

The Teachings of Jesus

The Sabbath

Lesson #11 for September 13, 2014

Scriptures: John 1:1-3; 5:16-17; Matthew 12:1-5; 24:20; Luke 4:16-21.

1. In this lesson we will discuss Christ's role in the origin of the Sabbath and what He taught about the Sabbath while He was here on this earth. We will also take a look at how He kept the Sabbath Himself as well as how His followers kept it after His resurrection and ascension. The memory text probably represents the clearest passage in Scripture on that subject. (See Mark 2:27-28; compare Matthew 12:8; and Luke 6:5.)
2. In our day, the questions which arise about the Sabbath include not only how it should be observed but also on which day it should be observed. There is no evidence whatsoever in the Gospels to suggest that Jesus made any attempt to change the day on which we are to celebrate the Sabbath; additionally, there is no evidence in the New Testament in the writings of Paul or others that the disciples or apostles made any attempt to change the day on which we are to celebrate the Sabbath.
3. Where did our day of rest, the Sabbath, come from? The first mention of the Sabbath in Scriptures was at the end of creation week. (See Genesis 2:2-3.) Elsewhere in Scripture, it tells us that everything that has been created was created by Jesus Christ the Son of God. (John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:1-2) The entire universe including the Sabbath was created by Him. While the Sabbath was specifically created for man living on planet earth in our solar system, no doubt, other parts of the universe have special times or "days" in which they celebrate their friendship with God.

Because the Sabbath was made for man, it is the Lord's day. It belongs to Christ. For "all things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made." John 1:3. Since He made all things, He made the Sabbath. By Him it was set apart as a memorial of the work of creation. It points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier. . . . 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*, p. 288.2.

4. So, why did God create the Sabbath? It certainly was not because He needed to rest! But, God recognized that in our humanity we would need the rest physically, mentally, and spiritually that is provided by the Sabbath day. But, the Sabbath is much more than just a day to rest. It is a day for us to set aside our cares, worries, and responsibilities from the rest of the week. It is a day to enrich our lives via special communication with God.
5. The command by God to rest on the Sabbath was given on several different occasions throughout Scripture. As we have mentioned, the first was at the end of creation week. The next time it is mentioned in Scripture was connected with the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Ten Commandments as recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Thus, in addition to being a memorial of creation, the Sabbath was also to be associated with the escape from slavery, the establishment of the new nation, and the celebration of the beginning of a theocracy. While the Sabbath was mentioned repeatedly by the prophets especially in connection with problems occurring during the Babylonian captivity, (See Ezekiel 20; Daniel 3, 6.) the next major event connected with the Sabbath was the death, the rest over the Sabbath day, and then the resurrection of Jesus at the end of His earthly

ministry. Isaiah 66:23 carries us far into the future, telling us that we will continue to celebrate the Sabbath in the earth made new. So, why did the keeping of the Sabbath and the worship of the true God upset the rulers of Babylon? It showed that the faithful Sabbathkeepers had another allegiance beyond allegiance to the Babylonian government and Marduk, their god; and it gave the Jewish workers a day of rest.

6. Was God intentionally trying to connect Sabbath observance with every major spiritual highlight in Scripture? Shouldn't the Sabbath be a time for us to celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ is our Creator, Redeemer, Savior, Comforter, and Elder Brother?
7. Read Matthew 12:1-8. What was happening in this story? Most likely, Jesus and His disciples were returning home following attendance at Sabbath morning service in the synagogue. On the way, they passed through a field of wheat. Being hungry, the disciples, picked a few heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, blew away the chaff, and chewed on the ripe kernels. To the Pharisees with their multitudinous rules about Sabbathkeeping, the disciples were committing several sins. They were harvesting, threshing, and winnowing the grain. Deuteronomy 23:25 states clearly that according to Scripture, everything they were doing was completely legal and acceptable—it was not stealing. But, rabbinical regulations forbade them from doing any of those things on the holy Sabbath.
8. So, how did Jesus respond when questioned about His disciples' behavior? There are three important points to be made in His answer to the Pharisees. 1) Just as David and his men were fed by the loaves from the tabernacle, we can be assured that God is concerned about even our simplest needs and wants. 2) The priests in Jesus's day, just like pastors in our day, did more work on the Sabbath than they did on any other day. We bless them for doing this; we do not condemn them! And 3) Another very subtle but very important point: David had been anointed to be the next king of Israel, but he had not yet been enthroned. Christ had been anointed by the Father and the Holy Spirit at His baptism, but He also had not yet been enthroned. The King of the universe who is also the Creator and Lord of the Sabbath had a perfect right to decide what should or should not be done on the Sabbath day. Shouldn't the God who created everything including the Sabbath have the right to determine what should be done on that day?
9. Read Luke 4:16-30. Jesus had been gone from Nazareth for a considerable period of time. As recorded in this passage, He was returning to His hometown and should have been given a hero's welcome. They did invite Him to conduct the service that day by reading from the Scriptures and explaining them. It should be noted that even 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.
10. No doubt, the audience expected Jesus to do some wonderful miracles following His presentation. But, things did not turn out the way they expected. Jesus asked for the scroll of Isaiah and turned to the correct place and read from Isaiah 61:1-2. Luke quotes those words as they appear in the Septuagint or early Greek translation of those verses. But, Jesus said three things that really upset His hometown crowd. 1) First, He said, "This passage has come true today." What was Jesus saying? He was essentially saying, "This prophecy of the coming of the Messiah is talking about Me!" 2) He stopped before reading the last few words in verse 2: "And defeat their enemies." This was their favorite part of the passage. That is what they expected the Messiah to do for them—to defeat the Romans. And the Jews recognized that this passage in Isaiah was a clear messianic promise. But

then, 3) He mentioned the time when Elijah was sent out of Israelite territory to stay with the widow of Zarephath, preserving not only his life but also her life and the life of her child. He also mentioned Elisha's healing of Naaman the Syrian. The idea that the Messiah whom Jesus claimed was among them that very day could reach outside the Israelite nation to bless Canaanites and Syrians instead of Jews was more than they could tolerate. So, they wanted to kill Him.

11. What should we learn about Sabbath observance by looking at the miracles of Jesus? Jesus performed several miracles specifically on the Sabbath to teach us something about Sabbath observance. None of those people were healed because they had emergencies. One man had been born blind. (John 9:1-12) By spitting on the ground and making "mud" and applying it to his eyes, Jesus was intentionally breaking their Sabbath rules. Another had been paralyzed for 38 years. (John 5:1-18) Another had a crippled hand that had been that way for a long time, likely for years. (Matthew 12:10-12)
12. What excuse did Jesus give for breaking their Sabbath rules? He pointed out that they would rescue their animals which were in trouble on the Sabbath but that they thought it was wrong for Him to rescue human beings who were hurting on the Sabbath! Furthermore, Jesus made it very clear that His Father continually sustains all things by His mighty power, even on the Sabbath. Just as His Father continues to work every day of the week, so Jesus had the right to do good works on the Sabbath.
13. Try to imagine yourself living in the days of Jesus. How do you think you would have responded to their many rules about Sabbathkeeping?
14. We know that many of our Christian friends worship God on Sunday instead of Saturday. They have offered a host of different reasons for doing so. The most important and most common of those reasons is the fact that Jesus arose on that day. But, what did Jesus Himself say about Sabbath observance even after His resurrection? Read Matthew 24:20. He told His disciples to pray that they would not need to try to gather their belongings together and escape Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.
15. Paul, one of the most prominent of the apostles, also faithfully kept the Sabbath. See Acts 13:14,42; 14:1; 17:1-2; 18:4. Now it might be suggested by Sundaykeepers that Paul simply went to the synagogue on Saturday because that was when the Jews would be gathered there and that was when he would have a chance to speak to them. But, read Acts 13:26,42-44. If Paul had been accustomed to worshiping God on Sunday, he should have told them to return the following day to hear what else he had to say since many of those who heard Paul were Gentiles. But, he did not. He told them to come the next Sabbath. Clearly, he did not intend to worship on Sunday.
16. What is special about the Sabbath? What is special about one's birthday? Down through the generations, Sabbathkeepers have wandered back and forth from a very legalistic observance of the Sabbath to a very lax observance of the day. Is there a good middle ground? Think about your own way of observing the Sabbath. Would you change your activities on the Sabbath if Jesus were to show up at your home on Sabbath?
17. Without being legalistic, could you make a list of holy activities that would be appropriate to do on the Sabbath? Has that list changed over the years?
18. How would you compare the way the average Seventh-day Adventist observes the Sabbath in our day with the way the Jews kept it in Jesus's day?
19. Do you find the Sabbath to be a true delight? (Isaiah 58:13-14)
20. What ideas are most important in your thinking regarding Sabbathkeeping? In your

thinking, is it more important that Jesus was our Creator? Or, our Redeemer? Or, our Savior? Or, our Comforter? Or, our Elder Brother?

21. God seems to promise us that if we take one 24-hour period and set it apart for worshiping Him, our week will be not only more blessed but also more efficient. Is that possible?
22. Have you ever been in a church group where Sabbath observance was discussed in detail with explanations being given as to why we should do one thing or another?
23. A special challenge for the Sabbath is how to spend the time with young children. How can we make the Sabbath not only enjoyable and meaningful but also educational for them?
24. Anyone who has studied ancient Judaism in any detail knows that there were a multitude of rules for keeping the Sabbath. Surely, all of us recognize that the Jews were particularly careful in Sabbathkeeping. They were constantly accusing Jesus of breaking their rules about the Sabbath. What were their Sabbath rules? Many of those rules have been preserved in the Jewish volume called the *Mishnah*. The Oxford University Press produced an English translation of the *Mishnah* which gives us some of those details. First, however, note that in giving the fourth commandment, God said simply: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. In it thou shalt not do any work." But, He did not tell them what "work" He had in mind. So, the Jews set about to solve that problem. See *Mishnah*, p. 106.

The main classes of work are forty save one: {Do you do any of these things on the Sabbath?} sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, {If a button fell off the pastor's Sabbath suit on his way to church—he does want to look tidy in the pulpit—it is too bad that he cannot sew it on.} tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer and taking out aught from one domain into another. These are the main classes of work: forty save one. (*Mishnah*, page 106) {Content in curly brackets is added.}

In the footnote it says: "These thirty-nine acts of work are treated in various degrees of detail" in chapters eleven and following.

So, what are those details? What if you were rushing home on Friday evening and you did not quite make it home and your donkey was still heavily loaded? There is definitely a rule for that.

If [on the eve of the Sabbath] darkness overtook a man while he was on the way, he must give his purse to a gentile {while it is yet day, of course} {You see, a Gentile was not going to be saved anyway; so, let him carry things for you.}, and if there was no gentile with him he must put it on the ass {on the donkey}. When he has reached the outermost courtyard [of the town] he may take off [from the ass] such baggage as can be taken off on the Sabbath, and for what cannot be taken off on the Sabbath he may loosen the cords so that the sacks fall down of themselves. (*Mishnah*, page 120) {Content in curly brackets is added.}

25. Dealing with dental pain:

Suppose you have teeth that are making you very uncomfortable, and it is Sabbath.

If his teeth pain him he may not suck vinegar through them but he may take vinegar after his usual fashion {and happy the man with sore teeth who is accustomed to taking vinegar in the usual fashion because he may find relief. But one may not specially take vinegar on the Sabbath. Can you see why Jesus ran into trouble healing on the Sabbath? If a man is accustomed to taking vinegar in an ordinary way, he may do it}, and if he is healed he is healed. If his loins pain him he may not rub thereon wine or vinegar, yet he may anoint them with oil but not with rose-oil. {Now} Kings' children may anoint their wounds with rose-oil since it is their custom so to do on ordinary days. (*Mishnah*, page 113) {Content in curly brackets is added.}

26. Remember that Jews were not allowed to light or put out a fire on the Sabbath. But, what if a Gentile was willing to light the fire for him? Are you old enough to put out the fire?

If a gentile came to put out the fire they may not say to him, 'Put it out', or 'Do not put it out', since they are not answerable for his keeping Sabbath. But if it was a minor {a young person} that came to put it out they may not permit him, since they are answerable for his keeping Sabbath. (*Mishnah*, page 114) {Content in curly brackets is added.}

Were there other things that a Gentile might do for him? Lighting a lamp? Or, filling a trough?

If a gentile lighted a lamp an Israelite may make use of the light, but if he lighted it for the sake of the Israelite it is forbidden. If he filled [a trough] with water to give his cattle to drink, an Israelite may give his own cattle to drink after him, but if the gentile did it for the Israelite, it is forbidden. If he made a gangway by which to come down [from a ship] an Israelite may come clown after him, but if he did it for the Israelite, it is forbidden. (*Mishnah*, page 115) {Content in curly brackets is added.}

One would have to be careful to know what the motive was for filling the water trough.

27. And one of the most unusual rules is about bathing on the Sabbath and drying off!

If a man bathed in the water of a cave or in the water of Tiberias and dried himself, even though it was with ten towels, he may not bring them away in his hand. (*Mishnah*, page 119)

One wonder what that would mean, so there is a footnote:

From fear of offending against the principle of squeezing out, however little the moisture in them.

Then you see the point. You are not allowed to squeeze a towel on the Sabbath. But you want to dry yourself. Well, use 10 towels and none of them will get very wet, and you will not by mistake squeeze them. But no, that is forbidden. So, the rule goes on like this:

But if ten men dried themselves with one towel {Then it would be very wet. Wouldn't it?} [wiping] their faces, their hands, and their feet, they may bring the towel away in their hands. {Well, how could that be? The footnote says:} So many would keep each other warned of the danger of squeezing. (*Mishnah*, page 119) {Content in curly brackets is added.}

It would be much safer for 10 people to use one towel and get it very wet because they would remind each other that they must not squeeze it. But, if one man used 10 towels, even though the towels would not be very wet, there is the danger he would forget and

squeeze one of them. Remember that next time you take a shower!

28. And what about a Sabbath-day's journey? How far were you allowed to travel on the Sabbath? How long is a Sabbath-day's journey? According to the Pharisees, it was about one-half mile. But, what if you had a second home that was approximately one-half mile away? Would you then be allowed to travel another one-half mile beyond that second home? What kind of home would be required? Could it be a tent set up the day before? Or, could it be owning a piece of property? What about your home being your lunch stashed under a bush or behind a tree?

29. So, how did Jesus observe the Sabbath?

(1) Jesus gathered with other believers for Scripture study and worship (*Luke 4:16-21*). (2) He experienced nature, hiking through the Galilean countryside (*Matt. 12:1-8*). (3) He relieved human suffering (*vss. 9-14; Luke 13:15, 16; and John 5:16, 17*). (4) He rested from work (*Gen. 2:1-3*). (5) Because of Christ's strict scriptural adherence, we may also infer that Jesus refrained from merchandising (*Matt. 5:17-19 with Neh. 13:15-22*). (6) We may also infer from Jesus' disciples' conduct that He observed the preparation day (*Luke 23, 24; compare with Exodus 16*). Based upon Jesus' example, Christians should conscientiously craft Sabbath practice for today. (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide, The Teachings of Jesus, page 134.*)

30. At the end of His ministry on that fateful crucifixion Friday about three o'clock in the afternoon, Jesus said "It is finished," and He died. His body was removed from the cross by the disciple John, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. (*Desire of Ages 773.3-774.1*) His body was carefully wrapped with the myrrh and aloes provided by Nicodemus in a way that would have been worthy of the most honored of all Jerusalem. Jesus then rested in what He called the sleep-death over the Sabbath while everyone in Jerusalem on both sides of the controversy over His Messiahship was thinking about Him, and many were studying the Scriptures to try to determine if He really was the Messiah. (*DA 775.1*)

31. In light of all that we have studied in this lesson, do you have a better appreciation of how the Sabbath should be observed and all that it should mean to each one of us?

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