

The Sabbath



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 6

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: John 1:1–3; Matthew 12:1–5; Luke 4:16–21; John 5:16, 17; Matthew 24:20.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath day was made for man. Man was not made for the Sabbath day. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day’ ” (Mark 2:27, 28, NIV).

THROUGHOUT JESUS' MINISTRY (WORK) ON EARTH, RELIGIOUS LEADERS CHALLENGED HIS SABBATH KEEPING. When criticized, Christ pointed to His authority as Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). He also showed what correct Sabbath keeping should be.

Today we face the challenge of “correct” keeping of the Sabbath and the popular belief that Sunday, not Sabbath, is the day of rest. Those who support Sunday can find nothing in the Gospels in favor of their position. The Sabbath arguments in the Gospels dealt only with *how* the Sabbath was to be kept, never with *when*. Jesus' life and teachings leave no doubt that the seventh-day Sabbath would continue as God's day of rest, even after His death and resurrection (Christ's return to life from the dead).

This week we will discuss Christ's relationship to the Sabbath—when it began and His authority over it. Next, we will study the example and teachings of Jesus about Sabbath keeping. Finally, we will look at the Sabbath as seen in His teachings and in the example of His disciples after the Resurrection.

CHRIST, THE CREATOR OF THE SABBATH (John 1:1–3)

What do the following verses show about Jesus' work in Creation? Why is this so important, especially when we think about the beginning of the Sabbath? Read John 1:1–3; Colossians 1:16; and Hebrews 1:1, 2.

John begins his Gospel with these famous words: "In the beginning was the Word [Jesus]. . . . All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made" (John 1:1, 3, NKJV). Both John and Paul leave no doubt as to the work of Christ in Creation. God the Son, Jesus Christ, created all things: "All things were created by him. He created everything in heaven and on earth. He created everything that can be seen and everything that can't [cannot] be seen. . . . Everything was created by him and for him" (Colossians 1:16, NIV). Through Christ, God made the universe, including our solar system, the earth, and everything in it, living and non-living.

Christ, who was to be humanity's Savior, was also the Creator. And right there, at the end of Creation week, the Lord gave us a day of rest. "The Sabbath was made for man. It is the Lord's day. It belongs to Christ. . . . Since He made all things, He made the Sabbath. By Him it was set apart as a memorial of the work of creation."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 288.

The same God who created man with the need to rest also gave him a time to rest. It is a weekly day in which every person is to set aside weekly work and troubles and to rest in Him, the Creator. After finishing Creation, Jesus Himself rested on the seventh day. It is not because He was tired, but because He wished to bless and make the Sabbath holy and give us an example to follow. And He also rested on Sabbath when He finished His work of saving us on the cross. This is not because He needed it, but because He wished to show His support for the Sabbath as a very special day to be kept throughout all time. Christ, who invites restless humans to rest in Him (Matthew 11:28, 29), invites us to rest in a special way, once a week, every Sabbath day.

Sabbath keeping ties us to the beginning of earth's creation, to the very beginning of life. What better time to think deeply about the important question of, *What am I doing with the life that God has given to me?*



**After creating our world,
Jesus rested on the
seventh day.**

CHRIST, THE LORD OF THE SABBATH (Matthew 12:1, 2)



David and his men ate the bread meant only for the priests.

Read Matthew 12:1, 2. What is going on here? Why would the Pharisees judge this action as “not lawful”?

Deuteronomy 23:25 says, “When you enter your neighbor’s field, you can pick heads of grain. But don’t [do not] cut down his standing grain” (NirV). The problem was not the action itself. The problem was the day on which it was done. The religious laws of the rabbis did not permit certain kinds of works on Sabbath, such as reaping, threshing, and winnowing (separating chaff from the grain). In the Pharisees’ (religious leaders’) opinion, by plucking the ears of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and separating the grain from the husk, the disciples were guilty of doing all of them.

Why are the examples important that Jesus used to answer the Pharisees? Read Matthew 12:3–5.

With the first example (1 Samuel 21:1–6), Christ argued that David and his men should not have eaten the bread meant for the priests (Leviticus 24:9). But because their lives were in danger, they were permitted to break a ceremonial rule. The second example Jesus used (Matthew 12:5) deals with the sacrifices and offerings for the Sabbath day in the temple service. The sacrifices and offerings on Sabbath were twice as many as those offered on any other day (Numbers 28:9, 10). The Jews themselves recognized that the temple service came first, even above the Sabbath.

After using these examples, Jesus made two arguments that show His authority to change the Pharisees’ rules about Sabbath keeping: (1) “‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’ ” (Mark 2:27, NKJV). The Sabbath was created to help humans and continues as a God-given gift for the service of people. And (2), by saying “‘the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (Mark 2:28, NKJV), Christ made clear His position as Creator and Ruler of the Sabbath. So, He alone had the authority to free the Sabbath from these man-made laws.

The spiritual leaders of God’s people blamed the Lord of the Sabbath for breaking the day that He Himself had created and made holy. What message should we all learn from this about the dangers of those who should know better but who are spiritually blind?

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS (Luke 4:16)

What does Luke 4:16 tell us about Jesus' attitude (feeling) toward the Sabbath? Why is this so important for us today? Read John 14:15 and 1 Peter 2:21.

The word Luke used in verse 16, *custom*, comes from a Greek word meaning habits continuing in time and practice. In other words, Jesus regularly attended the synagogue (a Jewish church) every Sabbath that He could. This is so important to Luke that four times in his Gospel he says that Jesus attended the synagogue on different Sabbaths (Luke 4:16; Luke 4:31; Luke 6:6; Luke 13:10). Also, Luke makes clear that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week (Luke 23:54–24:1). Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, kept the seventh-day Sabbath, along with the Jews. This is proof that the weekly cycle had not been lost since the giving of the law at Sinai, or even since Creation. Jesus' example as a keeper of the Sabbath is an example for Christians to follow, in both time and manner (way), of Sabbath keeping.

What did Jesus read on that special morning in the synagogue? Why is this important? Read Luke 4:16–21.

This was not the first time Jesus read and spoke at a synagogue. More than a year had already gone by since He was baptized in the Jordan River. But this was Jesus' first visit to Nazareth after leaving the carpenter shop. This is where He spent the first 30 years of His life and where He attended the local synagogue. During His youth, "often in the synagogue on the Sabbath day He was asked to read the lesson from the prophets. And the hearts of the hearers were thrilled as a new light shone out from the familiar words of the Holy Bible."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 74.

But this time it was different. Jesus chose special verses, Isaiah 61:1, 2. These verses explain the Messiah's work on earth and that He will come " 'to proclaim [preach] the acceptable year of the LORD' " (Luke 4:19, NKJV). That was the Sabbatical, or jubilee,¹ year, a time of rest. Jesus chose the day of rest, the Sabbath, to announce His ministry of saving souls, freedom, and healing. Truly, we find rest in Jesus, a rest shown in a very positive way every Sabbath day.

DEFINITIONS

1. jubilee—the Jews celebrated every fiftieth year as a very special year; for example, the land was put to rest from farming and all debts were forgiven, and so on.

MIRACLES ON THE SABBATH (Matthew 12:10–12)



The Pharisees cared more for their animals than suffering humans.



By healing the sick on Sabbath, Jesus showed its true meaning.

DEFINITIONS

2. legalistic—being too strict in keeping the law; also believing that you can be saved by your works or by keeping the law.

The Gospels speak of several miraculous healings that Jesus carried out on the Sabbath day. It is as if He purposely wanted to heal on the Sabbath, even though He could have done it any other day. Jesus was trying to make a point. Healing on the Sabbath was not unlawful.

What arguments are given in each of these verses to support Jesus' healings on the Sabbath? Read Matthew 12:10–12; Luke 13:15, 16; and John 5:16, 17.

It is true that we must set aside our own interests during the Sabbath (Exodus 20:9; Isaiah 58:13). But the Sabbath should never be thought of as a period of doing nothing. In His battles with the Pharisees, Christ clearly pointed out that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:12, NKJV). According to the rules of the rabbis, a sick person could be treated on the Sabbath if the situation was a serious danger to life. In the same way, if a sheep or an ox fell into a hole in the ground, a person was permitted to pull the animal out on the Sabbath day to save its life. Was a person's life not more valuable than an animal's life? Unfortunately, Christ's critics showed more mercy toward their own animals than to suffering humans. They approved watering an animal on the Sabbath but not healing a person.

Jesus also stated, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17, NKJV). This speaks about God's work in favor of His living people and animals. Even on the Sabbath day, He continues giving life and keeping the universe going (Hebrews 1:2, 3).

Jesus taught that we should not be legalistic² when keeping the Sabbath. To keep it means to “rest” from our own works (Hebrews 4:10). Even more important, we need to stop trying to work our way to salvation—which is not possible anyway. Satan wants to make us keep the Sabbath selfishly. If he cannot move us against the Sabbath, he will try to push us to the other end of being too strict in how we keep it.

It is easy to be legalistic about the Sabbath. But others can be too careless in keeping it. How do we keep the right balance? Also, why must we be careful in our attitudes toward how others keep the Sabbath? Do not forget what the Pharisees thought of Christ's Sabbath keeping.

THE SABBATH AFTER THE RESURRECTION (RETURN TO LIFE) (Matthew 24:20)

Many Christians keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath. They give many reasons. The main one they give is the resurrection of Christ. Nothing in the New Testament, including the verses on the Resurrection, teaches that Sunday is to replace Sabbath. The New Testament shows that Christ planned for His Sabbath to be kept even after His resurrection.

What does Matthew 24:20 have to say about the Sabbath in the years after the resurrection of Jesus?

Christ's words in Matthew 24:20 show us that in A.D. 70, about forty years after His death, the Sabbath was to be kept as holy as it had always been. The excitement, fear, and travel necessary to flee from Jerusalem would not be proper on the Sabbath day.

What other New Testament proof do we find that shows the seventh-day Sabbath remained holy after the resurrection of Christ? Read Acts 13:14, 42; Acts 14:1; Acts 17:1, 2; and Acts 18:4.

For the disciples, going to the synagogue (Jewish church) was what we also should be doing—going to church. Paul was present at the synagogue services on Sabbath when no church was there. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and the champion of justification (righteousness; holiness) by faith. But he still went to the synagogue on Sabbath. He preached to the Jews and also kept holy the Sabbath day.

One Sabbath, after the synagogue service was finished, the Gentiles begged Paul to preach the gospel to them. The apostle could have invited them to hear him the next day, Sunday, but he waited one week. “ ‘The next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God’ ” (Acts 13:44, NKJV). These verses give powerful proof that the early church knew nothing of the first day of the week as a replacement for the seventh.

OK, so we know we are right about the right Sabbath day. That is important, of course. But how can our Sabbath keeping make us Christians who are more merciful, loving, and caring?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “The Sabbath,” pages 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“ ‘Wherefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.’ These words are full of instruction and comfort. . . . The Sabbath points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier [Maker of holiness]. The Sabbath announces that He who created all things in heaven and in earth is the head of the church. And by His power we are reunited [joined again as one] with God. For, speaking of Israel, He said, ‘Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy.’ Ezekiel 20:12, NIV. Then the Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying [cleansing] power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 288, 289.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We are Christ’s, both by creation and salvation. How does the Sabbath remind us of these important truths?
- ② What is the problem with a legalistic obedience to the fourth commandment? On the other hand, why is weak Sabbath keeping not the answer to legalism? What is the important key that makes keeping the Sabbath a real blessing?
- ③ Why should the Sabbath and the opportunity to rest on the Sabbath day be special reminders to us of the crucial truth that we are not saved by our works but by Christ’s sacrifice for us?
- ④ What are ways that we can learn to have a deeper and richer experience with the Lord on the Sabbath?
- ⑤ What lessons about how to keep the Sabbath can we learn from Christ’s example of Sabbath healings? How do these healings help us to understand better what the Sabbath should be about?
- ⑥ We are told to keep the Sabbath holy. Think through some of the things you do on the Sabbath. How holy are they? More important, how do they bring you closer to God?