

The Sure Word Bible Studies
Lesson 15

The Sabbath Rest

We have talked about trusting in God's Word. In the Bible God has a specific test that demonstrates whether a person trusts His Word or not. We hear an awful lot about abortion - gay marriage - prayer in schools - and naturally many people are concerned about these issues. But it is not any of these. As a matter of fact, none of these issues are specifically mentioned in the Bible. But there is one issue that we hear little about - the Sabbath, the Lord's Day.

Have you ever wondered why most Christians worship God on Sunday, like the Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Pentecostals, Catholics? While many others worship on Saturday, like Jews, Seventh-day Baptists, Church of God Seventh-day, Seventh-day Adventists. And to add to the confusion, the Muslims hold Friday as the day of worship.

Can all of them be right? Who has the truth? 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 heard behind me a great 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 unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore **the Son of man is Lord also 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** 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"*

This text tells us that the seventh day is the “*Sabbath of the Lord.*”

But some say we don't know for sure which day is the seventh day Sabbath - it has been lost in ancient times. But the Bible has never lost track of the Sabbath day from its origin in creation to the time of the Apostles.

Genesis 2:1-3 – *“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.”*

In establishing the Sabbath at creation, God “*sanctified it.*” That means that He set aside the seventh day to be honored and observed. It also said He “*blessed the seventh day*” and in I Chronicles 17:27 it says - “*For thou blessest, O LORD, and it shall be blessed for ever.*”

The seventh day was not set aside for a certain people, but for all people; it was not meant to apply for a period of time, but for all time. Before Moses was given the law at Mt. Sinai, God reminded His people of the seventh day Sabbath. We find the story in Exodus chapter sixteen.

Exodus 16:4 – *“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 not.”* “*Prove them*” means to test them.

Exodus 16:26 - *“Six days ye shall gather it; but on **the seventh day, which is the Sabbath,** in it there shall be none.”*

Keeping the Sabbath was a test to see if they trusted God's Word and would follow it. That was God's purpose in withholding the manna on the seventh day. Note what happened -

And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye 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 or believe His Word. They failed the test.

God has continued to watch over the Sabbath day through the ages; it has not been lost. We have evidence in the New Testament that clearly shows which day is the Sabbath. Read the following verses.

Luke 23:50-54 – *“And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just: (The same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them;) he was of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews: who also himself waited for the kingdom of God. This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid. And that day was the preparation, and the sabbath drew on.”*

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

Verse 55,56 - *“And the women also, which came with him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid. And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment.*

Then chapter 24:1 – *“Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.”*

This of course is what the Christian world celebrates every spring “Easter Sunday.”

What day lies between Good Friday and Easter Sunday? Saturday, or the seventh day Sabbath.

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

Ephesians 3:9 – *“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who **created all things by Jesus Christ.**”*

Nehemiah 9:6 – *“Thou, even thou, art **LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.**”*

Verse 13 - *“Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments. **And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath,** and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy 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 freshly created, so they didn't need rest. However, Adam and Eve having just been brought to life did not know who God was. Surely they had many things to learn. Therefore, God set aside the seventh day for Adam and Eve to get to know Him. The primary purpose for the Sabbath is to spend time with God, getting to know him better. This is so important that God eventually wrote this precept on the tables of stone beginning it with the word *“Remember.”*

Exodus 20:8 - 11 - Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
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. Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”

The word “work” in this commandment is the Hebrew word for occupation. 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.

The Sabbath is a part of the law that was “*given for our good always*.”¹ 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 in John 20:17, the morning of His resurrection, He told Mary He had not yet gone to the Father, which implies He had remained in the tomb during the Sabbath hours.

John 20:17 – “*Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father.*”

Jesus rested in the tomb on the Sabbath after His work of redemption, just as He rested the Sabbath after His work of creation. 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 commandment from Christ changed the day of worship to the first day for the Christian believer because He was resurrected that day. If that is true they would have told us. As a matter of fact Luke tells us that in the first words of the book of Acts.

Acts 1:1,2 – “*The former treatise (writing – the gospel of Luke) have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*”

According to Luke's words, if Christ had changed the day of rest, from the seventh to the first day in honor of the resurrection, we should be able to find it in his writings, either the gospel of Luke or the book of Acts. However, in a careful reading of both, there is found 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 – *“And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them **the next Sabbath**... And **the next sabbath day** came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.”*

Acts 16:12,13 – *“And **on the sabbath** we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made”*

Acts 18:4 – *“And he (Paul) reasoned in the synagogue **every sabbath**, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.”*

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

Acts 20:7 - *“And upon **the first day** of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”*

Think about what is being said here. Does breaking bread (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, churches have preaching services on different days of the week as well.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary makes the following comment on this verse: *“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,*” because the practice did not begin until many years after the Bible was written!

The fact is 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, ceremonial law, fasting, circumcision, and the traditions of the Pharisees. If the Christians had made an attempt to change the Sabbath there would have been a tremendous controversy over that and it too, 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 the 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 thing that is gone out of my lips.”*

Ezekiel 22:28 - *“And her prophets have daubed them with untempered mortar, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, Thus saith the Lord GOD, when the LORD hath not spoken.*

In these verses God says that He will not change His Word – but church leaders will. Church history tells us the change came about in the fourth century long after all the Apostles had died. The change was subtle - prompted by two things. The first was compromise – the blending of pagan holidays making them Christian Holy Days in the Church.

**From “Sacred Origins of Profound Things” by Charles Panati
– Published by Penquin 1996 Page 216 Under 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 pridefully 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.”*

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. Many people blamed them for the death of Christ, others because of the Jewish-Roman War. The following is a statement made by the Roman Emperor Constantine which reflected the feelings of most, including many Christians in those days of the fourth century. *“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.”* 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 -

From Revell Bible Dictionary, Wynwood Press, New York, N. Y. 1973. Under heading "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 Pope Gregory officially mandated (made it church law) Sunday rest in A.D. 1234 for all Christians. The change has been claimed to have been made by the Roman Catholic Church. It is recorded in the following.

Peter Geiermann's Catechism of 1946 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 - the Church made the change – not based on the Bible, but in its own sense of authority. But does the Roman Church, or any church, have the authority to change the commandment of God for any reason? 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 the idea 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 came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the **tradition** of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the **commandment of God** by your **tradition**? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the **commandment of God** of none effect by your **tradition**. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”*

In reality, Sunday is a tradition of man that for the majority of Christians has replaced a commandment of God. This brings us back to the initial point – the Sabbath command as a test of whether or not we trust God’s Word. The Sabbath is a test in the sense that if one knows the word of God and refuses to honor it – it is evidence that they: 1) Don’t trust God’s Word, just as those people in the Old Testament who went out to gather manna after God told them there would be none on the Sabbath. Or 2) they possess a rebellious spirit – they will do only that which they want or find convenient for them, regardless of what God says.

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

God gave *“all His commandments for our good always”* (Deut 6:24), this includes the fourth commandment – *“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”* Jesus said, *“the Sabbath was made for man”* (Mark 2:27).

The Sabbath was a gift from God to man, it is to be a blessing and a delight to him. Take advantage of the blessings that come with keeping the commandments of God including the Sabbath.

Response Questions.

1. Is it clear to you the Bible teaches that Christians are to keep the Sabbath day holy? Yes __ No __
2. Is it clear to you that Saturday is the Sabbath of the Lord? Yes __ No __
3. Will you keep the seventh day Sabbath according to the commandment of God? Yes __ No __