

God's seventh-day rest

- *Enjoyment of what he had done*

- *Not idleness or inactivity*

- *Day 7 still continues!*

- *His reaping the benefit of His previous activity*

The Christian's spiritual experience of entering into God's rest

- *The reward that comes in this life as a result of diligent and persistent faith*

- *Abraham*

- *David*

After seven 'days' of creation, God is pictured as 'resting'. First we consider **what God's seventh-day rest meant to Him**. It was a time when God was enjoying looking at what He had done. God's resting is not idleness or inactivity. At every stage of creation God had reviewed what He had done, and at each point God '*saw that it was good*' ^{☞1}. Then at the end of the six days God saw everything that He had done and it was all exceedingly good. God's rest is the continuation of Genesis 1:31. It is the immediate effect of His having laboured for six days. God's rest is God's 'reward' for what He had done.

God's rest is still continuing. It is possible for us to 'enter' it even now ^{☞1}. In Genesis, although we are told of the end of each of the six days ^{☞2} we are not told of the end of the seventh day. It has not ended!

God's rest is not idleness. Jesus once healed a man on the Sabbath, and the Jews criticized Him. Their idea was that the Sabbath was a day for doing nothing! Jesus replied '*My Father is working...*' ^{☞1}. God's days of creating the universe have finished; now God is on His long period of Sabbath-rest. But it is not idleness. God is still at work. He can heal a person. God's Sabbath is His joy in what He has done. It is His reaping the benefit of His previous activity. It is His entering into the blessing of the six day's work.

Next, we consider the **spiritual experience of entering into rest**. The Bible tells us that it is possible to '*enter into*' God's rest. What does it mean to '*enter into rest*' in this way?

There is a spiritual experience that corresponds to God's Sabbath. When God made the world and was enjoying what He had done, His plan was that man, having been made at the end of the six days, should 'enter into' what God had done. God had done all the creating. Man was now to come along and enter into it all. The human race was designed to '*enter into God's rest*' that is to reap the benefit of everything that God had done in making His perfect world.

'*Entering into rest*' is the reward that comes to the Christian in this life as a result of diligent and persistent faith. It is the joy of inheriting promises. It is experiencing the oath of God, when He swears that He will bless us. It is when after years, maybe, of persistent faith, we come to have an assurance that we have obtained that which we have been looking for and which God has promised us.

If man had continued in obedience, the reward for his obedience would have been perfect enjoyment of everything that God had created for him. But man lost the privilege of entering into this rest of God. He rebelled. He became a sinner, and the possibility of enjoying with God everything that God had done was lost for the human race. It can be restored only by persistent and obedient faith in Jesus.

'*Entering into rest*' is what happened to Abraham when after years of diligent faith and testing, God said to him '*Now I see you fear me...*' At that point **on God's side** an oath was taken. At that point on **Abraham's side**, he entered into rest. At that point the promise was 'obtained'. Before that point it could have been aborted.

'*Entering into rest*' is what happened to David when after years of trials and tribulations he finally came to the point where God took an oath, and without the possibility of any reversal said to David '*Your seed will continue for ever. I swear it!*' (if I may summarise 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89 in this

way). On God's side an oath was taken. On David's side after many struggles against many enemies '*The Lord had given him rest on every side*' ^{☞1}. God also gave him rest within by giving an unshakable oath that his seed would last for ever.

^{☞1} 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25

^{☞1} Heb 4:11
^{☞2} 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31

^{☞1} John 5:17

^{☞1} 2 Samuel 7:1

- **God's rest for the Christian**

The Sabbath for Israel

- **An important sign of God's special relationship with Israel**

- **A sign of God's programme to bring spiritual rest to the whole world**

- **Christians are not under Israel's law**

- **What matters is entering into the enjoyment of what God is doing**

Sunday is not a Sabbath!

- **A matter of convenience not law**

- **Keeping the Sabbath for the Christian**

When a Christian comes to the point of believing obedience, it is **God's rest** that he enters into. He '*ceases from his own labours*' and enjoys reaping the benefit of what God has done, just as at the time of creation, God did all the work and man entered into what He had done.

Next, we consider what the Sabbath meant to Israel. The word 'Sabbath' means stoppage or cessation or standstill. Just before Israel got to Mount Sinai, God gave them a little training in '*keeping the Sabbath*'^{□1}. It had never been kept before. (Genesis 2:1-3 says nothing at all about any person '*keeping the Sabbath*'.) Then a few months later God gave the nation of Israel a command to keep Saturday as a holy day^{□2}. There was a social reason for it; it gave people a rest^{□3}. It was a 'sign' that God was in special relationship with Israel. The death penalty was the punishment for not keeping it^{□4}. From time to time people were reminded of its importance^{□5}.

The main reason for the Sabbath seems to have been to make it clear that God has a divine timetable. He created the human race to bring everyone into '*enjoying His rest*'. The sin of man held up the plan for centuries. But God has a programme to reintroduce the possibility of enjoying His rest. That plan involved the nation of Israel. Israel had to keep the Sabbath as a sign that they were part of the programme of God to bring spiritual rest to the entire world. The law demanded it be kept, under threat of the death penalty for disobedience.

When Jesus came the legal side of the matter was dropped. The Christian is not under Israel's law. It is still true that to take a holiday one day in seven is often a good idea, but there is no longer any law about it. A person can '*consider all days alike*' if he wishes^{□1}. What matters now is not that we 'keep the law of Moses' but that we enter into God's enjoyment of what He is doing. By diligent faith we are to '*enter into rest*' by reaching the point where God is pleased with us, and gives us an oath that He will bless us.

Lastly, it may be necessary to consider **Sunday, and how it relates to the Sabbath**. It does not relate to it at all! Sunday is not a Sabbath. The Christians kept Sunday to make it clear they were **not** keeping the **Saturday-Sabbath** of the Mosaic law. The Christian is released from the Mosaic law; he fulfils it by being under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Sunday is a matter of convenience. In the days of the New Testament it was convenient to keep Sunday as a day of worship. It was the day Jesus rose from the dead and so it could be called 'the Lord's day'. The keeping of days is a matter of convenience, of helpful tradition. It is not a matter of law.

The way to 'keep the Sabbath' is not to have exaggerated ideas about Sunday. The way to keep the Sabbath is to give diligence to enter into God's rest.

□1 Exodus 16:22-30

□2 Exodus 20:8-11

□3 Exodus 23:12

□4 Exodus 31:12-17

□5 Exodus 34:21; 35:2-3;

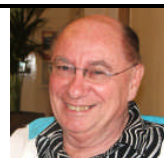
Leviticus 19:3, 30; 23:3; 26:2

□1 Romans 14:5



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