

The Rest of the Story



The following notes contain some of the material presented in the series "Is God for Real?"

Could you use more time? It seems like every minute of every day is packed with things to do and places to go. What difference would it make if we just stopped? Maybe it's time to pause, take a rest and rethink the schedule.

In our previous subject we looked at the Ten Commandments and saw how the Bible upheld the keeping of those commandments in both the Old and New Testaments. In this presentation we look at the fourth commandment in particular, which begins, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work.' This commandment goes on to give the reason for remembering the Sabbath. It says, 'For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it,' Exodus 20:1-7. The main reason given for remembering the Sabbath is that God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh day. We find this in Genesis 2:1-3 where God ended His creative work, rested, blessed and set apart as holy the seventh day. Here we find the origin of the Sabbath. Some have said that the Sabbath was only for the Jew, but here, at the beginning, there were no Jews, but there was mankind. When Jesus spoke about the Sabbath many centuries later He said, 'the Sabbath was made for man,' Mark 2:27, meaning mankind.

It is interesting to note that we derive our measurements of time such as days, months and years from the movement of the earth or the moon. However, when it comes to the seven-day week, its origin can only be traced to the book of Genesis. The seven day cycle we still observe today first began at creation culminating in the seventh day Sabbath. In the book of Revelation there is a call for God's people at the end of time to worship Him as their creator, Revelation 14:7. This a timely call indeed, especially when we consider the powerful influence the theory of evolution has held in the past century and half. The Sabbath stands as a memorial to God as the creator of the earth and the life on it – including us.

Some believe that the Sabbath was only introduced at Mount Sinai when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. However, as well as creation week, there is another reference to the Sabbath before Mount Sinai. After God had delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, He led them out into the wilderness. There was nothing much to eat so God rained down bread from heaven called 'manna.' God specifically told them that there would be manna every day except the Sabbath, and that on the sixth day they were to gather up enough for two days because there would be none falling on the Sabbath. You can read the story in Exodus 16:4-30.

The next reference to the Sabbath is of course part of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20:1-17, with the Sabbath in particular referred to in verses 8-11. The fourth commandment begins with the word 'remember,' indicating that it was something that already existed, and that God was reminding them of the Sabbath when He gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

Another aspect of the Sabbath is that it acts as a sign between God and His people - a sign that God belongs to them, and that they belong to Him. Just as the Sabbath was set apart by God for a holy purpose, so too His people are to be set apart for a holy purpose, Ezekiel 20:12, 20.

However, this does not mean that God restricts the Sabbath to one small group of people. On the contrary God is inviting everyone to embrace the benefits of the Sabbath. In Isaiah 56 we read that the Sabbath is to be for all people. Notice what Isaiah 56:6-7 says, "Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants— everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant - even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations." This raises another aspect of the Sabbath, and that is to bring people together. We worship God together on Sabbath, to encourage and support one another. This is part of God's plan.

The Sabbath in the Bible was observed from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday, and God was the main focus of the day. Sabbath keepers would focus on God as creator, God as sustainer, God as relationship builder and God as their redeemer. Isaiah 58 warns against losing the special meaning of the Sabbath, "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honourable, and shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken." Here God promises a blessing to those who will remember to keep the Sabbath holy.

In the New Testament we find that Jesus kept the Sabbath. In Luke 4:16 we read, "So 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 to read." Jesus kept Sabbath by joining others and participating in worship with them. It should not surprise us that Jesus described Himself as Lord of the Sabbath, Matthew 12:8. In addition, after the crucifixion and resurrection, when Jesus had ascended to heaven, we find Sabbath keeping continuing in the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul meets with, and preaches to, both Jews and non-Jews on the Sabbath day, see Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 11.

But how can we be sure today which is the seventh day Sabbath of the Bible? To begin with there are still millions of Jews, like Jesus, keeping the Sabbath every week, and they keep the Sabbath on Saturday. When we look up Saturday in a dictionary or encyclopaedia we find it described as the seventh day of the week. Even most calendars still list Saturday as the seventh day. However, the Bible also helps us to clearly identify which day is the seventh. In the gospel of Luke, we read that Jesus was crucified on the Preparation day, Luke 23:54, that the Sabbath came next, and that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Luke 24:10. At the time of Easter many people remember that Jesus was crucified on Friday – today we call it Good Friday. The day on which Jesus was resurrected is remembered as Easter Sunday. Now we can see that Friday is the preparation day, Sunday is the first day of the week, and Sabbath is the day between Friday and Sunday – which of course is Saturday.

God intended for the Sabbath to be a blessing to His people, and still wants them to experience that blessing today. In fact, Isaiah 66:22-23 indicates that God's people will still be keeping Sabbath in the new earth when peace and harmony will be restored to the universe. God asks us to remember Him by remembering His Sabbath. Will you choose to join with God's people in remembering the Sabbath?

If you would like to know more about this subject, or others in the series, 'Is God for Real?' then please contact one of our staff and they will be happy to help you.