

Major Bible Themes

52 Vital Doctrines of the Scriptures Simplified and Explained

Adapted from the book *Major Bible Themes*
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The Sabbath and the Lord's Day

- Introduction
 - The word “sabbath” (שַׁבָּת - shabbath) means “to cease” in the sense of a cessation from activity or work.
 - God declared that the Sabbath was to be observed by the people of Israel because it was holy to them (Ex 31:14).
 - The day was set aside as a day of rest where work was strictly prohibited (Ex 31:14-15).
 - However, apart from the continual burnt offerings and feasts, the day was in no sense a day of worship or service.
 - There is confusion today as to whether or not the Sabbath should still be observed, so some careful study is needed.
- The Sabbath in the Old Testament
 - In the period from Adam to Moses it is recorded that God rested at the close of His six creative days and sanctified the seventh day (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:10-11; Heb 4:4).
 - However, there is no intimation in the Word of God that man was appointed to observe, or ever did observe, a Sabbath until Israel came out of Egypt.
 - The Book of Job discloses the religious life and experience of the patriarchs, but there is no reference to Sabbath obligation.
 - In the giving of the Law through Moses, it is apparent that this is the beginning of Sabbath observance (Ex 16:29; Neh 9:14).
 - To confirm this, a careful study of Ex 16:1-27 shows that one week before the first ordained Sabbath the Israelites travelled from Elim to the wilderness of Sin, a clear violation of the Sabbath had it been in effect at that time.
 - In the period from Moses to Christ, the Sabbath was rightfully in force, being embedded in the Law (Ex 20:10-11).
 - It is important to note that the Sabbath was not imposed upon the Gentiles because it was given as a sign between Jehovah and Israel (Ex 31:13).
 - Israel was not faithful in keeping the Sabbath (Ezek 20:21).
 - Jesus Christ lived under the Law, so He is seen as keeping the Law, expounding the Law and applying the Law.
 - Seeing that the meaning of the Sabbath had been obscured by the teachings and traditions of men, Christ pointed out that the Sabbath was given as a benefit to man, not that people were made to keep the burdensome regulations that had been attached to the Sabbath (Mk 2:27).

- Christ was faithful to the whole Law including the Sabbath, but that forms no basis for the claim that Christians who are under grace are obligated to follow Christ in His Sabbath observance.
- The Sabbath in the Present Church Age
 - Following the resurrection of Christ, there is no record in the New Testament that the Sabbath was observed by any believer, even in error.
 - It is very likely that the multitude of Judaized Christians did observe the Sabbath, but the Holy Spirit did not permit any record of this to appear in the Word of God.
 - Likewise, following the resurrection of Christ there is no injunction given to Jew, Gentile or Christian to observe the Sabbath, nor is Sabbath-breaking ever mentioned among the numerous lists of possible sins.
 - In Gal 4:9-10 Jewish believers are scolded for turning back to their old ways of observing days, months, seasons and years.
 - In Heb 4:1-13 the “Sabbath rest” is said to come every day for the believer as he ceases doing his own (dead) works.
 - In Col 2:16-17 believers are instructed not to be judged with respect to the Sabbath given our position in Christ.
 - In Rom 14:5 it is obvious that it is completely legitimate for a believer to regard every day alike.
 - The conclusion can only be that it is not proper for believers in the Church Age to observe the Sabbath of the Law.
- The Sabbath in the Coming Ages
 - The Sabbath will be reinstated when the Church is called out of the world at the Rapture event and the stewardship responsibility returns to the people of Israel.
 - During the age of Tribulation, which must come before the Lord returns at the 2nd Advent to establish His kingdom on earth, the Sabbath is again in view (Matt 24:20-21).
 - The age of the Millennial Kingdom also occurs during the renewed stewardship of Israel, so it comes as no surprise that prophetic passages anticipate the Sabbath being a vital feature of the coming kingdom (Isa 66:23; Ezek 46:1).
- The Resurrection and the First Day of the Week
 - The first day of the week has been celebrated by the Church from the resurrection of Christ to the present time.
 - This is recorded in the New Testament, the writings of the early fathers and the history of the Church.
 - Believers in the Church are under a new relationship of grace and are blessed to observe the first day of the week in remembrance of the resurrection of Christ rather than the seventh day Sabbath of the Law.
 - Those that insist on following the Sabbath (and other aspects of the Law) ignore the N.T. doctrines of the new creation.

- The New Creation
 - The New Testament reveals that the purpose of God in this present unforeseen dispensation is the calling out of the Church – a body of believers corporately and individually joined to the Lord (1 Cor 6:17; 12:12-13; Rom 6:5).
 - Concerning individual believers in the Church...
 - ✦ As to sin, he has been cleansed, forgiven and justified.
 - ✦ As to his possessions, he has been given eternal life, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and joint heirship with Christ.
 - ✦ As to his position, he has been made the righteousness of God by which he is accepted in the Beloved forever, a part of the body and bride of Christ, and a partaker in the new creation.
 - Having partaken of the resurrection of Christ and being in Christ, the believer in the Church is said to be already raised (Eph 2:6; Col 2:12; 3:1).
 - However, as to his body, the believer is yet to receive a glorious body like the resurrection body of Christ (Phil 3:20-21).
 - The new creation – which began following the resurrection of Christ and consists of a born-again, heavenly company who are in Christ – is everywhere held in contrast with the old creation, and it is from that old and ruined creation that the believer is said to be saved and delivered.
- The Lord's Day
 - There are abundant reasons for believers today to celebrate the first day of the week.
 - ✦ That is the day of Christ's resurrection (Matt 28:1).
 - ✦ On that day Christ first met with His disciples after the resurrection (John 20:19).
 - ✦ That is the day of one of Christ's ascensions into heaven (John 20:17).
 - ✦ On that day believers came together to break bread and Paul preached (Acts 20:6-7).
 - ✦ On that day believers are to put aside and save money to be used to support ministries (1 Cor 16:2).
 - The term Lord's Day comes from Rev 1:10 which details Jesus Christ appearing to the Apostle John on the isle of Patmos.
 - While there is no Biblical reference that tells us that John was referring to the first day of the week, the early fathers of the Church used this same term to refer to Sunday (Didache 14).
 - There is no command for believers to observe the Lord's Day, but believers should willingly celebrate Christ's resurrection.
 - However, the believer's spiritual service of worship is not limited to one day of the week, but every day should be presented as a sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1).

- Questions

- Explain the provision in Israel for a Sabbath day.
- What does the word Sabbath mean?
- What is the background of the Sabbath prior to the Law of Moses?
- According to Scripture, when was the Sabbath first observed and by whom?
- Were non-Israelites ever required to observe the Sabbath?
- After Pentecost, is there any record of Christians keeping the Sabbath or being commanded to keep the Sabbath?
- When does prophecy indicate the Sabbath will be observed again?
- Why do Christians observe the first day of the week?
- Where do we find the term Lord's Day for the first day of the week?
- To what company is observance of the Lord's Day limited?
- What are some of the features of the new creation?
- In what sense is observance of the Lord's Day to be extended to every day?