

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
December 6, 2015**

**Lesson Text: Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16
Lesson Title: The Lord's Day**

Introduction

The Lord's Day is one of those subjects which usually ends with more questions than answers. Should the Lord's Day (Sunday) have the same restrictions and requirements as the Jewish Sabbath? What kind of entertainment or recreation is appropriate for the Lord's Day? Should a Christian work or not work on Sunday? Does church attendance end one's obligation for keeping the Lord's Day biblically?

It is unlikely that any group of believers will ever totally agree on all the questions relative to the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. However, there are some basic truths presented in Scripture which should be understood and observed concerning the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. When God's Word is carefully studied and applied in relation to this subject, it is clear God wanted man to observe an order of life that included rest and worship. The compelling evidence to support this truth is the fact God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day.

The seventh day of the week in the Old Testament is the Sabbath, Saturday, the last day of the week. It signified work completed. The first day of the week in the New Testament is called the Lord's Day, Sunday. Sabbath was about *creation*. The Lord's Day is about *resurrection*. The Sabbath Day and the Lord's Day are different. However, it is impossible to respect and honor the Lord's Day as a New Testament believer without a proper understanding of the Sabbath Day in the Old Testament. Both are holy days with holy purpose.

The Institution of the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11)

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" is the fourth of God's Ten Commandments. It is the longest of the commandments providing detailed explanations about what God wants us to do on the Sabbath, how we are to do it, and why we are to obey.

Verse 8

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

The fourth commandment begins with the word "remember." "Remember" had a double meaning for the Israelite. First, it meant they had heard about the

“sabbath” before and they are never to forget it. The “sabbath” was a part of Israel’s life before Mount Sinai. While traveling through the wilderness toward Mount Sinai, God gave the children of Israel manna six days out of seven. But the seventh day was a day of rest. They were required to gather enough on Friday to feed them on Saturday, the Sabbath. So, the Sabbath tradition was already a part of Israel's life (Exodus 16:22-30).

Second, it meant they were to intentionally and purposefully “remember” God’s creative work and how He rested on the seventh day when creation was finished (Genesis 2:2-3). The word “sabbath” means “intermission, to rest from labor.” God instituted the Sabbath. He was the first to observe a Sabbath day’s rest; and God was the one who commanded, through Moses, that man “remember” and observe the Sabbath.

“Remembering” involves more than just the mind; it demands the total participation of the whole person. It is possible to “remember” someone’s birthday without really “remembering.” Remembering a birthday involves more than recalling a date on a calendar. It involves thought, feelings, maybe a call, a card, a hug, or a gift. God wanted the Israelite to “remember” His work of creation by taking one day, the “sabbath day” and “keeping it holy.”

“Keeping” the Sabbath day “holy” means “sanctifying it” or “setting it apart for sacred use.” Obeying the fourth commandment meant the Israelites set apart the last day of the week for remembering God’s creative work. It was a day He finished creation and observed its sacredness.

The very concept of the “Sabbath” was unique to Israel. All the pagan nations around Israel based their worship upon the sun and moon, the solar calendar and the lunar calendar. The sun and the moon were worshipped as gods and the cycle of the sun and the moons determined the religious practice of the cultures around them. Only Israel was given a seven-day cycle of rest and worship to emphasize the Creator God who gave them this day.

Verse 9-11

“Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”

How was the Israelite to keep the Sabbath holy? First, they kept the Sabbath holy by working the six days prior to it. “Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work.” From the beginning of time “work” has been ordained by God. People generally have a negative attitude about “labour” and work. Work is a divine

gift from God going back before man sinned (Genesis 2:15). Man is to “work six days” but “rest” on the seventh day. “Work” is still part of God’s divine plan (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). For a man not to work when he is physically able is to mock the creative work of Almighty God. Laziness and refusal to work violates God’s creative order and violates the fourth commandment.

Second, the Israelite kept the Sabbath holy by ceasing from work on the Sabbath day. God said, “Thou shalt not do any work.” “Thou” referred to the entire Israelite household including servants and animals. To work on a day God commanded no work is sin. What did God mean when he said, “Thou shalt not do any work?” He meant the Sabbath was not to be business as usual. When there was no difference in the Sabbath from any other weekday in Israel, there was major problems (Nehemiah 10:31; Isaiah 56:2; Jeremiah 17:27).

Third, the Israelite kept the Sabbath holy by worshipping the Creator. The “Sabbath” is “the sabbath of the LORD thy God...For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.” To believe in divine creation and fail to keep the Sabbath day holy is a biblical contradiction.

Fourth, the Israelite kept the Sabbath by recognizing “the LORD blessed it.” The first time God “blessed” anything, he “blessed” man and woman and “blessed” a day called the Sabbath for them to share in his rest (Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3).

It is important to remember the Sabbath day was not a special day for Israel because God said, in effect, “Now you must do something or not do something on this day.” Rather, he said, in effect, “This day is special because I rested and you, your family, your servants, and your animals need rest.” Jesus said, “*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath*” (Mark 2:27).

The Importance of the Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-16)

God gave Israel, His chosen people, a special day of rest, the seventh day, the day we call Saturday, the last day of the week. Keeping the Sabbath was a sign between Israel and God, that they were His people. It was also a sign between God and Israel of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 31:21). Keeping the Sabbath was essential for God’s people. A violation of the Sabbath for the Israelite resulted in death (Exodus 31:14).

This was not the first time Moses had spoken to the nation about the Sabbath and it would not be the last. He repeats it so the people will not forget to observe the day. Moses’ words are spoken in the context of the instructions given to the builders of the tabernacle while still at Mount Sinai (Exodus 31:1-11). Notice some of the ways the Sabbath is emphasized in this passage.

Verse 12-13

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.”

The reason for Moses' fresh repeat of the fourth commandment at this particular time in Israel's history was because the Israelites might be tempted to excuse themselves from the day of rest. They might suppose the building of the tabernacle was a sacred work, therefore, God would understand if they used the Sabbath as a day for work on the tabernacle. Remember, Moses is on Mount Sinai receiving these words from the Lord and the people are at the base of the mount waiting for his return.

When the “LORD spake unto Moses” and told him to “Speak thou also unto the children of Israel” about “my sabbaths,” He wants the Israelites to understand nothing, not even the building of the tabernacle, takes precedence over keeping the Sabbath. Although the tabernacle was a special place of worship, the “sabbaths” were a perpetual “sign between” God and Israel “throughout your generations.” Keeping the “sabbaths” was a test of the nation's commitment to God. It showed the world they were in a special covenant relationship with Him.

Keeping the Sabbath was a reminder the “LORD” had “sanctified” Israel. He set them apart from all other nations. They were uniquely His!

Verse 14-15

“Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.”

The death penalty is to be administered in Israel for those who fail to keep the “sabbath of rest.” That is, those who treat the “Sabbath” as no differently from any other day, or not “holy” should die. Numbers 15:32-36 shows us this law being applied in the story of the man found picking up sticks on the Sabbath. Although death was rare in the Old Testament for Sabbath violators, the point being made by the Lord is the Sabbath observance is a vitally important principle.

Verse 16

“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.”

“Wherefore,” or because of its importance, “the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.” Again, Moses emphasizes the “sabbath” is to be “observed throughout all generation, for a perpetual covenant” because it is a sign for the Israelite. By keeping the Sabbath they will know God is the One who made them holy.

Conclusion

Is there an application of the Sabbath for believers? Do Christians have a day to remember? Do Christians have a day in which the cycle of their lives is governed for their worship of the living God? The answer is “Yes.”

New Testament Christians no longer keep the Sabbath Day. Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ, worship, and find our rest in Christ on the first day of the week, Sunday, which is “The Lord’s Day.” While there is no specific command in the New Testament to change from the seventh day (Saturday) to the first day of the week (Sunday), the evidence is overwhelming after the resurrection of Christ. Notice some of the changes in Scripture from Saturday, the Sabbath, to Sunday, the first day of the week:

- Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week (Mark 16:9)
- Christ met with His disciple on the first day of the week (Mark 16:11)
- The Commission was given on the first day of the week (John 20:21)
- The Holy Spirit was given on the first day of the week (John 20:22)
- Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week (Acts 2)
- The church met for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:6-7)
- Church offerings were collected on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2).

So why the change? Why the transformation from the “Sabbath” to the “Lord’s Day?” Here are a few suggestions:

a. From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day means we have moved from the shadow to the substance (Colossians 2:14-16). The Old Testament Sabbath was a shadow of rest until that rest was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

b. From Saturday to Sunday (Romans 14:5-6). The first Sabbath rest dealt with life in Adam. Our Sunday rest deals with life in Christ. The first Sabbath was rooted in creation. Our Sunday rest is rooted in resurrection.

c. From Sabbath to Savior (Hebrews 4:9-11). In the Old Testament they worked and then rested. In the New Testament, Christ did all the work, so we

rest on the first day of the week in His work! Every time we acknowledge the Lord's Day and His present rest, we look forward to an eternal place of rest with our Lord.

What are the challenges to Christians today in regard to the Lord's Day? The first and most important challenge is to remember it is "The Lord's Day," not yours! The second challenge is to avoid tradition and man-made rules. The way to avoid all this legalism is to remember that the Lord's Day is for celebrating the freedom that we have in Christ. This does not mean that anything goes. A call to freedom, like the one we are given in the fourth commandment, is never an excuse for seeking our own pleasure (Isaiah 58:13). However, the freedom we have in Christ does mean that for the Christian, the Sabbath is not a straitjacket.

Finally, every Christian should take inventory of how we are living in regard to the Lord's Day. Does the Lord's Day begin at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday and end at 12:00 p.m. for you and your family? Is the Lord's Day about family time or time with the Lord? How about your work? Are you working unnecessarily on Sunday? Both the Old and New Testament recognized that there was such a thing as necessary work. Has the Lord's Day become your day to celebrate sports and commit your children to athletics? Is the Lord ever mentioned during Sunday lunch or dinner? You know the answers to all the questions above. So does the Lord!

Christ's attitude toward the Sabbath Day should be our attitude concerning the Lord's Day. His activity was limited, not legalistic. He healed (Mark 3:1-6) or participated in acts of CHARITY. He pulled sheep out of pits (Matthew 12:10-13) or acts of EMERGENCY. He plucked corn (Mark 2:23-24) or acts of NECESSITY.

Amen.