

Honoring God's Sabbath

Sabbath Evening Chat
January 13, 2006

The scriptures reveal that on the seventh day of creation God ceased from His labor regarding the physical universe (Gen. 2:2). He then created that which *was* and *is* HOLY. The Great Architect of all that exists placed a segment of time in our physical dimension and wove through it sacred qualities (verse 3). God made the seventh day unique because it was designed for a unique purpose -- a Holy purpose. That purpose is to provide a link between mortal finite man and his immortal infinite Creator (Ex.31: 13-18). For this reason alone God's people should approach this day with great deference and respect. The Sabbath stands as a memorial to God's *physical* AS WELL AS His *spiritual* creation. In a very real sense it is a gateway into eternity.

On Friday evening January 13th, ***Blow the Trumpet*** hosted a special discussion regarding this remarkable command. The following are our observations concerning a series of questions advanced to those who participated in this discussion.

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### ***Who was the Sabbath made for?***

The scriptures reveal that God had a purpose for His Sabbath from the very beginning. He made it for man. In the book of Genesis we read that God created man on the sixth day (Gen.1: 26-31). This act concluded the framing of the physical universe -- the heavens and the earth (Gen.1). However, because God is a spirit (Jn. 4:24) He created a spiritual link for man to connect to Him. That link was His Sabbath. Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). This truth is affirmed by the Genesis account of creation. Man came first then the Sabbath. Additionally, the Sabbath was not created as the exclusive possession of the Jews. Despite what many assume today, the Sabbath belongs to God. It is called the Sabbath of the Eternal. It is God's Sabbath and as such He presides over it and He alone is the Judge of how it is to be honored.

### ***Why did God create the Sabbath?***

When God created the Sabbath on the seventh day He "sanctified" it (Gen.2:2). Literally translated, this word means to "consecrate" or to "purify". What God was doing with this act was setting this day apart for a Holy purpose. When giving His law to Moses God reconfirms that He "blessed" the Sabbath and "hallowed" it (Ex.20: 11).

This now brings us to the question. Why did God "sanctify" the seventh day? Why did he make it Holy? He did so as a constant reminder that it is His intent to sanctify His people. Just as the Sabbath was created for a holy purpose, so were His people. The Sabbath is a sign that will enable God's people to know their Creator and the plan He has for them (Ex. 31:13-17).

### ***What does the Sabbath picture?***

It is not by accident that God created the Sabbath on the seventh day as opposed to some other period during the week. It is also not by accident that He made a clear distinction between the first six days and the Sabbath. The first six days pertain to the physical realm, which God gave man dominion over (Gen. 1:26-30). These six days picture six thousand years of human history in which man presides over the

earth. However, once this time has ended, God will intervene and bring a kingdom that will be ruled by a great King. That King is Jesus Christ (Rev. 19:11-21). The Sabbath pictures that kingdom. It reflects a time when man will be delivered from the oppression brought on by six thousand years of human mismanagement. In its place will be a Kingdom driven by mercy, judgement and faith.

### ***When was the Sabbath made a formal command?***

The Sabbath was made HOLY on the seventh day of creation (Gen. 2:2). Those who obeyed God undoubtedly honored this day as He did. This would include people like Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When God gave the command to Moses on Mount Sinai He was reintroducing His law to the children of Israel. It is interesting that God began with His Sabbath (Ex. 16). This was done before Sinai.

### ***How is God's Sabbath to be Kept?***

Many resent the idea of do's and don'ts on God's Sabbath. However, because this day is Holy it can only be governed by a Holy God. That God thinks differently than man. His wisdom is perfect. Furthermore, His wisdom is not driven by self interest. It is driven by righteousness. Because of this God provides some very specific instructions concerning how His Sabbath is to be honored. The following are some of the things God specifically commands His people to do regarding the Sabbath.

To assemble with God's people before Him (Lev.23:2-3, Heb. 10:25)  
To rejoice and call the Sabbath a delight (Isa. 58:13)  
To honor God (Isa. 58:13)

Perhaps the best way to understand how the Sabbath should be kept is to follow the example of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath. Here are some of the things He did when honoring this day.

He assembled in the synagogue (Mk. 1:21)  
He read from the scriptures (Lk. 4:16)  
He healed the sick (Mk. 1:29)  
He shared meals with brethren (Lk. 14:1-6)  
He took walks with friends (Mt. 12:1)  
He inspired hope in the weak (Lk. 13:15-16)  
He stayed in constant contact with His Father

### ***What are God's people to refrain from doing on His Sabbath?***

Not only has God provided clear instruction concerning how the Sabbath is to be honored, He also explains how it can be profaned. The following are some things God forbids His people to do on His Sabbath.

They must cease from labor (Ex, 20:8-10, Deut. 5:13-14)  
They must not compel others to labor on their behalf (Deut. 5:14-15)  
They must not compel their livestock to work (Ex. 20:10, Deut. 5:14)  
They must not engage in business, buy or sell (Ne. 10:31; 13:15-21)  
They must not do their own pleasure (Isa. 58:13)  
They must not speak their own words (Isa. 58:13)  
They must not trample on this day (Isa. 58:13)  
They must not go outside the community of faith (Ex.16:29)

### ***What are the consequences for profaning the Sabbath?***

The Sabbath is so important to God that He actually outlined the consequences for failing to honor this day. He called it a capital offence (Ex.31:13;32:2). To illustrate how severe profaning the Sabbath is to God, consider what He instructed to be done to a man who was caught picking up wood on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36)

### ***Also:***

The Captivity of both Israel and Judah are directly linked to their polluting of God's Sabbath. Israel was indicted for breaking it (Ezk. 20; 22:26)

Judah was also warned (Jer. 17:19-27)  
Judah punished for not honoring this day (Jer. 52:12-30)

### ***Did Jesus break the Sabbath?***

Throughout His ministry Jesus was accused by the religious leaders of His day of breaking the Sabbath. This accusation often came when He healed people. However, the indictment by the scribes and Pharisees was not driven by a love of God's law but rather by intense jealousy and resentment. There was never any prohibition against healing on the Sabbath in God's law. As a matter of fact such a practice actually reflected the very Kingdom the Sabbath pictured (Isa. 35:3-6). Additionally, it is important to understand that Jesus is the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mk.2:27). For this reason alone He cherished this wonderful day. He designed its purpose and will one day bring all that it pictures back to this world. At that time all mankind will "remember the Sabbath and keep it Holy (Isa. 66:23).

### ***Are there exceptions to any of the Biblical prohibitions concerning the Sabbath?***

Jesus Christ indicated that there are two reasons that may necessitate engaging in profane labor on the Sabbath. The first involves an unforeseen emergency that is beyond a believer's control. This is often referred to as an "Ox in the ditch" (Lk. 14:5). The second involves labor done in the service of God's people provided it is genuinely a Levitical function. Today such labor might be something like setting up chairs for church services, working on the sound system, or ushering duties.

### ***Why is the Sabbath called the "test commandment"?***

Throughout history the Sabbath has stood as a great test of faith. It has challenged the true commitment of God's people. Just about every Sabbath-keeper has a story about a Sabbath trial. However, the real reason the Sabbath is often called the "Test Commandment" is because God Himself used similar words when teaching the Israelites about this day right after He delivered them out of Egypt. There He said he would "prove them whether they would walk in my law or no" (Ex. 16:4).