

The Sabbath



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:1–3; Matt. 12:1–5; Luke 4:16–21; John 5:16, 17; Matt. 24:20.*

Memory Text: “And He said to them, “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*).

Throughout His ministry, religious leaders challenged Christ's Sabbath observance. When criticized, Christ emphasized His authority as Lord of the Sabbath (*Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5*). He also showed what correct observance of the Sabbath should be.

Today we are confronted not only with the challenge of “correct observance” of the Sabbath but also with the popular belief that Sunday, not Sabbath, is the day of rest. Those pushing for Sunday, however, have nothing in their favor in the Gospels. The Sabbath controversies 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.

This week we will discuss Christ's relationship to the origin and lordship of the Sabbath. Next, we will study the example and teachings of Jesus regarding the observance of the Sabbath. Finally, we'll look at the Sabbath as seen in His teachings and in the example of His disciples after the Resurrection.

* *Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 13.*

Christ, the Creator of the Sabbath

What do the following texts indicate about Jesus' role in Creation? Why is this so important, especially when considering the origin of the Sabbath? See *John 1:1–3*; *Col. 1:16*; *Heb. 1:1, 2*.

John begins his Gospel with the famous statement: “In the beginning was the Word. . . . 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 role of Christ in creation. God the Son, Jesus Christ, created all things: “By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible. . . . All things were created through Him and for Him” (*Col. 1:16, NKJV*). Through Christ, God made the universe, including our solar system, the earth, and everything in it, animate and inanimate.

Christ, who was to be man's Redeemer, was also his 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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 288.

The same God who created humanity with the need to rest also provided the means to rest: a weekly day in which human beings are to set aside weekly toils and troubles and to rest in Him, the Creator. After finishing Creation, He Himself rested on the seventh day, not because of tiredness but in order to bless and sanctify the Sabbath and give us an example to follow. And He also rested on Sabbath when He finished our Redemption on the cross, not because He needed it but in order to (among other things) confirm the perpetual value of the Sabbath. Christ, who invites restless human beings to rest in Him (*Matt. 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 foundation of our existence. What better time to dwell upon the important question: What am I doing with the existence that God has given me?

Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath

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

Deuteronomy 23:25 states: “When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor’s standing grain” (*NKJV*). The problem, therefore, was not the action itself, but the day on which it was done. Rabbinical regulations expressly prohibited many types of work on Sabbath, such as reaping, threshing, and winnowing. In the Pharisees’ opinion, by plucking the ears of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and separating the grain from the husks, the disciples were guilty of doing all of them.

What is the significance of the examples that Jesus used to answer the Pharisees? See *Matt. 12:3–5*.

With the first example (*1 Sam. 21:1–6*), Christ argued that, although in normal circumstances David and his men should not have eaten the bread meant for the priests (*Lev. 24:9*), yet because their lives were in danger, their actions should be considered a permissible violation of a ceremonial rule. The second example Jesus mentioned (*Matt. 12:5*) has to do with the sacrifices and offerings ordained for the Sabbath day in the temple service, which were twice as many as those offered on any other day (*Num. 28:9, 10*). The Jews themselves recognized that the temple service had priority over the Sabbath.

After citing these examples, Jesus made two statements that vindicate His authority to redefine the Pharisees’ burdensome observance of the Sabbath: (1) “ ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:27, NKJV*). Here Jesus reaffirms the Edenic origin of the Sabbath, and redefines the incorrect priorities of the Pharisees regarding man and the Sabbath: the Sabbath was created to benefit human beings and continues as a God-given gift at the service of humanity, instead of humanity at the service of the Sabbath. And (2), by saying, “ ‘The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’ ” (*vs. 28, NKJV*), Christ ratified His status as Creator and Legislator of the Sabbath. Therefore, He alone had the authority to free the Sabbath from these man-made laws.

The spiritual leaders of God’s people charged the Lord of the Sabbath with violating the day that He Himself had created and sanctified. What message should we all take from this about the dangers of spiritual blindness among those who should know better?

The Example of Jesus

What does Luke 4:16 tell us about Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath? Why is this so important for us today? See John 14:15, 1 Pet. 2:21.

The word Luke used in verse 16, *custom*, comes from a Greek word related to habits constant in time and practice. In other words, Jesus regularly attended the synagogue every Sabbath that He could. Moreover, this is so important to Luke that four times in his Gospel he mentions Jesus' attendance at the synagogue on different Sabbaths (Luke 4:16, 4:31, 6:6, 13:10). Also, Luke specifically identifies the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week (Luke 23:54–24:1). The fact that Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, observed the seventh-day Sabbath, along with the Jews, testifies that the weekly cycle had not been lost since the giving of the law at Sinai, or even since Creation. His example as an observer of the Sabbath is a model for Christians to follow, in both time and manner of observance.

What did Jesus read on that special occasion in the synagogue? Why is this significant? See Luke 4:16–21.

This wasn't 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. However, this was Jesus' first visit to Nazareth after leaving the carpenter shop, 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 called upon to read the lesson from the prophets, and the hearts of the hearers thrilled as a new light shone out from the familiar words of the sacred text."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 74.

But this time it was different. Jesus selected a particular passage, Isaiah 61:1, 2, a text that explains the Messiah's work on earth and how He will come "to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD" (Luke 4:19, NKJV). That was the Sabbatical, or jubilee, year, a time of rest. Appropriately, Jesus chose the day of rest, the Sabbath, to announce His ministry of redemption, liberation, and healing. Truly, we find rest in Jesus, a rest expressed in a tangible way every Sabbath day.

Miracles on the Sabbath

The Gospels mention numerous miraculous healings that Jesus carried out on the Sabbath day. It is interesting to note that, in most cases, the healing came by Jesus' initiative, as if He purposely wanted to heal on the Sabbath, though He could have done it any other day. Jesus was trying to make a point: healing on the Sabbath was not unlawful. On the contrary, it was more lawful than what many of the Pharisees and religious leaders were accustomed to doing on the Sabbath.

What arguments are given in each of these texts to justify Jesus' healings on the Sabbath? *Matt. 12:10–12; Luke 13:15, 16; John 5:16, 17.*

Although it is true that we must set aside our own interests during the Sabbath (*Exod. 20:9, Isa. 58:13*), it should never be considered as a period of useless idleness. In His controversies with the Pharisees, Christ clearly pointed out that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (*Matt. 12:12, NKJV*). According to rabbinic traditions, a sick person could be treated on the Sabbath if the situation was life-threatening. Likewise, if a sheep or an ox fell into a pit, it was permissible to pull the animal out on the Sabbath day to save its life. Wasn't a person's life more valuable than an animal's? Unfortunately, Christ's critics showed more compassion toward their own animals than to suffering human beings. They approved watering an animal, but not restoring a person.

Jesus also stated: “ ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working’ ” (*John 5:17, NKJV*), referring to God's work in favor of His creatures. Even on the Sabbath day He continues giving life and sustaining the universe (*Heb. 1:2, 3*).

Jesus taught that we should not be legalistic when observing the Sabbath. To keep it means to “rest” from our own works (*Heb. 4:10*) and, even more important, to stop trying to work our way to salvation—which is impossible anyway. Satan wants to convince us to keep the Sabbath selfishly. If he cannot move us against the Sabbath, he will try to push us to the other extreme: legalism.

Though it's easy to be legalistic about the Sabbath, others can be very lax in keeping it. How do we strike the right balance? Also, why must we be careful in our response to how others keep the Sabbath (don't forget how the Pharisees viewed Christ's Sabbath keeping)?

The Sabbath After the Resurrection

Many Christians keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath, offering a host of reasons, the main one being the resurrection of Christ. Besides the fact that nothing in the New Testament, including the passages on the Resurrection, teaches that Sunday is to replace Sabbath, the New Testament shows that Christ intended for His Sabbath to be kept even after His resurrection.

What does Matthew 24:20 have to say about the Sabbath in the years following 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 considered as sacred as it had always been. The commotion, excitement, fear, and travel necessary to flee from Jerusalem would be inappropriate on the Sabbath day.

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

For the disciples, going to the synagogue was what church attendance should be for us today: one of the best ways to observe the Sabbath. This is especially noticeable with the apostle Paul, who was present at the synagogue services on Sabbath when no church was there. It was his custom, following Jesus' example (*Acts 17:2*). Although he was the apostle to the Gentiles and the champion of justification by faith, he usually went to the synagogue on Sabbath, not only to preach to the Jews but also to keep 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 texts provide powerful evidence that the early church knew nothing of the first day of the week as a replacement for the seventh.

OK, so we know we're right about the right Sabbath day. That's important, of course. How, though, can our Sabbath keeping make us Christians who are more compassionate, loving, and caring?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Sabbath,” pp. 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. . . . It [the Sabbath] points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier. It declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God. For, speaking of Israel, He said, ‘I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them,’—make them holy. Ezek. 20:12. 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 power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 288, 289.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 We are Christ’s, both by Creation and Redemption. How does the Sabbath especially remind us of these crucial truths?
- 2 What is the problem with a legalistic obedience of the fourth commandment? On the other hand, why is a watered-down observance of the Sabbath not the solution to legalism? What is the key element that makes keeping the Sabbath a real blessing?
- 3 Why should the Sabbath, and the opportunity to rest on the Sabbath day, be a special reminder to us of the crucial truth that we are not saved by our works, but by the merits of Christ in our behalf?
- 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 understand better what the Sabbath should be about?
- 6 We are told to keep the Sabbath “holy.” Think through some of your Sabbath activities. How holy are they?

The Greatest Power

Teresa was well-known in her community in western Bulgaria as a witch. She worked magic, casting spells, and removing spells. She told people's fortunes and predicted their future. People respected her for the power she had.

Teresa's little granddaughter, Sara, came to visit. How Teresa loved her! On Sabbath Sara asked her grandmother to take her to church. Teresa was surprised, but she found the church, which met in an old café in town, and took Sara.

A church member saw Teresa and Sara in church and offered Sara a child's Bible storybook. Every evening Sara asked her grandmother to read from the Bible storybook.

Sara loved to sing songs about Jesus as she played or helped her grandmother around the house. Teresa often stopped to listen. Teresa realized that this Jesus, whom her granddaughter loved, was Someone special. She decided to return to the church to learn more.

Teresa started attending church regularly, even after Sara returned home to Italy. Teresa smoked heavily and felt powerless to quit. One day, she stood during testimony time and said, "If you people want me in this church, you need to pray that God will help me get rid of my tobacco habit. I can't make it through church without a smoke."

The church members stopped to pray for her and promised to continue praying. Later that day, Teresa felt nauseated. She began vomiting. *OK, God, she thought, I guess that this is Your way to get the poison out.* She continued vomiting for several hours. When the nausea passed, she never felt the urge to smoke again.

As Teresa became better acquainted with God, she destroyed her witchcraft materials, her charms, and her herbs. When her former clients called to ask her to remove a curse or to curse someone, Teresa told them she no longer dealt in witchcraft. Then she offered to pray to God for them instead. Several of her clients agreed, and some called back to tell her that her prayers had been answered. A few even visited the church.

Teresa knows that she has found a greater power than witchcraft. God saved her, took away her witchcraft, and gave her the ability to read and write so she can share what she is learning with those who haven't yet heard.

Teresa is thankful that believers around the world gave a Thirteenth Sabbath Offering to help the believers in her town build a church. When it's finished, many more people will come and learn about God's great power and love.

TERESA shares her faith in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.