

9. Covenant Sign (2Q 2021—The Promise: God’s Everlasting Covenant)

Biblical Material: Gen. 2:2, 3; Exod. 20:11; Exodus 16; Heb. 4:1–4; Exod. 31:12–17; Deut. 5:14.

Quotes

- God did not intend the Sabbath to be a burden, but rather a time of joy. The Bible says that blessings come when we honor the Sabbath and call it a delight (Isaiah 58:13). Yeshua said the Sabbath was made for our benefit (Mark 2:27). So enjoy it and give thanks to God for giving us rest. *David Wilber*
- Every time we turn to Christ in faith it is like a moment of Sabbath, a little foretaste of eternal rest and glory... It is the holy time set aside to receive the greatest gift of God ever has to give, which is himself, in his own beloved Son. *Phillip Cary*
- A life built upon Sabbath is contented because in rhythms of rest we discover our time is full of the holiness of God. *Shelly Miller*
- Life and blessing will attend the man who observes the Sabbath. The Sabbath of rest is a continual lesson to him to turn his eye from all created objects, and look to that heavenly rest into which God is entered, and which is promised to man. *James Milner*
- Like a path through the forest, Sabbath creates a marker for ourselves so, if we are lost, we can find our way back to our center. *Wayne Muller*
- The happiness of heaven is the constant keeping of the Sabbath. Heaven is called a Sabbath, to make those who have Sabbaths long for heaven, and those who long for heaven love Sabbaths. *Philip Henry*

Questions

Why did God choose to designate a particular day in time as a sign to his people that he was their God? How does this sign act as “an everlasting agreement for generations to come” (Ex. 31:16 FBV)? How is the Sabbath different to the other “signs” such as circumcision which is also identified as an everlasting agreement (Gen. 17:13)? How is this relevant today?

Bible summary

Gen. 2:2, 3 records the institution of the Sabbath. Exod. 20:11 is the fourth commandment. In Exodus 16 the provision of manna is detailed, with special arrangements for the Sabbath. Exod. 31:12–17 explains that the Sabbath is a sign: “The Sabbath will be a sign between me and you for generations to come, so that you’ll know that I am the Lord who makes you holy.” (Exodus 31:12 FBV). Deut. 5:14 repeats the Sabbath commandment, however a different reason is given to that in Exodus 20: “Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, and that the Lord your God led you out from there with his great power and incredible strength. This is why the Lord your God has ordered you to keep the Sabbath day.” (Deuteronomy 5:15 FBV).

Comment

God promises the Sabbath will last forever. “As the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, will last forever, so your descendants and your reputation will also last forever, says the Lord. Everyone will come and worship me, from one New Moon to the next, and from one Sabbath to the next, says the Lord.” Isa.66:22-23 FBV. For some whose experience of the Sabbath has been less than ideal, this may not seem a promising prospect! But seen in the

context of God's love relationship with us, the Sabbath is meant to be a highlight, both now and in the future.

The Sabbath is made the sign, the emblem, (Ex. 31:13; Ez. 20:12, 20) of our relationship with the God who is not the distant Governor of the Universe but the one who walks with us in the cool of the day. On his Sabbath we can really come close to God, and share all our concerns and worries, all our praise and joy—without worrying about all the other things we “need” to do.

The Sabbath is the promise of God's continued interest and care, week by week by everlasting week. The Sabbath gives us who so badly need it our regular reassurance of hope. Hope that conquers the terrifying prospect of time running out, of there being nothing left. Hope that says there is time if we hug God close. For while the Sabbath reminds us of God as Creator in Genesis 2, repeated in Exodus 20, and Redeemer in Deuteronomy 5, God as the source of hope is the essential future-in-the-present aspect of Sabbath. God's future promises become real in the Sabbath of the present.

God's Sabbath is a delight, not burdensome; it is a time to be with Jesus. If we are worrying all the time about rules, we will not enter in the joy of true obedience. The Sabbath is only important in what it tells about God. For many of the Jews, the Sabbath said the wrong thing about God!

The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. And what happened to the Son of man? He was executed for breaking God's laws, Sabbath breaking and blasphemy!

On the cross we see God as he is. On the cross he is the Son of man, Lord of the Sabbath. As we come to know him as he really is, our Sabbaths will reflect him as he truly is. Not blindly following rules and regulations, but automatically following the Lord's way, because we agree with him that he is right. We love him and can delight in him and his Sabbath, for our God is a God of freedom.

Jesus dies Friday afternoon. He rests in the grave that awesome crucifixion Sabbath, dead yet ready with intense anticipation to rise again. With his glorious resurrection comes the total assurance of victory over death, over evil, over the inevitable passing of time that slowly kills us every week. For we are all dying, and every week takes us closer to our graves. But the Sabbath, each week, points us to that hope beyond death, the amazing truth that time cannot kill us or our relationship with God. Sabbath is the reminder of the world made new when all will still meet to spend that wonderful time together with God. That time when God shall share together with those who will live forever, to wipe away the tears from their eyes, and they shall be his people and he shall be their God...

Ellen White comments

Christ, during His earthly ministry, emphasized the binding claims of the Sabbath; in all His teaching He showed reverence for the institution He Himself had given. In His days the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of God. Christ set aside the false teaching by which those who claimed to know God had misrepresented Him. {PK 183}

The Jews accused Christ of trampling upon the Sabbath, when he was only seeking to restore it to its original character. The interpretations given to the law by the rabbis, all their minute and burdensome exactions, were turning away the Sabbath from its true object, and giving to the world a false conception of the divine law, and of the character of God.. {GCB, March 5, 1895 par. 24}