

SABBATH WISDOM

Contributed by Jim Jordal
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And Jehovah spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto Jehovah. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruits thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath unto Jehovah: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of itself of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, and the grapes of thy undressed vine thou shalt not gather: it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be for food for you; for thee, and for thy servant and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant and for thy stranger, who sojourn with thee. And for thy cattle, and for the beasts that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be for food.

Leviticus 25:1-7 (ASV)

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore Jehovah blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Exodus 20:8-11 (ASV)

To many Christians the term "Sabbath" elicits a somewhat negative response. The Hebrew word means literally an intermission of rest and repose commemorating God's rest on the seventh day from His labors of creation. But many of us still view the Sabbath mainly as a day of restrictions imposed by the Ten Commandments and religious legalism.

Many of my early religious memories arise from this view. I grew up in north Minneapolis during the Great Depression of the 1930s. We attended the Russell Avenue Church of the Nazarene during most of this time. I remember the Sabbath clearly--walk a mile to church in the morning, attend Sunday School (which, believe me, allowed no horseplay), endure a 2-hour service featuring at least an hour-long sermon, an altar call, then walk home after church. The remainder of the day consisted of a skimpy lunch, a nap in the afternoon, then back to church for the evangelistic evening meeting. There was no television, no books other than the Bible and other "uplifting" tomes, and certainly no sports or entertainment. I felt as if I were in bondage, and in reality, I was.

But another message lies embedded within the Sabbath--a message of hope, salvation, and deliverance from oppression and addiction to things of this world. This message is embodied in Jesus' well-known statement made to Pharisees protesting His Sabbath-day miracles: " Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man."

Jesus' teachings referred continuously to the Jubilee deliverance promised in His first sermon (Luke 4:16-21). The promise of Jubilee (Lev. 25) begins with the Divine wisdom embodied in a special day set aside by God for human betterment. The intent was not to indenture humans to religious tradition or legalism, but to provide rest and repose (for humans as well as the land and animals) from the rigors of dawn-to-dusk toil imposed by a reluctant earth cursed with thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:17-19).

The Sabbath was not only a time of rest from labor, but also an opportunity for enhanced relationship with God, family, and community. It was a day when people could move away from the stress of earning a living and interacting with the commercial world. It provided time and opportunity for meditation, communication, and physical/mental/spiritual renewal. And the goal was Jubilee release, not further enslavement.

So, what has happened to Sabbath wisdom today? Until a generation ago, society paid at least lip service to the Sabbath--some stores were closed, some sports events avoided Sunday dates, and Christians in general at least recognized the holy aspects of the Sabbath. Not so today. Sunday is a day celebrating mammon and commercial activity like every other day. Any serious respect for the Lord's Day has long been dissipated. And with what result?

The 24/7 ethic pervades business as well as family life. Children's sports activities take no rest on Sunday. Families are torn apart by activities, addictions, and stress. And our society plunges ever closer to destruction in its ever-increasing pursuit of the pleasure and prosperity of mammon.

So, what can you do to restore some semblance of sanity to the Sabbath? Avoid activities that scatter the family on Sunday. Schedule family meal times without the interruption of TV or cell phones. Take a little time for family meditation around the Bible. Avoid shopping or entertainment outside the home. Ask your kids what's important to them--and listen. And above all, thank God for your blessings and consider how to help those less fortunate humans for whom Christ also died.