

Is the New Covenant Sabbath “Our Rest in Christ”?

In an attempt to support the contention that Sabbath-keeping is no longer necessary, consider an *erroneous* line of reasoning used by some: “The New Testament Sabbath, the Sabbath rest that *remains* for the people of God (Hebrews 4) *is* the new life in Christ...The new life in Christ *is* the true Sabbath rest” (Joseph Tkach Sr., *The Worldwide News*, 1/10/95, pp. 6-7). “...the Sabbath of the New Covenant *is the rest we have in Christ, not* a 24 hour period of time in a week” (Joe Tkach, Jr.).

Let’s now consider four points which show the *error* of this idea that the Sabbath of the New Covenant is something other than a day of the week.

(1) They read something into Hebrews 4:9 that’s not there! The scripture in question says: “There remains therefore a *rest* for the people of God.” Then, some people say that this “rest” which remains *is* “our new life in Christ.” Yet, this scripture does not say that!

The Greek word translated as “rest” in verse 9 is *sabbatismos*, which means a “*Sabbath rest*.” In fact, a great many Bible translations *render* it that way: “There remains, then, a **Sabbath-rest** for the people of God” (NIV). (In addition to the NIV, the following versions, to mention a few, likewise render verse 9 as “Sabbath rest”: Today’s NIV; NASV; RSV; NRSV, ESV, NEB, Cassirer.)

Now notice verse 10: “For he [the Christian] who has entered His [God’s] rest has himself also ceased from his works **as God did from His**.” So we are to cease from *our* works **just as** God did from His. And *how* did God rest from His works? Verse 4 tells us: “...God rested **on the seventh day** from all His works.” *Yes, we, like God, are to rest on the seventh day!*

Yet, some try to dispute this by quoting Matt. 11:28, where Christ said, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and *I [Christ] will give you rest*.” However, the word “rest” in this scripture is translated from an entirely *different* Greek word than the Greek word translated as “rest” in Heb. 4:9. Again, the Greek word in Heb. 4:9 is *sabbatismos*, meaning a “*Sabbath rest*” ---whereas *anapauo* is the Greek word in Matt. 11:28, and it in no way refers to a “Sabbath rest.” Instead, it simply means “to refresh” or “give rest.” In Matt. 11:28 Christ was saying that those who come to Him and become Christians---those who receive the Holy Spirit---receive powerful help (*by* the Holy Spirit) to *avoid* sin---thereby receiving “rest” from the slavery and bondage of sin. Furthermore, those who would come to Christ would *also* receive “rest” from the burdensome, *man-made additions* to God’s law, and the extreme legalistic approach of the scribes and Pharisees, which Christ condemned (Matt. 23: 1-4).

(2) Christ Himself *kept* the weekly Sabbath. Furthermore, even *after* His crucifixion, the New Testament Church---including Paul---*kept* the seventh-day Sabbath!

Yes, Christ said that He is “Lord **of** the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28) ---and He *observed* the weekly Sabbath! If it were true that the “Christian Sabbath” is *not* a 24 hour period of time (and is instead “our rest in Christ”) then why does scripture show Paul continuing to observe the seventh day Sabbath decades *after* Christ’s crucifixion---as well as teaching *Gentile* converts to do so?!

(3) Keeping the Sabbath is one of God's Ten Commandments. And we know that God's spiritual law---summarized by the Ten Commandments---**always has been, and always will be, in effect!**

Christ said, "Do **not** think that I came to destroy the Law..." (Matt. 5:17).

God gave His spiritual law to *guide us* as to how to live His way. The law *defines* righteousness---it *defines* sin (I John 3:4; Rom. 3:20; 7:7). God's spiritual law---along *with* the Holy Spirit---is our guide!

Notice also Christ's words in Matthew chapter 7: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father in heaven.... [and then Christ will declare to them] **depart** from Me, you who practice **lawlessness!**" (verses 21-23).

(4) Usage of their terminology about "the Sabbath being our rest in Christ" makes no Biblical sense.

Let's consider a *New Testament* scripture that speaks of a time yet still ahead---a time just before Christ's return. In the Olivet Prophecy, Christ says this concerning the end-time: "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be **great tribulation**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor **ever** shall be" (Matt. 24: 20-21).

Christ is plainly talking here about God's people fleeing to safety at the end-time---a time of "great tribulation." And verse 20 says to "pray that your flight may not be in winter [a *time* of year] or on the Sabbath." Now, is the word "Sabbath"---*like* the word "winter"---speaking of a *time*....or is it speaking of "our rest in Christ"? To answer this, let's read the passage again, this time substituting the phrase "our rest in Christ" for the word "Sabbath": "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on your rest in Christ."

Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? And why does it sound ridiculous? Because Christ is plainly using the word "Sabbath" to refer to **a day of the week**---even when He is here referring to a point in history that is still just ahead of us now! Yes, the Sabbath, even under the New Covenant, is a *day of the week*. If it were, instead, "our rest in Christ," then that phrase would fit here in this scripture and make sense---but it doesn't!

So, this fourth point alone shows the *absurdity* of this erroneous teaching!

In closing, consider the following scriptures which refer to God's *command* that His people observe the seventh day and keep it holy:

"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..." (Gen. 2:2-3).

"Remember the Sabbath day, to **keep it holy**. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but **the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God**. *In it you shall do no work*...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**" (Ex. 20: 8-11).

"...The feasts of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are **My** feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the **seventh day is a**

Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the Lord..." (Lev. 23: 2-3).

Yes, it is the Sabbath "of the Lord"---*not* "of the Jews"! Furthermore, Gods' spiritual law is for the good of *all* mankind, and it has been in effect even since the time of Adam. Notice the scripture above from Genesis chapter 2, where God---**at the time of the creation of Adam**---"blessed" the seventh day and "sanctified it"---set it apart as *holy time*! This was *long before* there were any Jews or Israelites!

Still, many will sneer and say that these commands were *only* for the Israelites. Yet, we need to realize this: All true *Christians are* Israelites---i.e., *spiritual Israelites*---Israelites by *grace*, not necessarily Israelites by race. It is only *through Christ* that a Gentile can become a spiritually *adopted* Israelite---and thus become a seed (child) of Abraham---who was the *father* of Israel, and to whom the promises of God were made. Yes, speaking to *Gentile-born* Christians in Galatia, Paul said, "And if you are Christ's, then **you are Abraham's seed**, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).