

why the Sabbath?

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Consider how busy our lives get, our lives are in a constant state of rush. Rushing the kids to school, rushing to work, rushing through our work day, rushing home, rushing dinner; rush rush rush. Our daily lives are in a constant state of hurry, and we are left feeling tired, lethargic and eventually fatigued. Interesting that diseases such as cancer, influenza, AIDS and hepatitis are declining, but diseases such as chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes stroke and heart disease are all on the rise. Ever considered the link between our increasingly busy lifestyle and these diseases? Working long hours usually means an expensive substitute for a good meal, we call it fast food. Working long hours takes away from quality sleep time, and family time; traditionally these times are when we de-stress. Fortunately the bible has an answer.

“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which He had created and made.” **Genesis 2:2,3**

Ok, so God rested at the end of His creative work, but why? Did He rest because He was tired? No, not if we believe the words of the prophet Isaiah. *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable.”* **Isaiah 40:28**. So if God doesn't faint or get weary, then why did He rest?

“Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, 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: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. **Exodus 20:8-11**

Notice how in this particular one of the ten commandments, the command is to “remember”, so that we keep it holy. Isn't it ironic that of all the commandments in this section of the bible, that the one that has been by-and-largely forgotten is the one which we are commanded to remember? Also notice how Moses uses God's act of resting on the seventh day following creation as an example. At this point you may object, maybe you've been told that the Sabbath is “just for the Jews”, or that “it's the Old Testament, it doesn't apply to us today”, or one of a host of other objections. All I ask is that you consider the words of the bible and let scripture speak for itself. I hope we both agree that following Jesus' example is most important, whatever that means. How did Jesus view the law of the Old Testament, including the Sabbath?

“For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.” **Matthew 5:18**

Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught.” **Mark 1:21**

So 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 to read. Luke 4:16.

“Isn't it just that, His custom?” Doesn't that simply mean it was something He chose to do? No, in many ways its much more than that. The Greek word here translated as “custom”, is the word “etho”, which suggests a certain ethical and moral standard attached to it. A good English dictionary will tell you that the English word “ethic” comes from Latin which comes from the Greek “ethos”, and the Greek word “ethos” comes from the word used here—“etho”, which is translated as “custom”. So keeping the Sabbath wasn't just some arbitrary thing that Jesus did,

but it was morally important. Why should we be surprised at this? The remaining commandments, are things like “do not steal”, “do not murder”, “do not commit adultery”. If we want to follow His example, shouldn't we include keeping the seventh day holy as He has commanded us? Why should the Sabbath be excluded from being kept just because we don't think it applies any more? Remember that of all the times Jesus healed someone, so many of them were on the Sabbath, in that He asked the Pharisees *“Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?”* **Luke 6:9**. Although the Pharisees accused Him of breaking the Sabbath, it was a false accusation. Jesus, on another occasion, pointed out their double standards after they asked Him *“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”*. On this matter, He asked them *“What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?”* **Matthew 12:10,11**.

The apostles kept the Sabbath also, as taught by Moses, and set as an example by Jesus. Here are some explanatory texts.

“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.” **Acts 13:14**

“So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath, almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.” **Acts 13:24-44**

“And he [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.” **Acts 18:4**

So hang on a minute, there were Greeks who met on the Sabbath? Greeks? Wasn't the Sabbath “just for the Jews”? What about the “whole city” coming together to hear the word of God on the Sabbath? Were they “all Jewish”? If Jesus kept the Sabbath, and the apostles kept the Sabbath, and the early church also kept the Sabbath, we should also keep the Sabbath as per His instructions and example. Notice how of all Jesus' arguments with the Pharisees about the Sabbath, never once did He disagree with them on which day it was. In fact, in Luke 6:9, it clearly demonstrates that both Jesus and the Pharisees knew which day was the Sabbath and that there was never a question about which day was the Sabbath, rather it a question of how it should be kept. If there was an argument to be had about which day was the Sabbath, the Pharisees would have found reason to start one.

So which day was the Sabbath? Based on the fact that Jesus and the Pharisees clearly didn't disagree on which day was the Sabbath, it makes sense to refer to the Sabbath as the day which the Jews kept then as the Sabbath.

Consider the classical Latin literature by Cassius Dio, which predates the time of Christ.

Most of the city, to be sure, he took without any trouble, as he was received by the party of Hyrcanus; but the temple itself, which the other party had occupied, he captured only with difficulty. For it was on high ground and was fortified by a wall of its own, and if they had continued defending it on all days alike, he could not have got possession of it. As it was, they made an excavation of what are called the days of Saturn, and by doing no work at all on those days afforded the Romans an opportunity in this interval to batter down the wall. The latter, on learning of this superstitious awe of theirs, made no serious attempts the rest of the time, but on those days, when they came round in succession, assaulted most vigorously. Thus the defenders were captured on the day of Saturn, without making any defence, and all the wealth

was plundered. The kingdom was given to Hyrcanus, and Aristobulus was carried away. Cassius Dio, Roman History 37.16.1-4.

This document was written between 65BC and 60BC, which was written before the time of Christ, and demonstrates conclusively that the Jewish people were keeping Saturday as the Sabbath (albeit starting on Friday evening). Back then, Saturday was better known as the "day of Saturn", as the Romans named every day of the week after the sun, moon, and first five planets (excluding earth). Note that not all of the planets carried the same name as we know them today, some of them are Greek names. The Roman's were even prepared to base their military strategy on this, knowing that Jerusalem would not be defended on the Sabbath. This proves conclusively that no time has been lost between then and now. Further to this: of all the arguments between Jesus and the Pharisees, at no point does He rebuke their teaching. Even as He cross-examined them: *"is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath?"* (**Mark 3:4, Luke 6:9, Luke 14:3**), there was never a question about them keeping the wrong day. In fact, Jesus even went so far as to endorse their teachings, as He said *"they sit at the seat of Moses"* (**Matthew 23:2,3**). If Jesus kept the seventh day as the Sabbath, shouldn't we also remember the same day so that we keep it holy? (**Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15**). Since they kept the Sabbath on Saturday and since the day started at sunset, which the Jewish people continue to do today, we should conclude that Saturday as beginning on Friday night—is indeed the Sabbath.

That is, the day begins on Friday at sunset, and finishes on Saturday at sunset. Furthermore, the LORD gave the Sabbath to all His children as a sign between Him and them.

"Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them." Ezekiel 20:12

I find Paul's advice to the Hebrews sums everything up perfectly.

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest." Since therefore it remains that some must enter it, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience, again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today", after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore, a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his work as God did from His. Hebrews:4:4-10

The Sabbath is a gift to us to remember God's creative work, and so we can not change it or stop it. Suppose we were to keep another day as a Sabbath, that is, a day on which God Himself did not rest from His creative work. Is that really honouring Him as the creator God? To illustrate this, suppose a husband or wife wanted to celebrate a wedding anniversary on a different day from the actual anniversary, would that really be celebrating their marriage or would it be celebrating someone else's marriage? This is a vital point, because time and time again we are told that "it doesn't matter on what day you worship", and I want you to ask yourself in all seriousness, is this standard supported by scripture?

Will you enter into the next Sabbath rest? Will you share in God's special time?