GOD’S SABBATH REST

Most people are familiar with the traditional Sabbath of the Old Testament as being the seventh day of the week – Saturday, the day of rest. Since scripture states that God’s Sabbath is *forever* (Exodus 31:17, quoted below), and since forever takes us into the eternal future, then it appears that there is also a future prophetic meaning to the Sabbath rest of God that we should consider. This prophetic Sabbath is introduced in the New Testament. So let’s look at both and make the comparison to see that the Old Testament Sabbath is a precursor or a type of the Sabbath of the New Testament that is forever – eternal.

What is the Sabbath? Why did God establish it? When is it? How is it observed? Does it have a symbolic meaning or purpose? To answer these we need to start at the beginning. In Genesis we have the record of God working for six days on our current residence, planet Earth. On the seventh day He rested.

Genesis 1: 31- 2:3 – *Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. 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 God had created and made.*

This does not mean that God was tired and needed a rest; it simply means he stopped all His activity. No longer did He put forth effort to bring about what He desired - it was all done, and he liked the finished product seeing that it was “very good” – that is, up to this point. He didn’t need to continue because everything was done, including all the plans for the future.

At this point we need to consider the definition of the word Sabbath from both the Hebrew and Greek as used in the Bible. The Hebrew word comes from the route meaning *desist* and is translated as *intermission* according to Strong’s Hebrew-Greek Dictionary. This word is used to refer to the weekly seventh day of rest as well as other ceremonial celebrations when no labor is to be done. These ceremonial Sabbaths are called holidays, a derivative of *holy day*.

Scripture tells us that the Sabbath served the purpose of being a **sign** of the covenant that God had with His people, His holy people. It showed the world that God has a special relationship with His chosen people.

Exodus 31:12-17 – *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.* ***It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel******forever****; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’*”

Ezekiel 20:12, 20 – *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. ….allow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.’*

Israel was to live in righteousness by following the dictates of the Law given through Moses. Those dictates would show the rest of the world that God’s people were special because they lived a holy or separated life as compared to everyone else. Israel was to live in right doing – righteousness; thus showing that they were God’s holy people.

The Israelites did not do a very good job of obeying God’s laws. Scripture says that the Law served as a school teacher. It taught people that mere human effort could not keep up the righteous standard that God required of His people.

Galatians 3:24 *– Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*

Righteousness cannot come through the Law no matter how hard men try to keep it. Righteousness therefore cannot be obtained by the Law. Israel proved it! They sinned; and they had to continually make sacrificial atonements for their sins. God knew this from the very beginning, that’s why He had planned for a new and better covenant, revealed in and referred to as the New Testament. Jesus Christ was the only one who completely fulfill and satisfy the requirements of the entire Law. Thus Jesus was qualified to make to final and absolute sacrifice for the sins of everyone in the whole world.

In Hebrews 3 and 4 is a discourse regarding the failure of Israel to believe in, trust and obey God which caused them to not be able to enter into God’s rest - His eternal, spiritual rest – the Sabbath that is to come; also called “that day”.

Hebrews 3:7-11, 18-19 – *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’ So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’: 18And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.*

Hebrews 4:1-9 – *Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not £profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: “So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’” although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 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 works as God did from His.*

The writer of Hebrews is telling us that there is a future day of rest we are to look forward to; one that we desire to enter into. It is His eternal, spiritual rest – the Sabbath that is to come; also called “that day”. And we can only enter through faith and faithfulness (obedience) to Him and his Word.

Consider what Jesus had to say about the Sabbath as it provides a different perspective of what the New Testament Sabbath is and its purpose as He mentions it:

Mark 2:27-28 – *And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”*

So we see that the Sabbath in the New Testament is for our benefit. And it no longer refers to Israel, but to “man”.

In the New Testament there are two words for Sabbath used having the same meaning as the Hebrew for rest or ceasing activity; one of which refers specifically to the seventh day of the week but appears to be used figuratively. Both words appear in the Book of Hebrews – (written to Jews who became Christians).

The word Sabbath as used in most of the New Testament is Strong’s #2663 and # 2664; both of which refer to a period of rest, to lay down or repose, ceasing from effort. There is an interesting exception however in Mark 2:27-28 and Hebrews 4:9. Let’s look at the significance of these two words as used in these verses. Mark 2:27-28 uses Strong’s #4521, for this specific 7th day Sabbath, but this is different from common form of Sabbath using Strong’s # 2663 and #2664.

Hebrews 4:9 – *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.*

Hebrews 4:9 uses Strong’s #4520: Sabbatism, a spiritual or heavenly 7th day rest. This refers ceasing of human self- effort to attain righteousness, resting in what God has provided through Jesus’ atonement. Just as the traditional 7th day weekly Sabbath of the Old Testament was a sign of God’s people Israel, so also is this form of Sabbath is also a sign or a seal under the terms of the New Covenant, or Testament that the writer of Hebrews is referring to believers in Christ. It is Christ in us, the demonstration of a proper Christian life that is the New Testament sign of God’s people.

How do we come to this conclusion? It’s from Jesus’ own words referring to himself in Mark 2:27 as “Lord of the Sabbath”. Couple this with what we read in Hebrews 4 about looking for “another day”. What day is referred to? It is the day when Christ returns to earth and sets up His Kingdom – the thousand year millennium. The 7th millennial day since the God placed man on earth.

In Thayer’s English/Greek Lexicon, which gives greater detail to Strong’s #2663, as used in the Hebrews 3-4 discourse, the “rest” used here is Sabbath and used as a metaphor meaning: “the heavenly blessedness in which God dwells, and of which He has promised to make persevering believers in Christ partakers after the tests and trials of life on earth are ended”. Then Thayer’s explains Strong’s #4520, as used in Hebrews 4:9, as being, “the period of rest looked for in the age to come by true worshippers of God and Christians”.

Therefore it appears that the Old Testament sign of God’s Jewish Sabbath is symbolic or prophetic of the “day of salvation” waiting to be revealed at the consummation of this age. It’s that time of the Kingdom of God manifesting on earth when mankind finds rest in Christ our righteousness, ceasing from our own striving and effort to live in absolute righteousness. So we have the Sabbath introduced in the beginning (Genesis) and we are to look to the Sabbath coming at the end – the millennium.

To answer an age old question as to whether Christians are to keep the seventh day weekly Sabbath we need to consider the conclusion that the council at Jerusalem determined as to what is required of gentile converts to Christ.

Acts 15:28-29 – *For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.*

Note that no requirement to observe the 7th day Sabbath is mentioned. Why? ... it appears that the apostles knew that the Sabbath is fulfilled in Jesus Christ who is our righteousness, and they too were looking for that day. That day is the day of the Lord, the day all is completed and He returns as King, Judge and Lord of all; when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess…Jesus Christ is LORD! That is the day of salvation, the day it is finished and we no longer have salvation by faith because we have finally arrived.

Ephesians 4:30 - *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Philippians 1:6 – … *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

2 Timothy 1:12b – …*for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*

2 Timothy 4:8 – *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*.

Hebrews 10:25 – …*but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

It helps to recognize that there have been six millennial days since God placed man on the earth. (A millennial day is one thousand years.) It was two thousand years from Adam to Moses, (two millennial days); another two thousand years from Moses to Jesus, (two more millennial days); and two thousand years from Jesus to about where we are in time now – a total of six thousand years or six millennial days. When Jesus returns, which we all recognize will be soon, that begins the seventh millennium – the thousand year reign of Christ on earth. This is the seventh millennial day – the DAY OF REST, when Satan is bound and righteousness rules through Jesus Christ and His saints. He is then truly seen as King of kings, and Lord of lords – the saints being the kings and lords ruling with Him. Then He is truly “Lord of the Sabbath”! It will be truly a time of rest from human effort to achieve righteousness. The eternal Sabbath will have arrived and will continue forever with Him.

Jesus Christ is our Sabbath, and His millennial reign on earth is the Sabbath referred to in Hebrews; we are looking forward to THAT DAY – THE SABBATH.

“Amen, even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus” – Revelation 22:20.