

Sabbath | Exodus 20:8-11 | 25 August 2019

Our study of the Feasts of the Old Testament has revealed God's intention and purpose – for us to be connected to the land, food, drink, one another, neighbor and to Himself in excessive celebratory fashion. We also noted that God began with three Feasts (Exodus 23:14 ff.) then expanded to seven in Leviticus (see chapter 23). Lastly, the Feast's changed and morphed through the centuries, some in name, others in practice and purpose. Possibly the most dramatic change was our final Feast – Sabbath. Below we will note the change from Old to New in the Bible then look more closely at the origin of Sabbath.

In the First-century the practice of Sabbath went through dramatic changes stemming from two foundational events. The first was the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and how He overturned the tables – so to speak. The second event was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., redirecting the practice of the Jewish faith away from the Temple and animal sacrifice to the Synagogue, teaching and prayer. The first event gave us the Christian faith that remains today in all its diversity; the second gave birth to Judaism, having no Temple, no sacrificial system, centered to this day in the synagogue, teaching and prayer.

As we turn to the New Testament, we find Jesus in conflict with the Jews regarding how they interpreted and practiced the Sabbath. In Acts, when the role of the synagogue was not to compete with the Temple, nor viewed as Holy (see, Steven Fine, *On the Sanctity of the Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997; and, Lee Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue, the First Thousand Years*, (Yale University Press, 2000), it was viewed as “the meeting place” or community center, wherein Paul would readily share the Gospel.

When we enter the NT letters, we find a consensus that no day is more important than another – everyday is to be lived for God:

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. *Romans 14:5-6*

Let no one pass judgement on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. *Colossians 2:16-17*

I will close my brief introduction with a charge from Romans:

The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. *Romans 14:17-19*

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Sabbath, Lord's Day

The origin of the term: in Greek **sabaton** transliterates the Hebrew **sabbat**. [Transliterate means taking the letters from one language and forming a new word in a different language – the English word

baptism is an example whereby translators took the Greek letters **baptizo** and created a new word in English, making the meaning more fluid and dependent upon context.]. 405

The Etymology: [meaning, the study of historical linguistic change, especially as applied to individual words.] the most likely explanation seems to be that it derives from the verb **sabat**, to cease, to pause. This is the explanation implied in Genesis 2:2 f.: “And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So, God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested (**sabat**) from all his work which he had done in creation” (cf. Exodus 2:8-11). 405

The Sabbath in the OT: The sabbath is mentioned in all parts of the law. No other commandment is so strongly emphasized as this, showing what great importance it held in Israel’s history and carrying the death penalty for its infringement (Ex 31:14; cf. 35:3; Num 15:32-36). 405

As the creation story in Gen 1 centers on the creation of man on the sixth day, the author evidently intends the inauguration of the sabbath to be seen as the climax of the creation process as it applied to the man who had been formed. As Eichrodt has pointed out, this shows that the day was regarded as a source of blessing of universal significance and not merely for Israel, and as being coeval with the human race (W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, I, 1961, 133). Certainly the command includes the slave and the stranger, as Exodus 20:10 does. It underlines the fact by the comment, “that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.” But the primary reason for the commandment is given in the next verse; and as B. S. Childs rightly points out, it is basically theological (*Exodus*, 417). God’s people had been slaves in Egypt, but God mightily delivered them. The sabbath was to be kept holy, because Israel was a redeemed people. The Deuteronomic version then includes a second reason for its observance. Creation and redemption are both motives for its observance, the one for all men, the other especially for Israel. 406

This second aspect appears also in the law under another form. In Exodus 31:17 the sabbath is looked at as a sign between God and Israel. As B. S. Childs points out, “the sabbath as a sign is a reminder both to God and Israel of the eternal covenant relationship which was the ultimate purpose of creation” (*Exodus*, 416). 406-407

In Leviticus 23:1-3 the sabbath is included in the feasts of the Lord. The feasts were commemorations, days set apart so that Israel might spend time in meditation on different aspects of God’s good hand over the nation. Included in their observance were “holy convocations”, public acts of worship. Both for the individual and for the community the sabbath then was to be a day of public worship as well as an opportunity for a joyful observance of the day in the home. This was so in pre-exilic times (Hosea 2:11; Amos 8:5; Isa 1:13). It was a suitable time for consulting a prophet (2 Kings 4:23). 407

To Summarize: The Old Testament attitude to the sabbath was to regard it as a divine ordinance which was universal, but especially relevant to Israel as a redeemed people. Negatively it was observed by a cessation of labour; positively it was a feast of the Lord, an opportunity to concentrate in private and in public on the things of God. Its atmosphere was to be there of a joyful festival; its observance to be taken very seriously by all. 407

Overall: From what we have seen of the institution of the sabbath in the OT with its humanitarian and spiritual advantages, of Christ’s insistence that it was made for man, of Paul’s insistence that no day in

itself has any special sacredness, nor are we to be involved in the Jewish ritual calendar, we may fairly assume that the Christian church was guided by the Holy Spirit to attach the same privileges and blessings of one sacred day of rest in seven to the new Lord's Day. This was the day on which Christ in his resurrection was revealed as Lord, and the day would be celebrated with this thought in view. 412

"Let us therefore strive to enter that rest." Hebrews 4:11