

The True Sabbath

by

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*“Come unto me,
all you who labor
and are heavy laden,
and I will give you
rest.”*

Matthew 11:28

A basic meaning of the word “sabbath” is “rest”. Jesus promised rest to all who come to him when he said, *“Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I WILL GIVE YOU REST.”* Using the tongue of the prophet Isaiah, God foretold of this rest with these remarkable words (28:11-12): *“With stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people, to whom He said, ‘This is the rest, with which you may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing;’ yet they would not hear.”* About one hundred twenty were refreshed with this heavenly rest when it was first poured out (Acts 2).

In the Law of Moses, God ordained symbols of His rest. In particular, He gave to Israel days, and even years, of rest. The weekly sabbath day was only one of many days of rest God commanded them to keep. The first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were sabbath days, regardless of the day of the week upon which they fell. The day called “Pentecost” in the New Testament was a sabbath day. The 1st, 10th, 15th, and 22nd days of the seventh month were sabbath days. Moreover, every seventh year, the fields were to be given a year of rest from tillage, and every 50th year (the year of Jubilee), debts were to be forgiven and inheritances restored to their original owners. Jubilee was the greatest prophetic sabbath in Israel. Israel never observed these sabbaths as they should have, but the sabbaths were holy, given by God to

foreshadow better sabbaths to come.

“Six days shall you labor and do all your work. The sabbath day is the sabbath of the LORD your God. In it, you shall not do any work – you, nor your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your cattle, nor the stranger within your gates.”



In the book of Hebrews, the Law’s

symbols are called *“figures for the time then present.”* Paul called them *“a shadow of things to come”* (Col. 2:16-17). And what wonderful things have come! The washing away of our sins by the blood of Christ, the body of believers, the *“nation born in one day”*, the fellowship of *“just men made perfect”*, the *“access to the Father”*, and the *“hope that enters into that within the veil.”* We are blessed beyond expression to partake of a new covenant with God through Jesus Christ. It is God’s relief from sin for us; and it is, as Peter said, *“joy unspeakable and full of glory.”* It is the holy rest to which the Old Testament sabbaths pointed.

And yet, this rest in the Spirit, so rich and so free, is itself just a foretaste of the things *“God has prepared for those who love Him.”* It is just a foretaste of the glory that awaits those who believe in Christ. Just as the old covenant sabbaths pointed men to life in the Spirit of Christ, so the Spirit is pointing us to the thousand-year reign of Christ. His reign will be a day of rest for the whole earth. Wars will be forbidden, and the redeemed of all the ages, resurrected with bright, immortal bodies, will be given authority over the nations to *“reign with Christ a thousand years”* (Rev. 20:4). One can only imagine the joy that will fill the hearts of the children of God as they work not only for Christ but with him on this earth!

The apostle Peter wrote that *“one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”* (2Pet. 3:8). Accordingly, the Bible

makes it clear that there have been but six thousand years, or six “days” of human history. The seventh “day” of human history is approaching, and it is this thousand-year sabbath for which the saints throughout history have yearned and to which the writer referred in these compelling words: *“There remains, then, a rest for the people of God. . . . Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after [Israel’s] example of unbelief”* (Heb. 4:9, 11).

This thousand-year reign of Christ with his saints is that terrifying and glorious “day of the Lord” spoken of by the prophets:

ISAIAH

“Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel both with wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate, and He will destroy the sinners thereof out of it. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease. . . . Enter into the rock and hide in the dust for fear of the LORD and for the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low. . . . And they will go into the holes of the rocks and into the caves of the earth for fear of the LORD and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth.”

PAUL

“The day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night. For when they say, ‘Peace and safety’, then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.”

As terrifying as the day of the Lord will be for the ungodly, it is the most precious hope of the saints. Those who believe in Jesus have nothing to dread and everything to gain from the coming of the day of the Lord!

THE ULTIMATE SABBATH

But the good news grows greater and richer still! For the thousand-year reign with Christ, glorious as it will be, is itself but a foretaste of eternal rest on an entirely new earth! This blessed state is beyond all human capacity to perceive or imagine. As the man of God wrote, *“Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love Him.”* And who could imagine escaping the frighteningly complete devastation of this universe which Peter describes here:

“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements will melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.”

There will be no wickedness on the new earth, no sickness, death, or pain. The ancient prophets wrote, *“At His right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”* And, *“He will make an utter end [of sin and sorrow]. Affliction shall not rise up the second time.”* This sweet life on a new earth is THE TRUE SABBATH which all other sabbaths foreshadowed – Old Testament sabbaths of days and years, the New Testament gift of the Spirit, and the thousand-year reign with Christ. All of those wonderful rests were designed as ever-greater foretastes of life in a new universe that God has created for His people, and He will give that life to every soul who loves Him now, in this present, evil world.

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