

# Christ as the Lord of the Sabbath



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Mark 1:21, 6:2; Luke 4:17–19, 31–37; 2 Cor. 5:17; Luke 6:1–11; 13:10–16.*

**Memory Text:** “‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV*).

**A**lthough Luke wrote his Gospel primarily for the Gentiles, it is significant how frequently he refers to the Sabbath. Of the 54 times the Gospels and Acts refer to Sabbath, 17 are in Luke and 9 in Acts; there are 9 in Matthew, and 10 in Mark and 9 in John. As a Gentile convert, Luke certainly believed in the seventh-day Sabbath for Jews, as well as Gentiles. The first coming of Christ made no difference concerning the keeping of the Sabbath.

Indeed, “Christ, during His earthly ministry, emphasized the binding claims of the Sabbath; in all His teaching He showed reverence for the institution He Himself had given. In His day, the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of God. Christ set aside the false teaching by which those who claimed to know God had misrepresented Him.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 183.

This week's lesson turns to Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath: how He observed it and how He set an example for us to follow. The practice of observing the first day of the week as Sabbath has no sanction either in Christ or in the New Testament.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.

## “As His Custom Was”

“As His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (*Luke 4:16, NKJV*). This is a good Seventh-day Adventist text. Most of us use it in evangelistic meetings or in Bible studies in order to emphasize the point that it was the practice of Jesus to keep the Sabbath.

Synagogues played a crucial role in Jewish religious life. During the exile, when the temple no longer existed, synagogues were built for worship and for the schooling of young children. A synagogue could be built wherever there were at least ten Jewish families. Growing up in Nazareth, Jesus followed the “custom” of going to the synagogue each Sabbath, and now on His first journey to His hometown, the Sabbath finds Him in the synagogue.

**Read** Mark 1:21, 6:2, Luke 4:16–30, 6:6–11, 13:10–16, 14:1–5. What do these texts teach us about Jesus and the Sabbath? As you read them, ask yourself where, if anywhere, you can find indications that Jesus was either abolishing our obligation to keep the Sabbath or pointing to another day to replace it?

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“As His custom was” (*Luke 4:16, NKJV*). Only Luke uses this phrase: in Luke 4:16, as Jesus attended the synagogue in Nazareth; and in Luke 22:39, as the cross drew near, Jesus “went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives” (*RSV*). Both times the “custom” had to do with worship and prayer.

Why should we make it our custom to go to church on Sabbath, as Jesus went to the synagogue on Sabbath?

First, God is everywhere. He may be worshiped anywhere, but there’s something special about getting together in a common place on the day designated at Creation and commanded in His moral law.

Second, it provides a public opportunity to affirm that God is our Creator and Redeemer.

Finally, it gives an opportunity for fellowship and sharing one another’s joys and concerns.

**Those who accuse us of legalism or of being in bondage because we keep the Sabbath have obviously missed out on the great blessing that the Sabbath can bring. In what ways have you experienced just how liberating Sabbath keeping can be?**

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## Sabbath: Its Message and Meaning

“When He had opened the book” (*Luke 4:17, NKJV*). The Sabbath was not only for going to church in order to worship but also to hear God’s Word. A life without His Word is not far from the trap of sin: “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (*Ps. 119:11, NKJV*).

**Read** **Luke 4:17–19.** Today, looking back upon what we know about Jesus, about who He was, and what He has accomplished for us, how do we understand the meaning of these words? How have you experienced the reality of His Messianic claims in your own walk with the Lord?

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After reading from Isaiah 61:1, 2, Jesus said, “ ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’ ” (*Luke 4:21, NKJV*). The word *today* deserves note. The Jews expected the kingdom of God to come at some time in the future in a dramatic, militaristic way, uprooting an alien regime from Judea, and ushering in the Davidic throne. But Jesus was saying that the kingdom had already come in His person and that He would break the power of sin, crush the devil, and free the oppressed captives of his domain.

Think, too, about how closely tied the Sabbath is with His Messianic claims. The Sabbath is a day of rest, rest in Christ (*Heb. 4:1–4*); the Sabbath is a symbol of freedom, of liberation, the freedom and liberation we have in Christ (*Rom. 6:6, 7*); the Sabbath reveals not only God’s creation but the promise of re-creation in Christ, as well (*2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Cor. 15:51–53*). It’s no coincidence, either, that Jesus chose the Sabbath day to do many of His healings, to free those who had been oppressed and imprisoned by sickness.

The Sabbath day is a weekly reminder, etched in something more immutable than stone (time!), of what we have been given in Jesus.

**How has Sabbath keeping helped you to understand better salvation by faith alone, in that we can rest in what Christ has done for us, as opposed to seeking to earn our way to heaven?**

## Sabbath Healings at Capernaum

Rejection at Nazareth sent Jesus back to Capernaum, where He had already ministered before (*Matt. 4:13*). This important city became the base for Jesus' Galilean ministry. In this city was a synagogue, possibly built by a Roman officer (*Luke 7:5*), and Jesus, as per His custom, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

On this single Sabbath, Jesus' ministry covered a wide range of activities—teaching, healing, preaching. Nothing is said as to what Jesus preached, but the reaction of the people was one of astonishment, “for His word was with authority” (*Luke 4:32, NKJV*). His teaching stood in contrast to that of the rabbis. No simple palliatives. Here was preaching with authority, rooted in the Scriptures, delivered with the power of the Holy Spirit, calling sin by its right name, and urging repentance.

**Read** Luke 4:31–37. What powerful truths are revealed in these verses about (1) the great controversy, (2) the reality of demons, (3) the purpose of the Sabbath, and (4) the power of God over evil? What else can you find there?

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In Luke 4:31–41, we have the first of many healings on the Sabbath that Luke records (*see Luke 4:38, 39; 6:6–11; 13:10–16; 14:1–16*). In the Nazareth sermon, Jesus announced that it was His mission to relieve, to heal, and to restore those who are brokenhearted and oppressed. Here in Capernaum, on a Sabbath day, when the synagogue was full of worshipers, a demon-possessed man confronted Jesus with a confession: “‘Let us alone! . . . You, Jesus of Nazareth. . . . I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’” (*Luke 4:34, NKJV*). The demon, being one of the satanic host, and as such a supernatural being, was quick to recognize the Incarnate Savior. In this account, the veil between the seen and unseen world has been pulled aside.

**Think of how openly the great controversy was manifested here. Often it's not that obvious. How, though, are you seeing it played out in your own life? What is your only hope of victory in this battle? See also 1 Cor. 15:2.**

## The Lord of the Sabbath

Luke 6:1–11 provides two accounts of Jesus dealing with the Pharisees over the Sabbath.

**Read** the first story in Luke 6:1–5. How did Jesus face the accusation that He and His disciples did not care for the Law and the Sabbath?

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While walking through a field, the disciples plucked the heads of grain, rubbed them in their palms, and ate them. But the Pharisees twisted the fact to charge the disciples with breaking the Sabbath commandment. Jesus sets the story straight and refers the Pharisees to David, who, when he was hungry, entered the House of God and he and his men ate the shewbread, which only the priests were allowed to eat. By doing this, Jesus was pointing out how the Pharisees, through a long history of legalism, have heaped rule upon rule, tradition upon tradition, and turned the Sabbath from the joy it was supposed to be into a burden instead.

**Read** the second story in Luke 6:6–11. What lessons about the Sabbath are seen here as well?

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Although all the synoptic Gospels narrate this story, only Luke tells us that the hand that was withered was the man's right hand. Dr. Luke's additional detail helps us to understand the serious impact this physical deficiency must have had on the man's ability to carry on a normal life. The occasion stirred two responses: first, the Pharisees waited to charge Jesus with Sabbath breaking in the event He chose to heal the man. Second, Jesus read their hearts and proceeded to show that He is the Lord of the Sabbath, the One who created the Sabbath, and that He will not fail in His mission to deliver the broken man from the bondage of the sin-sick world. Thus, He placed Sabbath keeping in its divine perspective: it is lawful on the Sabbath day to do good and to save life (*Luke 6:9–11*).

**Think how blinded these leaders were by their own rules and regulations, which they thought were God's. How can we make sure that we don't fall into the same trap of allowing traditions and human teachings to blind us to deeper divine truths?**

## The Sabbath: The Sick Versus the Ox and the Donkey

Of the three synoptic Gospels, only Luke records these two Sabbath healings of Jesus (*Luke 13:10–16, 14:1–15*). The first caused the ruler of the synagogue to be indignant with Jesus; the second put the Pharisees to silence. In either case, the enemies of Jesus were using their misinterpretation of the Law to accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath.

**Read** *Luke 13:10–16 and 14:1–6*. What important truths are revealed here about how easy it is to pervert crucial biblical truths?

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Consider the crippled woman. She belonged to a gender that was looked down upon by the Pharisees; she was crippled for 18 years, long enough to test anyone’s patience and to multiply in her a sense of life’s meaninglessness; and, finally, she was totally unable to free herself.

To her comes divine grace personified. Jesus *sees* her, *calls* her to come near Him, *speaks* to her in order that she may be healed, *lays* His hands on her, and “immediately she was made straight” (*Luke 13:13, NKJV*). Eighteen-year-old agony suddenly gives way to a moment of undiluted joy, and she “*glorified* God” (*vs. 13*). Each verb that Luke used is Inspiration’s way of recognizing the worth and dignity of the woman and, indeed, the worth and dignity of every despised individual, regardless of that person’s situation.

In the second miracle (*Luke 14:1–6*), Jesus—on His way to a Pharisee’s home for a meal on the Sabbath—heals a man who suffered from dropsy. Anticipating the objections from the leaders who were watching Him closely, Jesus raised two questions: first, on the purpose of the law (“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” *[vs. 3]*); second, on the worth of a human being (“Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?” *[vs. 5, NKJV]*). His point should have been obvious; in fact, it was, because according to Luke they had no answer to what He had said. Jesus revealed their hypocrisy, the worst kind because it came under a veil of supposed holiness and righteous indignation over what they perceived to be an egregious violation of God’s holy law.

How careful we need to be.

**Further Study:** “God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this [the Sabbath] day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 207.

“No other institution which was committed to the Jews tended so fully to distinguish them from surrounding nations as did the Sabbath. God designed that its observance should designate them as His worshippers. 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.” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 283.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Isn’t it amazing just how clear the Bible is about Jesus and the Sabbath? And yet, millions of churchgoers around the world still insist that the seventh-day Sabbath is no longer binding or that it doesn’t matter or that keeping it is tantamount to legalism. What should this tell us about why unwavering fealty and obedience to the Word of God are so important? On something as foundational as God’s holy law, the masses are so deceived. What crucial warning does Jesus give us in Mark 13:22?
- ② Look at how Satan has worked so hard to destroy the Sabbath: either he used the leaders in Israel to turn it into a heavy burden, all but denuding it of so much of what it was supposed to mean and be; or he used, and still uses, leaders in the church to dismiss it as antiquated, legalistic, or a mere Jewish tradition. What is it about the Sabbath, and what it entails, that would make it such a target of Satan’s enmity?
- ③ Jesus is the “‘Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*Luke 6:5, NKJV*). What implications does this statement have for Christians and their attitude toward the Sabbath?

## Guided and Transformed

HELIO, JAPAN

My father, a Japanese emigrant to Brazil, was a Buddhist. My mother, who was of Japanese descent, was raised a Roman Catholic. Our home was an interesting mixture of Catholicism with Buddhism.

When I was 14, my father died of tuberculosis. He longed to be healed, and perhaps that was why he didn't reject having a Christian religion in the house. He prayed every day.

My father had a small watchmaking business, and after his death, I had to take over. It was difficult to accept his death and suddenly become the breadwinner. During that time, I started reading the Bible and read a passage that stayed with me: " 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' " (*John 14:6, NIV*).

Life was difficult; at the age of 26, I went to Japan to get a better perspective, but things only got worse. I was having terrible back pain and spent much money trying to find relief, but nothing helped. To make matters worse, my three-year marriage fell apart.

My life lost direction until a Seventh-day Adventist, Silvio, began working at the factory where I worked. What caught my attention about this man was his composure and good humor in all circumstances, although every day he suffered from severe pain due to an accident years ago. I knew about pain, so I really admired Silvio.

At that time, I was a member of a Japanese spiritualist sect called Mahikari. We believed in two gods—the god of the universe and the god of the earth. Every time I bowed down to these gods, I remembered John 14:6 and wondered where Jesus Christ was.

Some months after Silvio started working at the factory, he invited me to his church. We became good friends, and during our lunch hour, Silvio told me about Jesus and how He could change my life. But it was because of Silvio's personal testimony that I wanted to know about the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

I began attending church with Silvio in the city of Hamamatsu and took Bible studies with the pastor. Before long, I was baptized.

It has been ten years since then, and I'm a literature evangelist with the Japan Union. I also lead out in a newly formed Adventist church in the city of Yaizu. I am married to a Japanese Seventh-day Adventist nurse, and we have a two-year-old child.

I praise the Lord for how He has guided and transformed my life.