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# The Saviour and His Sabbath

## Part 2/Gerhard F. Hasel

IN LAST month's article we pointed out that Jesus shocked the legalists of His day with the statement "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."

It was a cry of emancipation, setting man free from the multitude of legalistic and casuistical regulations of Sabbath observance. But this intent in setting forth the priority of man over the Sabbath goes far beyond this.

According to Jewish thought the Sabbath was for Israel only (cf. Mekilta 109b and Jub. 2:31). "He hallowed no people or peoples to keep the Sabbath on this day, except Israel only; to it alone he granted to eat and drink and

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keep sabbath on it."—Jubilees 2:31.

Against this restrictive position, which limits the Sabbath to one nation, Jesus took the wider view of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not made for the Jews, nor for Seventh-day Adventists. No, the Sabbath was made for man in the generic sense. It was made for all mankind in all generations. "The institutions that God has established are for the benefit of mankind" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 288), says Ellen G. White in connection with the Sabbath.

Thus we may speak of the universality of the Sabbath. The knowledge that the Sabbath is for mankind gives us an irrepensible mandate to make the Sabbath known to all men. The fact that it was made for the benefit of all mankind, that is, for each indi-

vidual in the human family, gives us a reason for our existence as a people called by God to bring this message to a world of restless, aimless men.

The Sabbath is one of the pillars of God's last-day church. It is one of the three fountainheads that along with the sanctuary message and the Spirit of Prophecy made its appearance in the designated year of 1844. It is our task, a task that no one shares with us in the full sense, to bring the true knowledge and meaning of the Sabbath to the world in which we live.

We must never lose sight of this fact; we must not shortchange ourselves in respect to this blessed mandate, or we will lose a key reason for our existence and indicate a lack of understanding of the fact that the Sabbath is made for man, for all men.

The universality of the Sabbath is further emphasized in Mark 2. Jesus Himself added the pronouncement, "Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:28).

This sentence must not be construed to mean that Christ abolished the Sabbath, that He obliterated the Sabbath. To the contrary, it affirms the lordship of Christ over the Sabbath. He who is man's Lord and Saviour, He who is man's Creator and Recreator, is also the Lord of the Sabbath. He determines its use and purpose. John tells us, "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3, R.S.V.).

And Hebrews 1:2 explains that through the Son the world was created. Thus we know that Jesus Christ in actuality made the Sabbath. The Sabbath, then, is the day of the Lord Jesus, the Lord's day. It belongs to Christ, it is His possession. And even more than this, it is His gift for man.

To understand the Sabbath as God's gift for man, we must understand the threefold expression found in Genesis 2:2, 3, which describes the uniqueness of this day in distinction to all the other six days of the weekly cycle. "And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (R.S.V.).

Much has been said and written about this, God's concluding work of Creation through Christ. We cannot here even touch on all the high points. But one thing must be emphatically emphasized. This concluding act of God in His work of Creation must be seen within the framework of the two focal points around which the entire Creation story revolves. On the one hand, there is *God*, i.e., Christ the Creator, and on the other hand, there is *man*, the crown, the pinnacle of Creation.

One would expect that with the creation of man on the sixth day the Creation story comes to an end. But not so. To one's surprise something significant and unusual is reported about the seventh day, the Sabbath day. The whole report of the Creation process finds its last and hidden goal in the story of the Sabbath. Thus we have the three centers of emphasis in the Creation story: *God*, *man*, and the *Sabbath*. Thus we have a correlation between Christ, His work for man, and the Sabbath as a day for man from the beginning of the world.

I have recently studied all known ancient Near Eastern Creation stories and myths of beginning. One of the things that struck me during this study was that we look in vain in the whole record of the ancient religions of the world for such a majestic scene as that which depicts God's rest at the conclusion of the Biblical narratives of Creation as we find in Genesis 2:1-3. In contrast to the noise that accompanies the festival of the Babylonian gods at the end of the creation by Marduk, when fifty names of honor are shouted, the Biblical writer speaks of the solemn silence and rest of the Creator of the world.

"God . . . rested on the seventh day from all his work." We would be mistaken to think that God was tired and needed physical rest. No. When God created He merely needed to speak and it was done. The emphasis here is different. Christ, the Creator, identified Himself already, then, with man, and set an example for men to

follow throughout the millenniums of the weekly cycle.

This phrase also clearly demonstrates that the seventh-day Sabbath is as old as the world and not as young as Israel. The Sabbath was made for man back at Creation. Jesus in His earthly life needed to liberate the Sabbath from its Jewish restrictions and

### ***The seventh-day Sabbath is as old as the world and not as young as Israel.***

restore it to that which it was intended to be.

God performed a work, however, on the seventh-day Sabbath. Certainly the nature of this work is entirely different from the creative works of the previous six days. Perhaps we can begin to appreciate even at this point in the Sacred Record that Sabbath rest does not mean "useless inactivity" (*ibid.*, p. 207), but healthful rest, worship, and holy deeds.

"God blessed the seventh day." Christ did not allow this day to pass away with useless inactivity. He takes the seventh-day Sabbath and does something with it.

How shall we understand the blessing of the Sabbath? When a man is blessed in the Biblical sense, special forces of life are placed in the blessed one. But how can we understand that a day is blessed? Obviously we must understand the blessing of the seventh-day Sabbath to mean that God takes the seventh day and impresses upon this day something that no other day of the week has. He puts life forces into this day. These life forces can be transferred to those who rest on this day. As such the Sabbath "was given for the benefit of man" (*Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 267).

Disobedience of the Sabbath commandment results in the removal of oneself from the special life forces available for human existence. Through the blessing God pronounced, the seventh-day Sabbath receives the invigorating and beneficial power that enriches and fulfills human existence.

God *sanctified*, or hallowed, the seventh day. This is something completely unique. The term *sanctified* must be understood in its original sense. That which is sanctified is separated to exclusive use for God. It is separated from everyday use and treated as God's possession. The seventh day is thus a day that God has set apart at the creation of the world for a special purpose. Everyone who comes in contact with this day must prepare himself and must know that he enters upon holy ground, upon a piece of God's property.

It is well to remind ourselves that at the beginning of Creation, on the first day, God made a specific division. He separated light from darkness. This division became determinative for the life of man: The existence of all creation stands in the polarity of day and night. Then, at the end of Creation week God divided working days from the day of rest through his sanctification of the seventh-day Sabbath. Thus, at Creation, God prepared that which will benefit man in this life, that which in fact will be essential to his enjoying the best in life. Also that which one day will receive him eschatologically in eternity (see Hebrews 4).

The correlation between God, man, and Sabbath at the beginning of Creation, with its emphasis on Sabbath rest, Sabbath blessing, and Sabbath sanctification, shows itself to be the fundamental basis for proper Sabbath observance.

I believe that present-day shortcomings in properly keeping the Sabbath have to do with our lack of understanding of the meaning of the Sabbath. Too often we consider the Sabbath commandment as merely a law, and its vital function in the process of salvation is not recognized.

We must come to recognize the significance of the Sabbath as a day in the weekly cycle that contributes a vital function to spiritual growth, to sanctification, and to perfection. This is essential if we are to experience fully the Sabbath blessing and to grow to that perfection that will enable Christ to receive us into eternal communion with Him. ➤