their religion. And I would never tell them that they are wrong. But I don’t want them telling me that I’m wrong either, so I’ve laid out these biblical talking points for you — not to accuse, but to defend. Their religion is valid, and so is mine. They worship on Saturday, and I worship on Sunday. So what?

It had occurred to me that an Adventist and a Mormon would make ideal business partners. Their store could remain open seven days a week without either of them violating their Christian conscience. The Mormon could run the store on Saturday and take the profits, and the Adventist could run the store on Sunday and take the profits — so that neither benefited from the profits taken on his own Sabbath day. How about that? Just a thought.