

The Sabbath

IS IT A SPECIAL DAY?

When you have read this leaflet you will know the answers to these questions:

1. Which day is the Sabbath?
2. Did Jesus think the Sabbath was a special day?
3. Should Christians keep the Sabbath?
4. What is the Rest that God has promised to faithful Christians?

1. WHICH DAY IS THE SABBATH?

The answer to this question may surprise you. The sabbath in the Bible began at sunset on Friday and ended at sunset on Saturday. That is how the Jews observed it. The day began when darkness fell. The reason for this is found in Genesis 1:5: "So the evening and the morning were the first day." The evening came first. The sabbath, and many duties on it, is first recorded 2,500 years later, in Exodus 20:9,10: "Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work. The LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." Today, orthodox Jews still keep that sabbath. It was a wonderful rest for those who worked six days a week, and especially for slaves. For everyone, it was a release from busy days focussed on making a living. They could, on the sabbath, give their full attention to worshipping God.

2. DID JESUS THINK THE SABBATH WAS A SPECIAL DAY?

There is a marked contrast between the ideas of the Jewish leaders about the sabbath day, and those of Jesus. The leaders were very strict. They were hard on people who were not equally strict. In fact, they were more severe than God had intended. Jesus took a very different view. He understood the real meaning of the sabbath.

The leaders were concerned about the letter of the law. Jesus cared about the spirit of the law. When Jesus healed men and women on the sabbath day, the leaders were against him. They even complained that a lame man who Jesus healed was working on the sabbath. All because he carried his mat after being healed! They also spoke against the disciples of Jesus for plucking ears of corn to eat, on the sabbath.

When Jesus healed on the sabbath, he saw it as a way in which God was glorified. Jesus must have been right, because he came to do his Father's will, and he did it. God was pleased to call Jesus, "My beloved Son." Jesus said: "The sabbath was made for man." It was a day of rest and worship, and for honouring God by doing His will.

Even when Jesus healed a woman who had suffered for 18 years with a bent spine (Luke 13:11-13), and a man who had been paralysed for 38 years (John 5:1-9), the leaders still grumbled. But, the sabbath, through the work of Jesus, reached new heights. He offered more than physical rest when he said, "Come unto me all you who labour, and I will give you rest – learn of me – you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Jesus could also lift their burden of sin. He could show them a path which would lead to everlasting life.

The example of Jesus helps us to understand the true meaning of the sabbath. He did his Heavenly Father's work every day. His followers must do the same. Doing the will of God day by day is far more important than arguing about whether or not the sabbath should be kept as a special day.

3. SHOULD CHRISTIANS KEEP THE SABBATH?

There are many reasons why Christians should not be compelled to keep the sabbath day as a special one:

- a) Nowhere in the New Testament are we told that Christians must keep the sabbath.
- b) In Acts 15, Christian leaders concluded that, "no greater burden should be imposed on non-Jewish Christians, than to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood". It was wise advice. This would keep the peace between Jew and Gentile Christians. Notice that the sabbath was not included as something which Gentile Christians must keep.
- c) The New Testament does not refer to Christians being condemned for not keeping the sabbath.
- d) In Exodus 31:13-17, it is stated that the sabbath was a sign between God and Israel. There is no mention that it was ever made a sign between God and Christians.
- e) Christians are not under the Law of Moses. Paul makes that very clear in Galatians 3:24,25: "The law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." Paul is telling us that there is freedom in Christ for Christian believers. In fact, Paul was upset when some Christians were going back to the law. He called them "foolish Galatians" for doing so (Galatians 3:1).

Christians are free to choose whether or not they want to regard the sabbath as a special day. Paul says: "Let no-one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16,17).

Jesus Christ himself is the substance. His words and actions must transform our lives. The law was only a shadow. To argue about whether or not we should keep the sabbath as a special day, is to argue about a shadow. It is missing the point. Understanding the life of Jesus Christ is much more important.

Paul tells us, in simple language: %One person esteems one day above another, another man esteems every day alike.

Let each be fully convinced in his own mind+(Romans 14:5). This means that no Christian, or Christian group, has the right to tell others how they should regard the sabbath. The Jews had to keep the sabbath because God commanded them to do so. Christians may choose to, but they don't have to keep the sabbath. God has not given Christians a commandment to do so.

Our whole focus must be on Jesus Christ, his teaching, his perfect life and his sacrifice. This can lead to salvation and everlasting life. Christians need to realise that every day belongs to God.

Because all our time belongs to God, Christians must live every day in a Godly way.

4. WHAT IS “THE REST” THAT GOD HAS PROMISED TO FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS?

%A promise remains of entering his rest ÷ Today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts ÷ There remains therefore a rest for the people of God+(Hebrews 4:1-9). Knowing Jesus brings us spiritual rest now. But even greater blessings are yet to come. They will begin when Jesus returns to the earth.

He will raise the dead and give everlasting life to his faithful followers from every generation. He will come as %King of kings and Lord of lords+. It will be a time of peace and great joy.

The Bible calls this future time the %Kingdom of God+. At that time, the wonderful message will be %The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and ye shall reign for ever and ever+(Revelation 11:15).

Those who are saved will help Jesus to teach his message of salvation to the mortal population of the earth. What a prospect! What a blessing! If we worship God acceptably every day now, and not just on the sabbath, then everlasting life will be ours at the coming of our King.

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

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