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227 - The Sabbath Day

1. Introduction

Today there's confusion about when we should worship and why there's a difference between our time and the period governed by the Law of Moses. From the first chapters of Genesis onward there was emphasis on the seventh day. The Ten Commandments specified a day that was to be kept as a holy day. In our time some of these ideas have continued and many don't understand the changes brought about by the death of Christ and the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost. In this lesson we'll discuss **The Sabbath Day**, what it meant, its significance then and what it means for us now.

2. Understanding the Sabbath day

If you look up a definition for the word Sabbath, chances are you'll find references to it as the seventh day of the week, Saturday, and notes that this is an important Jewish observation in keeping with the Law of Moses. In most people's minds the term Sabbath means seventh and there are religious groups who base their doctrines and practices on this idea. But if we look deeper we'll find that's not exactly correct.

The problem here is that in the scriptures the Sabbath observance is tied to the seventh day. This is a fundamental misunderstanding among Bible believers today that generates conflict at times. In this lesson we'll

- a. Define the term "Sabbath" and review it's scriptural origins
- b. Discuss the usage of the term under the Law of Moses
- c. Examine changes that take place when the church is established
- d. Explore figurative connections of the Sabbath

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. The Sabbath & its connection to seven

Most people think the term "Sabbath" means seven, or seventh. Due to the connections and references in the Old Testament that place the Sabbath on the seventh day we can see how we would reach that conclusion. A good starting point for understanding the seventh day and its connection with the Sabbath is to define the term.

The word Sabbath is derived from a Hebrew root that means to stop or cease. When we read the account of creation in Genesis we can see this illustrated. Genesis chapter one provides detail about the creation of the physical universe. The chapter ends with the creation of man and God's instructions to the humans he created (**Gen 1.26-31**). Chapter two begins with a summary

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of what has just taken place. “*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*” (Gen 2.1). This concludes creation proper, but the story doesn’t end there. “*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. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.*” (Gen 2.2-3). There are important points we can highlight from these verses.

First is the functional definition of the word Sabbath. The final day, which we know as the last day of the week, was set aside by God as the day in which he “*rested*”, or ceased, from his work of creation. We’re told that God sanctified it and set it apart as a memorial to his completion of making the universe. At this time we have no information concerning a command for Adam and Eve to observe this but the fact remains that this day was to mark the time at which God stopped creating. This is significant because after this point throughout the narrative, the physical world and universe is maintained through natural mechanisms set in place but there’s no new creation. The only new creation, referred to in the scriptures, are children who will be “*created*” (Psm 102.18) but this also follows natural reproductive laws God put in place.

I’ve noted before that the physical universe was created in such a way that it mirrors spiritual realities. In the discussion of blood I noted that the ability to feel pain and the significance of blood were examples of elements that connected with spiritual realities later on. When God set the seventh day aside at the beginning he did so with His plan to redeem mankind in mind. Commands to observe the Sabbath don’t emerge until the Law is given to Moses at Mount Sinai. I’ll discuss this in more detail in a minute but we need to understand that from the beginning God sets a precedent of having a day that will be sanctified or set aside as a holy day. In the early part of the narrative we see a powerful figurative connection being forged which will continue throughout the text.

In the lesson on **The Numbers Of God**, I noted that the number seven was associated directly with the power and work of God. As creation comes to a close we see that God designated a seventh day to mark the fullness or completion of his work of making the universe. This illustrates the point I made earlier about the physical world and its design mirroring spiritual realities. God will continue to be represented by seven and this begins literally at the beginning of everything as God creates a seventh day denoting finality and completeness. He then sanctifies it which solidifies the connection between these ideas, the number seven and the Sabbath.

Back to our definition. The word Sabbath means to rest, stop or cease. God completed his work of creating on the sixth day but marked a last day, the seventh, to commemorate the event. Because of this association most think that a Sabbath has to be the seventh day. Under the Law of Moses it was but as we turn our attention to the Law and how it was given we’ll set the stage to understand changes that take place later.

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4. Sabbath days, years and other things under the Law

In 1860 Ellen G. Harmon, later known as Ellen G. White founded the Seventh Day Adventist church based on a vision she had a few years earlier. In her vision she saw the fourth commandment surrounded by a bright halo and she was led into the Holy Place within the Tabernacle. Over the years she taught a variety of doctrines and ideas that emphasized dietary regulations and other things but the core of her belief was the sacredness of the fourth commandment - to keep the Sabbath day. For her the only day that one should worship God is therefore the Sabbath or seventh day. We'll come back to this when we discuss the New Testament and the establishment of the church but at this point we need to know that she wasn't alone in her beliefs about the Sabbath.

Today there are many Bible believers who refer to Sunday as the Sabbath, or Christian Sabbath, and while Sunday has traditionally held the first spot on calendars, in recent times this has changed. In casual conversation we refer to the weekend and for most people the last day of the weekend is Sunday. Those in the Jewish religion worship on Saturday, referring to it as the Sabbath, in accordance with the Law of Moses. The observance of the Jewish Sabbath, use of the term weekend, and the idea of a Christian Sabbath are cemented in mainstream religious thought. In order to understand the term and how the day was set by God we need to review the Law and how things are worded. First, we'll take a look at the first appearance of the term and its connection with the seventh day.

The children of Israel left Egypt on the night of the fourteenth day of their first month when the firstborn of Egypt died. About one month later they're in the wilderness of Sinai on their way to the mountain where God would give the Law to Moses. On the fifteenth day of the second month there was a problem. ***“And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*** (Ex 16.2-3). God's response to this leads us to a very well know story in the scriptures.

“Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.” (Ex 16.4). Up to this time the only instructions given to the people were in reference to the plagues, preparation for the Passover and what they were to do when leaving Egypt. There wasn't anything stated about worship or on what day this would be observed. The interesting thing about this period, and to some degree the first century, is that God reveals commands or conditions when there are issues that need to be addressed. These functional decrees illustrate not only the content of God's command but also provides detail concerning application. This episode is one of those. God then gives instructions for how the

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bread that will rain from heaven is to be used. On the sixth day they were instructed to gather twice the amount since the following day was the “*holy Sabbath unto the Lord*” (Ex 16.23). On the seventh day, the holy Sabbath, there would be no manna for them to gather (Ex 16.26)

On Mount Sinai, Moses received the Law from God. I’ve pointed out that the Law is made up of many commands, the most familiar of which are the Ten Commandments recorded on tables of stone. God states, “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” (Ex 20.8). The Lord then provides additional detail. “*Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*” (Ex 20.9-11).

The seventh day, the holy Sabbath, was sanctified by God and was not to be violated. God stated consequences for doing this. “*Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.*” (Ex 31.14). As we study the Law we can understand the attitudes that surrounded it’s observance. In the first century the Jews revered this day as they had been commanded. On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover, Christ’s kingdom, the church was established and with the preaching of the Gospel things changed.

5. The New Testament and a significant change

The Jews of the first century lived in a tumultuous time. A remnant had returned during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah after seventy years of exile in Babylon. The walls of the city and Temple had been rebuilt and the people waited for the time when the kingdom would be restored to Israel. Over the years they saw the Romans occupy their land placing them under foreign rule. They were expecting the ultimate deliverance promised by God through the Messiah who would sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem. They looked to the writings of the prophets for signs showing when these things would take place and imagined freedom in a restoration of the physical kingdom. There were many who believed Christ was the Messiah but expected him to take his place on the throne and drive the Romans out.

This misconception was one that even Jesus disciples held. As Christ prepared to leave them and ascend to the Father they asked, “*Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*” (Acts 1.6). Christ told Peter that he would build his church and the gates of Hell would not prevail against it (Matt 16.18). As they stood waiting for an answer to their question, Jesus told them, “*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father*

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hath put in his own power.” (Acts 1.7). Christ then went on to explain what was to happen. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1.8). Luke records another detail given by Christ during this conversation. “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24.49).

Until the day of Pentecost the disciples, later identified as the apostles, didn't understand the nature of Christ's kingdom. Christ told them they were to be his witnesses to the world including the “*uttermost part of the earth*”. The writings of the prophets Isaiah and Micah indicated that the new kingdom, described as the “*mountain of the Lord's house*” (Isaiah 2.2), the “*mountain of the house of the Lord*” and the “*house of the God of Jacob*” (Mic 4.1-2) would be established for all nations to come to God. The nationalistic mindset of the Jews of the first century, including the apostles, didn't comprehend this change until the church was established.

Opposition to the Gospel in the Jewish world failed to realize that the new law which was being revealed brought significant changes to the way they were to worship. Evidence that the law was to change however is indicated in the writings of the prophets. Jeremiah states, “*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake...*” (Jer 31.31-32). The writer of Hebrews discusses this change (Heb 8.7) and speaking of the Law notes its end. After quoting the prophecy of Jeremiah the writer states, “*In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.*” (Heb 8.13).

The Jewish nation preserved and held to the traditions of the Law of Moses. They rejected the idea that Christ was the Messiah and even in our time still wait for the coming of God's anointed who will assume the throne of David and restore the kingdom. Paul the apostle speaks of this in his letter to the Romans. “*Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.*” (Rom 10.1-4).

As the Gospel was preached in the Gentile world, teachers began to impose elements of the Law on gentile Christians. Such practices as circumcision and keeping the Sabbath weren't to be ignored and these ideas caused trouble for gentiles who had embraced the teachings of the

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apostles. Paul addressed these false ideas in his letter to the churches of Galatia. ***“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”*** (Gal 3.24). While on Earth Christ stated he had come to fulfill the Law and the prophets (Matt 5.17). Addressing false doctrine being taught in the church at Colossi Paul states that the Law had been taken away as it was nailed to the cross in Christ’s death (Col 2.14). The end of the Law was figuratively shown when the Vail in the Temple was torn in two at Christ’s death (Matt 27.51). The writer of Hebrews speaks of Christ passing into the Most Holy Place and notes the reason for this. ***“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us...”*** (Heb 9.24). Christ offered a better sacrifice for the sins of the world (Heb 10.5-10) and makes intercession for us as the high priest of the faith for all time (Heb 7.23-28).

The Sabbath was sanctified as the day of worship by God. When Christ died the work of salvation God had promised at the beginning became a reality. The first day of the week is therefore significant as the day of worship for Christians as seen in the resurrection. ***“In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.”*** (Matt 28.1-6).

Christ rose on the first day of the week. We have statements that Christians met on the first day of the week (Acts 20.7, 1 Cor 16.1-2). While God had set the Sabbath apart and sanctified it, the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week sanctified a new day that was part of the new law. This was difficult for the Jews of the first century and remains a difficult thing for believers today. The following chart compares the changes that took place with the establishment of the church and preaching of the Gospel.

| Law Of Moses | Gospel |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Sabbath - last day | Sunday - first day of the week |
| Cessation of God's work | Beginning of God's work |
| End of physical creation | Beginning of new creation |
| Sacrifices killed | Christ raised |
| Worship on Sabbath | Church est on first day |

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1. Under the Law of Moses the Sabbath day was sanctified by God as the day of worship
2. Christians met on the first day of the week
3. The Sabbath marked the time when God rested from his work
4. The Gospel marks the beginning of God's final work of redemption & salvation
5. The Sabbath day marked the completion of physical creation
6. The first day of the week marks the day of a new spiritual creation - the church
7. Sacrificial animals were killed on the Sabbath day foreshadowing the Messiah
8. Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week
9. God commanded the Sabbath to be remembered as a holy day of worship
10. The church, Christ's kingdom was established on the first day of the week

The changes brought about by the death, burial, resurrection of Christ and the establishment of the church on the first day of the week were significant. When Christ died he completed the work his Father had begun. On the cross as he died Christ stated, "*it is finished*" (**John 19.30**) referring to the completion of God's plan to save all of mankind. The Law was fulfilled and as Moses had stated, the prophet like him had come into the world and a new law was revealed over time.

Today those who approach God through his word in true faith realize that the first day of the week, not the seventh, is the day sanctified for worship in the New Testament. The passing of the Law of Moses wasn't understood in the first century and the changes weren't accepted. Today confusion remains as many fail to understand that God's work was done and the Law, having served its purpose, was no longer valid.

6. What we need to know about the Sabbath day

There are some important lessons we need to understand concerning the Sabbath day and the period of the Gospel era that we live in now.

- a. The Sabbath means to rest or cease, not seventh
- b. God Sanctified the Sabbath as the day of rest and worship under the Law of Moses
- c. The Law of Moses was fulfilled in the death, burial & resurrection of Christ
- d. The establishment of the church and preaching of the Gospel brought in a new law
- e. The Law of Moses being fulfilled was at an end and taken out of the way
- f. Believers today remember Christ and worship on the first day of the week
- g. It's inappropriate to refer to the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath

In the next series of lessons I'll be discussing the doctrine of the Bible with a focus on the

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New Testament. An important aspect of this is that God's commands for the time in which we live must be accepted in whole, not partially. That will be the subject of an upcoming lesson.

7. Conclusions

I hope you've enjoyed this series on Biblical Symbolism including an exploration of the Law of Moses. These are areas that are generally neglected but in my opinion are strong bits of evidence supporting divine inspiration of the scriptures. The symbols, types and foreshadows we've studied possess common traits and functions that serve to emphasize their common point of origin - God. Understanding symbolism and applying the principle of preserving the context of passages, chapters and entire books in the Bible will shed light on common misconceptions about the Bible and how God works. Now that we've studied the content of the Bible and have a grasp of how symbols work we're in a good place to take a deeper look at the doctrine of the Bible. I'm currently working on the next series and hope to have those lessons ready soon. Thanks again for watching and listening and remember to keep searching the scriptures.