Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The New Testament and the Mosaic Sabbath
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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Tonight we come back to our study on the seventh day, and I don't know about you, but I'm having a wonderful time going through all of this great material in the Scriptures. This is part four of our look at the seventh day.

In the church of Jesus Christ, there has long been discussion about the Sabbath or seventh day, and questions relating to the weekly day of rest come up again and again. The basic issue can be summed up like this: Are Christians obligated to keep the Sabbath, the Sabbath of Old Testament Judaism? Or are Christians obligated to turn Sunday into a kind of a Sabbath with similar restrictions? Or are Christians to reject all Sabbath law and enjoy freedom from that Sabbath law and leave any other designated day alone as to prescribing any specific restrictions? And then, a final question: What is the Lord's day, as Sunday is called in the Scripture, who instituted it, and to what degree are we obligated to it?

Now we have been looking at this very important issue. It has a lot of implications, as we already know, and it shall have even more implications when we get to the study of the Lord's day. But to answer all of this, we simply need to turn to the Word of God and become familiar with what the Bible says. Now we have done that. First of all, we looked at the seventh day rest of God after Creation in Genesis chapter 2. Then we looked at the seventh day Sabbath in the Mosaic law in Exodus chapter 20. And then thirdly we looked at the nature of the New Covenant and its relation to the Old Covenant Mosaic law.

We've already considered those three matters, and this is what we have concluded, and I'll give you a quick summary. In looking at God's seventh day rest at the end of a six-day Creation in Genesis chapter 2, we come to this conclusion. Only God rested, and only in the sense that he ceased the work of Creation, which he had done in six days, and that He found perfect delight in that perfect Creation. It was a rest of satisfaction, a rest of delight.

We also learned in that study of Genesis that God rested, because there was no work to do. His Creation was perfect. There was no sin in his world. The whole universe was perfect, required no work. We also learned that no command is given in Genesis anywhere, certainly not in Genesis 2, no command is given to man to rest. Well, first of all, in Genesis, man didn't need to be commanded to rest, because he didn't work. In fact, man, before the fall, was in a perpetual state of rest. He was in a perpetual state of joy. He was in a perpetual state of delight. He had no sin in his life. There was

no falleness in the universe. There was no work to do. He didn't need a day of rest. He enjoyed a life of rest. There was no human involvement at all in God's rest on the seventh day, and there was no command given to man to rest.

So no Sabbath observance on the part of man was instituted in Genesis 2. That is a very critical point, because anyone who holds to Sabbath law today, whether it's the Seventh Day Adventists or Sabbatarians, Baptists who meet on Saturday, or what other group it is, they all say Sabbath law goes back to Genesis, but there is not any indication in Genesis chapter 2 that God imposed on man any Sabbath rest. As I said, all he knew was rest, because in a perfect world, there was no work, only delight as he enjoyed the wonders of the garden. Again, I say nothing is ever said anywhere in the 50 chapters of Genesis about any Sabbath law for man.

Now it is true that God blessed the seventh day. We learned that. And that means that he elevated it above the other days in a special way. He set it apart as a unique day, as a memorial, a memorial to a six-day Creation, a testimony to the wonders of the edemic creation, so that every seventh day man would pause and thank God for the wonderful universe He had created.

The seventh day then initially was a day set apart for the remembrance of the perfection of God's original six-day Creation, a wonder of its magnificent beauty. And we can still do that, even though the world has fallen, and the universe feels the curse. The wondrous variety and complexity and majesty and beauty of the Creation, even in its fallen condition, is still manifest to us. So the day was set aside for a special thanks to God for creating our amazing universe, and even today, every Saturday that comes, we should worship and honor God as Creator.

Now the second indication that we looked at in understanding Sabbath and its relation to the believer today is to go to Exodus chapter 20 and see there the institution of a day of rest, not instituted in Genesis, but instituted in the Mosaic Covenant, the law given at Mt. Sinai to Israel by God. And what did we learn? We learned that when God had formed his nation, Israel, when God had led them out of their bondage of 400 years in Egypt, when God was on the way to bringing them into the Promised Land to populate the land and establish the nation, he did institute in that now fallen world a seventh day system, a system of Sabbaths. It included a weekly Sabbath every seventh day and many other Sabbaths, many other special days, various feasts and festivals, monthly and yearly and every seventh year and every fiftieth year.

And God's law for all of those Sabbaths was very clearly revealed with very specific requirements. The weekly Sabbath, very, very specific requirements were given. And every other festival or feast Sabbath had very specific requirements, and the seventh year had very specific requirements, as did the fiftieth year of jubilee. And any violation caused the imposition of the death penalty.

We also learned that the weekly Sabbath, while it certainly remained a day to thank God for the wonder of His Creation in six days, the Creation by now was marred severely by what? Sin. And so you couldn't just look at Saturday as remembrance of Creation. It would remind you while you were thanking God for the wonder of His Creation how His Creation had been so severely marred and scarred by sin. So it became a day not only to consider the Creator, but it became a day to consider the curse. It became a day to remember that Paradise found was Paradise lost, and while you could reflect on the Eden of Creation, you also had to recognize how it had been scarred by sin.

And sin had been defined in the Law of God, the Mosaic Covenant, both in its narrowest form, the two commandments, loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and likewise, loving your neighbor as yourself, and the ten-fold explanation of the law, the Ten Commandments, and the manifold explanation, which fills much of the Penatuch. That law was laid down in front of man so that man might see how really sinful he is.

Now what happened on the Sabbath day, we learned, was not the seventh day when everybody went somewhere and got together, but rather on the seventh day you couldn't go anywhere. It was mostly a day of contemplation, and while you were thanking God for Creation, you were also being made aware of his law, because the Sabbath law in the Ten Commandments was right in the middle at number four. If you looked up, you saw the Commandments related to God and your behavior for God. And if you looked down, you saw the Commandments related to your behavior before man. So remembering the Sabbath day, setting it apart, meant looking at the Law of God, and looking at the Law of God meant seeing your sin.

And so it was not only a day to remember Creation, it was a day of conviction. It was a day to cause people to remember the Creator, also to remember the law giver. The seventh day then identified God as Creator. The second seventh day, the Sabbath of the Mosaic Covenant, identified God as law giver. One view produced gratitude. The other view produced penitence. And many, many of the Sabbaths were specific days of sacrifice. And sacrifice always reminded one of sinfulness. So no week went by without that crowning day when you stopped to remember the Creator, and you remembered the curse, and you remembered the law the Creator had given and how far short of it you came. It was a time to consider the Maker of heaven and earth and to consider, as well, your own sin.

Thirdly, we have already discussed the nature of the New Covenant and its relationship to the old Mosaic Covenant. We looked last time at 2 Corinthians 3 and also into the book of Hebrews, and we saw that the New Covenant spelled out in the New Testament is, in a word, superior to the Old in every way. In fact, the New Covenant is the reality of which the Old is the shadow. We saw that only the New Covenant saves, and we saw that there is an abandonment of the Old Covenant with all its ceremonies, all its rituals, all its external trappings. The holy of holies is gone. The veil was rent from top to bottom. The temple is gone. It was all destroyed in 70 A.D. It's never come back again. The

whole Judaistic ceremonial ritualistic sacrificial system is gone, all of God's Law that was non-moral.

Now God hasn't changed his morality, but he has changed the structure of the Mosaic economy in which that morality existed under the Old Covenant. And everything about the New Covenant we saw is better than the Old Covenant. Even the Sabbath day rest, that one day a week rest, is replaced by a life of rest when believers delight in the God of salvation all the time, when believers rejoice, aware of their sin, in the sacrifice for sin, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now to further explore the issue of whether Sabbath law is required in the New Covenant, let's come to a fourth point. I'll give you a fourth and a fifth tonight. This is a very important point, because it provides a transition for us. It is this: Jesus' treatment of the Sabbath. I want to know how Jesus dealt with the Sabbath. He is the mediator of the New Covenant, which is a better covenant. He is the one who knows the significance of the Sabbath. He knows what it is intended to do, and He is the only also who knows the New Covenant.

So the question is, "How did Jesus treat the Sabbath?" And it is a really important question and a somewhat common question in the gospels. It's important to note that this issue of Sabbath observance was the major hot button that set off the volatile hatred of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus and finally resulted in His execution. There were two things that galled the Jewish leaders. One was that He called Himself the Son of God, which they saw as making Himself equal with God. It was saying He was of the same nature as God.

The second galling thing that Jesus did that led to His execution was that He paid no attention to Sabbath law. When you ask the question, "How did Jesus treat the Sabbath," there's only one way to answer it...any way He wanted. And that is not an off-the-cuff statement. That is the conclusion to my study. Jesus treated the Sabbath any way He wanted.

Now let's begin by looking at Matthew chapter 12, Matthew chapter 12. Now, obviously, we could get wrapped up in a lot of things here, but we'll try to go through this as quickly as we can. I think you'll get the point. Matthew 12, "At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath...it says that...through the grainfields." Now, one thing we know about the Sabbath, there's one thing you can't do. What's that? You can't go somewhere. You can't take a trip. Jesus went out wandering through the grain fields with His disciples, and Old Testament law said that couldn't happen. At least that is the way the Jews understood it and interpreted it.

"And while they were going through the grainfields, His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat." Well, now the Jews would have a second problem, because you weren't allowed to do any harvesting on the Sabbath. You weren't supposed to do your normal common work on the Sabbath. And verse 2, "When the Pharisees saw it," now it just so happens that Jesus did this in the face of the Pharisees. He must have known some were around and mostly likely did it for the

very purpose of exciting their legalistic rankor. "When the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, 'Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.'" Can't do this.

Now there is nothing specifically in the Old Testament law that says you can't do this very thing, but the Old Testament law did forbid traveling, and it did forbid doing your normal work, which for people in an agrarian society would be plucking grain and eating it. In verse 3, He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God?" You think this is bad? David went in the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread. Show bread, the loaves of presentation. It wasn't lawful for him to do that, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone.

Now no cooking was also prescribed for the Sabbath, but it didn't apply to the priests. And no eating of show bread did not apply to someone desperately hungry and in great need of food. Jesus is saying to us Sabbath law is not moral. There are times when reasonable people will set it aside. In verse 5, "Have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests of the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?" For example, He says, "Priests break the Sabbath every Sabbath. They work on the Sabbath." But that's okay, because Sabbath law is not moral. It is not a substance. It is not a reality. It is a shadow. It is a picture of another reality.

So Jesus, right in the face of the Pharisees, breaks their understanding of the Sabbath law, takes a trip through the fields with His disciples, plucks the grain, and eats it. And then when they question Him, He even makes it legitimate for somebody who's hungry enough to go and eat the show bread, the consecrated bread, in the temple service. And all of these indications show that Jesus did whatever He wanted on the Sabbath. Why? Go down to verse 8, "For the Son of Man is...what?...is Lord of the Sabbath." Well, that is a finee. That is the final statement.

Jesus is simply saying, "I'm in charge of the Sabbath. I'll do whatever I want. I'll do anything I want with the Sabbath." Now this is the very claim that infuriated them.
"What do you mean you're Lord of the Sabbath? That is a claim to deity." Unquestionably. Jesus said, "I can do anything I want with the Sabbath, because I'm God. I can institute it. I can hold men to it by obligation with the death penalty if I choose. Or I can set it aside. I can do anything I want with the Sabbath." Now friends, this is a pretty serious transition taking place here, and these Pharisees are choking big-time on this, because they are so fastidious in their observation of the Sabbath.

Turn to Luke 14. Luke 14, at the beginning of the chapter again. "He came about when He," being Jesus, "went into the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath to eat bread that they were watching him closely, and there in front of him was a certain man suffering from dropsy. And Jesus answered and spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?' But they kept silent, and He took hold of him and healed him and sent him away.

And He said to them, 'Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well and will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?' and they could make no reply to this." Just shut their mouths.

Now Jesus appears purposely to have chosen the Sabbath day for his healing, because He struck such a blow at the legalism of the Jewish system. They might have said, when He asked the question, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" they might have said, "No," but they couldn't have given any Old Testament support, because there isn't anything in the Old Testament that forbids healing on the Sabbath, because nobody could heal. What are they gonna say?

At the same time, if they said, "Yes," then they would free Jesus up from a Sabbath violation, and they didn't want to do that, because they wanted to continue to indict Him for everything He did, so they just stood there with nothing to say. Healing was no violation of any Old Testament Sabbath law, because nobody could heal. But again, you see, he's traveling around. He went to the house of one of the leaders. Why did he do that? He's not supposed to be traveling around. It's almost as if he picks the Sabbath to strike a blow at the Sabbath.

Now go back to Mark's gospel chapter 2, Mark's gospel chapter 2 and verse 23. This takes us back to the Matthew account. It's most likely the parallel to that, as you'll see. "It came about when he was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain, and the Pharisees were saying to him, 'See here. Why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' And He said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, the show bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he gave it also to those who were with him?'"

And then He said this, and this is crucial. He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was never some kind of moral law that couldn't bend. Never. He gave it to man as a blessing. He gave it to man as a legitimate way to have a day of rest and not work and stay home and enjoy the love of his family and give his body a day of rest and recovery. It was a day when he could sit back and enjoy as God's divine Creation, a day when he could examine his own heart before the Law of God, and he could come before God and receive forgiveness and the resultant joy and peace and salvation.

"I never intended to take the Sabbath and turn it into some kind of a hammer to beat people down," which the Pharisees had done. But in verse 28, he adds, "Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." What is He saying? He's saying, "I'm greater than the Sabbath." If He says He's greater than the Sabbath, then He's greater than Moses, and He's greater than the Mosaic law, and that again is absolutely intolerable to them. But what He's saying is, "I'll make the Sabbath whatever I want to make it. I'll do with the Sabbath whatever I want to do with it. It is not moral. It

has a purpose, but I'll determine that purpose, and I'll determine when that purpose begins and when that purpose ends. It began with Moses, and it's ending." That's what you see in this transition, Jesus beginning to dismantle the Sabbath.

Now go to the gospel of John. We've looked at Matthew, Luke, Mark. Let's go to the gospel of John. Each of the gospel writers plays up this. In John 5, there was a feast of the Jews. Now this is one of those times in the gospels when we can't reconstruct what feast it was, but it was a feast, which was also a Sabbath. "And Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool which is called in Hebrew Bethesda," which is familiar to all of us. It had five porticos or porches there, and in these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered.

And then there is a disputed section here that isn't in the better manuscripts. It may reflect a traditional belief that it says, "They were waiting for the moving of the waters. The tradition existed that an Angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, stirred the water. Whoever was first into the water after the stirring was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted." As I said, you'll notice it's in brackets in the NAS, and it well should be, because it's best not to accept is as an accurate representation of truth, but it may well reflect a tradition.

Anyway, it's the blind and the sick and the lame and the withered are all gathered around there, and perhaps they did believe this, even though it wasn't the case. There was a man there, to show you that either he was slow, or this didn't work. He'd been 38 years in his sickness. This is a very sick man with a chronic condition. Now remember, this is a feast of the Jews. "When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, 'Do you wish to get well?' The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up.'" That is inspired and does indicate that perhaps that tradition exists, "but while I'm coming another steps down before me." He was in some way incapacitated by his sickness and not quick enough to get in the water.

"Jesus said to him, 'Arise. Take up your pallet and walk.' And immediately the man became well and took up his pallet and began to walk." Thirty-eight years he's been in this kind of sickness. Thirty-eight years may indicate some kind of paralysis of some kind, and in a moment in time he is told to pick up his pallet or bed and walk. Now end of verse 9, "It happened to be the Sabbath that day," which suits Jesus just fine, because this is another opportunity to dismantle the common understanding of Sabbath and to indicate that the Mosaic economy is coming to its end.

Old Testament law did forbid the normal customary work, but Rabbinic tradition had developed at least 39 different forbidden activities according to the mission, the codification of Rabbinic law, 39 different forbidden activities, one of which was carrying your bed. Jesus just went right head-on, said, "Carry your bed, my friend. Pick it up, and walk out of here." Now it wasn't a bed for you. If I said for you to do that, you'd have to dismantle the frame, pick up the box spring, unload the mattress, gather

the sheets, and you'd need a small truck to get your bed out of there. No, what they slept on in those days was a flat mat, very small, barely larger than the human body, filled with straw, and it could be rolled up and put on the shoulder, and it was very lightweight. He says, "Roll up your mat. Walk away."

Well, verse 10 says, "The Jews were saying to him who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.'" I mean, get the picture here. It doesn't matter to them that the guy is healed. Thirty-eight years he's been sick. All they can say to him is, "Put down that bed." This is a very narrow perspective they have. They didn't say, you know, "We're so happy for you. I mean, let us help you carry the thing." Shows you their hard attitude. But verse 11, He answered them. He said, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Take up your pallet and walk.' I'm under command to do this, and by the way, the one who told me to do this healed me.'" Bottom line, you know what he's saying to them? "'I have just met a higher authority than you. I've been here 38 years. You never healed me.'"

They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your pallet and walk'? But he who was healed didn't know who it was." And you know what I get from that? That it wasn't, at that moment, it wasn't important that the man know Jesus. It was only important that Jesus interrupt the Pharisees' view of the Sabbath. He wasn't trying to convince the man of anything in particular. At that moment, he was showing the Pharisees that the Sabbath was in the process of being dismantled. He didn't know who it was, because Jesus, verse 13, said "had slipped away while there was a crowd in the place. But afterward...I love this...Jesus found him in the temple." He wasn't done with him, but for the moment all he wanted was the Pharisees' reaction.

"And he said to him, 'Behold, you have become well. Do not sin anymore so that nothing worse may befall you.'" The man went away, told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well, and for this reason, the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. And then he said something that was just too much. He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I myself am working." What is He saying? God and I can do anything We want, any day We want to do it," which again is a claim to deity. And verse 18, "For this the Jews were seeking all the more." They already started with this, but all the more they were seeing to...what?...kill him. And the two things that galled them, He was breaking the Sabbath and calling God His own Father, thus making Himself equal with God.

And again what you learn from this is the Sabbath is not moral, and the Sabbath is not permanent. The whole work of Jesus, again I say, seems to have been planned for Sabbath violations. It was planned to incite the leaders and unmask their hypocrisy and unmask their legalism and unmask their lovelessness. Now look, you've been sick for 38 years. This is not life-threatening. This is just chronic. Jesus could have healed him on Sunday. Could have healed him on Monday, Tuesday. Why does he pick the Sabbath? He did it on the Sabbath even though it was not life-threatening. He

did it on the Sabbath because He wanted the Pharisees to see that He was Lord of the Sabbath. Therefore, He was God.

He commanded the man to carry his bed, a direct violation of Sabbath law as the Jews understood it. And there was no compelling reason for Him to do that. He could have said to him, you know, "Rise up and walk." Why carry the bed? Why just carry the bed? Why not leave it there? Because Jesus again is confronting Sabbath law. Jesus didn't say to the Pharisees, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. I didn't violate Sabbath law. I didn't violate Sabbath law." He just said, "I do what God does, and We do whatever We want on the Sabbath." And, by the way, verse 18, "They were seeking to kill Him because He not only was breaking the Sabbath." That's continuous active indicative of the Greek.

There was a pattern of life with Him. He just continued to break the Sabbath, continually involved Himself in incidents that violated Sabbath law. And so the Pharisees charged Him for breaking the Sabbath and making Himself equal with God, and it led them eventually to Calvary. Jesus never attempted to curb His actions by Sabbath law, by Old Covenant prescriptions for that day. Jesus lived. Listen, He lived. He was born of the woman, Galatians 4:4, born under the law, and He obeyed every component of the law until it came time for the introduction of the New Covenant. Then He began to dismantle the ceremonies. The temple veil is ripped. This is just one of those same kind of things as He takes apart the externals, the shadows, in favor of the reality.

They didn't need a Sabbath day of rest anymore, because the great Menachem, as we saw this morning, the great consoler, the great rest giver, the great comforter, had come, who through the New Covenant would bring their hearts permanent and eternal rest. Jesus was saying the true reference point between them and God was not the Sabbath. The true reference point between them and God was Himself...was Himself.

The Sabbath had to go. For the Jews, it was either Jesus or the Sabbath, and they chose the Sabbath and killed Jesus. That was the choice. Pharisees were strict Sabbath keepers. They followed Old Testament laws to the letter as much as they could, yet in following these laws, keeping the Sabbath, they missed the true rest of God. On the other hand, this blind beggar here, saved by faith, entered without works into the true rest of God.

Dale Ratsliff in his book on Sabbath says, "The seventh day creation rest in Eden was characterized by face-to-face fellowship between man and his Creator. This was before the curse of sin, before the enmity man developed as a result of sin. The Sabbath laws had their origin in the way things were in Eden. There was no need to build a fire. There was no need to buy or sell, for Adam and Eve could eat freely from the fruit of the garden. There was no need to leave the garden where the Lord met them in the cool of the day. For these reasons, it would seem the Sinaitic Sabbath of the Old Covenant was a way of acting out in a sinful environment, the conditions which existed in the sinless environment of Eden. It pointed the Israelites back to the perfect beginning, when all was very good."

End quote.

He's right. Sabbath laws pointed back to Eden, but they also pointed forward, and let me add that. They pointed forward to the true rest that would come, that wouldn't be weekly or seasonal or yearly. There would come a time when they would enter into the true rest of God. This healed man experienced that. He was healed and washed and found and accepted, and there he was worshiping in intimate face-to-face fellowship with none other than the Creator Himself. Here he had entered into the true rest to which the Old Testament Sabbath law pointed. And no work was done by the man at all. It was all by grace. He was found, healed, washed, accepted by the sovereign Lord Himself. And in his heart, he found that Eden rest.

So we see in the gospel accounts of how Jesus dealt with the Sabbath. He did whatever He wanted, because the Sabbath, when it was given, was intended for the blessing of man, but only a shadow of the true rest to come. There would come a time, as there was when Sabbath was established, when it would be disestablished, the sign and the shadow giving way to the substance and the reality.

Now as you transition from that into the last point, all that remains is when the transition is complete, and the New Testament writers write to the church. After Christ died, after He rose, after the Spirit comes, the church is established. What does the New Testament say to the church about the Sabbath? Is the transition complete, or is it not?

Now let's begin to look at this by turning to Hebrews chapter 3, and we'll do this rather quickly. This is a wonderful kind of culmination of our understanding of Sabbath. Several crucial definitive texts uncovered this teaching. Hebrews 3, now this is one of those that, you know, I can tell you, you know, read my commentary on this section to get a full outline of it, but let's just go to verse 7, Hebrews 3. Hard to know where to jump in here, but 3:7, the Holy Spirit says, and starting there at verse 7, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked me as in the day of trial in the wilderness," talking about Israel and their hard hearts in the wilderness after they left Egypt.

"Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me and saw My works for 40 years...they were wandering 40 years...therefore, I was angry with this generation and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways. As I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest.'" Now what is "my rest" there? What didn't that generation enter? It didn't enter what? The Promised Land. They didn't enter Canaan. They wandered for 40 years and all died off. "My rest" is the earthly rest of Canaan. The rebellious generation never entered into it. They died in the wilderness. Now the rest of Canaan symbolizes salvation. It symbolizes all that God has for those who enter into His eternal Heaven. The Land of Milk and Honey, the Land of Canaan, is often a picture of Heaven. What He is saying is where there is unbelief, you forfeit rest. The ultimate rest, the great rest of God is the rest of Heaven.

And so in verse 12, he says, "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that causes you to fall away from the living God." I mean, you can do it again, just like they did it then. He says to these Hebrews that he's writing to, "Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called today, as long as you have time, lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, for we have become partakers of Christ if we hold fast to the beginning of our assurance firm to the end while it is said. Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoke me." So he's writing to the Hebrews in this community somewhere outside Jerusalem, and he's saying, "Don't do what they did. Don't do what they did."

Verse 16, "For who provoked Him when they heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry for 40 years...He being God...? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? They all died there. And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest but to those who were disobedient? And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief." And all of that is a picture that he pulls into this modern time, modern at the time it was written, and he says, "Look, there is a rest for you. There is a heaven for you. There is a Canaan for you. There is salvation for you, but unbelief will shut you from it, just as unbelief kept them out of Canaan." Two million Jews perished in the wilderness, and he says, "You'll perish, too, if you harden your hearts." It is the rest of salvation which ultimately is the rest of Heaven.

You come to chapter 4. "Therefore, let us fear, lest while a promise remains of entering His rest any one of you should seem to come short of it." "Please," he's saying, "there is a rest. It's the true rest. It's the rest of salvation that was pictured by that day." Why? Because on the day of rest, what have I been saying to you? What did they do? They recognized God as Creator. They recognized God as law giver, and as they looked at that fourth command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, and as they sat in their homes and contemplated the Law of God, they would be brought to the reality of their sin, and they would therefore be brought to penitence and come to God and seek from Him the forgiveness and the salvation that would produce the rest their troubled, guilty hearts needed. That's what he's saying, but pictured salvation. And when salvation comes, it is the substance of the shadow of the Sabbath.

"For indeed," verse 2, "we've had good news preached to us, just as they also, but the Word they heard didn't profit them, because it wasn't united by faith in those who heard." If you don't believe, you can't enter rest. "For we who have believed enter that rest just as He said. As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest. Although His works were finished from the foundation of the world, God had made a plan. He had provided a redemption. He had provided a Canaan just as He has provided a heavenly Canaan and salvation, and unbelief shuts you out."

Verse 4, follow this, "For he has thus said somewhere concerning the seventh day, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all His works.'" And again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest, since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience." He again fixes a certain day, today. Here's God, so merciful, so gracious, saying through David, long after those had died in the wilderness, long after they'd gone into the land, established the land themselves, and established the monarchy with David.

God comes back again, through David, Psalm 95, after so long a time, and says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." And God's still trying to get them to enter into salvation rest. If Joshua had given them rest, he wouldn't have spoken of another day after that. So finally, verse 9, there still remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. There is still salvation. There is still a Heaven, for the one who has entered his rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

There's a wonderful analogy there. Here were all these Jews working, working, working, working to enter salvation, never do it. Finally, you cast yourself on the mercy of God, you enter rest, and you rest from all those works. That's why Jesus said, "Come unto me all you that labor." All you Jews working and working, trying to earn your way in, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden." You have all these burdens of the law. "Come unto me all you that labor, all of you that are burdened and weary, and find rest for your souls," Matthew 11:28. "Let us therefore," verse 11, "be diligent to enter that rest." It's the rest of God.

In the note I wrote for the study Bible, I said this: "God's true rest did not come through Joshua or Moses, but through Jesus Christ, who is greater than either one. Joshua led the Nation of Israel into the land of their promised rest. However, that was merely the earthly rest, which was but the shadow of what was involved in the heavenly rest. The very fact that according to Psalm 95 God was still offering His rest in the time of David, long after Israel had been in the land, meant that the rest being offered was spiritual, superior to that which Joshua obtained. Israel's earthly rest was filled with the attacks of enemies and the daily cycle of work. The heavenly rest is characterized by the fullness of heavenly promise and the absence of any labor to obtain it."

And so rest, the true rest, the true Sabbath, is salvation. We could say this: The Mosaic Sabbath, the prescripted Sabbath in the Ten Commandments, was a dim reflection of Eden's perfect rest looking back and of salvation's perfect rest looking forward. In that Mosaic Sabbath, the sinner faced his need of true rest, rest from the weariness of guilt and shame and struggle. The rest of Hebrews is the salvation of God with all of its delights fulfilled in the glory of that eternal heavenly Eden. And once you've entered into that rest, which is provided by the New Covenant, the external Sabbath of the Old Covenant has no more meaning.

Turn to Romans chapter 14. I'll give you a couple more Scriptures here. Romans 14. Now we're going to understand Romans 14, because by now the transition is complete. Romans 14, verse 5, "One man regards one day above another." And he's talking here about those who are still hanging on to the Sabbath. "One man regards one day above another. Another regards every day alike. Well, let each man be fully convinced in his own mind that's subject to their own thinking. He who observes the day...that's the Sabbath...observes it for the Lord," and that's true. That's true.

Paul is saying you're gonna find some Jewish believers, and I mean they spent their whole life believing the Sabbath was a sacred day. For them it was, and now they've become believers, but they can't let go of that, because it's ingrained in them. They grew up with it. And they always did it under the Lord. "And so he who observes the day observes it for the Lord." If he wants to do that, let him do that. "And he who eats does so for the Lord. He who follows a certain dietary pattern does it for the Lord, or he gives thanks to God. And he who eats not for the Lord, he doesn't eat and gives thanks to God."

Some hold the day. Some don't. Some hang onto the dietary restrictions. Some don't. What he's saying here is it really doesn't matter. There are some new Jewish believers who can't let go of that. They still feel compelled to observe it, because they believe, and they are right. It was part of the Law of God, and they want to honor the Law of God, and they haven't yet grown to the place where they are free to cease doing it. That's fine. And some people don't have any obligation in their heart and by their conscience to the Law, and that's fine, too. It's all right. Don't make an issue out of it. It isn't an issue. So he's pointing up here the non-significance of the Sabbath day.

Now go to Galatians chapter 4. That in Romans is sort of a neutral point, just says, "Well, some do. Some don't. Don't make it an issue." Galatians 4, now Paul cranks it up a few notches. "Now that you have come to know God," he writes to the Galatians, "rather to be known by God, how is it that you turned back again to the weak and worthless elemental things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?" Whoa. What he is saying, he's saying to these Galatian believers. Galatia is an area in which there are many cities where gospel was preached and people believed. Now there are churches there. What happened, you remember. Gentiles converted to Christ. Not long after that, Jews come in, Judaizers. They start imposing on them the law. Now even Peter got caught up in that, you remember?

And so the Jews come in, and they start imposing the law, and they say, "Well, you can't be in the Kingdom of God. You can't be a true believer in God. You can't enter into Heaven. You can't have salvation if you don't get circumcised and keep the whole law of Moses." And so, they back in chapter 3 had begun in the Spirit, and they now were getting sucked into Jewish legalism and thinking they could be made perfect by the flesh. Well, here he says, "You're going back to weak and worthless elemental things." Whoa, that's pretty strong language. "Do you want to be enslaved to those all over again? What are those things? What are you talking about?" Verse 10, "Days and

months and seasons and years." Wow. What is that? What is that? Sabbaths, a weekly Sabbath, monthly Sabbaths, seasonal Sabbaths, the festivals and feasts, and the Sabbath of years and the jubilee in the fiftieth year, you're going back to that. What does he call it? Weak and worthless elemental things. Now that is not neutral. That is very strong.

He says not only do you not have any obligation to that, it is not moral. The Sabbath is not moral. None of those Sabbaths are moral. None of those feasts or festivals are moral. Not only do you not have an obligation to the non-moral elements of the law, but those, frankly, are weak and worthless elemental things. They had their place in the elementary era. Why do you want to go back and be enslaved all over again, because in Christ you have implied, entered the true rest. What are you doing observing days and months and seasons and years again?

Every believer has an obligation to the unchanging moral and spiritual realities that forever reflect the nature and will of God, but not the external Old Covenant observances, and most particularly, those are tied to weekly Sabbaths, monthly Sabbaths, seasonal Sabbaths, and yearly Sabbaths or multi-year Sabbaths. Along with the familiar weekly Sabbath and seasonal festivals were the new moons, another kind of festival probably implied by the word "months" there. He is saying salvation has come to you. It is a free gift of God. It has no connection to Old Covenant ritual. It has no connection to Old Covenant ceremony. Listen carefully. It has no connection to Mosaic calendar.

There are today all across this country what are called Messianic Synagogues. Have you heard of those? They are ostensibly Christian churches defined by Jewish ritual and tradition. They meet on Sabbath, and they carry out all the traditional Jewish festivals and feasts. And they have, in the words of Paul, "simply gone back to weak and worthless elemental things...and become enslaved all over again."

One other passage, Colossians chapter 2 and verse 16, this is a watershed passage. This is very, very important. Verse 16, see, what is the first word in verse 16? "Therefore." Now let's go back a little bit, just to find out what the "Therefore" is there for. It's a transition of great importance. "When Christ comes," verse 2 says, "you receive all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding in a true knowledge of God's mystery concerning Christ." In other words, when you receive Christ, you get it all. You get it all.

Verse 3, "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." In verse 9, "In Him all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form." Verse 10, "In Him you have been made complete." You have everything you need in Christ, everything. "Therefore," verse 16, "let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink...that has to do with the dietary laws...or in respect...this is important...to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day." Now folks, it cannot be more explicit than that. Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. And I go right back to where I was with Jesus and the Pharisees. "It is either Sabbath or me."

The ceremonial rituals are no longer binding, and neither is the Sabbath day. Paul is saying the New Covenant gives you Christ, and he gives you God's eternal rest. You don't need the Sabbath. In the same letter, in the prior letter that we read, Galatians, Paul warned the believers. He said, "If you are circumcised, then Christ is of no effect." There were two signs connected with the Old Covenant. One was circumcision. The other was Sabbath, and the New Testament does away with both. But what he is saying here is the Sabbath day, verse 16, is done away. "No one can judge you with regard to it."

Now you say, well, the Seventh Day Adventists will immediately say, "No, no, no. This isn't talking about the weekly Sabbath. This is talking about the seasonal Sabbaths, the feasts and festivals, all that. It's not talking about the daily, the weekly Sabbaths. It's not talking about the seventh day Sabbath. Its' talking about all those other Sabbaths." In answer to that, I'm going to give you some things to think about.

In the Old Testament references, which list these terms, the terms being "festivals" or "feasts" and "new moon" or "Sabbath day." In Old Testament references which list those terms, Sabbaths always refers to the weekly Sabbath. And when they are listed, they are always listed...follow this...in an ascending or descending order. So here you find them festival, seasonal, new moon, monthly, Sabbath day, weekly. They're always listed either in a descending or ascending sequence.

Furthermore, in the Old Testament references which list these terms, the yearly Sabbaths are never, ever called Sabbaths. They are always called fixed festivals, feasts, appointed feasts, annual feasts. Well, in Leviticus 3 there is a term used to describe them all, "Sabbaths of rest." They are not called specifically Sabbaths, surely to avoid confusion with the weekly Sabbath, and you'll notice here there is the word "festival." That gathers up all the monthly, all the seasonal festivals. New moon gathers up the monthly ones, and you're left with Sabbath, which refers, obviously, to the weekly Sabbath.

If you were to try to say that the Sabbath day at the end of 16 that's being done away with and no one can judge you on, if you're trying to say that's all the other feasts but the weekly one, then it's redundant, because the word festival covers that. Festival refers to the seasonal annual Sabbaths. Sabbath day must be Sabbath day. The order is very, very clear and very natural and consistent with the Old Testament. Well, "don't let anybody judge you regarding the Sabbath," he says. Don't let anybody try to force you to keep the Sabbath or any other Old Covenant convocation.

Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, Feast of Pentecost, Feast of First Fruits, they're all shadows...all shadows...all shadows. They lose their significance in the New Covenant presence of Christ. And here is the key, verse 17, "They're just mere shadows of what is to come, and what is to come is Christ." And you have Christ, and you don't need the pictures. You are complete in Him.

Now in case there's any lingering doubt in your mind, let me make an argument from silence. These are always fun to do. Close your Bible, and I'm gonna tell you what it doesn't say. There is not one New Testament command to keep the Sabbath, not one. All that the New Testament says about the Sabbath you have just seen in terms of the epistles. There's not one New Testament command to keep the Sabbath.

Furthermore, all of the Ten Commandments, all of them, are repeated in the New Testament except the Fourth Commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Every other one, all nine, are repeated in the New Testament. This one is left out. Thirdly, there are no Sabbath rules given anywhere in the New Testament, none. There are no Sabbath rules given in the Old Testament passages that speak of the New Covenant. There aren't even any Sabbath laws connected to the Abrahamic Covenant or the Davidic Covenant. So in the New Testament New Covenant instruction, nothing is said about the Sabbath. There is no New Covenant Sabbath.

Furthermore, the Jerusalem Council, the Jews who were believers in the early church in Jerusalem, when they met together determined not to require Gentile believers to keep the Sabbath. There is no requirement from the Jerusalem Council about the Sabbath imposed upon Gentile believers. Furthermore, the Apostles never made any rules for Sabbath observance. They never warned believers about violating the Sabbath, and they never encouraged believers to be faithful and keep the Sabbath.

All that leads to the clear, inescapable conclusion that there is no Sabbath law in the New Covenant. We're not under that law. It is not a moral law, and it is one that was temporary. It is set aside. And for us, when Saturdays come around, we can still remember God as our Creator and God as our law giver and how short we come to his law. But that brings to us no sorrow, no lasting sadness, for we have entered into eternal rest. The Sabbath for us is just faint shadow.

That leaves one critical question, and that's for next Sunday night, and you better be here, because I'm gonna talk about Sunday, the Lord's day. Is it a kind of Sabbath? Who started it? Why? And what is required of us in it? And one thing for sure is required of you. Be here. Okay? You're very kind. Let's stand. Boy, that was long, wasn't it? It was good.

Father, we thank You tonight. What a wonderful evening, glorious fellowship. Now send us on our way with grateful hearts. We love You. We thank You that we are in Christ, whose yoke is easy, and His burden is light. We've come unto Him who labor and are weary and heavy-laden and found rest for our souls. Rest. The rest of salvation, the peace, the joy, the comfort that comes when we know our sins are forgiven, and Heaven is our eternal home. We have come to the reality, the true rest, our Savior and His salvation. For that we thank You. Amen.

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