

## Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Covenant Sign – 22-28 May 2021

**C**hrist would have us understand the Sabbath as a sign of the everlasting Covenant. To us as it was to ancient Israel we read: “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:16-17). The Israelites are keep the seventh-day Sabbath. We put aside for now whether Gentile Christians should keep the seventh day. Jews are in duty bound by the unalterable command of God to keep the seventh day. But here we are reminded that the promises of God are all to Israel (Romans 9:4). Those who are “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” have no hope, and are “without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). It is Israel that is to be “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation” (Isaiah 45:17). And not only a part, but “all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:26). True, many who are Gentiles will be saved, but it will not be as Gentiles; they must be grafted into the stock of Israel. To be a Jew indeed is to be one who has praise of God (Romans 2:29). So desirable is the position, that even many who are of this “synagogue of Satan” will falsely claim to be Jews (Revelation 3:9). Moreover, it is with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the redeemed from all nations are to sit down in the kingdom of God, and they will do so as children of Abraham (Matthew 8:11; Galatians 3:20).

Now, since Christians are those who are Christ’s, and all who are Christ’s are Abraham’s seed (Galatians 3:29), it follows that all Christians are Israelites, for the promise to Abraham was through Isaac and Jacob. And since the children of Israel are commanded to keep the Sabbath “throughout their generations,” it follows that the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is especially enjoined on all Christians. And since Israel is to be saved with an everlasting salvation, it follows that their generations are to continue throughout eternity; and so “it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord” (Isaiah 66:23).

The Sabbath is the Lord’s. The word Sabbath means *rest*. It is a Hebrew word transferred into the English language. When the Hebrews used the word “Sabbath,” it conveyed the same idea to them that the word “rest” does to us. The fourth commandment says to us: “Remember the rest day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the rest of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the *rest* day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11). We must not make the mistake of judging of the Lord’s rest from what men are accustomed to call rest. God is not a man. We should rather learn from God’s rest what rest really is. God’s rest is not mere physical rest from weariness. This we know from two facts. First, “God is Spirit” (John 4:24). Not ‘a spirit,’ as though He were one of many; but He is Spirit. Second, “The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary” (Isaiah 40:33). The Lord therefore did not rest because He was tired, and His rest is not physical, but spiritual, since He is Spirit. It is why Christ said, “They that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

God rested, not because He was weary, but because His work was finished. When work is finished, and is well done, nothing but rest remains. In six days God finished His work, and as He surveyed it, He pronounced it “very good.” There was no flaw in it. It was without fault before Him. Therefore since God’s work was done and well done at the close of the sixth day, “He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.” He had no sad reflections, no regrets. His rest was not marred, as what man calls rest so often is, by any such thought as, ‘To-morrow I must go at that work again;’ nor ‘I wish that I had done this portion a little differently.’ Nothing of the kind. Every portion of the work, even man, was as perfect as it was possible for it to be, and God took pure delight in contemplating the work from which He was resting because it was complete and perfect. This is the rest which He offers to us. It is not something that He imposes on us, but which He in everlasting love and kindness gives to us. Rest is not a task that is laid on one. It is not a burden. They who look

upon the Sabbath as a burden, have no idea of what the Sabbath of the Lord is. It is rest, perfect, unalloyed rest. Jesus Christ is the One by whom the worlds were made, "for in Him were all things created, in the heavens, and upon the earth" (Colossians 1:16), therefore He is the one who offers us this rest. To every soul He cries, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The rest is found in Him, because in Him the works of God are completed. In Him is the new creation, and if any man be in Him, he is a new creature. On the cross Jesus cried, "It is finished," thus showing that in His cross we find that perfect rest that comes alone from the finished work of the Lord.

This rest is gained by faith. "We which believe do enter into rest" (Hebrews 4:3). How so? Because by faith we have the finished, perfect work of the Lord as our own. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (John 6:29). Believing Him means receiving Him; and since in Him the works of God are complete, it follows that by believing on Him we find the rest. The rest that Jesus gives is rest from sin. The heavy laden whom He calls to Him are those who are burdened with the weight of their sins. All men are thus burdened, "for all have sinned." Our best works are utterly worthless. Christ will have a people who are "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14-15), but the good works must be those which God Himself has wrought for us in Christ. Only His work is enduring. "His work is honourable and glorious; and His righteousness endureth for ever" (Psalm 111:3). Hence, "by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before prepared, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). It is "not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6). It is by the works of God, therefore, that we are saved, and not by our own. Good works there are in abundance, and they are for us too, but through no work of our own; solely through the perfect work of God in Jesus Christ. If the works were our own, then the rest would be our own; but God gives us His rest, not ours, because only His works can yield perfect rest.

"He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered" (Psalm 111:4), or, literally, "He hath made a memorial for His wondrous works." That memorial is the seventh day, the day on which He rested from all His works. That day He has blessed and sanctified, made holy. Its holiness has never departed from it, for "whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever" (Ecclesiastes 3:14). No matter what man does, its holiness remains. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9); and the seventh day, which God for ever declares to be His rest, is that by which He makes known to us the perfection of His rest, because it calls us to contemplate a finished and perfect new creation. It reveals to us the everlasting God, the unwearied, almighty Creator, who has wrought and laid up great goodness for them that trust in Him before the sons of men (Psalm 31:19). It reminds us that we are "complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:10). It tells us that, although we have sinned, and brought the curse upon God's perfect creation, the cross of Christ, which bears the curse, restores and perpetuates the perfect work of God, so that through it we may stand without fault before the throne of God, just as when man was first made. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

It is absolutely impossible for one who is not a true Christian to keep the Lord's Sabbath; for, as we have seen, God's rest comes only from His perfect work, which is found only in Christ. "We which believe do enter into rest." The Jewish Sabbath falls on the same day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord, but it is not by any means the same thing. It represents only the man himself, and his own work. Instead of being the sign of justification by faith in the work of the Lord, it is the sign of self-righteousness, as indicated by the question which the Jews asked of Jesus: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" (John 6:28). They counted their own works equal to God's works. Their obedience was not the obedience of faith, but only of form. From such a Sabbath may the Lord deliver us. It is from it that we are delivered in the Sabbath of the Lord, for we are saved from our own works, and given the perfect works of the Lord. "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord," but let us beware of making it a mere caricature of rest. Let us take it really is: the rest of the Lord.