

The Sabbath *and* Worship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:15, Isa. 44:15–20, Rom. 6:16–23, Matt. 11:28–30.*

Memory Text: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (*Psalms 95:6, 7*).

As we saw in the introduction, Creation and Redemption are central to the first angel's message and the theme of worship. The first angel calls us to the “everlasting gospel,” the good news of salvation in Jesus, a salvation that includes not only forgiveness of sin but power over it. The gospel, then, promises us a new life in Christ, the promise of sanctification, which itself is part of the process of salvation and Redemption (*John 17:17, Acts 20:32, 1 Thess. 5:23*).

And, as we saw, the first angel's message includes a special reminder that the One whom we are to worship is our Creator, the One who made us and the world we live in.

Thus, linked to worship are the themes of Creation, Redemption, and sanctification. Not surprisingly, these three themes are revealed in the Sabbath, a crucial element in the events depicted in Revelation 14, when the question faces all of us: do we worship the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier or the beast and his image? The texts do not leave us any third option.

This week we will take a look at the Sabbath commandment and how these themes are revealed in this day. As we study, ask yourself, how can we make these themes central to our worship experience?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.*

Creation and Redemption: The Foundation of Worship

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (*Exod. 20:8*). The words *remember* and *memorial* in Hebrew come from the same Hebrew root, *zkr*. When God said “Remember,” He was giving the people a memorial of two great events, one the foundation of the other.

According to the fourth commandment, what are these two events, and how are they related to each other? *Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:15*.

Christ’s role as Creator is inextricably linked to His role as Redeemer, and every week the Sabbath highlights both of these roles. Not monthly, not yearly, but weekly, and without exception—that is how important it is. The One who designed and made us is the same One who delivered Israel from Egypt and who delivers us from the bondage of sin.

Read Colossians 1:13–22. How does Paul clearly link Christ in His role as Creator and Redeemer?

Creation and Redemption are at the foundation of all biblical truth, and they are so important that we have been ordered to keep the Sabbath as a reminder of these truths. From Eden, where the seventh day was first set aside, up until now, there have been people who have worshiped the Lord through keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy.

Think for a moment how important these two truths must be for the Lord to have given us a weekly reminder of them; so important that He commands us to devote one-seventh of our lives in a special kind of rest in order that we can better focus our attention on these truths. How can your Sabbath-worship experience help enhance your appreciation of Christ as Creator and Redeemer?

Remember Your Creator

The Bible begins with the famous line, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The verb “created,” *bara*, refers to actions of God only. Humans can build things, make things, create things, and form things, but God alone can *bara*. Only God can create space, time, matter, and energy—all part of the material world that we exist in. It is all here, only because God *bara*-ed it.

Of course, how He did it remains a mystery. Science barely understands what matter itself is, much less how it was created and why it exists in the form that it does. What is crucial, however, is that we never forget for a moment where it all came from. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (*Ps. 33:6, 9, NKJV*).

Also, when an important project is finished, people like to celebrate. For example, when we build a church, we dedicate it to God. Similarly, when God finished with the earth, He commemorated the event by setting aside a special day, the Sabbath.

Compare Isaiah 40:25, 26; 45:12, 18; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:2 to Isaiah 44:15–20; 46:5–7. What contrast is being made here?

Ever since the great controversy between Christ and Satan reached the earth, the enemy has tried to lead people to doubt or deny the existence of the true God, the Creator. Through ignorance of His Word or denial of the evidence of His creative power, human intelligence seeks to find ways to explain our origins in ways other than from the Lord. All sorts of theories have been proposed. The most popular today, of course, is evolution, which posits random mutation and natural selection as the means by which all life and intelligence exist. Someone recently presented a theory that we are all just computer projections and that we do not really exist but are merely the computer creations of some super-race of alien beings. In many ways, one could argue that the wooden gods Isaiah wrote about, which were worshiped by their own makers, are as good as many of the other theories of origins often presented as an alternative to the God of the Bible.

If we truly accept the Sabbath for what the Bible says it is—a memorial of God’s six days of Creation—how can we be protected from false ideas about our origins? Also, who would want to worship a God who used the vicious and violent process of evolution to create us, as some teach?

Freedom From Slavery

As we have already seen, the Sabbath points not only to Creation, an important theme of worship, but also to Redemption. Deuteronomy 5:15 tells us, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (*NIV*). These words echo to the crucial theme of the first angel’s message, that of Redemption and salvation.

And this redemption is symbolized by what the Lord did for the children of Israel through the Exodus. No god in Egypt had the power to stop this nation of slaves from escaping their bondage. Only the God of Israel, who revealed Himself in powerful miracles and His presence in majestic and blinding glory, had the ability to deliver them with “a mighty hand” and a “stretched out arm” (*Deut. 5:15*). God wanted them to remember “that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him” (*Deut 4:35, NKJV*). So, He gave them the Sabbath day to be a constant reminder of His great deliverance and as a reminder to us of the bondage from which Christ has freed us.

Read Romans 6:16–23. What promises are offered us there, and how does this relate to what the Lord did for Israel in Egypt?

The New Testament clearly teaches that the slavery of sin demands a powerful Savior, as did the Egyptian bondage of ancient Israel. That is what the children of Israel had in their Lord; and that is what we as Christians today have, as well, because the God who delivered them from their bondage is the same One who delivers us from ours.

If we ever needed a reason to worship the Lord, would it not be for the deliverance from slavery that He has won for us? The children of Israel sang a great song once they had been delivered. (*See Exodus 15.*) Thus, for us the Sabbath worship experience should be a celebration of God’s grace in freeing us not only from the legal penalty of sin (which fell upon Jesus on our behalf) but from the power of sin to enslave us.

What does it mean to no longer be slaves to sin? Does it mean we are not sinful, or that we do not at times still sin? Most important, how can you learn to claim and make real the promises of freedom that the gospel offers us?

Remember Your Sanctifier

Read Exodus 31:13. What do you understand this to mean? How is it relevant for us today? What does it mean to have God sanctify us? How can we experience this process in our own lives?

Creation, Redemption, sanctification—they all are related. Creation, of course, is the foundation of everything (for without it there would be no one to redeem and sanctify). Yet, in our fallen condition, creation is no longer enough; we needed Redemption, the promise of forgiveness for our sins. Otherwise, we would face eternal destruction, and our creation would be forever over.

Of course, inseparably linked to Redemption is sanctification, the process by which we grow in holiness and in grace in our lives. The word translated as “sanctify” in Exodus 31:13 comes from the same root word used in Exodus 20:8, when the Lord tells the people to keep the Sabbath “holy.” The same root appears in Exodus 20:11, which says that God “hallowed” or “made holy” the Sabbath day (see also Genesis 2:3, where God “sanctified” the seventh day). In all these cases the root, *qds*, means “to be holy,” “to set aside as holy,” to be “dedicated as holy.”

God called Israel and set them apart as His holy people, to be a light to the world. Christ called His disciples to a mission of carrying the gospel to the world. Central to that task is the holiness and character of the ones spreading the message. The gospel is not just about no longer being condemned for our sins. As we saw yesterday, it is about being free from the bondage of our sins. It is about being new people in Christ and having our lives be living witnesses to what God can do for us here and now.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What is Paul saying here, and how can we relate this text to the themes of Creation and Redemption and the Sabbath? How can our Sabbath worship help us focus on these themes?

Resting in Redemption

Creation, Redemption, and sanctification: we have all these in Christ, and they all are symbolized in a special way through the blessings of the Sabbath.

In Matthew 11:28–30 read Jesus’ invitation to rest. How does the Sabbath fit in with what Jesus is telling us here?

The “rest” Jesus offered to people included emotional, psychological, and spiritual rest for those who were burdened with heavy loads, including the load of sin, guilt, and fear. In addition to the basic human need for physical rest, there is an equally important need for the mind and the spirit to have a change of pace—to rest from the burdens and the stress of daily living. God designed the Sabbath for precisely that. Studies have shown that productivity in the work place actually increases with a weekly break. Bringing closure to the usual routine of life enhances mental acuity and physical endurance. Further, the Sabbath provides the needed sense of anticipation that helps prevent boredom and fatigue.

While anyone can say that they are resting in Christ, the Sabbath gives us a concrete and physical manifestation of that rest. The Sabbath stands as a symbol of the rest that we truly have in Him, in the salvation Christ has wrought for us.

The Sabbath also meets us at the level of our emotional life. It gives us a sense of identity: we are created in the image of God, and we belong to Him because He made us.

And just as God gave the marriage institution in Eden to meet the human need for horizontal intimacy, so He gave the Sabbath for vertical intimacy between the Creator and His creatures.

The Sabbath promises fulfillment—what we may become through Christ’s work of restoration. It gives us hope for the future—the ultimate eternal Sabbath rest. But most important of all, the Sabbath meets us at the highest of all human needs, the need to worship something or Someone. God in His great wisdom has given us the Sabbath as a day set aside for worship, a day to spend in honor and praise of Him.

What burdens are you carrying that you need to have rest from, and how can you learn to give them to Him? How can your Sabbath worship experience help you truly learn to rest in Him?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Literal Week,” pp. 111–116, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Sabbath,” pp. 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“God designed that [Sabbath] observance should designate [Israel] as His worshipers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 283.

“When the Lord delivered His people Israel from Egypt and committed to them His law, He taught them that by the observance of the Sabbath they were to be distinguished from idolaters. It was this that made the distinction between those who acknowledge the sovereignty of God and those who refuse to accept Him as their Creator and King.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 349.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Dwell more on the idea of how true Sabbath keeping can protect us from many of the delusions regarding Creation. Think, for instance, about the final events regarding those who worship the beast as opposed to those who worship the Creator (see *Revelation 14*). How would a false understanding of our origins—such as the idea that Jesus used evolution to create us—set people up to be deceived in the final days?
- ❷ Go back over the question of Sabbath and worship. How does your church worship on Sabbath? Is the service geared toward exalting God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier? If not, what is the emphasis? How can we learn to keep the Lord as the focus of our worship experience?
- ❸ Creation is central to all our beliefs. Why does nothing we believe as Seventh-day Adventists make any sense at all apart from God as the Creator? Creation is foundational to all that we believe, and the Sabbath is imbedded in the original Creation account. How do these facts help reveal just how pivotal and basic the Sabbath is? How does this help us better understand, too, how in the last days, when false powers seek to compel the worship that God alone deserves, the Sabbath will be so central to that final drama?

I Prayed You Would Come

by ARTUR ARAKELYAN

I am a Global Mission pioneer. I was selling books door-to-door in a city in Armenia. I knocked on one door in an apartment house, and a woman answered. I introduced myself and my work. She welcomed me in and listened as I told her about the books.

She looked up with tears in her eyes and said, “Just before you came to my door, I was praying that God would send someone to help me know more about God and the Bible. I believe God sent you.” The woman, Alvar, said that her 11-year-old daughter had been attending a Protestant church and often told her things she was learning about God. Although Alvar wasn’t attending the church, her daughter’s comments created a hunger to know more.

Then she told how one day three months earlier she had put her two-year-old son to sleep in his stroller near the bedroom window and went about her housework. Her daughter, Anna, was playing outside in the apartment courtyard. The baby awoke and climbed from the stroller onto the windowsill and fell out the window from their ninth-floor apartment. A passerby saw the child falling and screamed. Anna looked up to see her baby brother falling toward her. “Dear Jesus, help me!” she prayed, and instinctively she held out her arms. The baby fell into her arms, and both children tumbled to the ground. Amazingly, neither child was hurt.

As Alvar recalled the story, tears welled in her eyes. “At first I thought that God was punishing me for my sins,” she said. “But when I realized that God had used my daughter’s church to save her brother, then I realized that God was trying to help me. That’s when I began praying to know more about God.”

She couldn’t afford to buy the books she wanted, so I gave her a small book and offered to study the Bible with her. She gladly accepted. She didn’t have a Bible, so I gave her one. She is ready for baptism.

When I first went to this town, we had not even one Seventh-day Adventist there. Now we have a group of 10 people who are meeting in a home every Sabbath and studying the Bible. Another 20 or so are interested to know more but haven’t committed themselves to Bible studies yet. They’re from all walks of life—lawyers, doctors, taxi drivers, and homemakers. I had met them by working as a literature evangelist.

I praise God that our Sabbath School mission offerings help support the work of Global Mission, one way to tell the world that Jesus loves them.

ARTUR ARAKELYAN is a Global Mission pioneer in Armenia.