

The 'Rest' of the Story

The Sabbath can be traced back to creation. It was prominent in the Ten Commandments and it was observed by Jesus and the apostles and many thousands keep it today. But are we short-changing God's Sabbath? Are we guilty of treating it as just "a day off"? If you can wrap your mind around or better yet, embrace the full spiritual implications of the Sabbath, you'll be able to revolutionize your weekly Sabbath-keeping!

You're tired after working a full week. The boss had been riding your back, you lost some important clients, and you had to work late four evenings in a row.

But since you keep not just the Nine but the *Ten* Commandments, you are blessed to have "a day off." Late Friday afternoon, the strained muscles in your neck and the tense look on your face begin to loosen up and relax, for you know that God said there are six days in which to do all your work, but you are to rest on the seventh day, the Sabbath.

What a commandment! What a blessing to have a regularly "approved" day off of work each week!

But answer this: Does the Sabbath's value rest only in the fact that it's "a day off"? Is that the limit of the Sabbath's meaning and purpose? Are we, above all others, God's *true* children merely because we know which day not to work?

Let's get a grip on the Sabbath's primary value so we as God's people can more fully rejoice on His Sabbath day! To begin our short study, let's go to the beginning.

Creation and the Sabbath

God prepared the earth during *[the]* Creation Week for one purpose: so it would be suitable for the habitation of His ultimate creation, man. On day one of Creation, God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good" (Genesis 1:3, 4). On day two, God made the sky (verse 8). On the third day, He made land, seas, plants, and trees, and "God saw that it was good" (verse 12). The next day He made the lights in the sky to govern the day and the night. "And God saw that it was good" (verse 18). On the fifth day God created the fish of the sea and the

birds of the air. "And God saw that it was good" (verse 21).

Now on the sixth day, after creating the rest of the animals, "God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (verse 27). After creating His masterpiece—man—God looked at all He had created, and it wasn't just "good"; "it was *very* good" (verse 31).

The Creation narrative is written in such a way that *[it]* separates man from the animals. The days of Creation found their climax in the creation of man. Man is set apart, on a higher level. God made man in His own image. Man is exactly like God in many aspects, he has been given many of God's attributes. Man was given dominion over the earth, and he was created with the ability to think, decide, create, solve problems, and express a wide range of emotions. The mind of man is markedly of greater brilliance than that of any of the animals. The reason for all this is that God made us to be His own children, to fellowship with Him and with fellow man as members of God's family.

After His "magnum opus," the creation of man, God rested from all of His labor. "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (2:3).

Don't miss the significance. After placing man on this specially prepared earth—man being the pinnacle of Creation Week—God rested. He rested not because His divine energies were sapped, not because He was exhausted from an exceptionally hard week's work, but because He had finally created the first of His children.

Simply put, with the advent of man, God's work of Creation was over—and so He entered into rest, waiting with open arms to be joined in this rest by His children.

The Fall of Man

But our first parents, Adam and Eve, ignored the invitation—that is, they did not comply with the loving direction of their Father. The story of their “fall” in the Garden of Eden is told in the second and third chapters of Genesis.

The Creator told Adam and Eve that they could eat the fruit of all the trees in the Garden—almost. There were two noteworthy trees in the middle of the Garden: one was the tree of life, and the other was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The latter was the only tree in the Garden that God strictly forbade to be used for food. The penalty for disobedience was death.

But the crafty, cunning serpent (representative of a higher embodiment of evil—see Romans 16:20 and Revelation 12:9) led Eve astray from the clear parameters drawn and issued by God. She disobeyed and ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and she in turn caused Adam to commit this same sin of disobedience. Now, unlike before when man was innocent and when God described His creation as “very good,” there was sin in the world. This sin separated man from full fellowship with God (cf. Isaiah 59:1); thus, man was violently removed from the “rest” God intended to share with him—thanks, in part, to the serpent’s diabolical influence.

In the end, however, the serpent will not stand as the victor. “You will crawl on your belly,” God told the serpent, “and you will eat dust all the days of your life” (verse 14). God was not talking about the snake’s diet or how it will carry itself bodily; He was describing the certainty of his utter defeat (cf. Psalm 72:9; Isaiah 49:23; 65:25; Micah 7:17). The serpent will eventually lose the war.

In His grace, God provided a means to rescue man and restore him to full rest and fellowship with his Creator. He poetically described the means when He told the serpent, “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring

and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

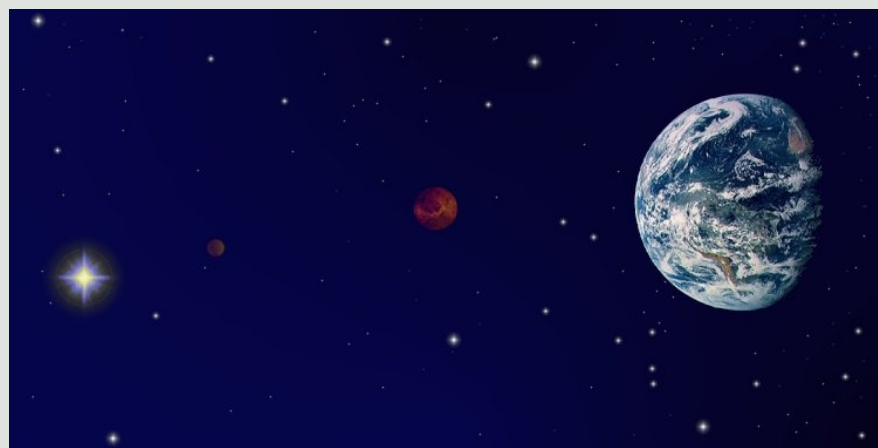
We understand that her “offspring,” ultimately, was Jesus Christ, who figuratively “stomped on the devil” through His earthly life’s work—notably His death and bodily resurrection.

This truth is well stated in Hebrews 2:14,15: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might *destroy* him who holds the power of death—that is, *the devil*—and

“remember” the Sabbath because they had previously been given instructions pertaining to the Sabbath as it related to gathering their food, or “manna” (chapter 16).

But within the Fourth Commandment a reason—a meaning—is given:

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (verse 11; see also 31:17).



“And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating he had done.”

Genesis 2:3

This commandment pointed back to the Creation described in the first two chapters of Genesis. As we saw earlier, this “Creation” involved God specially preparing the earth for man, who, unlike any of the other creatures, was created after God’s own “image” and “likeness.” Man was uniquely created to enjoy a perfect familial relationship with God—pure and untainted by sin. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, separating

themselves from God. Their iniquity prevented them from having the proper relationship that their holy God so desired to have with them.

Israel and the Sabbath

Because of sin, which came into the world at the beginning, “death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses” (Romans 5:14). Through Abraham, and later through Moses, God was working out His plan for man’s redemption—to bring him back into His rest and fellowship.

In the time of Moses, God thundered out the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai to the children of Israel, who had until recently been slaves in Egypt. Prominent in these great commandments was the Fourth:

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates” (Exodus 20:8-10).

The physical aspect of the Sabbath is not easy to misunderstand. It is simply: don’t work. The Israelites were told to

By the time Moses repeated the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, in preparation for the people’s entrance into the land of promise, the Sabbath commandment had picked up a national meaning as well. The basic premise, though, was the same. He said, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. *Therefore* the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (verse 15). The Israelites were in bondage while in Egypt, but God delivered them and was bringing them rest.

But after the people of Israel came out from under Egyptian bondage, and after they saw many miraculous signs and wonders from God, they repeatedly proved themselves rebellious and unbelieving. Their sinful hearts so angered God that, even though He said, “I have forgiven them” (Numbers 14:20), He avowed that “not one of them will ever see the land I promised on

oath to their forefathers” (verse 23).

Listen to how the insightful Psalmist described God's judgment against these rebellious people:

“For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest’” (Psalm 95:10,11).

While that generation was not permitted to enter the promised land, the next generation did enter it. Moses did not enter, however, because in his anger he showed disrespect to God's holiness in the sight of the Israelites (Numbers 20:12); so Joshua the son of Nun was commissioned to be Moses' successor, to lead the children of Israel into the land (Numbers 27:18-23). Joshua would finally lead the people into the

the writer quotes from Psalm 95, which describes the sinfulness of those in Moses' time whose hearts went astray in the wilderness. As we've read, it concludes with, “So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest’” (verse 11).

The writer then reiterates and reinforces why the children of Israel were forbidden entrance into the “rest,” or promised land. They “*rebelled*” (verse 16); they “*sinned*” (verse 17); they “*disobeyed*” (verse 18). “So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their *unbelief*” (verse 19). We should learn from their wrong example. We should avoid rebellion, sin, disobedience, and unbelief, because if we do, we read that we can enter a “rest” that is much more valuable than any land inheritance.

Now let's read chapter 4, uninterrupted, verses 1 through 11:

every effort to *enter* that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

If you followed along with the context, this passage should be crystal clear!

God rested on the seventh day of Creation. This rest—God's rest—is the one “we who have believed” enter into. It is called “his rest” (verse 1), “that rest” (verses 3,6,11), and “God's rest” (verse 10), and God calls it “my rest” (verses 3,5). And only those who refuse to follow Israel's “example of disobedience” may enter; all others “will fall” (verse 11).

When the writer says we can enter “rest,” he's not saying that Christians literally enter the land of Canaan promised to Abraham. We enter a *superior* rest. The promised-land rest only typified the ultimate redemptive rest we can have in God. Israel, because of her “disobedience,” was eventually taken captive and scattered from the land anyway, so it wasn't a true, permanent rest after all.

The ultimate “rest,” however, contrasted with the promised-land rest, is full spiritual communion with God. The Israelites could have entered this kind of rest eventually had they been obedient and pursued it by faith (4:2; cf. Romans 9:32), but they did not. That's why the writer of Hebrews says, “For if Joshua had given them rest [*true rest*], God would not have spoken later about another day” (Hebrews 4:8). They received a kind of temporary “rest,” but not the “real deal” which the promised-land rest typified.

Most significant is this: While it was Joshua who led the Israelites into *their* rest, it is Jesus Christ who leads spiritual Israelites into “God's rest”! In other words, compliant with the theme of the book of Hebrews, *the Sabbath points to Jesus Christ our Savior!*

Don't let anyone hoodwink you into believing the Sabbath is archaic, useless, or in any way void of Christian relevance. Looking back, from this side of the cross, we have twenty-twenty vision. We can see the full richness of meaning that has been intrinsic to the Sabbath all along—going all the way back to day seven!

Many Sunday-keepers will object to modern-day Sabbath-keeping by saying, “But Jesus is our Sabbath, so since we have the Reality we don't need to keep the old law.”

And to be honest, they're right about Jesus being our “Sabbath.” Of course, He's not the seventh day of the week—and the Fourth Commandment was *definitely* speaking of days of the week—but still it is

“There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”

Hebrews 4:9-11

land of “rest” their home sweet home—from under the tyranny of foreign powers.

The Remaining “Sabbath-Rest”

Let's turn our attention now to the book of Hebrews. In the clearest way, chapters 3 and 4 bring out the fullness of the Sabbath's meaning for us. The context of the entire book, of course, is the superiority of Christ. He is greater than the angels, greater than Moses, greater than the Levitical priesthood, greater than the old system of animal sacrifices. The book of Hebrews, then, which includes discussions on various “Jewish” practices from a profoundly Christian perspective, should force us to see the Fourth Commandment in a brand-new light—one that enhances and brings greater meaning to our worship.

Chapter 3 of Hebrews says to “fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess” (verse 1). But even after you “fix your thoughts on Jesus,” says the writer, you must guard your heart from going astray; you must guard against turning to unbelief. “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (verse 12).

Ancient Israel is aptly used to illustrate this kind of unbelief (3:7-19). In verses 7-11,

“Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. *Now we who have believed enter that rest*, just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in my anger, “They shall never enter my rest. And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' And again in the passage above he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.'

“It *still remains* that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There *remains*, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters *God's rest* also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make

just as plain that He is our “Sabbath” in the same sense that He is “our Passover lamb” (1 Corinthians 5:7) or our “high priest” (Hebrews 3:1) *who will GIVE us that ultimate rest.*

But does this mean the Sabbath command is now abrogated, abolished, or designated as a “Jewish custom”? Don't be hasty to jump to conclusions.

The apostles continued going to the synagogues long after the ascension of Christ. “*Every Sabbath,*” while the apostle Paul was in Corinth, “he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and *Greeks*” (Acts 18:4).

After Paul's sermon to Jews and gentiles in Psidian Antioch, he and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue when the gentiles “invited them to speak further about these things on the *next Sabbath*” (13:42). So “the *next Sabbath* almost the whole city [including many gentiles] gathered to hear the word of the Lord” (verse 44). If it was Paul's eager ambition to demolish Sabbath-keeping in his time, he certainly did not help this cause here. He continued to speak to Jews and gentiles on the Sabbath day.

But there is an often-ignored aspect of the Sabbath which should be considered by our Sunday-keeping friends: *The Sabbath's “rest” will not be fulfilled completely until the Second Coming!*

This is most important to note! It's true that certain things such as the Sabbath “are a shadow of the things that were to come,” and that “the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Colossians 2:17; see also Hebrews 10:1). *But since we are still looking forward to the Second Coming, which will be the consummation of our rest in Him, the Sabbath's meaning has yet to be exhausted!*

Rest and fellowship with God cannot be fully had while we are mortal flesh, subject to aches, pains, weaknesses, sin, and death. But the time is coming when we will see the returning Lord Jesus Christ, “who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21).

When we are freed from the burden of our earthly bodies, then we will truly be free. The apostle Paul writes that we, “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the *redemption* of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved...” (Romans 8:23,24).

If our rest in Christ is fully completed now, then Paul would not have written (in context of the future resurrection), “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Corinthians

15:19), or, “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be *made alive* [from the dead]” (verse 22; cf. Romans 5:18).

So now that we know all of these, what should you be doing?

You and the Sabbath

If you are not entering it already, you need to enter into God's rest. You have the knowledge and understanding it takes to enter, but you need to repent of your sins while you still have this window of opportunity. That's what it means when the writer of Hebrews says that God has “set a certain day, calling it Today,” and quotes the Psalmist saying, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7). Right now is your window of opportunity—your “Today”—and it is up to you to soften your heart, to believe, to obey God and His commandments through faith in Jesus Christ. That opportunity “still stands” for *you!* Learn from the mistakes of Israel, for their sins and consequences “occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:6,11).

Jesus Himself invites you to enter His “Sabbath-rest.” Just before He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath day to pick some heads of grain, and before He healed a man on that same day, Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, *and I will give you rest.* Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28,29). Submit yourself to Jesus, who “is Lord of the Sabbath” (12:8).

Start by praying to God through Jesus Christ. Thank Him for the knowledge of His truth, and for giving you an open invitation to enter His rest while it is still called “Today.” Thank Him for the weekly Sabbath which beautifully typifies the plan He has set in motion from the creation of the world. Obey God. Keep His commandments—all of them. Love Him with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself (22:37-40).

Next, if you can, why not find a church near you to worship with this Sabbath? Scripture admonishes, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Since the Sabbath pictures fellowship with God, it is only logical that we should also fellowship with others in whom the Spirit of God lives and dwells. “And let us consider how we may

spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (verse 24).

If you would like to know where a Church of God International congregation is meeting near you, call, write, or e-mail us today and we'll be happy to direct you.

If you're already regularly attending church each Sabbath, don't let it become a sleepy, boring, predictable routine. Be prepared ahead of time and come with the right attitude and mind-set. It is good—especially on the Sabbath—to heed this exhortation: “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (12:2,3).

Conclusion

The Sabbath, then, is not just “a day off” from work. This holy day points both to the salvation we can have in Jesus Christ now and to the ultimate salvation we will receive from Him at His Second Coming. Realizing this will help us make the transition from seeing Sabbath-keeping as simply an old “Jewish” law, or as a law that's severely limited in meaning, to experiencing the full Christological and redemptive significance that its observance pictures.

But whether you enter God's fellowship, and whether you fellowship with His children, is up to you—now that you know the “rest” of the story.

All Scripture quotations were taken from the New International Version.

If you'd like to know more:

write

The Church of God International
P.O. Box 2450 MCPO Makati City
Metro Manila 1264 Philippines

tel/fax

(632)824-3277

pager

EasyCall 141-284265

e-mail

cgiphils@mydestiny.net

web sites

US <http://www.cgi.org>
Phils <http://members.xoom.com/cgiphils>