

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 15

The Sabbath Rest - Part One

Throughout these studies we have talked about trusting in God's Word. What we mean by that is that we believe what God says is true, that following His word is for our best good, it is right, it is life. The Bible teaches that there are a number of things that demonstrate whether or not a person really trusts God's word. The next two lessons are concerned with one of those issues and that is the Sabbath, the Lord's Day.

There is apparently some confusion about this day that needs to be cleared up. For example, it is common knowledge that ALL Jews believe Saturday is the Sabbath. At the same time ALL the Muslims believe Friday is the proper day of worship, but, some Christians keep Sunday while others keep Saturday as the day of worship.

Have you ever given any thought as to why this is? Does it matter? Maybe the most important question is - who is truly trusting and following God's word on this issue? To answer that we must once again turn to God's Word.

Revelation 1:10 *"I was in the Spirit on **the Lord's day**, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet"*

This text tells us the Lord has a day, but it does not tell us which day is the Lord's Day.

Mark 2:27 *"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."*

This text tells us the Sabbath is the "*Lord's day*," but it does not tell us which day is the Sabbath. We need another text.

Exodus 20:10 *"But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates."*

This text tells us that the seventh day is the "Sabbath of the Lord." By the way, note it is the Sabbath of the Lord, not the Sabbath of the Jew or my Sabbath or your Sabbath, but the Lord's.

But some argue that we don't know for sure which day is the seventh day, assuming it has been lost track of back in ancient times. But the Bible has never lost track of the seventh day from the Creation even to the time of the Apostles.

Genesis 2:2,3 *"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."*

In establishing the seventh-day as the Sabbath at Creation, God "sanctified it." That means that He set aside the seventh day to be honored and observed. It was not set aside for a certain people, but as we just read Mark 2:27 where Jesus said it was "made for man" (the Greek word translated "man" is "anthropos" meaning "mankind," or all people including men and women.) The fact that there were no Jews at the time of Creation is evidence that it couldn't be just for the Jew.

Then before Moses and the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, where they would be given the Ten Commandments, God reminded His people of the seventh day Sabbath that was established back at the Creation. We find the story in Exodus.

Exodus 16:4 *"Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not."*

Verse 26 *"Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none."*

Keeping the Sabbath was to “prove” or test them to see if they would trust God’s Word and follow it. That was God’s purpose in withholding the manna on the seventh day. But note what happened -

Verses 27, 28 *"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?"*

Why did those people go out on the seventh day to gather when God had told them there would be no manna that day? Because they did not trust His Word. They failed the test.

When they finally arrived at Mount Sinai God himself then wrote the Sabbath commandment on the tables of stone to indicate its permanence. God has continued to watch over the Sabbath day throughout the ages; it has not been lost.

We have evidence in the New Testament that clearly shows which day is the Sabbath. Note the following verses. from the record of Christ's crucifixion.

Luke 23:50 - 54 *"Now behold, there was a man named Joseph, a council member, a good and just man. He had not consented to their decision and deed. He was from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who himself was also waiting for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before. **That day was the Preparation, and the Sabbath drew near.**"*

This is what later became known as “Good Friday” – the day Christ was crucified.

Verses 55,56 *"And the women who had come with Him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how His body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment."*

This is the day following Good Friday, which would be Saturday or the seventh day of the week.

Luke 24:1 *"Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."*

This was Sunday morning, the first day of the week, what the Christian world now celebrates every spring as "Easter Sunday."

What day lies between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Saturday or the seventh day Sabbath. The seventh day has not been lost.

If the Jews had been keeping the wrong day as Sabbath, Jesus would have told them. As we learned in a previous lesson, as the Son of God, Jesus is the Creator and Lawgiver as seen by the following passages.

Ephesians 3:9 *"And to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ"*

Nehemiah 9:6 *"You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, The heaven of heavens, with all their host, The earth and everything on it, The seas and all that is in them, And You preserve them all. The host of heaven worships You. You are the LORD God"*

Verse 13 *"You came down also on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws,*

Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your servant."

The Lord who created the world also blessed and sanctified the seventh day as a day of rest. But who needed rest that first Sabbath? God never gets tired, Adam and Eve were just created, so they didn't need rest. However, having just been brought to life they would not have known who God was. Surely they had many things to learn. Therefore, God set aside that first seventh day for Adam and Eve to get to acquainted with Him. One of the primary reasons for the Sabbath is to spend time with God, getting to know him better. This is so important that when God wrote this precept He began it with the word "*Remember.*"

Exodus 20:8 - 11 *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."*

This day was to be a weekly reminder that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them, thus keeping men from developing other theories of how this world came into existence eventually leading them into atheism.

The seventh-day Sabbath was not a part of the ceremonial law of the sacrificial system that was a "*shadow of good things to come*" (Hebrews 10:1) pointing to the coming Messiah. The Sabbath is part of the moral (right) law that points back to the Creator and Lawgiver.

Approximately 4000 years after Creation, as Christ died on the cross, He declared, *"It is finished,"* and rested in the tomb the seventh-day Sabbath.

Note according to John 20:17, the morning of His resurrection, He told Mary He had not yet gone to the Father, which means He had remained in the tomb during the Sabbath hours.

John 20:17 *"Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"*

Just as the Creator rested the Sabbath after His work of Creation, the Redeemer rested in the tomb on the Sabbath after His work of redemption.

The Hebrew noun "Sabbath" comes from the verb "sabat" which means, "to take intermission." The Sabbath day is a day of "intermission," a time for us to stop and remember - both our Creator AND our Savior!

Some teach that the Apostles, acting on a commandment from Christ, changed the day of worship to the first day for the Christian believer because Jesus was resurrected on that day. If the Lord had given them a commandment that important they would have told us! It would be in their writings, as Luke tells us in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:1,2 *"The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."*

According to Luke's own words, if Christ had commanded a change in the day of rest and worship from the seventh to the first day in honor of the resurrection, we should be able to find it in his writings, either in the Gospel of Luke or the book of Acts.

In a careful reading of both books there is no record of such a change. However, the following are some of the verses in Acts that clearly show the apostles worshipped on the Sabbath.

Acts 13:42 - 44 *"So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God."*

Acts 16:13 *"And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there."*

Acts 18:4 *"And he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks."*

There is one text that does mention Paul's preaching and breaking bread on the first day of the week.

Acts 20:7 *"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."*

Think about what is being said here. Does breaking bread or communion make a day a Sabbath? No, churches have communion on different days of the week. Does preaching make a day a Sabbath? Again, no, preaching services are held on different days of the week as well.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary makes the following comment on Acts 20:7:

“This is the earliest clear reference to the Christian practice of observing Sunday as a day of worship. The first Christians, as Jews, probably continued to observe the Sabbath as well as the first day of the week. **We are not told when or how the practice of Sunday worship arose in the church.**”

(From The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1962 by Moody Press. All rights reserved.)

This is true, we are *not* told in the Bible “*how the practice of Sunday worship arose in the Church,*” the reason being that the practice of Sunday worship did not begin until many years after the Bible was written!

The fact is that all the New Testament books were written 20 to 90 years *after* Christ’s resurrection – in those writings the Jews argued with the Christians about Moses’ law, fasting, circumcision, and the traditional teachings of the Pharisees. But if the Christians had made an attempt to change the Sabbath day there would have been a tremendous controversy over that and it would have been faithfully recorded in the Bible just as the other issues were. But there is no mention of changing the day of worship in the entire New Testament.

Note this honest admission of a Baptist theologian, Herschel H. Hobbs from his book, “The Baptist Faith and Message” copyright 1971 – Convention Press, page 94 -

“There is no specific command in the New Testament to change from the seventh to the first day.”

If the change is not in the Bible, then who, when and by what authority was the seventh day Sabbath changed to the first day Sunday? Before we answer that question read the following verses.

Psalm 89:34 *“My covenant will I not break, nor alter the word that is gone out of my lips.”*

Ezekiel 22:28 *“Her prophets plastered them with untempered mortar, seeing false visions, and divining lies for them, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ when the LORD had not spoken.”*

In these verses God says that He will not change His Word but some church leaders will. Church history tells us the change from the seventh day Sabbath to the first day Sunday came about during the fourth century long after the scriptures were finished and all the Apostles had died.

The change was subtle and prompted by two things. The first was compromise – the blending of pagan holidays making them Christian Holy Days in the Church. Note the following excerpts from a book written by the Catholic scholar - Charles Panati.

“Sacred Origins of Profound Things” Published by Penquin 1996
Page 216 Under the heading “Christmas.”

“It is important to note that for two centuries after Christ’s birth, no one knew, and few people cared, exactly when he was born. Birthdays were unimportant.... On December 25, pagan Romans, still in the majority, celebrated “Natalis Solis Invicti,” (Latin for) “Birthday of the Invincible Sun God,” Mithras.... Mithraism was so popular with the masses that the Emperor Aurelian proclaimed it the official state religion. In the early 300’s the cult seriously threatened Christianity, and for a time, it was unclear which would emerge victorious. Church fathers debated their options. It is well known that Roman patricians (high society) and Plebeians (common people) alike enjoyed festivals of a protracted (prolonged) nature. The Church, then, needed a December celebration. Thus, to offer converts an occasion in which to be proudly celebratory, the Church officially recognized Christ’s birth. And to offer head-on competition to the sun worshippers’ popular feast, the Church located the Nativity (Christ’s birth) on December 25th.”

And then on Page 204, 205 Under the heading – “Easter Sunday.”

“In the Christian faith, Easter is the most sacred of holy days because it commemorates the cornerstone miracle of the faith...But the holy day’s name derives from an ancient pagan festival and is the name of the Saxon goddess of spring and offspring (fertility), Eastre. It just so happened that Eastre, a fertility goddess, had as her earthly symbol the prolific hare, or rabbit. Hence the origin of the Easter bunny. Named “the Lord’s Day,” Sunday became a symbol by which Christians differentiated themselves from the Jew. However, it was not until Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire in the early decades of the fourth century that the Lord’s day took over the full significance of the Sabbath, and that the observance of the seventh day was dropped and left entirely to the Jews.”

The second thing that prompted the change was hatred for the Jews whom many people blamed for the death of Christ as well as for the Jewish-Roman War in the first century. The following is a statement made in the fourth century by the Roman Emperor Constantine which reflected those feelings among many early Christians.

“We ought not therefore have anything in common with the Jews, for the Savior has shown us another way. We desire dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews.”

Quoted from the Council of Nicea 325 A.D.

The change from the seventh day Sabbath to the first day Sunday was officially adopted by the Church fathers in A.D. 338 at the Council of Laodicea as noted in the Revell Bible Dictionary, Wynwood Press, New York, N. Y. 1973. Under the heading of “The Lord’s Day.”

“However, there was no transfer of the concept of a day of rest from Sabbath to Sunday. In the first century, the first day of the

week was a normal work day. Yet the tendency to transfer elements of Sabbath observance to Sunday soon appeared and is reflected in the pronouncement of the fourth council of Laodicea that while “Christians must not Judasize by resting on the Sabbath, they should, if possible, rest on the Lord’s Day.”

Later, in A.D. 1234, Pope Gregory officially mandated Sunday rest for all Christians. The Roman Catholic Church claims to have made the change from Sabbath to Sunday as recorded in the following church document.

The Converts Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, by Rev. Peter Geiermann, C.S.S.R, pg 50 –

Q. What is the third commandment?

A. The third commandment is: Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.

It is a historical fact that the Church made the change, not based on the Bible, but based on the authority of the Church. But does the Roman Church, or any church, have the authority to change the commandment of God for any reason? The Apostle Peter answers:

Acts 5:29 *"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."*

If the commandment to keep Sunday is not in the Bible, then it is clearly a precept or a law of man. The dictionary defines the ideas of men as “tradition.” Jesus warned us about keeping the traditions of man in place of the commandments of God.

Matthew 15:1 - 9 *"Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God"-- then he need not honor his father or mother. 'Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"*

Though most Christians do not realize it, Sunday is a tradition that has replaced the commandment of God, *"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."*

This brings us back to the initial point – the Sabbath command is an issue that can demonstrate whether or not we trust God’s Word. It is a test in the sense that if one knows the word of God and refuses to honor it, that is evidence that they:

1) Don’t trust God’s Word, just as those people in the Old Testament who went out on the Sabbath to gather manna after God told them there would be none.

Or, 2) they possess a rebellious spirit – they will do only that which they want to do or what they find convenient for them, regardless of what God says.

The bottom line is that the issue here not about this or that day – it’s about trusting God and being willing to follow His Word. And instead of being a sign that we are attempting to work our way to heaven, keeping the Sabbath is a sign that we “rest,” or trust in God’s Word.

