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PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

## **BIBLE ANSWERS to the SABBATH QUESTION**



Published by

Church Of God

CHURCHLIGHT PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 9901

Colorado Springs, CO 80932

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Distributed by

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Second printing 1987

Third printing 1990

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## **BIBLE ANSWERS**

### **TO THE**

### **SABBATH QUESTION**

There seems to be as many ideas about the Sabbath as there are days in the year. Hundreds of books and articles have been written explaining man's opinion on the Sabbath. However, those who sincerely desire to worship God "in spirit and in truth" know that there is only one book that expresses God's thoughts on this subject. That book, which is the very word of God, is called the Bible. It is to this source that we will go to find the truth about God's Sabbath.

It is hoped by the writer that the construction

of this booklet will encourage people of various minds on this matter to sit and read the Bible together and discuss God's word as He admonishes us to do. God says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord..." (Isaiah 1:18). We, therefore, encourage each reader to look up the texts that are quoted herein and read them from their own Bible.

### Sabbath Before Moses

Since the Sabbath is first mentioned in the creation account, let us begin there. Immediately after the creation of man, the Bible record says,

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 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" (Genesis 2:1-3).

These words should prompt questions in our minds. Which day was it that God rested? The

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clear answer from your Bible is the *seventh day*, the day we call Saturday. It was not because God became tired from all the work of creation that He rested, for we find in the writings of Isaiah, the prophet, "the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary" (Isaiah 40:28).

Since God does not grow weary, it is evident that He created the Sabbath for the benefit of man. That is exactly what Jesus Christ said, "The Sabbath was made for man..." (Mark 2:27). It is interesting how so many people believe that God made the Sabbath holy only for the Jews when Jesus said it was for man, without specifying any particular race or ethnic group.

The next question we could ask concerning the statement in Genesis 2:3, is what does "sanctified" mean. The meaning of sanctified is to be *made holy or separated for a holy purpose*. In other words, God *separated the seventh day* from the other six days for a holy purpose.

It is evident from the preceding scripture that Adam did not work seven days a week throughout the 930 years of his life. However, there are

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some who will argue with this scripture and say that the Sabbath day was not given until Moses received the Ten Commandments.

So, let's move on in the Bible to the place where these commandants are first recorded by Moses. 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.”

The careful reader will notice the wording of this commandment begins with *remember*. What does the word *remember* imply to you? The implication is that the Sabbath had been forgotten. A quick glance through the first few chap-

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ters of the book of Exodus will confirm that the people to whom the Lord was speaking had been in slavery to the Egyptians. Furthermore, it will reveal that worship to their God was at least limited, if not totally, prohibited.

Under such conditions, it is reasonable to understand how the Sabbath had been ignored by these people and necessarily had to be reinstated. This seems much more reasonable than to say, as some do, that God is expecting these people to recall something totally unknown to them.

From your reading of this commandment, what were the people recalling to mind by observing the Sabbath? It is so clear from reading verse 11, that they were thereby commemorating the creation of the earth and all things therein.

The purpose of the fourth commandment was not only to give them a day on which to rest, but to remind them of the creation. This is even more clear when we read the 16th chapter of Exodus. These things occurred prior to giving the Ten Commandments, and God here speci-

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noted that the Bible does not use the term *Jewish Sabbath*. However, the Jews did observe *God's Sabbath*.

Throughout the scriptures God continually refers to the Sabbath as *My Sabbaths*, but never once as the *Jewish Sabbath*. An excellent example of this is found in the 20th chapter of Ezekiel. Each reader of this article is challenged to read through this portion of your Bible and note no less than six times how God refers to the Sabbath as *My Sabbath*. You will find the phrase in the following verses of Ezekiel, chapter 20 verses 12, 13, 16, 20, 21, and 24:

*“Moreover also I gave them My sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness: they walked not in My statutes, and they despised My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and My sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out My fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for My name's sake, that it should*

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not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out. Yet also I lifted up My hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; Because they despised My judgments and walked not in My statutes, but polluted *My sabbaths*: for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless Mine eye spared them from destroying them, neither did I make an end of them in the wilderness. But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk ye not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols: I am the LORD your God, walk in My statutes, and keep My judgments, and do them; And hallow *My sabbaths*, and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the LORD your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against Me: they walked not in My statutes, neither kept My judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them, they polluted *My sabbaths*: then I said, I would pour out My fury upon them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wil-

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derness. Nevertheless I withdrew Mine hand, and wrought for My name's sake, that it should not be polluted in the sight of the heathen, in whose sight I brought them forth. I lifted up Mine hand unto them also in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the heathen, and disperse them through the countries; Because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, and had polluted *My sabbaths*, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols" (Ezekiel 20:12-24).

Now please notice in verse 11 that it says,

"And I gave them My statutes, and shewed them My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them."

Notice it does not say *a Jew*, it says *a man*. More about the Gentiles keeping the Sabbath will be addressed later.

### Jesus Keeps The Commandments

At no time did Jesus ever break God's Ten

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Commandments or encourage others to do so. On the contrary, He said, in Matthew 5:17-19:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

How long does Jesus expect the laws of God to be taught and obeyed? "Till heaven and earth pass..."

Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of violating the Sabbath when He healed people on the Sabbath day, but it was the traditions of the religious leaders of the day that He disagreed with. These traditions were the Jewish interpretation of the laws of God. Jesus rebuked them for such religious hypocrisy saying,

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“Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:3,9).

We need to be sure today that we are not following the traditions of men instead of the true commandments of God.

Did Jesus keep the Sabbath as a part of God's law? Yes, He did! Luke 4:16:

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His *custom* was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.”

The word *custom* in this verse means habit. It was Jesus' habit to be in the place of worship on the Sabbath day. He did not change the Sabbath during His lifetime, although He did disagree with the strict Pharisaeal traditions that made it a burden on God's people instead of a blessing. His habit was to obey the laws of God.

### Did The Early Church Observe The Sabbath?

Many Christians think that the apostles worshipped on the first day of the week (Sunday) instead of the Sabbath. Even though the Bible makes no such reference, it repeatedly shows they came together on the Sabbath day the same as the Israelites did. The best history of the early church immediately after Jesus' death confirms that the disciples continued to gather for worship on the Sabbath day. Let's turn to that historical record in the book of Acts in your Bible. Beginning in chapter 13, verses 14-16:

“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.”

Here we find that the apostle Paul, on his first missionary journey about 15 years after the death of Jesus, was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Some may think he was only accommodating the Jews, but notice in verse 42:

*“And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.”*

Both Jews and Gentiles were meeting for worship on the Sabbath day. Verse 44 is the real clincher, however:

*“And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.”*

If Sunday worship was a tradition of the apostolic Christian church, why did not Paul invite these eager Gentiles to services the following day, instead of making them wait until the next Sabbath as the text clearly shows?

To prove this was not an isolated case, let's

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consider some others. Continuing in Acts 16:13:

*“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.”*

If there was no synagogue present, it did not stop Paul from Sabbath worship. Reading on, in verses 14 and 15:

*“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”*

We find people being converted and baptized without a word about changing their day of worship. Again, in Acts 17:2:

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“And Paul, as his *manner* was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures.”

An interesting word in this verse is *manner*. In the Greek text, this is the same word translated *custom* in Luke 4:16. Paul followed the habit of his Savior in observing the Sabbath. It is implied here that he did this on three consecutive Sabbaths. To further confirm this was a continual occurrence for Paul, we will cite one more historical account. In Acts 18:4, it reads:

“And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.”

Please notice carefully that Paul did this every Sabbath. Now, moving on to verse 11 in the same chapter, we read:

“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

A year and six months would amount to 78 weeks and we are forced to admit, according to

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verse 4 which we have just read, it was every Sabbath.

This is a record of Paul's second missionary journey, about 49 or 50 A.D. Would it not be reasonable to assume that if the early church were observing Sunday as a day of worship, Paul would have been more explicit about it in his teachings? The Bible record seems to be quite clear as to his keeping the Sabbath consistently.

#### Sabbath In The Last Days

Thus far, we have discussed and proven how the Sabbath was a commandment of God and observed during the time from creation to the establishment of the nation of Israel, from Moses' day through Christ's ministry, and then in the apostolic church after the death of Christ. But, what does the Bible say about you and me keeping the Sabbath in these last days before His return?

In the 24th chapter of Matthew, we have Jesus' very own words prophesying conditions just before His return to the earth. Matthew 24:3:

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“And as He sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto Him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

Among other things, He says, Matthew 24:20:

“But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day.”

Why would Jesus be concerned with the Sabbath day if it had been abolished? The obvious truth is that He wouldn't have mentioned it as being relative unless it would be relative during that future time period. Some will say this verse only applies to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. But even then the Sabbath would be kept long after Jesus' death.

### **During The One Thousand Year Reign of Christ**

The prophet Isaiah describes the coming of the Lord in these words. Isaiah 66:15-18:

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“For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with His chariots like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many. They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD. For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues, and they shall come, and see My glory.”

Notice these verses are talking about the Lord pleading with all flesh (verse 16) and gathering all nations and tongues (verse 18). This has never happened in human history; it is prophecy of a glorious future when Christ returns to rule the nations.

Verses 22 and 23 speak of the new heavens and the new earth:

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“For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the LORD.”

All flesh will worship the Lord from one Sabbath to another. The simple truth is clear to those who wish to obey and let Him be the Lord of their lives.

The biggest problem today among Christians is that they want God to agree with their denominational teachings. When His word teaches contrary to what we have been taught, we need to weigh the evidence and follow John's advice in I John 2:2-4:

“And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His command-

ments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

We who abide in Him are to “walk even as He walked.”

### Conclusion

The Sabbath has been kept by God's people from creation onward, and was codified in the Ten Commandments. It was kept by Jesus, also by the apostolic church, and is to be kept in these last days before Jesus' return and will be kept during the millennium. Israel was promised blessings for obedience toward God's Sabbath. Isaiah 56:2-7:

“Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it: that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep My sabbaths, and choose

the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant; Even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant; Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people."

We, too, may be blessed of God if we follow Jesus exhortation in Matthew 4:4, to "live...by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." May God bless you in your effort to understand His will for His people today.