

## Why Christians Worship on Sunday

AT TIMES THE question arises why we rest and worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, rather than on the last day of the week, known in Old Testament times as the Sabbath.

The day of rest is as old as creation. God created all things in six days, then rested on the seventh day and sanctified it. From creation to Moses we find only faint hints that a day of rest may have been observed. We read of no commands concerning the Sabbath during this time. But when the Old Testament law was given to the Israelites, it contained very strict rules for many details of their life and worship.

Concerning the Sabbath, God said, "Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. ...It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever" (Exodus 31:12, 17).

These laws applied only to Israel and were fulfilled in a spiritual sense by Christ. Today we look to the New Testament for direction for our lives. We search in vain for any direct commands concerning a day of rest.

The Old Testament Jews were to keep the last day of the week, but Christians observe the first. When did this change?

When the Roman emperor Constantine accepted the Christian religion in the early 300's, he united the church and state. This was the beginning of the Roman Catholic church. In order to regulate the population, he decreed that the Lord's Day be kept on Sunday. This was not new to the Christians but it was the first that it became state law.

Christians have worshiped on Sunday ever since the resurrection of Jesus, as we can see in ancient writings. For example, Barnabas wrote ninety years after Christ arose, "Wherefore also, we keep the eighth day (the day after the seventh) with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus arose from the dead." Even before that, 'The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles' instructed, "But every Lord's Day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving." Justin Martyr wrote in 140 AD; "Sunday is the day on which we all hold communion assembly..., Jesus Christ, our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn [Saturday]."

From these early writings we can understand that keeping the Lord's Day stems right back to the resurrection, as we note:

- 1) Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week
- 2) This same day the disciples were together and Jesus appeared in their midst.
- 3) A week later Jesus again blessed their meeting with His presence and admonished the doubting Thomas.

- 4) On the Day of Pentecost, a large gathering of disciples waited for the promised power from heaven. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on them, they preached the Word with power. Three thousand people were convicted, repented of their sins and were baptized. Thus the Christian church was born, — on the first day of the week.

### THE SPIRITUAL SABBATH

When God created the world in six days and rested the seventh, His labors were complete. His creation moved in unison and peace. But by disobedience man brought sin into the world. Sin causes separation from God and unrest in the soul. God in His mercy promised to send one to restore that rest.

When God gave the law through Moses, He included the Sabbath — "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy." The sabbath was a figure of the rest that was to be restored by the coming Messiah.

In due time Christ did come with this invitation, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Here we find spiritual rest, the true sabbath (the Hebrew word for rest is 'shabbath').

Hebrews 4 expounds on the spiritual Sabbath, as in verse 10, "For he that is entered into his rest, he also has ceased from his own works, as God did from his," He who has found rest in Christ will no longer live according to his own restless nature, but will walk in harmony with God's Word, a spiritual rest.

### CHRIST THE FIRST-FRUITS

Another type of Christ is the offering of the first-fruits. On the day following the Passover Sabbath, they were to offer a sheaf of the new crop. Eating the new crop was forbidden before this was done.

When Jesus was crucified, He lay dead in the grave over the Sabbath Day. On the next day, the very day that the Jews offered the first-fruits, Christ arose, being the first to rise from the dead. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:20, Christ became "the first-fruits of them that slept." This is what the first-fruit offering had pointed to all these years.

The Jews first offered to God His due before using their own portion. We can apply this to our day. Begin every day and meal with God. Every duty and venture should be approached with thanksgiving and prayerful consideration. Likewise we begin every week by setting aside the first day. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you."

The people of Israel were to rest on the Sabbath and remember their release from bondage in Egypt. We also are buffeted daily by cares and temptations that wear on the soul. We need weekly renewal by putting aside distractions and cares of this life. On the

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first day of the week let us worship and remember that by the power of Jesus' resurrection we can have a new life of fruitfulness.

The resurrection is one of the most important aspects of the New Testament.

First of all, as the old man is crucified with his dead works, he becomes resurrected into a new life. Being at peace with God brings rest within and a fruitful life.

Secondly, since Jesus rose from the dead, He will also bring to life those who have died when He returns for His Bride. This gives us hope for a future life.

What about those who teach a seventh day Sabbath?

As noted above, we have good reason to keep the Lord's Day and we don't wish to judge those who keep the Sabbath. We find, however, that such are inclined to promote teachings that distract from, or even conflict with the spiritual resurrection. There tends to be a carry-over of a works-oriented Jewish religion rather than walking in newness of life by the strength and grace of God. Observing Old Testament feast, offerings and Sabbaths have passed their time of usefulness.

"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23, 24).

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## The Lord's Day

THE IDEA OF A holy rest goes back to Genesis 2:2: "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made." The Hebrew Old Testament uses the word *Shabath* in Genesis 2:2. Interestingly, the Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, compiled before the time of Christ, does not use the *Sabbaton* in Genesis 2:2, but first uses the word *Sabbaton* in Exodus 16:23. This passage pertains to the story of the Israelites in the desert collecting manna with God's command to collect a double portion on the sixth day and to collect none on the seventh day, calling the seventh day "the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord."

Luther's German Bible and the King James Version, along with the Septuagint, all first use the word *sabbath* in the previously mentioned Exodus 16:23.

As one reads the Old Testament, the word *sabbath* always denotes a rest, either for a person to rest from labor on the seventh day or for the land to rest from crop production in the seventh year. This writing will focus on the Sabbath rest on the seventh day.

Of all God's many commands to Israel, the

most oft repeated one with the greatest promised blessings was to keep the Sabbath, while disobedience to that command incurred God's greatest wrath. "...Whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 31:15).

As we forward to the New Testament accounts, we read that Jesus frequently had discussions with the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath. The Pharisees demanded the rest from one's labors on the seventh day, while Jesus emphasized the idea of helping one's fellow man on the Sabbath, which was a new concept. Jesus even declared, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Up until the crucifixion of Christ, the Sabbath unto the Lord was still defined as a literal physical rest on the literal seventh day.

After the resurrection of Jesus, though, the commandment of keeping a Sabbath rest on the seventh day is amazingly never mentioned! This is not an oversight on God's part. God makes no mistakes.

At times, Paul in the book of Acts preached to the Jews on the Sabbath Day in the synagogue; not that he was keeping a Sabbath rest but rather he then had a captive audience so he could preach the Gospel of Christ to the Jews.

Paul triumphantly declares that all believers in Jesus are freed from observance of the Levitical law, including the keeping of a Sabbath rest on the seventh day. Romans, through chapters 1-8, describes the need of the law in the Old Testament, but through Christ we are freed from the law. With Christ as our new master we are now servants of righteousness. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:2-4).

Paul, in Romans 7, notes that man's observance of the law is like a woman being married to her first husband. Only when her first husband dies is she free to marry another, which Paul parallels to our need to be dead to the law before we can be betrothed to Christ. "But now we are delivered from the Law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the boldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6). To keep the law and also to claim Christ at the same time would be spiritual adultery.

Paul continues this concept about freedom from the law all through the books of Ephesians and Galatians, even declaring, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that

ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Galatians 3:1-2). What a very bold statement to those insisting on keeping a literal Sabbath rest.

So what does a literal seventh day Sabbath rest mean to us today? Paul gives us the clue: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

This passage shows that the physical things of the Old Testament are types and shadows of the spiritual in the New Testament. For example, a physical nation in the Old Testament is a type and shadow of a spiritual nation in the New Testament, that is, the body of Christ, or the church. The list goes on: Physical king - Spiritual king (Christ); physical enemies - spiritual enemies (spiritual wickedness in high places (Ephesians 6:12); physical weapons - spiritual weapons (Word of God); physical uncleanness - spiritual uncleanness (heresy); physical dead person - spiritual dead person (an unbeliever); physical promised land - spiritual promised land (heaven).

For a case in point, understanding how the physical types and shadows of the Old Testament point to the spiritual in the New Testament makes it easy to understand why Christians today do not fight in physical wars while the Israelites did so in the Old Testament.

The fourth chapter of Hebrews tells how God rested on the seventh day at the creation and also how the Israelites in the desert had a physical rest available to them in the Promised Land. The author of Hebrews then compares those physical rests to a spiritual rest available to us today. "There remaineth therefore a rest [sabbath in the Greek text] to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his" (Hebrew 4:9-10).

Thus, belief in Christ is the fulfillment of the physical Sabbath rest commanded in the Old Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus states, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

In this present age of the Spirit, Jesus Christ alone, not a literal day, is our Sabbath rest. So when the Old Testament severely condemns not keeping the Sabbath, this is a type and shadow of unbelief in Christ in the New Testament age. "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh

to God must believe that he is, and that he is rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

So what about Sunday? Is that somehow the new Sabbath? Not at all! As shown previously, the Old Testament Sabbath was a God-ordained physical rest on the seventh day (Saturday). Nowhere in the Scriptures, either the Old Testament or the New Testament, is it ever mentioned or alluded to that the Sabbath was "moved" from Saturday to Sunday.

Sunday is definitely not a God-ordained Sabbath, but it does hold a special place in the Christian walk as the Lord's Day. What do we mean by the Lord's Day? It is a day set aside for meeting together, contemplating, praying, and serving others.

Jesus Himself was resurrected on Sunday. Soon after His resurrection, Jesus twice appeared to His gathered disciples on Sunday. The disciples met together at Troas to break bread and hear Paul preach on Sunday (Acts 20). The Apostle John exiled on the Island of Patmos in Revelation was "in the Spirit" on the Lord's Day. Beyond these accounts, there are no other New Testament Biblical references to Sunday or the Lord's Day.

So as can be seen from the Scriptures, the Saturday Sabbath never did change to Sunday. Sunday stands on its own as the Lord's Day, not as a Sabbath. Therefore, whenever Sunday is referred to as "The Sabbath", it is a misnomer, totally unsupported by the Scriptures.

Interestingly, or maybe sadly, when one reads the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (the definitive theological work compiled by the Vatican), it states, "The Sabbath, which represented the completion of the first creation, has been replaced by Sunday which recalls the new creation inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ." At initial glance, this statement sounds fine except for the declaration that the Sabbath was "replaced" by Sunday. The catechism continues to state that Sunday is a "holy day of obligation" with participation in the Mass. There are no Scriptural references to support these heresies.

Seventh Day Adventists believe that the observance of the Old Testament Sabbath still is in effect today, and any denomination that worships on Sunday has the "mark of the beast" as mentioned in Revelation 13. This also is a heresy, indicating that the Seventh Day Adventists are deceived.

In conclusion, let us understand that having faith in Jesus Christ is our true Sabbath rest, and that Sunday is definitely not our Sabbath, but rather the Lord's Day. "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

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