

Is The Lord's Day God's Sabbath Day?

BY BASIL S. BRUNNING

This question has come to be answered generally amongst professing Christian people to-day with an emphatic "No"! But time was, and not many years ago, when the general answer would have been "Yes" with an equal emphasis. And there are still many who take this positive affirmative view.

What is the reason given for the modern negative to the question? The answer is found in the avowed refusal to accept or receive into the Christian economy anything that is Jewish. One wonders that our Lord Jesus Christ Himself should, as to His Person, find any place in their acceptance seeing that, of the Jewish people, "Christ came, Who is over all, God Blessed for ever". (Rom 9:5).

The Sabbath Day, they reason, was a Jewish institution. But when did the Jewish nation institute the Sabbath? No, the Sabbath Day was a Divine Institution: God instituted it. But when? And for whom? They are "willingly ignorant" indeed who argue and urge that the Sabbath Day was instituted for the Israelitish people when Moses was their leader and law-maker. All history known before the Jewish people had their existence as a nation proclaims the long established institution of the weekly recurring Sabbath day; observed and kept by the earlier nations of the world. So that the alleged Jewish "origin" of the Sabbath day is a crass fallacy.

If we ask, "By whom was the weekly Sabbath Day instituted?", secular history, while plainly witnessing to the fact of its institution, is silent as to its Originator. Sacred History alone answers and with no dubious uncertainty declaring:

"God blessed the Seventh Day and sanctified it." Fatuous futility accompanies the mental floundering of those who, being at a loss to explain the origin and Originator of the Sabbath Day, seek to keep from it the Mind of the Divine Being in the appointment of it and His benevolence and goodness in the provision of it.

From the beginning it was God's Sabbath, "made for man". History, sacred and common, confirms this incontrovertibly.

The Sabbath commanded to Israel

In the course of time, during which the weekly Sabbath regularly recurred, God gave origin in a super-natural and Divinely miraculous way to the Nation of Israel. He appointed Laws for their good government and consequent national well-being. Amongst those laws He embodied the obligation to "keep holy the Sabbath Day", prefacing His direction with the emphasis of the word "Remember". It was not a *new* law unknown and unobserved before that date any more than the command, "Thou shalt do no murder," was a new law unknown and unobserved to that date. In His Mind and Will it was a necessitous law, obedience to which He exacted.

Now sacred history makes frequent references in the course of the ages to the Sabbath Day in which the possessive case is used. It is "the Sabbath of the Lord thy God", "My Sabbath", "My holy day". Not once, *your* Sabbath, *your* holy day. God re-iterates His Sovereign title and claim to the Sabbath: it was HIS. It was HIS before Israel was as a nation commanded to observe and keep it.

Was the Sabbath thus commanded and observed by Israel the same Sabbath as was previously observed and kept before, as a nation, they were called into being? Undoubtedly it was, as to its nature, character and force. That God should add to the enjoined command the words: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth . . . and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" is clear evidence of the identity of the Sabbath

commanded with the Sabbath so long kept in previous existence.

Sabbath Order in the week

The question is often raised as to the order in the week of the Sabbath day. Modern chafers against the wholesome restraints of the Lord's day adopt an air of supercilious superiority of dialectic wisdom in opposing the upholders of the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath. They endeavour to emphasise the seventh day in order of the week as being the Sabbath day commanded, though it must be said they never show any regard for observing it.

The crux of the whole matter lies in the nature of that which is commanded—a Sabbath. The order of the week is the “accident”, that is, the “property of the thing which is not essential to it”. The order in the week as the accident could be and indeed was changed.

A brief study of Exodus 15:27, and Chapter 16: will reveal a change in the order, while the “thing”, the essential thing, the Sabbath, remained.

Turn to Exodus 15:27, to the record of an incident in the early beginning of Israel's journey through the wilderness. “They came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters”. Was that the Sabbath day when they *came* there or did they encamp there and remain for a day which was the Sabbath day? Either might be the case. But follow the chronology of the days immediately following in the succeeding chapter (Exodus 16), remembering that no journeying took place on the Sabbath day.

Verse 1. “They took their journey from Elim on the 15th day of the second month and murmured” The 15th day of the month could not have been the Sabbath

Verse 12. At the end of the 15th day it was said of the morrow: “In the morning ye shall be filled with bread”. This then is the 16th day of the month and the first day of gathering the manna.

Verse 13-14 Records the first giving of the manna.

Verse 21. "They gathered it every morning . . ."	The 17th day of the month and second day of gathering. The 18th day of the month and the third day of gathering. The 19th day of the month and the fourth day of gathering. The 20th day of the month and the fifth day of gathering.
Verse 22. "On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread"	The 21st day of the month and the sixth day of gathering.
Verse 23. "Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to-day . . . and that which remaineth lay up for you to be kept until the morning".	"Tomorrow", that is the 22nd day of the month was the Sabbath, being the seventh day from the first day of the giving of the manna.
Verse 24. "And they laid it up till the morning (i.e. the morning of the day following).	
Verse 25. And Moses said, Eat that to-day, for to-day is a Sabbath unto the Lord".	

But where does this table of chronology lead us ? Go backward and consider, that if the 22nd day of the month was the Sabbath day, then by order in the week the 15th day of the month was the Sabbath day preceding it. But was it ? No, decidedly not. In verse 29 God forbade journeying on the Sabbath. But on the seventh day preceding that Sabbath of the manna-giving week, viz., the 15th day of the month, "they took their journey from Elim . . . and came into the wilderness . . ."

There is obviously then at this eight-day period of the journeying of the children of Israel a change made in the order of the Sabbath in the week.

In nature and identity, the Sabbath "from the beginning" before Moses, and the Sabbath commanded through Israel's history was the same essentially, actually and identically. It was God's Sabbath, "My holy day". Its order, as the property of it but not essential to it, might be changed: but the Sabbath itself remained, obligatory and necessary.

Origin of New Order of Sabbath

In the fulness of time a brighter age was ushered in with the coming of the dear Son of God Who became Man. He came to "save His people from their sins": to "redeem them that were under law that they might receive the adoption of sons". He lived, He died, and His body was laid in the grave for the whole of the next day after His death, being the Sabbath—the seventh day in order of the week. To His immediate followers who loved Him, *that* Sabbath was not "a delight" It was a dark and dismal day. The word Sabbath—"A rest of the heart" was surely a misnomer to them of that black day so full of sorrow, grief, forebodings and fear.

But when on the first day of the week, at the end of that dark seventh-day Sabbath their Lord and Saviour rose from the dead and emerged from the darkness of the tomb, their darkness was dispelled and their mourning turned into joy. He met with some of them in the garden: He walked and talked with others in the way and caused their hearts to burn within them not leaving them before He had blessed and broken bread with them. They were gathered together in full company save one, on the evening of that day, when He came and stood in their midst and said "Peace be unto you" and showed to them His wounded hands and His scarred side, the evidences of His Redeeming Love for them.

Again and again He appeared unto them on the first day of succeeding weeks, thus sanctifying a day of another order in the week. He left them in order to take His place at the right hand of the Majesty on high; but He did not leave them comfortless. For on the first day of a subsequent week the Holy Ghost descended upon them by Whom they were empowered to go forth to execute the commission their Master had laid upon them.

On that memorable first day of the week they preached to multitudes when four thousand were pricked to the heart and cried in true Gospel repentance, "What shall we do?" And as the years of apostolic labours passed on so it was their practice to "come together on the first day of the week".

Truly by the Resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ on "the first day of the week", by His consort-

ing with His disciples to their comfort on the first day of the weeks before His glorious Ascension, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost on "the first day of the week", by the regular practice of the New Testament churches on "the first day of the week", and lastly, by giving that glorious Revelation to the beloved disciple in exile in Patmos on the "Lord's day", "the first day of the week", that first day in order of the week was hallowed and sanctified—it was the New Testament Sabbath.

The Divine Sovereignty of it is emphasised in the New Testament by the possessive case of the Sabbath of the Old Testament. "My Sabbath", "My holy day", was His claim made in the Old Testament. "The Lord's Day" is the Christian acknowledgement and acceptance of the same claim made by the representative of Christian Believers—John—in the New Testament.

The word "Sabbath" as a significance

But is it the Sabbath essentially, actually, identically ? Is it to be observed and regarded as was the Sabbath which from the beginning had preceded it ? First of all, let us examine the name "Sabbath" which it has become fashionable to despise. When one hears the remark spoken contemptuously by religious professors, "I am not a Sabbatarian !" one wonders at the mentality of those who utter it. It is a delightful word to be used as a name. Sabbath—"rest of the heart". Applied fittingly to a day, then that day must be "a delight".

Could such a word, as a name, be applied to The Lord's Day ? Millions of God's people who have rested and worshipped Him on that day proclaim it to have been to them the day when the "rest of the heart" has been one oft-recurring blessed experience. Those who despise the word "Sabbath" as applied to The Lord's Day and knowing the meaning of the word cannot have known on His day the sweet experience of heart rest which it brings. One wonders that fundamentalists should join with modernists to decry the use and application of that delightful name.

Jewish Sabbath not as God made it

But the main question is not whether the Lord's Day is the Sabbath in name but the Sabbath in its nature, with all the implications which an affirmative answer would convey. From a wide observation and experience amongst the churches in our land to-day one notes this obvious fact: the Sabbath of the times in which our Lord walked this earth, with all the ecclesiastical accretions of ceremonial and superstitions which marred that delightful day which the Lord had made, is erroneously regarded as the Sabbath which God gave in Wisdom which could not err, and in goodness which was Divinely superlative.

What ignorance ! Willing ignorance we fear with many. As He said on one occasion, "Ye do make the Word of God of none effect by your tradition", so did He say by example and practice: "Ye do make the day of God of none effect by your tradition". But though the tradition of the ecclesiastical ceremonialists could cover the Word, it could not conceal it nor abrogate it. The Written Word of God remained as Peter described it: "A light shining in a dark place to which ye do well to take heed".

So with God's Sabbath day. The barnacle-like traditions of the ecclesiastical ceremonialists were affixed to His day, but they could not conceal it, nor abrogate it. He Himself by His customary practice of communal worship, by His works of tender mercy, by His communion and fellowship with His followers in the cornfields, by the sea-shore, in the valley, and upon the mountain side, revealed the brightness of the Sabbath day which was made for man.

Let those, who cavil at "the Jewish Sabbath" as they regard it marred by superstition, say if they despise the Word of God which similar superstition made of none effect. Many of them will, and do: but surely the Fundamentalist ought not to despise the Sabbath as "made for man" of which the Lord Jesus Christ claimed to be the Lord !

The Sabbath and "The Lord's Day" identical

This brings us to the crux of the question. Is God's Sabbath as made for man identical with "the Lord's Day"? We

have noted that He Himself said of the Sabbath, "The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath day". Has He ceased to hold Sovereignty of the Sabbath day ? If that day no longer exists, then He has. But when did it fade out of existence ? When did God come to see, after centuries had passed from the beginning of time when He instituted the Sabbath, that there was no longer any necessity for it to remain ? When did He abrogate it ? And if He did not abrogate it, who and by what authority could anyone else abrogate it ?

The Commandments forbade sins of every kind. Sins are transgressions of Divine Law for which all men, Jews and Gentiles, are accountable. The nine commandments, apart from the fourth (the Sabbath commandment), forbade polygamy, idolatry, filial disrespect, perjury and false witness. His laws concerning these are for all time and for all people. "Sin is the transgression of the Law"—the Law which forbids the above. But when did God single out this law: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy", to repeal it and make it to be no sin to transgress it ?

Sabbath observance still Divinely required

It is argued that such a Law is "unsuitable for modern times and conditions". By the same minds it would have been reasoned in the 17th century that the "times and conditions" of Charles II justified the abrogation of the Law against adultery as "unsuitable".

But no, the Sabbath Law "is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good". "The Son of man is Lord", *still* Lord, "of the Sabbath day". He wielded an axe and a hammer to break off from it the superstitious accretions of formal religionists; but over the day itself and those who keep it, He bears a gracious sceptre to rule it and them in benign Love and Divine Sovereignty and Authority. That Sabbath day is that "first day of the week", "the Lord's day", the day for "the rest of the heart".

The Lord's Day predicted

The words of the Psalmist in Psalm 118:22 and 23, "The stone which the builders refused is become the head

stone of the corner" are quoted by our Lord as prophetic of His rejection and condemnation by the Jews and of His resurrection. They are used by Peter in his address before the High Priest and council of the Jews. "This *is* the stone which is set at nought of you builders". (Acts 4:11).

He was "refused", "set at naught", when they cried, "Away with Him ! Crucify Him !" That was a bad day, an evil day. But note, "the stone . . . is become the head of the corner", when "He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead". That day was a good day, and of it the Psalmist declares following the prediction of the evil day of rejection: "This is the day which the Lord hath made: we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). As here the Psalmist was Divinely inspired to prophesy of the day of His rejection, he was also writing under the same Divine inspiration of "this day". What could "this day" be other than that "first day of the week" when He was made "the Head of the corner ?" "This is the day which the Lord hath made".

Of the Sabbath day our Lord Himself hath said "The Sabbath was *made* for man". Of that Sabbath of the new order, that Resurrection day, that first day of the week, the Holy Spirit said: "This is the day which the Lord hath *made*; we will rejoice and be glad in it". Yes, The Lord's Day is *His*: "My Sabbath", "My holy day" is *His*. The same, not in order of the week, but essentially and actually, the same—*His* Day. His through all time, from the beginning to eternity with no ending and when the Sabbath day of time becomes merged into that eternal Sabbath, "the rest that remaineth for the people of God".

Oneness of Sabbath of Creation, Sinai, Resurrection

The bud, the blossom, the fruit are not three by reason of the changes of order, but *one*: the child, the youth, the man, are not three by reason of the changes of order, but *one*. The Sabbath of Creation, of Sinai, of Resurrection are not three, but *one*. It remains The Lord's Day, "My holy day",

hallowed and sanctified by Him; "made for man", under the Sovereignty of Him Who is "Lord of the Sabbath day" to be observed and used according to His Mind and Will.

May His people have Grace ever to regard it as His. "holy unto the Lord"; to devote it *wholly* unto Him and thus to "keep it holy". Would that all men would so regard it as being "made" for them—for their blessing and benefit, displaying the Divine Wisdom and Goodness of God which combined in the provision of it for physical and temporal well-being. "Made" to display and emphasise the Glory of God in His Creative Power and Wisdom: but much more, to display and emphasise the Grace of God in His Redeeming Love and Mercy when His Dear Son, having triumphed over death, secured Eternal Life for them that believe.

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Is the "Seventh" Day essential?

Besides the members of the Seventh Day Adventist sect, great play is often made on the wrong (?) "order" in the week of the Christian's Sabbath by others who "pollute" it by all kinds of secularism. While these affect to be "wise" on this matter, they show no inclination to be "good" by observing any other day whatever as "holy unto the Lord".

It might be profitable to look at this matter of order in the week of the Sabbath. More especially as many Christian people are "so soon shaken in mind and are troubled" by the vociferous insistence of the Adventists on that word "seventh".

First, then, let us remember that the "order" in the week of the Sabbath is not the essential. The essential is the Sabbath; the "order" is the "accident", that is, the property which is not essential to the thing. The "accident" is capable of change, of mutability, and even of removal while yet the essential remains, unchangeable, immutable.

But in the case of the Sabbath "order" it is insisted that God pronounced, proclaimed, the "seventh" day "order" and

that His Word is immutable, unchangeable. The crux however lies in this: God pronounced, proclaimed, the essential *thing*, the Sabbath, with the "accident", the order. His Word of that essential thing is immutable and the essential thing therefore is immutable, unchangeable.

Is the "accident",—the non-essential property to the thing, (in this case the order in the week,)—immutable and unchangeable? Most certainly not. God may and does change an "accident", and even dispenses with it, while the thing itself remains unchangeable, immutable, eternal.

Take for instance Priesthood with all pertaining to it—atonement, advocacy, satisfaction, mediation, intercession. God from the beginning ordained priesthood with all its offices and engagements. With His ancient chosen people He pronounced and proclaimed it as an essential thing. In doing so He clothed the thing in an order, viz: the house of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. The order was however but the "accident", the property not essential to the thing.

Centuries passed and the essential remained with the order also apparently firm. But through certain circumstances the order of the priesthood which God pronounced and proclaimed has gone. It is removed. There are no priests today of the order of Aaron and the tribe of Levi.

But with the removal of the order, the non-essential property of the thing, has the priesthood also gone, the essential thing? No, certainly not. It is vested in One Who is "a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedec". All that pertains to priesthood—atonement, advocacy, satisfaction, propitiation, mediation, intercession—remain as His priestly offices and engagements.

Even in His manhood He was not of the natural "order"—the tribe of Levi—"for it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (*Heb. 7:14*).

Seeing then in so necessary and Divinely appointed a matter as priesthood God has removed the "accident", the property not essential to the thing, while the priesthood

remains eternal, unchangeable, how can it be urged in respect to the Sabbath that its order in the week is inexorably immutable ? Why should not He Who commanded and gave the Sabbath strip from it the age-worn habiliment of the order under the Law to clothe it in a new one of Resurrection light, under Grace ?

Be this remembered: the day our Redeemer's dead body lay in the darkness of the tomb was the last day of the old "order". The Law was manifested in that circumstance. The Day our Redeemer rose from the dead was the first day of the new "order". Grace is manifested in that circumstance.

Thus the Sabbath, the Lord's Day, the essential for man's highest and best, clad in a new order, the "accident", is "the Day which the Lord hath made". It remains, though the old order is changed, giving place to the new—"The Sabbath of the Lord—the Lord's Day".

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