

BIBLE COURSE LESSON 24

THE TRUTH ABOUT GOD'S HOLY SABBATH

What is God's PURPOSE for His weekly Sabbath? Why do so few understand that keeping the Sabbath brings special BLESSINGS? Let's learn HOW and WHY New Testament Christians are to keep God's Sabbath day holy.

Does it really matter on which day of the week we worship God? Is the observance of any day of the week in honour of the Creator equally acceptable? God commands us to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shall not do any work" (Ex. 20:8-10). But why should we observe God's holy Sabbath day? What purpose does the seventh-day Sabbath serve in the space age? And how does one keep it holy?

CREATED BY JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the member of the God Family through whom God created all (Eph. 3:9; Heb. 1:1-2). But did you know that Christ, the Word (John 1:1-3, 14), also "made" the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28) and later kept it as a human? After finishing His work of renewing the face of the earth and creating all physical life upon it in six days, the Word "rested" on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 20:11). By resting on the seventh day, He "sanctifies" it, setting it apart for a special purpose. The word "Sabbath" means rest in Hebrew. God intended the seventh day to be a period of rest and relaxation from our regular work of the previous six days. And so God set the example for mankind by ceasing from all work on the seventh day of what is commonly called creation week. By so doing, He made the Sabbath and set apart every future seventh day as a time of rest for man.

But the purpose for keeping God's Sabbath goes far beyond simply resting from our labours every seventh day.

WHY THE SABBATH?

When God does anything, or makes anything, there is a reason—an important purpose. God created man and put him here on earth for a purpose. But mankind has lost the knowledge of that great purpose. God, through the Word, made the Sabbath. But why? What purpose does it serve? Mankind has lost knowledge of that important purpose, too! Jesus Christ said the Sabbath was "made for man" (Mark 2:27), but He did not then say why or for what great purpose the Sabbath was made, except to serve and benefit man. God revealed that important purpose to His chosen people about 1,470 years earlier, shortly after delivering them from slavery in Egypt.

After God spoke the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai and His covenant with Israel had been made complete, God made a totally separate and eternally binding covenant with His people (Ex. 31:12-17).

Notice the conditions of this special covenant: "And the LORD spoke 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 generation; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you" (verses 12-13).

Here, then, is the purpose of the Sabbath. It is a "sign." A sign is a badge, symbol or token of identity. God commanded His people to keep His Sabbath as a sign to identify WHO is their God!

God gave man His Sabbath for the purpose of keeping mankind in the true knowledge and true worship of the true God. The Sabbath points back to the creation of the present physical world (Ex. 20:1 1; 31:17), and creation is proof of God's existence. The very day God set aside for assembly and worship points as a memorial to WHOM we are to worship-the Creator and Ruler of all that is!

But that is not all.

SABBATH IDENTIFIES GOD'S PEOPLE

The Sabbath was also given as a sign to identify who are the people of God. Not only does the special covenant say, "...that ye may know that I am the LORD..... but "...that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you" (Ex. 31:13). The word "sanctify" means to set apart for a holy use or purpose. On the seventh day of creation week, the Eternal sanctified-that is, He set apart for a holy use-the Sabbath day. The special Sabbath covenant also reveals that the Sabbath is a sign that the Eternal sanctifies His obedient people- sets them apart from other people-for His holy purpose. In Old Testament times, God's people were the tribes that composed the nation of Israel. In New Testament times, God's people are spiritual Israelites (Gal. 3:28-29) - those of His own Spirit-led Church-His Spirit begotten children. And they are being prepared by God for a holy use.

For these "first fruits" (James. 1:18) of God's Master Plan, the Sabbath foreshadows the completion of God's spiritual creation in them. It pictures their being BORN into the Kingdom or Family of God to be rulers and teachers of His Word in tomorrow's world (Rev. 5:10).

THE TEST COMMANDMENT

In Exodus 16 we find that Sabbath keeping was a test of the Israelites obedience to God. God told Moses He was going to "prove them, whether they will walk in my law" (verse 4). God's sign is one we accept

voluntarily. But how many do you know who keep the seventh day Sabbath? It is obvious to the world when one keeps God's Sabbath. But most people don't want to be identified as being different from the world.

Many professing Christians are willing at least to acknowledge that the other nine commandments should be kept, but the one commandment they reject and refuse to keep is the Fourth! Therefore it is the crucial test of obedience, for it identifies those who have truly surrendered to God-who obey all of His commandments regardless of persecution or cost! God commands us to "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8). God is giving us a TEST-an examination relevant to our entrance into eternal life in His Kingdom-every week! What kind of grade is God giving you?

Let's begin an in-depth study of this most important day of the week to make sure we are passing God's test.

GOD'S SPECIAL CREATION FOR MAN

The seventh-day Sabbath was a unique creation. It was not until God's physical creation, including man, was complete that the Creator brought the Sabbath into existence. The plain truth about God's holy Sabbath day begins in the second chapter of Genesis.

1. On which day of what is commonly called creation week did God rest? Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:11. Did God rest because He was tired from all the work He had done during the previous six days? Isaiah. 40:28.

Comment. God is composed of spirit and therefore never becomes tired. God created or "made" (Mark2:27) the Sabbath by resting, whereas all else was created and made by working. By resting on the seventh day, God also set an example for mankind to follow.

2. What did God do to the seventh day? Gen. 2:3.

Comment: Notice that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. By resting on the seventh day of creation week, God put His divine presence in it, making it holy. Therefore He set it apart from the other six days of the week for a holy use. In so doing, He also made every future seventh day of the week holy!

God established the Sabbath as the time from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. Each week when that time arrives, we are in holy time! It is GOD'S time, not ours. God made it holy, and in the Fourth Commandment

He commands us to keep it holy!

3. Which member of the God Family made that first Sabbath? Col. 1:13-16; Mark 2:28. Is the seventh day Sabbath one of the Creator God's Holy Days? Isaiah. 58:13.

Comment. As we have proved conclusively from our studies with previous lessons, Jesus Christ was the Lord God who revealed Himself to ancient Israel throughout the Old Testament. God the Father created all things through Him. Jesus Christ is therefore "Lord of the Sabbath" because He made it. So the seventh-day Sabbath is the real "Lord's Day"!

4. For whom did Jesus say the Sabbath was made? Mark 2:27. Who would that include? Ex. 20:8-10, especially verse 10.

Comment: "The Sabbath was made for man," declared Jesus. Every seventh day from creation week was set apart by God as time to be specially observed by mankind, regardless of race or nationality. The Sabbath was made for Adam and all of his descendants, including everyone today! The seventh-day Sabbath was to benefit all who would ever live-if they would keep it as God intended.

5. How did God intend the Sabbath to benefit mankind? Deut. 5:14; Ex. 23:12. (Notice the words "rest" and "refreshed.")

Comment: The word "Sabbath" means rest in Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament Scriptures were written. Physical rest and mental relaxation after a busy week are obvious reasons for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. God knew humans would need periodic rest and change from work. But the purpose for keeping God's Sabbath goes far beyond simply resting on it and being refreshed physically.

6. Is the Sabbath also a reminder of God's creation? Ex. 20:8-11, especially verse 11.

Comment. Keeping God's seventh-day Sabbath every week reminds us that God is the Creator of all that exists, including all of humanity. Thus the Sabbath is a memorial of God's creation, which includes God's great spiritual purpose for creating mankind. As we will learn later in this lesson, the Sabbath also pictures our eventual spiritual birth as members in God's divine Family! God set aside a special or hallowed one-seventh of the week to be a reminder of Him as Creator and of His purpose for our existence. The Sabbath is time in which we can be spiritually rejuvenated by having close spiritual contact with God. It allows us time to think more about God, to pray to and worship Him (both in private and in fellowship with others), and to study the Bible to understand more about His awesome purpose for our lives and how to achieve it!

SABBATH DAY MIRACULOUSLY REVEALED TO ISRAEL

From the time of creation week until the Exodus (more than 2,500 years later), we find no specific mention of the Sabbath in the Bible. Obviously, however, "righteous" Abel (Heb. 11:4), Enoch (who "pleased God"- verse 5), Noah (a

"just man" and a "preacher of righteousness" Gen. 6:9; 2 Pet. 2:5), Abraham (the father of the faithful- Rom. 4:16), Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and others kept God's Sabbath. These men were righteous in God's sight, and righteousness is keeping God's commandments (Ps. 119:172). Let's especially notice the example of Abraham.

1. Are we told that Abraham kept God's law, which would have included His seventh-day Sabbath? Gen. 26:5.

Comment: The patriarchs knew and kept God's law. God would not have inspired Moses to write that Abraham kept His commandments, statutes and laws if he had kept the wrong day for the Sabbath or had not kept it at all!

2. Was God confident that Abraham would teach his children to keep His law? Gen. 18:19.

Comment: Isaac kept the seventh-day Sabbath, since Sabbath keeping is a part of God's law-His way of life. Jacob (whom God later renamed Israel) also kept the Sabbath, following in his father Isaac's footsteps. However, by the time of Moses, their descendants, the Israelites, had lost much, if not most, of the knowledge of God's way. Recall that after the death of Joseph, the children of Israel became slaves in Egypt, a land in which time was not measured by weeks, but only by months and years. The Israelites were forbidden to worship the true God and forced to work seven days a week. For about a century, they were not permitted to keep the Sabbath.

But shortly after delivering them from Egypt, God made it absolutely clear to the Israelites exactly which day is His Sabbath by specially revealing it to them.

3. One month after leaving Egypt, and about two weeks before arriving at Mt. Sinai, where God thundered out the Ten Commandments, what did God promise to give the Israelites? Ex. 16:4. What did they call this bread? Verse 15. (Be sure to read all of this chapter before going any further).

4. Was the raining of this bread from heaven also to be a test of the Israelites' willingness to obey God? Verse

4, last part. (Notice that God's law existed before He spoke the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai.) Were they told not to save manna overnight for the next day? Verse 19. What happened to the manna the disobedient ones saved for the following day? Verse 20.

5. Were the Israelites to gather twice the normal amount of manna on Friday morning? Verse 5. Was this double portion to be enough for both Friday and Saturday, the seventh-day Sabbath? Verse 23.

6. Did the manna saved for the Sabbath stink and breed worms, as it did if saved overnight for any of the previous six days? Verse 24. Was that because God withheld manna from falling on the seventh day, and miraculously preserved the portions saved for the Sabbath? Verses 25-26.

7. But did some of the people disbelieve Moses and disobey God by trying to gather manna on the Sabbath? Verses 27-28. Did God again command them not to work on the Sabbath? Verse 29. What did the people finally do on the Sabbath? Verse 30.

Comment. The absence of manna on the seventh day identified exactly which day was the Sabbath on which the Israelites were to rest from all their labours. Thus God miraculously revealed His Sabbath day to them! Notice that God performed several miracles every week to point out the exact day of the Sabbath to the Israelites. He miraculously gave the people manna on the first six days of the week, including a double portion on the sixth day. And He preserved the leftover portion of Friday's manna so it could be eaten on the

Sabbath, since there would be none to gather on the seventh day, thereby giving the people rest from working

on His Holy Day. Every week God vividly reminded the Israelites of His seventh-day Sabbath. He performed these

miracles week after week for forty years (Ex. 16:35). This clearly shows how important Sabbath keeping is to God!

A SIGN OF IDENTIFICATION

God has a special sign that identifies His people. That sign of identification is His holy Sabbath day. Let's understand how it identifies true Christians today.

1 . In addition to commanding the Israelites to keep the Sabbath, revealing by the miracles of manna which day it is, and shortly thereafter including it as one of the Ten Commandments, did the One who later became Jesus Christ make Sabbath keeping an additional and separate covenant or agreement with His people? Ex. 31:12- 16, especially verse 16. Was this covenant to be binding forever? Verses 16-17.

2. Was the Sabbath to be a "sign" between the Creator and His people? Verses 12-13, 17. Would He sanctify-set apart for a holy use-the Sabbath keepers? Verse 13, last part.

Comment. A sign identifies. A sign may advertise a business's name and the nature of the business. A sign may also proclaim certain other information. What knowledge does the Sabbath advertise? "That ye may know that I am the LORD" who "made heaven and earth" (Ex. 31:13, 17). The Sabbath identifies who the true God is. It is a reminder of the Creator of the heavens and earth! God wanted ancient Israel to be sure to remember that He is Creator, and Supreme Ruler over all His creation. So He singled out Sabbath observance as the one great sign by which they would always be reminded of who He is. But this special Sabbath covenant of Exodus 31 reveals that the Sabbath does more than identify the Creator. It is also a sign that identifies the true people of God: "That ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you" (verse 13). The Sabbath was to point out who they were-His chosen people. It was the one commandment that would make Israel especially stand out from all other nations. As stated earlier in this lesson, most people do not want to be identified as being different from the world. Most simply will not keep the Fourth Commandment unless they truly want to obey all of God's commandments. Therefore it is the crucial test of obedience today, just as it was to ancient Israel (Ex. 16:4), because it identifies those who have surrendered to God-who obey all of His commandments. And so God doubly commanded Sabbath observances by making it a separate covenant with His people after the covenant commonly called the Old Covenant (which included the Ten commandments) had been completed ratified, and put into force and effect. This special Sabbath covenant was to be an everlasting agreement. It was to be the sign that would identify the people of God of all generations, including "spiritual Israel" today-Spirit begotten members of God's Church.

3. Does the Bible reveal that a real Christian, regardless of race or nationality, is one who has become a spiritual Israelite-one of Abraham's "seed" through Jesus Christ? Gal. 3:28- 29, Rom. 4:16; Eph. 2:11-13, 19.

Comment. God made the special Sabbath covenant with Abraham's physical seed-the nation of Israel. It was to be obeyed throughout their generations. Today, all Spirit-begotten children of God-true Christians (Rom. 8:9)-regardless of race or national origin, have become Abraham's spiritual descendants, and therefore, keep God's Sabbath! They have been set apart ("sanctified"-Ex. 31:13) by God as His people.

However, most religious groups that profess to keep God's seventh-day Sabbath do not keep all of God's commandments. Therefore they are not part of the Church of God, which is composed of Spirit-begotten children of God. Jesus said that His disciples would keep all of His commandments (John 14:15, 21). And

God gives His Holy Spirit only to those who obey Him! (Acts 5:32). God's special Sabbath covenant reveals another important reason why true Christians keep His Sabbath today. Let's further understand why God wanted to sanctify the Israelites.

4. What were the Israelites to become if they obeyed God? Ex. 19:5-6. Were they to set an example of obedience for the Gentile nations? Deut. 4:5-8.

Comment. Israel was to be set apart as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They, by their example of obedience, were to lead the Gentiles to obedience to God so they could also receive the blessings that would result from keeping God's law. God called the ancient Israelites out of slavery not only to fulfil His promises to the patriarchs, but also so that through the Israelites He could reveal Himself to the world-to show that He is the Creator and ruler of the universe-and to reveal His laws, commandments, promises and blessings to the rest of mankind! So the keeping of God's Sabbaths was to also be a sign that the Israelites were selected for this purpose.

5. Did the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac become a holy nation and kingdom of priests? Ezek. 20:13. (Notice the word "rebelled".) Did they keep God's Sabbaths? Same verse.

Comment: The nation or Congregation of Israel was a physical type of God's spiritual Church today. Had the Israelites obeyed God, they would have become a holy nation, fit and able to teach other nations. But they failed to keep the Sabbath holy. Therefore they failed to remember the true Creator God and failed to become a holy people and a light to the world.

6. Today, for what special purpose are Spirit-begotten Christians-spiritual Israelites especially set apart from this present evil world? I Pet. 2:5, 9; Rev. 5:10; 20:6. Are they the light that ancient Israel failed to become? Matt. 5:14, 16.

Comment: As we learned in Lesson 16, the Israelites under the covenant of Sinai failed to respond to their calling because they did not have the Holy Spirit to help them recognize or understand this call and carry it out.

But we, if we are converted spiritual Israelites, do have the perception and power through the Holy Spirit to recognize our calling and obey God. It is we who keep God's Sabbath day holy and keep His commandments who will become God's "holy nation" and "kingdom of priests"! We will become this holy nation when we are born into the Kingdom of God at Christ's soon coming. Christ will then have made us "kings and priests" unto Himself and His Father (Rev. 1:6). As members of the ruling Family of God, we will be prepared to teach, serve and save the world throughout the Millennium and beyond!

TRUE CHURCH KEPT GOD'S SABBATH

Jesus, our perfect example, kept the seventh-day Sabbath properly. So did the Church He founded. The example set by Christ and His apostles is recorded in the Bible for us to follow today.

1 .Did Jesus set an example of how we are to live? I Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6.

Comment: Jesus taught His disciples how to live the Christian way of life. He also showed how He, as Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), intended the Sabbath to be kept. And Jesus shows us today, by His recorded example and teaching, how the Sabbath is to be a great joy and blessing.

2. How do we know Christ kept the Sabbath? Luke 4:16, 31.

Comment: Jesus regularly attended religious services on the Sabbath day "as His custom was." He obeyed His own command to meet every Sabbath (Lev. 23:3). This is the day He would naturally have observed, because He is the One who made the Sabbath and ordained that it be kept holy!

3. Did the women who came with Jesus from Galilee observe the Sabbath a few days after He was crucified? Luke

23:55-56. Was the first day of the week (Sunday) still a regular work day? Luke 24:1.

Comment: Notice the words "according to the commandment" in Luke 23:56. Writing this account perhaps 30 years later, Luke knew the Sabbath commandment was still in effect.

4. Was it also the Apostle Paul's custom to keep the Sabbath? Acts 17:1-2. Did Paul keep the Sabbath because he felt like it, or because Jesus Christ dwelt in him through the Holy Spirit? Gal. 2:20. Does Christ's will remain the same forever? Heb. 13:8.

Comment: It is quite plain that the Apostle Paul observed the same day Christ did. And if Christ lives His life in us today through God's Spirit, we will also be keeping the same day Jesus kept-the seventh-day Sabbath!

5. Was the Apostle Paul specially taught by Christ in preparation of his ministry? Gal. 1:11-12, 17-18.

Comment: Christ trained Paul for his ministry to the Gentiles, apparently during the three years he was in Arabia. Had Christ done away with any of His Father's laws or changed the Sabbath to some other day, He certainly would have revealed it to Paul. But no changes were made. Paul taught the Church of God exactly what Christ taught him to preach, as the Bible clearly shows! Notice further.

6. Did Paul, even in a predominantly Gentile city, observe the seventh-day Sabbath? Acts 18:1-4, 6, 11.

Comment: For more than 18 months in Corinth, Paul laboured during the first six days of the work as a tentmaker. Then he preached every Sabbath-on Saturday, the seventh day! Notice how the Sabbath was regarded by Gentile converts in the early Church.

7. On one particular occasion Paul preached to both Jews and Gentiles on the Sabbath (Acts 13:14-42).

After the Jews left the synagogue, did the Gentiles ask Paul to preach to them again on the next Sabbath? Verse 42. On the next Sabbath, how many came to hear Paul? Verse 44

Comment: Notice that it was the practice of many Gentiles to meet with the Jews on the Sabbath. And because these Gentiles were interested in Paul's message, they asked him to speak about Jesus again on the very next Sabbath. Even though this would have been a good opportunity to do so, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, did not tell them to cease assembling on the Sabbath for worship!

If we could find even one text in the New Testament giving us as strong authority for Sunday observance as these do for Sabbath keeping, we would have Scriptural authority for observing the first day of the week. But it just isn't there! The phrase "first day of the week" is found eight times in the New Testament. But in not one of these eight texts is there found any authority for changing the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday. (A future lesson will cover the details of how men, not God, changed the Sabbath to Sunday, the first day of the week.)

8. Since Paul followed the example of Christ who dwelt in him, what did he command the Gentile Christians at Corinth? I Corinthians. 11: 1. Did he command the Philippians to do likewise? Phil. 3:17.

Comment: Paul taught the converted, Spirit-begotten Gentile Christians to imitate his obedience to God, even as he imitated Christ's obedience. The Christian Gentiles of the early Church of God always assembled on the Sabbath day, just as Christ did while in the flesh, in order to keep the day God commands in His Word.

In like manner today, all Spirit-begotten children of God imitate Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul by keeping the seventh-day holy!

9. What did Christ say that indicates His Church would still be keeping the Sabbath even at the time of the end, just

before His Second Coming? Matt. 24:20.

Comment: Christ clearly shows here that His Church would continue to keep His Sabbath commandment.

The early Church of God fled from Jerusalem before the city was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. True Christians were keeping the Sabbath at that time. But this prophecy is dual, and its main fulfillment is yet in the future. It shows that God's people will then still be keeping His Sabbath! For more than 1,900 years, God's true Church has continued to keep the commandments of God, including the seventh-day Sabbath! (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

WEEKLY CYCLE REMAINS UNCHANGED

Would God set apart a certain day of the week, put His blessing on it, make it holy time, command that it be kept holy forever, and then let that holy time become "lost" so we would not know when to keep it today? Absolutely not! God has seen to it that the knowledge of when to keep His holy Sabbath day has been preserved.

1. What did God entrust the tribe of Judah-the Jews-to preserve? Rom. 3:1-2.

Comment: Paul shows that God used the Jews to preserve the Hebrew or Old Testament Scriptures ("oracles"). God caused the Jews to preserve this revealed knowledge for His New Testament, Spirit-begotten Church!

2. What did Jesus say that shows the Old Testament Scriptures had been preserved? Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 16:17; John 5:46-47.

Comment The Jews carefully preserved God's Word. Jesus plainly indicated it was intact in His day and dogmatically stated it would NEVER BE LOST! That of course, applies to the written word of God. They also preserved the weekly cycle and the true Sabbath day, but unfortunately departed from the calendar they kept at the time of Christ in the 4th century, so that now their annual festivals rarely fall on the correct day.

3. Can we be absolutely certain that the Jews preserved and observed the right day for the Sabbath up to the time Jesus lived? Luke 4:16.

Comment. Notice again that it was Jesus' "custom" to keep the same Sabbath day the Jews observed.

The One who made the Sabbath would not have been keeping the wrong day! Clearly the Jews at that time knew which day of the week was God's Sabbath. Notice also that Jesus gave His official approval of the Scriptures the Jews used by reading aloud from them in the synagogues on the Sabbath day! But could time have been "lost" between then and now? After the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Jews eventually migrated to all parts of the world. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Jews in China had no way of communicating with the Jews in Africa. Nor could the Jews in Europe communicate with other parts of the world. If the weekly cycle had been changed or mixed up, the Jews in one part of the world would be observing one day for the Sabbath, while the Jews in another part would be observing another day. But everywhere, in every nation on earth, we find that the Jews have always been observing the same day Jesus kept-the seventh day, Saturday! This practice of the Jews is proof that we have not lost the right day for God's Sabbath. Even though the Jews in general have lacked spiritual understanding and have disobeyed the Scriptures (John 7:19; Rom. 3:3-4), and although they became overly strict in keeping the Sabbath by adding many of their own customs and traditions, the Jews have faithfully retained the knowledge of the correct day for God's Sabbath.

FORESHADOW OF THE MILLENNIUM

God has ordained a period of 7,000 years in which to accomplish His spiritual creation of mankind. The time pattern for God's little-known plan is revealed in the first two chapters of Genesis. It is the seven-day week.

Besides being a memorial of creation and an identifier of the Creator and His Spirit-begotten children, the Bible shows that the weekly Sabbath is a type or foreshadow of the coming millennial "Sabbath"-the seventh millennial "day" in God's 7,000-year "week" for the working out of His plan for mankind. Let's understand.

1. Is a thousand years as a "day" to God, and vice versa? 2 Pet. 3:8. Is the time Christ and the resurrected saints will rule over the earth specifically called a thousand years? Rev. 20:4-6.

Comment: In God's plan for man, a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years of human civilization is as one day in His planned "week" of seven 1,000-year "days" ! God intended the weekly Sabbath day to foreshadow or picture the coming 1,000-year period known as the Millennium. ("Millennium" literally means "thousand years.") The Millennium will be a time of rest and peace for the entire world-a 1000-year "Sabbath" of rest from Satan's influence and the resultant discontent, strife and warfare. It is during this thousand-year Sabbath that the knowledge of God's great purpose for mankind will spread throughout the world (Isaiah. 11:9). All mankind then living will be taught God's ways and given the opportunity to be begotten by God's Spirit, and the vast majority will eventually be born into the Family of God. The first six days of creation week clearly correspond to the 6,000-year period of human civilization that we are now nearing the end of. Since Adam chose to follow Satan's way of "get" instead of God's way of "give," God has allotted mankind 6,000 years in which to learn that disobedience to Him results in nothing but suffering and death! God has permitted Satan to exercise dominion over mankind for 6,000 years. "Six thousand years," God said in effect to Satan, "you may labour and do all your work" -in this case Satan's work of deception and influencing man to sin- "but the seventh thousand-year period is My Sabbath; in it you will not do any work" (compare with Exodus 20:9-10). Thank God we are near the end of the six working "days" allotted to Satan. God's thousand year "Sabbath" is about to begin!

SABBATH PICTURES THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In Hebrews 3 and 4, Christians are exhorted to continue keeping the seventh-day Sabbath in light of an interesting and important analogy. A comparison is drawn between ancient Israel's entrance into the Promised Land and the Christian's entrance into the Kingdom of God We need to understand and be sure we're heeding God's warning!

1. What does God warn all His Spirit-begotten children about entering His "rest" ? Heb.3:7-13,16-19; 4:1-2.

Was rebellion, especially Sabbath breaking, the reason God did not allow an entire generation of Israelites to enter His "rest"? Ezek. 20:12-13, 15-16.

Comment: The word "rest" in the mentioned verses in Hebrews is translated from the Greek word *katapausin*, which is defined as "rest" or "place of rest". As used in Hebrews 3:1 and 18, it denotes the ancient Israelites' rest from their wanderings in the wilderness by entering the Promised Land.

The "rest" Israel finally entered (Josh. 1: 1-3) is symbolic of the Christian's spiritual "rest" (Heb. 4: 1) of entering (being born) into the divine Kingdom or Family of God and living forever! The Israelites were headed toward the Promised Land, even as God's Spirit-begotten children today (spiritual Israelites) are aiming at the goal of entering God's Kingdom. But because Israel had become rebellious and polluted God's Sabbaths during their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, God did not allow the generation of adults that came out of Egypt to enter the Promised Land.

2. Was it primarily because of their unbelief that the Israelites disobeyed, and therefore were prevented from entering God's "rest" for them-the land of Canaan? Heb. 3:19; 4:1-2,3.

Comment: Because the Israelites did not believe God, they "hardened their hearts". They profaned God's Sabbaths even though He had made Sabbath keeping the very test of their obedience (Ex. 16:4). Therefore God said of that generation, "They shall not enter into my rest" (Heb. 3:11). And none of that generation, except faithful Joshua and Caleb, entered the Promised Land. But the next generation born during the 40 years in the wilderness, and those under 20 years of age at the Exodus, did enter with those two men. God had originally promised this land to Abraham and his descendants and, whether or not the Israelites obeyed, God was bound to keep his promise.

3. If New Testament Christians believe and obey God, may they enter their "rest"-eternal life in God's Kingdom? Heb. 4:3, first nine words. What does Hebrews 4:4 refer to? Gen. 2:1-3.

Comment: Hebrews 4:4 plainly speaks of God's rest after finishing His work of creation. This verse refers directly to the first weekly Sabbath day as a type of the "rest" chapters 3 and 4 in Hebrews are speaking of.

And so the Sabbath day was symbolic of God's "rest" for ancient Israel-the Promised Land they entered. And both are symbolic of true Christians entering the Kingdom of God at Christ's return!

4. Will God's Spirit-begotten children be keeping His Sabbath day as a weekly foreshadow of their future "rest" in His Kingdom? Heb. 4:9-10.

Comment: The meaning of verse 9 has been obscured by the word "rest" in the Authorized Version.

Everywhere else in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 the word "rest" is translated from the Greek word *katapausin*.

However, in verse 9 of chapter 4, "rest" is translated from *Sabbatismos*, which literally means "keeping of a

Sabbath"! Most English translations have correctly translated Hebrews 4:9. Even the margin of the Authorized Version renders it: "There remains therefore a keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God." The Moffatt translation renders this verse: "There is a Sabbath-Rest, then, reserved still for the People of God." The Lamsa translation really makes it clear: "it is therefore the duty of the people of God to keep the Sabbath." So there still remains a *sabbatismo*-the KEEPING of the Sabbath day-for God's people today. And Spirit begotten Christians (spiritual Israelites) will enter the future "rest" (*katapausin*) of God's Kingdom even as they now keep the weekly Sabbath, which points to it! But why would the Kingdom of God be pictured as a "rest"? Because being a divine member in God's Family will be a rest from sin. When born of God's Spirit, we will be free of our present struggles against sin. We will then possess the fullness of the mind and character of God and thus be able to remain sinless forever! (I John 3:9). And when born into God's Kingdom-when we become eternal members of God's divine Family-we will each possess the same kind of gloriously radiant and powerful spirit body that Christ and the Father now have. We will no longer be limited by our present weak, mortal bodies that tire so easily. We'll then possess the capacity for tireless, never-ending accomplishment (Isaiah. 40:28, 31). This is what we can look forward to when we enter God's "rest"-when born into the eternal Family of God!

RESULTS OF POLLUTING GOD'S SABBATH

The Sabbath is so important to God that He included Sabbath keeping as one of His Ten Commandments-as part of the first four, which explain what our relationship to God should be. Let's understand just how important Sabbath keeping really is in God's sight.

1. After delivering His people Israel from slavery in Egypt, did God promise them tremendous blessings if they would keep His commandments? Read Leviticus 26:3-12. Which commandments did God specifically mention? Verses 1-2. How else would God bless Israel for obedience to Him? Read Deuteronomy 28:1-13.

2. But what terrible curses would result if the Israelites would not keep God's commandments? Read Leviticus 26:14-39. Was national defeat and captivity one of the curses? Verses 31-33, 38-39.

What else would God do to the Israelites if they would not obey Him? Read Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

Comment: God warned that tragic curses would befall the people if they would not keep His commandments, especially the Fourth, which was the great sign identifying Him as their God and them as His chosen people!

3. Did the House of Israel obey God? 1 Kings 17:16-17. What did God eventually do to the people because of their disobedience? Verse 18. Were they removed to a foreign land? Verse 23.

Comment: In the days of their last king, Hoshea, the northern ten tribes were invaded by Assyria, conquered, removed from their land and made slaves. The reason for the punishment was the same reason God punished Israel in the wilderness—for rebelling against Him, and specifically for polluting His Sabbaths !

(Review Ezekiel 20:12-24). They also committed idolatry which would not have happened had they kept the Sabbath.

4. But the House of Judah also polluted God's Sabbaths and therefore came under His curse. More than 100 years after the House of Israel went into captivity, what did God do to Judah for not keeping His holy Sabbaths? 2 Chron. 36:5-7, 16-19, 21. What happened to those who were not killed? Verse 20.

Comment: The sacking and destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and the captivity of those who survived, was the fulfillment of God's warning to Judah (Jeremiah. 17:21-25, 27). God was patient with the Houses of Israel and Judah, but after their persistent disobedience, He finally allowed them to be militarily defeated and taken in captivity!

5. Was Nehemiah well aware that the main reason Judah had been punished was for breaking God's Sabbath, which the Jews were beginning to profane again in his day ? Nehemiah. 13:15, 17-18.

Comment: The punishments that befell ancient Israel and Judah were types of the same punishments prophesied to befall their modern descendants, who will be punished for the same sins - Sabbath breaking and idolatry.

GREAT BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE

When God made the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day of creation week, He intended His holy Sabbath to be a blessing to all mankind. Not only would people be refreshed physically by keeping God's commanded rest day, they would also be blessed materially and spiritually.

1. Does God promise to bless the individual who keeps His Sabbath? Isaiah. 56:1-2. What did Jesus say a true Christian will inherit? Matt. 5:5. What does He, as Lord of the Sabbath, promise those who keep His Sabbath properly? Isaiah. 58:13-14.

Comment: The "heritage of Jacob" is the inheritance God originally promised to Jacob's grandfather righteous Abraham. God promised us- if we have become Abraham's obedient spiritual "seed" through

Christ (Gal. 3:16, 29) - eternal inheritance of the earth (Romans 4:13), as well as great spiritual blessings!

Let's notice further.

2. Recall the tremendous physical blessings God promised the ancient Israelites if they would keep His Sabbath and

other commandments. Are the Blessings of Leviticus 26:11-12 also promised to Spirit-begotten Christians? 2Cor. 6:16-18. Upon what conditions? Verse 17.

Comment: These blessings are clearly conditional both for the ancient Israelites and for spiritual Israelites-God's Church today. God's blessings come as a result of obedience to Him, not rebellion or apathy.

Verse 18 shows us one of the greatest of God's blessings: becoming Spirit-born members of the divine Family of God! Those who obediently keep God's Sabbath spiritually draw closer to their Creator. They are reminded of and grow in the understanding of God's great purpose for them. They are cooperating with God in perfecting the spiritual character He is creating within them in preparation for their eventual birth into His Family.

3. In the very next verse, what is the Apostle Paul's exhortation to all Christians, which they must follow before they can receive God's spiritual blessings? 2 Corinthians. 7:1

4. What name does God promise to give those who obey Him, faithfully observing His Sabbath every week? Isaiah. 56:4-6. Will God make them His joyful Sons with positions of ruler-ship in His own house, His Temple-the seat of His world government? Verse 5 and the first part of verse 7; also Revelation 3:12.

Comment: God specifically promises that if we do not pollute His Sabbath, but keep it as He commands, we will inherit an everlasting name-the family name GOD! Our incredible potential, as we learned in God's Word through previous lessons, is to become sinless, powerful, Spirit-born members in God's divine Family! Our spiritual birth into God's Family will make us SPIRIT BEINGS like the Father and Jesus Christ! Tremendous spiritual blessings await those who have the sign of obedience to God that distinguishes them-sets them apart-as ones destined to inherit God's incomprehensible riches-glorious eternal life filled with never ending joy and accomplishment in the universe ruling Kingdom of God!

THE FAITH TO OBEY

Keeping the Sabbath sometimes requires considerable faith. It is not always easy to obey God in a world that lives diametrically opposite to God's way. But as we have just seen, the blessings are very great for those who have the courage to step out in faith and obey God, regardless of any pressures or seemingly insurmountable obstacles that appear to be presenting them from keeping the seventh-day Sabbath.

Let's review a few facts about the help God promised to give us if we sincerely desire to obey Him in all things.

1. Does God plainly show that we must have faith before He will give us eternal "rest" membership in His Kingdom? Heb. 4:1-3, 6. (Notice the words "faith" in verse 2, "believed" in verse 3 and "unbelief" in verse 6).

Comment: "Unbelief" is a lack of faith, resulting in disobedience to God. We are exercising faith when we obey God by resting on His Sabbath day. Notice further.

2. Must obedience accompany one's faith to make it acceptable to God? Rom. 3:31. Also read James 2:14- 26. How does one demonstrate his faith? James. 2:18. What does one's faith become if not accompanied by works? Verses 17, 20, 26.

3. What further encouragement are Christians given about entering God's eternal "rest"? Heb.4:10-11. Where may they go for the help-the faith-needed to obey God? Verses 14-16.

Comment: This whole chapter is about keeping God's Sabbath. And it closes by telling us to go to Christ for the help we need in overcoming all obstacles in our path that may be hindering us from obeying God.

4. Is the faith through which we are to please God and receive salvation a gift from God? Eph. 2:8. Is this faith an

attribute of the Holy Spirit that all true Christians must possess? Gal. 5:22. Whose faith, in reality, is it? Rev. 14:12.

Comment: In Revelation 14:12 is a description of the true Church of God. Those in God's Church have the "faith of Jesus". It is not just their faith in HIM, but HIS faith placed in them and acting in them!

God's Spirit can impart to your mind real saving faith. That faith-the very faith of Jesus Christ by which He Himself obeyed God-will enable you to obey God! (Be sure to review in Lesson 12 the section "You Can Overcome!" It explains in much greater detail the faith necessary to obey God, and how we can receive it).

REJOICE IT'S GOD'S SABBATH DAY!

1. Is the keeping of God's Sabbath commandment a grievous burden to Christians? I John 5:3.

Comment: God's Ten Commandments, including the Fourth, are a blessing to keep, not a burden!

Through a complete misunderstanding of the Scripture is a great curse to mankind! Let's completely dispel this myth.

2. Was man made for the Sabbath, or was the Sabbath made for man? Mark 2:27.

Comment: The Sabbath, as we have learned, is holy time. Yet, it was made for man to be a great BLESSING to all mankind. The Sabbath is one of the greatest blessings the Creator has bestowed upon the human family! The true observance of the Sabbath would keep man in contact with God. Without that contact, he cannot know the tremendous purpose for his existence or understanding the law that govern success in life. He is cut off from the understanding of what he is, where he is going and how to get there. However, as a result of God having caused the House of Judah to be taken into Babylonian captivity for polluting His Sabbaths, many of the Jews who were allowed to return to Jerusalem by Cyrus, king of Persia, became very strict in observing the Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisee of Jesus' day had a list of about 65 activities defined as "work" that they prohibited. These uninspired prohibitions made Sabbath observance a "yoke of bondage." These additions went far beyond the spirit and intent of the Fourth Commandment. Jesus Christ rebuked the self-righteous Pharisees for their traditions and swept those human regulations aside!

3. Did Jesus show it is permissible to obtain food on the Sabbath if one is hungry Matt. 12:1-8; Mark 2:27. How did He show it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath? Mark 3:1 4. Did the Lord of the Sabbath acknowledge that it was proper to rescue an animal that had fallen into a ditch on the Sabbath, and thus by implication handle other genuine emergencies that cannot wait until after the Sabbath to be resolved? Luke 14:5; Matt. 12:9-13. Could one water an animal, and by implication feed it, on God's day of rest? Luke 13:10-17, especially verse 15.

Comment: God wants us to use honest, sound judgment in applying the spirit and intent of what we can or should not do on His Sabbath day. Christ taught balance and wisdom and having the right attitude in observing the Sabbath. The Jews, steeped in physical rituals, could not understand the spiritual application of the Sabbath commandment. They would rescue an animal from a ditch on the Sabbath, but condemned Christ for healing an unfortunate human being on that day! By adding their own traditions and interpretations, they had made the Sabbath a burden to keep.

4. Should we pursue our own interests and pleasures on the Sabbath? Isaiah. 58:13.

5. The Sabbath belongs to God. He made this 24-hour period holy time Employment, shopping, mowing the lawn and home maintenance are to be done on the previous six days of the week. Neither is the Sabbath the appropriate time for indulging hobbies, sports and other special interests. Such activities take our minds away from God and the entire purpose for His Sabbath.

6. In His instruction to ancient Israel, what principle does God reveal for Christians today in regard to preparing for the Sabbath? Ex. 16:22-23.

Comment: The Sabbath is intended to free us from as many physical labours and job related mental activities as possible. God told the Israelites to prepare ahead by doing any heavy cooking or baking the day before the Sabbath. Christians today should plan to have their work completed before sunset on the evening of the sixth day (Friday). The house should be cleaned, the dishes washed, and any heavy cooking or baking done before sunset so that the entire family can begin the Sabbath in an atmosphere of rest and worship-that it may be a day truly kept HOLY to God!

6. Are we to delight in God's holy Sabbath day? Isaiah. 58:13. How do we do this? Same verse.

7. The Sabbath will be a day of gladness and joy-a delight to those who honour and worship God. Resting from our work and mundane pleasures on God's day gives us an opportunity to spend much more time in prayer to God, and in studying, discussing and meditating upon His Word.

FELLOWSHIP ON THE SABBATH

The Sabbath is a day of physical rest and spiritual refreshing. It is also a day for holy convocation and fellowship with other Christians, with God the Father and with Jesus Christ. It is very important that we understand the truth about Christian fellowship.

1. Did God command the Israelites to meet together for worship on the weekly Sabbath? Lev.23:3. Did Jesus obey this, His own command? Luke 4:16.

Comment: Jesus Christ, who set the example of how we should live, taught by His own life and practice that a holy convocations commanded assembly-of God's people is to be held on every Sabbath. It is a day for the united worship of God by His called and chosen people. It is a time for God's ministers to preach and expound the principles of God's living laws from His inspired Word (Eph. 4:11-13).

2. What are New Testament Christians admonished regarding the assembling of themselves? Heb. 10:24-25. Just how important is Christian fellowship within the body of believers that comprises the Church of God? I John 1:3, 6-7.

Comment: Christ's presence is in His Sabbath day, making it holy. When the Father's own obedient children, each joined to Christ (John 15:1-5)-each walking with Christ in harmony-assemble on His Holy day, they actually have fellowship with Christ. He is there, in their midst, in spirit! And Christ joins them together through God's Spirit in fellowship with Him and the Father!

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

There is only one body of true believers-Spirit-begotten Christians-empowered by God and carrying out God's great commission to preach the true Gospel of the Kingdom of God to the world as a witness (Matt.24:14). It is faithfully keeping all the commandments of God (Rev. 12:17) with the help of His Holy Spirit. It is, as Jesus said it would be, a "little flock," persecuted, despised by the world.

God's people truly rejoice in His Sabbath and enjoy fellowshiping with each other on His weekly Holy Day.

They are learning what a pleasure and great blessing it is to keep God's Sabbath holy-the day that reminds us of the Creator God and His stupendous purpose for mankind!

Properly understood and properly observed, God's holy Sabbath day is one of God's greatest blessings! given to mankind. It is an identifying SIGN between true Christians and their Creator. "Remember" it-"keep it holy".

