

Sunday, Saturday— What Difference Does It Make?



SUNDAY, SATURDAY —

What Difference Does It Make?

**Some Christians observe Saturday as the Sabbath,
while others, the majority, observe Sunday, claiming it is the “Lord’s Day.”
But does it really matter which day one keeps? Can we know for sure which
day is the seventh day? Is there any evidence that the weekly cycle
has continued intact throughout all these centuries?**

It was a glorious day for the people of Israel. David, their king, had proved himself a courageous leader, and was now taking steps to fully revive the nation's allegiance to God.

David's plan—to transport the all-but-forgotten ark of the covenant from the house of Abinadab to the king's home city—was pleasing to the people, who had come out by the thousands to take part in the procession.

“So they carried the ark of God on a new cart from the house of Abinadab, and Uzza and Ahio drove the cart. Then David and all Israel played music before God with all their might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets” (1 Chronicles 13:7,8, New King James Version throughout).

Things couldn't have been better. The men, the women, even the youth, were overflowing with joy. After all, this was not just any old ark; it was the ark of God!

But the day did not end the way it began. A single incident, and the jubilation was over. Tears of joy became tears of sorrow. Rejoicing was replaced with mourning.

Had the oxen not stumbled, perhaps it would not have happened. But the oxen did stumble, and Uzzah, who was helping drive the cart, reached out to stabilize the shaken ark. “Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he had put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God” (verse 10).

You see, the ark was God's ark—not David's, not Uzzah's. And being God's ark, it had to be handled according to God's specifications. Uzzah had touched the ark, an act contrary to God's instructions (Numbers 4:15)—and God killed him!

But the law forbidding touching the ark seems so minor, so trivial. Did it really matter that Uzzah disobeyed this seemingly minor commandment?

It mattered to God!

At an earlier date, before Israel had a king, a judge named Samson began delivering Israel from the Philistines. Samson, with the incredible strength God had given him, accomplished some amazing feats. On one occasion, for example, he killed a lion with his bare hands. At another time, he slew a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of an ass.

Samson was a Nazarite from birth, and one of the things Nazarites were not permitted to do was cut their hair. So a razor never came upon Samson's head, until...

You know the rest of the story: Delilah's enticement led to the cutting of Samson's hair, which left him without his unusual strength. He then fell into the hands of the Philistines; his eyes were put out, and he was bound with brass fetters and put in prison, where his time was spent grinding at the mill—all this because his hair had been cut. (Read Samson's story in Judges 13-16.)

Sure, Samson had been told not to permit the cutting of his hair, but let's face it, hair is hair—what's the big deal? Did it really matter that Samson was careless in this seemingly minor bit of God's instruction?

It mattered to God!

And then there was the unnamed prophet known as “the man of God.” His title, “man of God,” was not without good reason, for we see in him an excellent example of faith. For instance, he boldly cried against the altar of Bethel, and didn't seem to feel threatened by the

presence of the wicked king Jeroboam. On the same occasion, he prayed for the restoration of the king's withered hand, and God answered his prayer—an indication of strong faith. Indeed, this prophet had all the markings of a genuine “man of God.”

But failure to comply with a seemingly minor technicality brought the prophet's career to an end. God had commanded him to neither eat nor drink while in Bethel, and apparently the man of God fully intended to obey. With the deceptive influence of another prophet, however, the man of God did eat and drink in Bethel. For his disobedience, God sent a lion to kill him (1 Kings 13:24).

Did it really matter that the man of God failed to obey some seemingly minor technicalities of God's instructions?

It mattered to God!

Now, let's consider another “technicality.”

The Fourth Commandment says: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

God commands us to keep holy His Sabbath—the seventh day of the week, not the first. But does it really matter which day we keep? Did it matter that Uzzah touched the ark? Did it matter that Samson's hair was cut? Did it matter that the man of God disobeyed God's seemingly “minor” instructions? If the Ten Commandments are in force today, then yes it matters!

But, some will argue, we really cannot know for sure which day is the seventh-day Sabbath, because the weekly cycle which began at Creation has been changed and time has been lost.

Has Time Been Lost?

Actually, time has not been lost. God has provided a way whereby we can know for sure we are keeping the day He blessed and sanctified. Consider the following:

The Jews have always observed the seventh-day Sabbath. When they returned from Babylonian captivity, there was no question as to which day was the Sabbath. They were still observing the same day when Jesus came on the scene. In fact, Jesus observed the day the Pharisees and other Jews observed.

From their dispersion in the first and second centuries until the present, the Jews have observed the seventh day of the week, the same day Jesus observed. There have been no breaks in the weekly cycle, no change from the seventh to another day of the week. Since the advent of global telecommunication methods, Jews all over the world have been found observing the same weekly cycle, the same Sabbath.

Paul writes, “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision?

Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1,2). The “oracles” include the Holy Scriptures as well as the seven-day cycle which began at Creation. The Sabbath has definitely not been lost.

A second witness to the true seventh day is, believe it or not, the historic Christian-professing church! From the early centuries to the present, Christian writers have acknowledged the difference between Sabbath and Sunday; have presented arguments in favor of first-day observance, and against seventh-day observance; and have accused Sabbathkeeping Christians of “Judaizing.”

So the claim that we cannot how for sure which day is the Sabbath is completely fallacious. All the currently popular television evangelists, all biblical historians, and all educated Christian pastors know that Jesus observed the seventh-day Sabbath—the day we call Saturday—the day the Jews have always observed.

Clearly, God has specified which day, and has provided a means whereby we can know when that day occurs.

Again, does it matter which day we observe?

If it mattered whether Uzzah touched the ark of the covenant; if it mattered whether Samson permitted the cutting of his hair, if it mattered whether the man of God ate and drank in a certain place—it matters whether we keep the day God specifies!

It certainly mattered in ancient Israel—as we shall see.

Israel Punished for Sabbath-breaking

The apostle Paul writes: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed [went with] them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after [desire to do] evil things as they also lusted” (1 Corinthians 10:1-6).

Notice that Christ was the “Rock” who went with Israel into the wilderness. The same Rock leads God’s people today through the spiritual wilderness of this world. It was He who reminded Israel of the Sabbath day, and commanded them to keep it holy. Has He changed?

Jesus Christ, says the book of Hebrews, is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:8). He has not changed! The holy law He gave to Israel—including the commandment to keep the Sabbath day—still stands (Matthew 5:17-19).

Note also that Israel’s mistakes are “our examples” in that we should not desire to do the “evil things” they did. Paul lists several of their evil things, including idolatry and fornication. But let’s notice some Old Testament scriptures that tell us of another of the evil things the Israelites did in their wilderness wandering.

In Ezekiel 20:12,13, God says: ‘Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they

despised My judgments...and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them.”

Did it matter that Israel polluted God’s Sabbath?

God says, “So I also raised My hand in an oath to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ the glory of all lands” (verse 15).

Why did God threaten to refuse His people entry into the promised land?

“[B]ecause they despised My judgments and did not walk in My statutes, but profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols” (verse 16).

The children of Israel were allowed to enter the land of promise after forty years in the wilderness. But they went the way of their fathers; they broke God’s law, disregarded His Sabbaths. The land flowing with milk and honey was eventually flowing with invading forces from surrounding nations.

God says: “Also I raised My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers’ idols” (verses 23,24).

The command to observe the Sabbath day may not seem as “spiritual” as some of the other commandments, but its violation was one of the major reasons the children of Israel were overthrown in the wilderness and lost their privileges in the promised land.

Some believe that the Fourth Commandment is not among the “moral aspects” of the law—that only those commandments that have to do with “love” are important in the Christian era. But what is love? And how do we express love toward God?

In Exodus 20:6, God’s mercy is promised to “thousands, to those who love [Him] and keep [His] commandments.” Notice the connection between love and commandment-keeping. This concurs fully with 1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.”

While love toward God certainly does involve human emotion, it is expressed first and foremost in obedience to Him. Jesus said, “If you love Me, [you will] keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Our obedience to God’s law, then, directly reflects the love we have for Him.

The Sabbath commandment may not seem “spiritual”; it may not seem to be one of the “moral aspects” of God’s law. But if acknowledging the seventh day as God’s holy day—and keeping the day holy because God says to keep it holy—is not a matter of morality and spirituality, then what is?

But, some argue, the Sabbath is a “physical thing,” isn’t it? Yes, it is. So is your neighbor’s wife, his property, and even his life. Nevertheless, the unlawful treatment of any of these constitutes sin!

In God’s warnings to Israel, Sabbath-breaking is placed side-by-side with idolatry and worship of false gods. Never is there a distinction made between “physical” and “spiritual” transgressions.

Moreover, the Bible nowhere says that the Ten Commandments were for Israel only.

Sabbath for All, Not Just Israel

It is sometimes erroneously assumed that citizenship in the nation of Israel was restricted to the physical descendants of Jacob. Apparently, some do not realize that a “mixed multitude” left Egypt with Israel in the time of Moses (Exodus 12:38), or that God specifically instructed, “One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you” (Exodus 12:49).

There was never a time when gentiles could not join themselves to Israel. From the Exodus to the time of Christ, many thousands of gentiles became citizens of the nation of Israel. They kept the laws given to Israel, and were, in fact, considered Israelites.

God says, “Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil” (Isaiah 56:2).

Is this blessing promised to Israelites only? Continue: “Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the Lord Speak, saying, ‘The Lord has utterly separated me from His people’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” (verses 3,6).

Notice that the gentile who “joined himself to the LORD” is commanded to keep the Sabbath. There are no differences in the way Israelites and gentiles are to worship God, but only one law for both homeborn and stranger.

The same is true in the New Covenant. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28,29).

The seventh day is often referred to as the “Jewish Sabbath.” But Jesus says, “The Sabbath was made for man...” (Mark 2:27). And in Genesis 2:1-3, we find conclusive proof that the Sabbath was made long before the first Jew was born.

The Sabbath, then, was made for mankind, not just the Jews. It was made for man’s benefit, and carries with it God’s own blessing.

How could a day of rest and relaxation, blessed and sanctified by a loving Creator, and given to His children for their physical and spiritual benefit, be regarded a “burden” or “yoke of bondage”?

Men have contrived every imaginable argument to get rid of the Sabbath. They have attempted to nail it to the cross, label it “Mosaic,” and exchange it for another day.

Nine of the Ten Commandments are accepted by almost everyone, whether Catholic or Protestant. A comparative few, however, accept and keep the Fourth Commandment. Interestingly, this is the one commandment God gave -as a special sign between Himself and His people.

A Sign and Perpetual Covenant

God's laws make sense. They have purpose. The First Commandment, for example, is so sensible, so logical—for what good could possibly come of worshiping anything that is not God? Bowing down before a dumb idol—an object of worship so vastly inferior to the worshiper—is absolutely senseless. Speaking reverently of the One who made us, avoiding taking His name in vain, is so perfectly sensible.

The commandments against murder, adultery, theft, lying, and coveting are “holy and just and good”—they are good for us—they make good sense, and have obvious purpose.

But what about the Fourth Commandment? Besides providing physical rest and spiritual rejuvenation, what is the purpose of the Sabbath? Why a specific day?

God says: “...Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:13-17).

Notice that God says the Sabbath is a sign between Him and His people. It points directly to Creation-week; thus, the Sabbath is an ongoing reminder of the Creator. Its purpose is to keep knowledge of the Creator perpetually in the minds of His people. Also, it is a “holy convocation” (Leviticus 23:3), or special time for assembly of God's people, who are described as those who “keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Revelation 12:17).

The true worshipers, then, will be keeping the Ten Commandments. One cannot imagine a true worshiper bowing down before an idol, or taking God's name in vain, or serving false gods. But how many who profess to be “true worshipers,” or “Christians,” completely disregard or even reject the Fourth Commandment?

Christians who keep the seventh-day Sabbath are often thought to be “a little strange.” Sabbathkeeping churches are often labeled ‘cults.’ Seldom does one find in a Christian book store material promoting Sabbath observance. Literature against Sabbathkeeping is far more common.

Yet, James writes: “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10, 11).

If we break one point of the Decalogue, James says, we are guilty of violating the whole law. If we neither kill nor commit adultery, but do break the Sabbath, we are guilty of breaking the law—we are transgressors, sinners. He who said, “Do not commit adultery!” and

“Don not kill!” also said, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy!”

Some, however, insist that the Fourth Commandment is the one commandment of the Decalogue that has been abolished. But notice that the Sabbath is called a ‘perpetual covenant’ —meaning a continuing covenant—between God and His people. Not one word in the entire Bible even remotely suggests that the perpetual Sabbath covenant was to come to an end with the advent of Christianity.

In fact, the prophet Isaiah gives us good reason to believe that the Sabbath covenant will continue into the Millennium. Speaking of that period, he writes, “And it shall come to pass That from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says the LORD” (Isaiah 66:23).

The phrase “all flesh” indicates that Israel as well as the gentile nations will be keeping the Sabbath. This concurs with Zechariah’s prophecy concerning the same period. The prophet writes, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles” (Zechariah 14:16).

With two prophecies of inspired Scripture positively confirming the fact that all nations will observe God’s weekly and annual Sabbaths during the Millennium, how can anyone claim that these observances are not for Christians today?

Summary

Those who reject the Sabbath would do well to carefully consider the following summary of scriptural facts:

- (1) The Sabbath was made at Creation; it was made for man.
- (2) The continuing cycle of sabbaths, occurring every seventh day, was never lost. It was carefully preserved by both Jews and Christians.
- (3) The Sabbath was to be a sign between God and His true people.
- (4) The Sabbath was to be a perpetual covenant.
- (5) The command to keep holy the seventh day is found in the Decalogue, alongside commandments against idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, and so on.
- (6) The importance of keeping the Sabbath (from God’s perspective) is seen in the punishment Sabbath-breaking brought upon Israel.
- (7) The prophets tell us that both Israelites and gentiles will keep God’s weekly and annual Sabbaths during the Millennium.

When we add to the above the fact that Jesus Christ kept the Sabbath, the fact that the apostles and early New Testament church kept the Sabbath, and the fact that both Christ and the apostles upheld the so-called “Old Testament law,” the only conclusion we can come to is that we should be keeping the Sabbath!

Contrary to what you may have been told, the Sabbath day is not a burden; it is not a “yoke of bondage”; it is not an outdated “Mosaic” commandment that does not apply today.

The Sabbath was made for mankind—all mankind.

It was made for you.

About the Church of God International

This literature is published by the Church of God International, based in Tyler, Texas. Incorporated in 1978, the CGI has ministers and congregations scattered throughout the United States and Canada. We also have churches in Jamaica, the Philippines, and Australia.

The CGI's mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world (Matthew 28:19). We are blessed with four basic tools to accomplish this:

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