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### God's Precious Gift In Time

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# God's Precious "Gift in Time"

## Chapter 4: Man, What a God!

by C. Mervyn Maxwell

This article is the fourth chapter of Dr. Maxwell's latest book, "Man, What a God!" You can get the complete book by writing to Pacific Press, 1350 Villa Street, Mountain View, California 94040. Just \$1.25 postpaid. Order several copies for your friends. Mervyn Maxwell is also the author of our popular answers to youth questions.

An advertisement in front of me as I write states with unabashed self-satisfaction that an Omega was "the first watch worn on the moon," and adds that "Omega makes the best watches in this world—or any other."

This proud boast should remind us that the God who made the universe also permeated it with time.

Time! What an enigmatic mystery! No one has enough of it and everyone wants more of it, yet few people ever use it well. For couples on a date it goes too fast, for tots anticipating Christmas it moves too slowly; yet (ignoring "relativity" for the moment) whether measured by the rotation of the stars or by the vibration of a crystal, it always passes at a uniform speed—and always in the same direction. Anyone can turn back a clock; but no one, even by a microsecond, can turn back time. Everyone asks what time it is, but no one knows what time itself is.

Whereas things occupy space, time occupies no space, yet is found throughout all space. Even on the moon Omega watches found time to measure.

Clocks to measure time have been built with increasing accuracy during the twentieth century. Fifty years ago the Shortt pendulum clock was dependable to within two seconds in three years. Then came the quartz-crystal clock, good to two seconds in three hundred years. And now appears the atomic clock, considered reliable to a second in three million years.

Clocks must be kept well maintained and running if they are to measure time. Rods of metal alloy for measuring standard distances can be stored permanently in a vault, but standard units of time must be continually remeasured again and again whenever they are needed. Time is always "getting away" from one.

Conversely, time is always "getting in" to where people are; it cannot be shut out of any place. A person can fail to remember an appointment; but, unless he dies first, he cannot avoid the time of the appointment. As tenuous as a rarefied gas, time filters in through the most formidable barriers, seeps in

through the most invincibly sealed doors. Whether a person is in a cave or on a mountaintop, in a crowded tenement or in a submarine—or on the surface of the moon—time comes to him without question, offers itself to him for his employment, and hurries on without a backward glance.

Now the Bible says that when God made the *things* in our world He proceeded in an orderly manner toward His predetermined goal. Did he perhaps climax creation with an enduring celebration in Time?

Indeed He did.

The seventh day God ordained should then and forever after be the "Sabbath," a memorial in Time.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 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." Genesis 2:1-3, RSV.

God rested, not because He was weary, but because He was through. He rested "from all His work which He had done." The Sabbath is not a day of laziness or indolence, but of unique spiritual devotion. God "blessed the seventh day and hallowed it." He made it holy, setting it apart for a sacred use.

Of course, God did not need the Sabbath for Himself. "The Sabbath," Jesus said, making the point clear, "was made for *man*." Mark 2:27. And God intended that the Sabbath should be kept by everyone as the weeks roll around. The fourth of the Ten Commandments says: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work . . . : 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 Sabbath day, and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8-11.

No sooner had God created the world in six days and placed our first parents in it than, ceasing from His work of creating, He immediately spent the next day with them



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as their Friend and Teacher. What a lot of things He had to tell them about the universe, and about themselves, and about Himself! What a fascinating day they must have spent together! And what a magnificent and generous gesture it was on God's part! For that day was to be the first of many such days. His plan was that every seventh day from then on, as long as the world should last, would be an occasion for men and women to spend a day with Him and He with them.

The Sabbath is one of God's most precious and priceless gifts to man. On Friday God gave man and woman to each other with the capacity to find true joy in a loving companionship. On Saturday He gave mankind a privileged appointment, a period of time to be spent in a very special spiritual relationship with Himself. Thus the Sabbath is a recurring "piece of time" given by the eternal God to His human children.

And because it is a gift of "time," it is available to every one, everywhere. It comes to all as free as the air and as regularly as the sun rises and sets and the stars revolve in their orbits.

As we saw in chapter two, God has made it evident that He is with us *every* day; hence, His manner of being with us on Sabbath is extraordinary. Sabbath time ranks above ordinary time. Every day is a house of God, but the Sabbath is a cathedral. The Sabbath is a "chapel in time," a place lifted above the ordinary of the day-by-day, a vantage point nearer infinity where a person can gain a clearer perspective on the troubles of the world and of God's unlimited solutions.

We are invited to keep the Sabbath because God created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. The Sabbath thus stands as God's chosen memorial of creation. It comes as a weekly reminder both of God's infinite power and love and of man's essential dignity. It reminds us that man is not a mere intellectual animal, not a sophisticated descendant of a protein molecule, not the accidental end product of a fortuitous combination of interacting chemical particles, but a *child of God* designed and intended

for loving fellowship with God and with other men and women—with *other "children of God"!*

If the Sabbath was necessary for man in his original innocence, how much more necessary did it become after sin entered and clouded the picture. In response to man's deepened need, God added still more content to the purpose of the Sabbath. It is a sign, He says through His spokesman, of His power to sanctify (make holy) His people. See Ezekiel 20:12. The Sabbath was originally intended to help man remain holy; now it comes to assist him in returning to holiness. Reminding us of the Creator's power and love it calls us away from hate and selfishness and directs us to the Creator's power to *re-create* us as new men and women, once more restored to "His image."

Sad to say, as the history of the earth developed, as the centuries passed by, men and women chose to disbelieve and disobey their Creator and seek their own answers to life's questions rather than His. Still, though the Sabbath was largely ignored and its privileges disregarded, it was never completely lost sight of. Indeed, history abounds with periods of great revivals of Sabbath keeping. Moses brought one about in the fifteenth century B.C., and others occurred in the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries B.C. During one of them Isaiah expressed God's famous Sabbath keepers' promise: "If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, and keep My holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the Sabbath a day of joy and the Lord's holy day a day to be honored, if you honor it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs, then you shall find your joy in the Lord, and I will set you riding on the heights of the earth . . . ; the Lord Himself has spoken it." Isaiah 58:13, 14, NEB.

Isaiah also restored information about the Sabbath that should never have been forgotten, namely, that God never intended it to be confined to the Jews. Far from it! God gave the Sabbath originally to the parents of the entire human race, thousands of years before the first Jews arrived on the scene. How

unlike God it would have been for Him to restrict so splendid a gift to only one race and to deny it to all the others. God invites all people to keep the Sabbath with Him. "Everyone that keepeth the Sabbath . . . will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: . . . for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people." Isaiah 56:6, 7.

Not for a minute does the Bible call the Sabbath "the Sabbath of the Jews" or "the Jewish Sabbath." No Jew invented the Sabbath; no one of any race could have. Only God could have. The seventh day, the Bible says, is "the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Exodus 20:10.

Tragically, even though the Jews did not invent the Sabbath, by the days of Jesus their leaders—in a misguided attempt to improve on its sanctity—had done much to it that was harmful. They had imposed on it a multitude of petty rules and regulations that effectively destroyed its spirit and caused it to fall into disfavor. For example, acts of mercy to the sick they classed as works of Sabbath breaking; yet at the same time they permitted animals to be cared for on the holy day.

It is because the rabbis distorted the Sabbath that the Christian church, not long after it arose, unfortunately shucked it off. Gentile Christians mistook the narrow-minded Sabbath keeping of official Judaism for the real thing. Christianity then gradually substituted a "sabbath" of its own choice, the day on which Christ arose from the dead; and while no doubt people receive blessing from worshiping on the first day of the week, a study of church history reveals that Christendom has paid a very heavy price for disregarding the Creator's own true Sabbath.

We certainly cannot blame Jesus for blunders His church made in respect to the weekly holy day. He did all He could to restore the Sabbath to its original position of great spiritual helpfulness.

And people who keep it find in it an answer to their needs.

An acquaintance of mine was a prominent community leader in Arizona when he first learned about



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the Sabbath. He and his wife became deeply impressed that they should keep the day holy as God commands; but before seeking membership in a Sabbath-keeping church they elected to perform an experiment. They called their teenage children—who were just as interested in the subject as they were—to a family council and suggested, "Let's practice keeping the Sabbath for a full month before making our final decision, and see if it works."

They did so. When I saw this good man some time later, he and his whole family were Sabbath keepers, grateful and happy to be obeying God's law and receiving His promises. "If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, . . . then you shall find your joy in the Lord," the Bible says, and no words could be any more true. See Isaiah 58:13, 14, NEB.

There was the young bride, too, in southern California. Energetic and vivacious, she had been keeping the Sabbath for only a few weeks and, frankly, had found that at first Sabbath keeping can require some major personal adjustments. We sat in the living room of her home discussing the Bible and some of the experiences she had been meeting, when all at once I dropped the question to her, "Are you really glad you've found out about the Sabbath and the other things we've been studying?"

Her answer was unequivocal. She shot it back with quick warmth: "Oh, yes, Mr. Maxwell. Of course!"

The Healer of Bethesda still asks, when Sabbath comes, "Wilt thou be made whole?" For the Sabbath still comes to us as fresh and new each week as when God first gave it to us at creation.

What a wonderful gift it is that God has made available to us, His personal appointment "in time" that reaches everyone, everywhere!

Only the Creator could have thought of something so fine, so constantly healing and appealing. Only a loving God could have offered Himself to us in this way, a Father who desires to be with the men He has made and to help them meet their most basic needs.

Man, what a God!

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