

GRACE IN ACTION:

Is the Sabbath to be observed in the age of grace?

TRACING SABBATARIANISM IN THE AGE OF GRACE

1. With the transition from the dispensation of the Mosaic Covenant to the dispensation of grace, the first century church had confusion about the Sabbath. (New Testament passages addressing the Sabbath are addressed later in this paper.)
2. Emperor Constantine (321 AD):
"On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and the people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed." (*Codex Justinianus*, lib. 3, tit. 12, 3)
3. Apostolic Constitutions (ca. 380):
"But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrections."
4. Church Fathers:
 - a. Iranaeus: "On the Lord's day every one of us Christians keep the Sabbath, meditating on the law, and rejoicing in the works of God."
 - b. Eusebius taught that "the Sabbath had been transferred to Sunday."
5. Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):
"As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; sin, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week,; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath. This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, word, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy."
6. Treatise on the Faith and Practice of Free Will Baptists:
"This one day in seven, which from the creation of the world God has set apart for sacred rest and holy service. Under the former dispensation, the seventh day of the week, as commemorative of the work of creation, was set apart for the Lord's Day. Under the gospel, the first day of the week, in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ, and by authority of Christ and

the apostles, is observed as the Christian Sabbath. On this day all men are required to refrain from secular labor and devote themselves to the worship and service of God.”

7. Johnathan Edwards:

“We are strictly to abstain from being outwardly engaged in any worldly thing, either worldly business or recreations...the sabbath-day is an accepted time, a day of salvation, and time wherein God especially loves to be sought, and loves to be found.”

8. Province of Massachusetts Bay (1671):

“That whosoever shall profane the Lord’s-day, by doing unnecessary servile work, by unnecessary travailing, or by sports and recreations, he or they that so transgress, shall forfeit for every such default forty shillings, or be publicly whipt: But if it clearly appear that the sin was profoundly, presumptuously and with a high hand committed, against the known Command and Authority of the blessed God, such a person therein despising and reproaching the Lord, shall be put to death or grievously punished at the Judgment of the Court.”

9. Blue Laws in the states

Blue laws are the product of religious influence in government.

10. Alexander Souter, A Pocket Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917).

σάββατον (Semitic), sing. and plur., *the Sabbath*, a night and day which lasted from about 6 p.m. on Friday till about 6 p.m. on Saturday: πρώτη (μία) [τῶν] σαββάτων ([τοῦ] σαββάτου) (Hebraistic), *the first day after the Sabbath, the day following the Sabbath, that is, from about 6 p.m. on Saturday till about 6 p.m. on Sunday, Sunday.*

HEBREW TERMS FOR SABBATH

The Hebrew word שָׁבַט is used 111x in the Old Testament and is based on the verb שָׁבַט which means “to cease, stop, rest.”¹

SABBATH BEFORE THE MOSAIC COVENANT

1. Genesis 2:2, 3

- a. On the seventh day, God ceased from creation.
- b. God made the seventh day a distinct, special day.

2. Exodus 31:12-18 (Looking back to Genesis 2)

- a. “[I]n six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was **refreshed**.” (emphasis mine)

¹ Dr. Doug Brown, “Should We Observe the Sabbath?” Faith Baptist Theological Seminary.

- b. The Hebrew verb נִפְּחַ and the noun form נִפְּחָה means "to breath, refresh."
 - c. The Hebrew verb translated "refresh" is niphal expressing the passive voice. When God was refreshed after the six day of creation, He received satisfaction or gratification from His completed creation which was "very good."
3. Exodus 16:21-30
- a. Israel was to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day because the seventh day was a Sabbath. The manna is referred to as "bread" in verses 15, 22, and 29.
 - b. The people immediately violated the Sabbath. They went out on the seventh day to gather bread.

SABBATH WHILE THE MOSAIC COVENANT WAS IN FORCE

1. Exodus 20:8-11
 - a. While the nation and sojourners in the nation were to observe the Sabbath as a day of rest, the imperative is to "remember." They were to consider the origin of the Sabbath, God resting on the seventh day after six days of creation.
2. Exodus 31:12-17
 - a. The Sabbath is given a place of prominence because it is a sign that God separated Israel from the nations and established a special relationship between them.
 - b. The Sabbath was to be celebrated by Israel and their successive generations. (Not for the church)
 - c. The penalty for violating the Sabbath was death.
3. Leviticus 23:2
 - a. This passage connects Israel's feast and the Sabbath. The people were to celebrate the Sabbath in their homes.
4. Leviticus 25:1-11
 - a. It establishes the year of Jubilee.
 - b. It repeats the seventh year as a year to let the land rest.
5. Deuteronomy 5:12-15
 - a. The Ten Commandments are repeated in this passage to the second generation of Israel after coming out of Egypt.
 - b. Israel was commanded to observe the Sabbath. It was to be guarded, preserved, protected.
 - c. They were to remember that they were slaves in Egypt and by God's power brought out of Egypt.
6. Joshua
 - a. Joshua 1:12-15 refers to the land as rest given to them by God.

- b. Several passages refer to Israel having rest in the land from their enemies. Victory over their enemies would result in rest.
7. After the exile
- a. Under Nehemiah, the people of Israel recommit to the Mosaic Covenant (10:29-31) citing the Sabbath, unequally yoked marriages with the nations around them, money for supporting the temple, and bringing the firstfruits of the ground to the temple.
 - b. In 13:15-22, Nehemiah confronts those violating the Sabbath. He closes the gates to the city and appoints Levites as guards.

GREEK TERM FOR SABBATH

1. The word σάββατον is used 70x in the New Testament; 60 of these uses refer to the seventh day.² The Greek word comes from the Hebrew word. Its meaning is the same as the Hebrew word "rest, stop, cease."
2. The only term used for "Sunday" in the New Testament is "the first day of the week." It is not referred to as the Sabbath, Sunday, or the Lord's Day. The only place in the NT where the term "the Lord's Day" occurs is Revelation 1:10. The Greek word for "Lord" is an adjective. It is describing the day as "lordy."

SABBATH IN THE GOSPELS (MOSAIC COVENANT IN EFFECT)

1. Jesus healed people with diseases and handicaps on the Sabbath.
2. The disciples harvested and ate grain on the Sabbath.
3. Matthew 11:28-30
 - a. Jesus invites those who are burdened to come to Him for rest.
 - b. He also invites them to take His yoke upon them because He is gentle and humble. When they take His yoke, they will find rest.
4. Mark 2:27
 - a. The first statement by Jesus is that "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." Sabbath was for the benefit of man in that God was conveying an eternal truth. The religious leaders had transformed the Sabbath into something other than what God intended.
 - b. The second statement is, "The Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." Jesus is the author of the Sabbath, and thus has authority over it. The Pharisees had made themselves the lord of the Sabbath. Arnold Fruchtenbaum states that "Rabbis came up with about one thousand five hundred different rules and regulations concerning the Sabbath. These were derived from thirty-nine areas of work which were forbidden on the Sabbath day."³

² Ibid.

³ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Sabbath* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2014), p. 5.

SABBATH (REST) IN THE AGE OF GRACE

1. Acts 15:1-32

- a. During the Jerusalem council, Pharisees who had trusted in Jesus as Savior stated that gentile believers were required to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Covenant. They also stated that the church must command believers to keep the Mosaic Covenant (v. 5).
- b. James gives the church his decision about the matter—believers are not to be required to keep the Mosaic Covenant (v. 19). He also suggests to the Jerusalem church that they recommend to the church in Antioch four practices in light of the fact that the Law of Moses is proclaimed every Sabbath in the synagogues (v. 20, 21): “Abstain from things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.”
- c. The whole church, including the Pharisees who objected at the beginning of the council, agree with James—the gentile believers are not required to keep the Mosaic Law (v. 22). *This includes the Sabbath.*
- d. This conclusion was the result of the Holy Spirit’s work among the Jerusalem church (v. 28). They accomplished God’s will in the matter.

2. Romans 6:13-8:11

- a. The term law is anarthrous. Thus, Paul is referring to law in general rather than one specific law such as the Mosaic Code.
- b. In 7:7, Paul cites the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet.”
- c. The believer is under grace, the teachings of grace contain its own rules.

3. Romans 14:1-15:13

- a. The statement in 14:5 refers to regarding one day as more significant than the other six can refer to two possibilities: the Sabbath or the first day of the week (believers gathering together in churches). Contrasted to this position is a person who regards all seven days as equally important.
- b. Paul’s ruling that “each person should be fully convinced in his own mind” indicates at the very least that the Mosaic Code is not in effect during the age of grace.

4. Galatians 4:9-5:25

- a. Paul takes to task the believers who were saved by grace but have since turned toward “another gospel.”
- b. Paul chastises the believers for “observing days and months and seasons and years.” The Sabbath and other observances in the Mosaic Law are included in the “elementary principles of the world.”
- c. The allegory of Abraham’s two sons representing two covenants are a reference to the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant. Paul unequivocally states that the son representing the Mosaic Covenant is to be cast out (4:21-31).

- d. In 5:2-4, Paul states that if a person binds himself by circumcision which is contained in the Mosaic Covenant, then that person is required to follow the whole Mosaic Covenant. One who does this has fallen from grace. These verses also indicated that the Mosaic Law is a unified code and not tripartite in nature.
5. Colossians 2:16-23
 - a. No believer is to judge his brother with respect to "food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath."
 - b. These things, including the Sabbath, are a shadow of future things. The substance of these things is Christ. It finds its fulfillment in Him.
 6. Hebrews 3-4
 - a. These chapters allude to the first generation of Israel which did not enter the land of Canaan, their inheritance and place of rest. (The book of Joshua refers to Canaan as an inheritance and place of rest.)
 - b. The parallel for this present age is that there is a future rest (σάββατον) for the saints.
 - c. The command to the believer is not to fall short of the future Sabbath. In fact, they are to continually labor while they are here on the earth so that they enter the future rest. There is no weekly Sabbath for the church.
 - d. Rest follows work. Refreshment comes from a life well lived in loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

SABBATH IN THE MILLENNIUM

While the Old Testament prophets indicate that in the Millennium the Mosaic Law will be in force, it is not the scope of this paper to delve into it.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT REST IN THE AGE OF GRACE

1. While all Scripture is profitable, the Mosaic Code is not the rule for the age of grace. The Sabbath is not binding upon saints in the age of grace.
2. If a child of God wishes to make a Sunday a day of rest from physical labor along with gathering with God's people in the local church, he has the liberty to do so.
3. To enforce the Sabbath of the Mosaic Covenant upon New Testament saints is to depart from Christ, holding onto the "shadow" and not the "substance."
4. Believers must rest in and be refreshed by the finished work of Christ.
5. Believers must daily live by faith as they contemplate their future rest, refreshment, and inheritance.