

Sabbath

Introduction

One of the primary ways in which Jesus is revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures is through the Biblical Feasts. These feasts include:

- A weekly feast called Shabbat, which means the Sabbath Day, from Friday evening at sundown to Saturday evening at sundown.
 - Seven annual major feasts: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles.
 - Two additional annual festivals, Purim and Hanukkah
- There is also a special observance once every seven years, when the land was to have a “Sabbath of Rest” (Leviticus 25:4)
 - Then there is the Year of Jubilee, which is celebrated once every 50 years, throughout all the land of Israel (Leviticus 25:8-13).

All of these feasts, in one way or another, point toward Jesus the Messiah and King of Israel. They are all fulfilled in Him!

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ For *in* six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴ 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 ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath

The Hebrew word “*Shabbat*” (Sabbath) comes from a word meaning “to desist, cease, or rest”. In the Bible, Sabbath primarily speaks of the seventh day of the week. This is the day that God rested or ceased from His creation work.

There are a number of Sabbaths mentioned in Scripture. There were the weekly rests. Most of the feast days and celebrations were Sabbaths. Every seventh year was to be a Sabbath year where the land was allowed to rest. Because Israel had failed to observe 70 of these, they went to Babylon until those years were fulfilled. There was also the 50th year of Jubilee where slaves were set free, property was returned, and the land enjoyed a rest.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath day of rest is the first of the holy convocations God gave the nation of Israel. It was a holy day and set apart because God Himself had blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. Keeping the holiness of this day was part of the Ten Commandments and violation cut a person off from the nation and carried the death penalty. God was serious about this day.

The Sabbath

There was a threefold purpose of the Sabbath.

1. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest and refreshment for the Israelites, their servants, their animals, and any visitors staying with them. They were to labor for six days, but on the seventh day, they were to have a complete rest or cessation from work. In doing so, observant Jews identified with God who also worked for six days and rested on the seventh.

The Sabbath

2. The Sabbath was to be a sign between the Lord and Israel. Similar to circumcision, the Sabbath was to be kept throughout their generations as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. The penalty for not keeping the Sabbath was the same as failure to practice circumcision. Non-observers were cut off from the covenant people.

3. The Sabbath was to be a day of remembering their physical redemption (Deut. 5:15). The people of Israel were not to forget that they had been slaves in Egypt and that God had delivered them with great power and might.

The Sabbath

Resting on the Sabbath involved more than just physical refreshment. God did not rest on the seventh day because He was fatigued. Rather the idea of resting spoke of cessation. Israel was to cease whatever work they were involved in during the week. They were to detach themselves from the material, temporal, and mundane and focus on the spiritual, eternal, and heavenly facets of life.

They were to refresh the inner man as well as the outer. They were to reflect on their relationship with God, putting aside their own desires and putting God's desires first. This marked their distinction between themselves and the world system around them.

The Sabbath

The Scripture gave a few examples of prohibited activity, but the Rabbis sought to clarify the principles behind the commands and formulated a list of 39 general categories of work that was prohibited on the Sabbath. Many of these laws were “fence laws”. The barrier was set before they considered the Sabbath broken.

It should be mentioned that those working in the Temple were exempt from the Sabbath requirements. The Temple sacrifices did not cease on the Sabbath, nor did other priestly duties, such as changing the showbread (Lev. 24:8). The Levites chanted Psalm 92, believing that it contained a prophetic aspect. They understood the Psalm to look ahead to the Messianic age, a time that all time was to be “all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting.”

Jesus and the Sabbath

The Scripture speaks of the Sabbath. Its importance to the life of Jesus cannot be underestimated. Many of Jesus’ miracles were performed on the Sabbath to the anger and astonishment of the religious leaders. Jesus never really broke the Sabbath, but He seemed to go out of His way to break man’s traditions. Those traditions stood as a stumbling block for many in coming to Him.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath, but you were not allowed to take medicine unless it was serious. If you read carefully (Mark 1:32-34), it says that people waited to come to Jesus to be healed until “the sun set”. Sunset brought an end to the Sabbath and began a new day.

Jesus and the Sabbath

Healing on the Sabbath and commanding those healed to pick up their bed and go home, violated the Rabbinic Sabbath Laws. However, by these healings, Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 53:4, “Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.

The result is that the religious leaders wanted to kill Him.

Why did He take such risks.

There are three principles that help answer that question.

Jesus and the Sabbath

1. Through His life and ministry, Jesus fulfilled specific prophecies proving that He was Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

2. As Messiah, Jesus had the authority to supersede the Sabbath. This was not contrary to Jewish tradition. The Rabbis taught that in the days of Messiah, a new Torah would be given to Israel. The idea is that when the Messiah is present, the law takes a subservient role to Him. Therefore, as the Messiah, Jesus had the right to make such statements as “the Son of man (a messianic title) is Lord even of the Sabbath day” (Matthew 12:8).

Jesus and the Sabbath

3. As Messiah, Jesus had the authority to correct, reinterpret, and even change the Sabbath laws. On four occasions He demonstrated that overriding Sabbath law was not new with Him.

- David ate the showbread reserved only for the priests (Matt 12:3-4).
- The priests work in the Temple every Sabbath (Matt 12:5)
- The rabbis allowed the Sabbath laws to be overridden by circumcision (John 7:22-23).
- The rabbis allowed for the care and well-being of livestock to supplant the Sabbath laws (Matthew 12:11)

Jesus and the Sabbath

The primary difference between the rabbinical teaching and the Sabbath presented by Jesus is declared in the statement “the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath (Mark 2:27). Although their intentions were good, the rabbis turned the Sabbath into a legalistic burden, not a day of rest. People and their needs were relegated to second place behind rituals and even animals. Jesus understood that people and their needs were always first in God’s sight. This is why He said, “Wherefore, it is lawful to do good on the sabbath days” (Matthew 12:12).

Jesus and the Sabbath

The ultimate view of the Sabbath pictures the coming of the Messiah, who would provide a permanent rest for His people. With the establishment of the Old Testament Law, the Jews were constantly "laboring" to make themselves acceptable to God. However, no one could possibly keep all those laws, so God provided various offerings and sacrifices so they could come to Him for forgiveness and restore fellowship with Him. However, these sacrifices were only temporarily. These sacrifices looked forward to the Messiah who would remove sin once and for all.

Jesus rested after performing the ultimate sacrifice, He sat down and rested – ceased from His labor of atonement because there was nothing more to be done. Because of what He did, we no longer have to "labor" in law-keeping in order to be justified. Jesus was sent so that we might rest (Sabbath) in God and in what He has provided.

Jesus and the Sabbath

Jesus can be our Sabbath rest because He is "Lord of the Sabbath". As God and the law giver, He decides the true meaning of the Sabbath because He created it! Jesus is our Sabbath rest in the flesh. When the Pharisees criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath, Jesus reminded them that they would not hesitate to pull a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath. Jesus came to seek and save His sheep who would hear His voice (John 10:3,27) and enter into the Sabbath rest He provided.

Jesus and the Sabbath

Hebrews 4 is the definitive passage regarding Jesus as our Sabbath rest. The writer to the Hebrews exhorts his readers to “enter in” to the Sabbath rest provided by Christ. After three chapters of telling them that Jesus is superior to the angels and that He is our High Priest, he pleads with them to not harden their hearts against Him, as their fathers hardened their hearts against the Lord in the wilderness. Because of their unbelief, God denied that generation access to the holy land, saying, “They shall not enter into My rest” (Hebrews 3:11). In the same way, the writer to the Hebrews begs his readers not to make the same mistake by rejecting God’s Sabbath rest in Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 4:9–11

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.

So What

When Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation, He will usher in the Millennial Kingdom and after that we will move into eternity. Here we will find our ultimate rest. We will cease from the work of this life and live forever in His presence.

Are you ready?

Matthew 11:28

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

As we partake of communion, let us remember the price that Jesus paid and find our rest in Him!