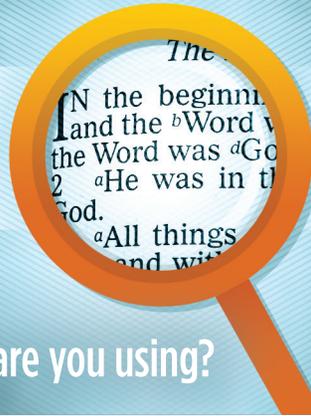


BIBLE



OPTICS

What lens are you using?

The WORD or the world?

This issue:

1. *Is the Sabbath Worth Keeping?*
2. *It's Vertical and Horizontal*
3. *Q&A: When Should the Sabbath be Observed?*
4. *A Sacred Sign Since Creation*



From the Pastor

“They must like each other! Have you seen how much time they’ve been spending together!?”

The whispered comments echo down the school hall as the young couple passes by. They are oblivious to everyone except each other, for love has captured their hearts.

It’s true, isn’t it? When we spend more time with someone, it’s a sign of our interest in them. We’re glad to be seen with those we love.

When we fall in love with Jesus, we are thrilled to spend time with Him. We especially look forward to the weekly date He’s set up with us – the Sabbath. It is THE sign that proclaims to the world that we are His and He is ours.

Have you ever experienced the joy of keeping the Sabbath with Jesus, your best friend? If you haven’t, we encourage you to find a local Seventh-day Adventist church. Like Mark Forsyth (his story is told in *Is the Sabbath Worth Keeping? One Man’s Story*) you’ll discover that the Sabbath is truly the key to walking fully with God.



Nelson Mercado | Pastor
Nashville First Seventh-day Adventist Church

Is the Sabbath Worth Keeping?

One Man’s Story

Mark Forsyth openly declared his hostility to God as a teenager. His father had died when he was 13, and with no one to stop his hell-bent path, he lit up with tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. Soon he was using heavier drugs and committing burglaries to pay for his addictions.

At 18, Mark landed in jail for the first time. This “adult time out” did little to redirect his path. “I was bitter. I just wanted to be back out in the world,” Mark recalls.

When he got out, Mark moved to another city and left the drugs behind. This time he sought fulfillment in a woman. Two children and a couple stints in jail later, she left and Mark found himself raising his kids alone. “God was convicting me and I started taking my kids to a non-denominational church,” Mark says. “I got a Bible and began carrying it to work with me. God also convicted me about alcohol and tobacco, and I gave those up cold-turkey. But I had anger issues and I was struggling with pornography and lust.”

“Lord, What Is the Truth?”

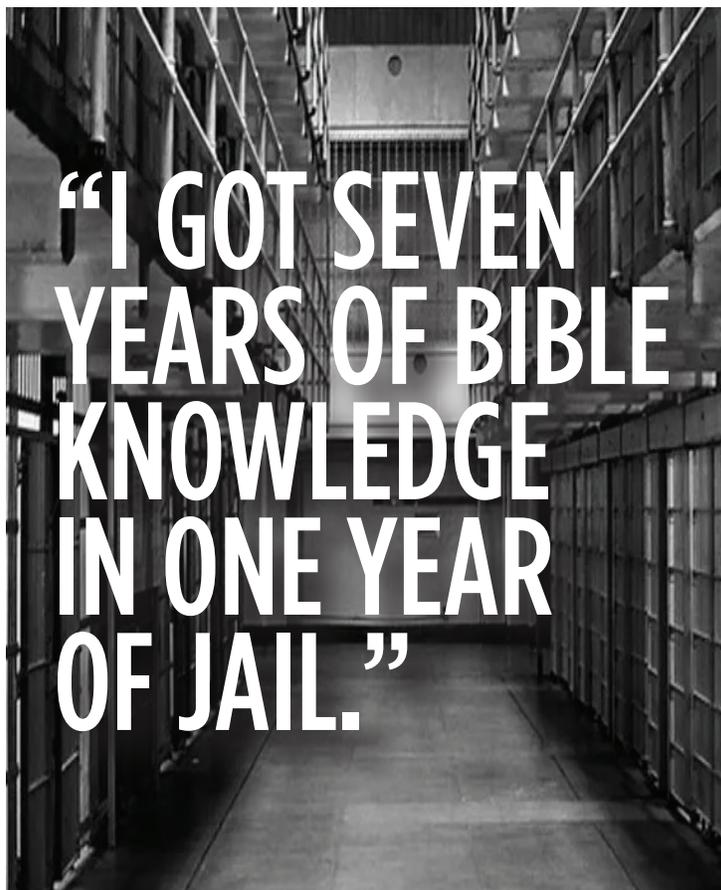
His anger got out of control in 2010 and put Mark back in jail. This time, it was the turning point he needed. He studied the Bible with a different church group each day.

“I got seven years of Bible knowledge in one year of jail,” he laughs.

Yet as he studied Scripture with these different denominations, he began to notice that the doctrines they taught did not all line up with the Bible. “Many of them based their teachings on just one or two Bible verses,” he explains. “I saw that they were taking things out of context. I was praying, ‘Lord, you are the way and the truth. I want to know the truth. What is the truth? These can’t all be the truth.’”

One denomination was different – the Seventh-day Adventists. They brought in magazines and books from Amazing Facts that were easy to read and understand. “I saw that they were using the whole Bible to teach the truth.”

He gladly accepted the truths he learned about the state of the dead, prophecy, the Sabbath, and health. “Most of us in my circle of friends rededicated our lives to God in the Seventh-day Adventist church while we were in jail,” Mark recalls. “We were witnessing to our cell mates, praying for each other. I was sharing the Amazing Facts booklets with others. My mind was blown. I wanted people to know the truth. I was on fire going around the jail pod.”



“I GOT SEVEN YEARS OF BIBLE KNOWLEDGE IN ONE YEAR OF JAIL.”

The Key to Abiding in Christ

Mark got out of jail after a year and started attending a local Sunday-keeping church where he met and married his wife Lindsey. “I didn’t really want to let Sunday go,” Mark explains. “I kind of had one foot in the world and one foot not. I kept making excuses for working on Sabbath, eating meat, etc. I was justifying my decisions, but I knew, deep down, that I wasn’t following God completely.” His struggles with temptation continued and “I began to wonder if I was really abiding in Christ,” Mark explains. “I told my wife, ‘maybe I need to go back and start keeping the Sabbath again.’”

Then the pandemic hit and with it came an opportunity to watch church online. Mark and his wife, Lindsey, began watching Pastor Doug Batchelor from Amazing Facts together on Sabbaths. “My faith started growing again and I tried to teach Lindsey what I knew.” The family also switched from watching regular TV to watching faith-based programming from Three Angels Broadcasting Network.

Not long afterwards, they discovered that the White House Seventh-day Adventist church in Tennessee was near their home. They watched online and were impressed with Pastor McKenzie’s Biblical sermons. Before long they were attending in person. About the same time, Mark left his job because of the harassment he was receiving for being a Christian.

Faithfulness Rewarded

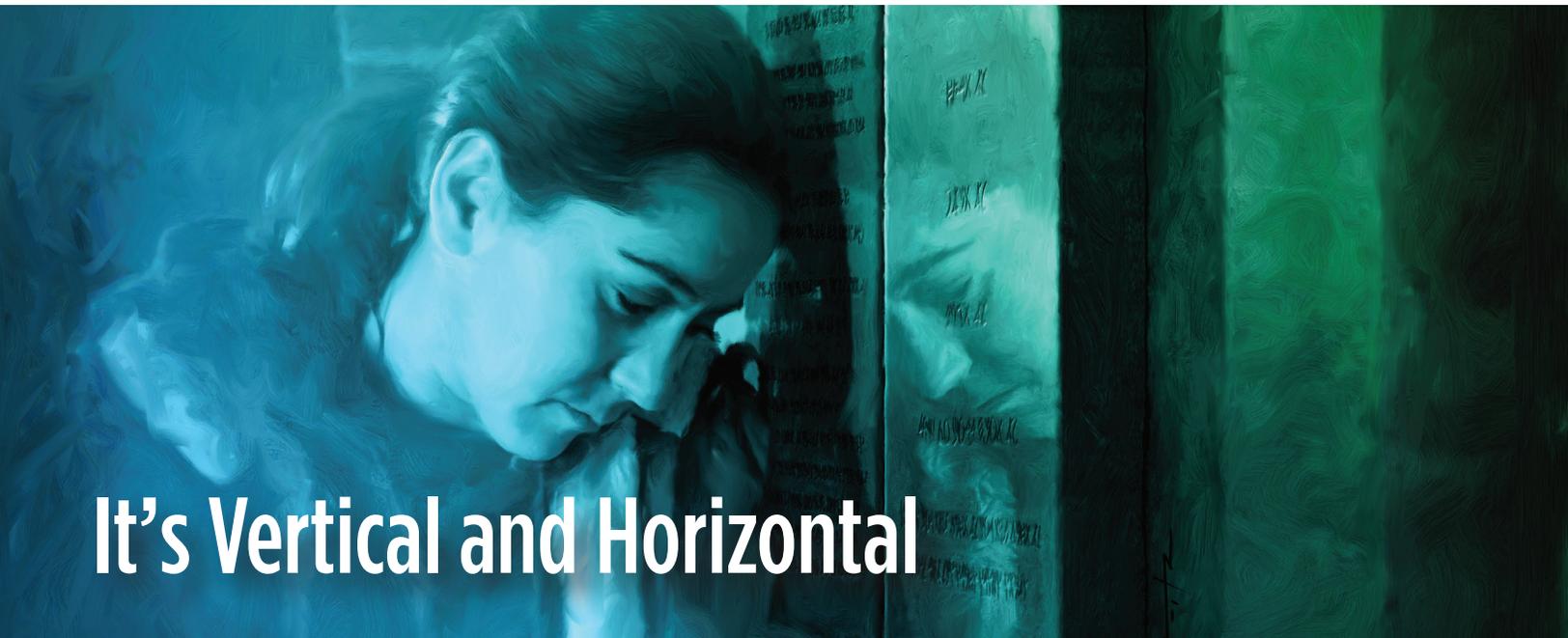
For three weeks Mark looked for a new job that would allow him to have Sabbaths off. “Our faith was tested during that time,” says Lindsey. “He’d never been out of work for this long before and we wondered whether he should really insist on not working on Sabbath.”

Then one Sabbath after potluck, he told Pastor McKenzie about his need for work. They prayed together that God would lead Mark to the right job. “Just a couple of days later, I got a new job,” Mark smiles. “And there are no Sabbath issues at this job! God provided exactly what I needed!”

Keeping the Sabbath has not been all easy for Mark and Lindsey. Their six kids are having a difficult time adapting to Sabbath keeping. The devil’s temptations and attacks have increased. But their faith remains strong, and they are committed to

keeping God’s Sabbath regardless of the difficulties. “I’m so thankful that God is faithful and keeps working with us,” says Mark. “He kept working the sanctification process in me, even when I wasn’t following everything I knew.”

By: Shenalyn Page



It's Vertical and Horizontal

Are your relationships struggling to survive? Do you find yourself yearning to make deeper connections with those around you? What about your relationship with God, has it been lacking fullness lately? God has a solution written in stone for you.

The Sabbath

The Sabbath was not created arbitrarily. It certainly wasn't created just to make the Ten Commandments an even number. God created it with a purpose to benefit our earthly lives, and also our life beyond. The Sabbath is a multipurpose, relational law. It is centered in the middle of the commandments and is the bridge in the commandments that connects our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with our fellow men.

On Sinai, God not only verbally communicated his law, but also wrote it into stone. The moral law, the Ten Commandments, was written into stone to represent its eternity. They were to announce to the Hebrews and all of creation that these words are the foundation of God's kingdom.

Right in the center of the Ten Commandments is the Sabbath Law. In Exodus 20:8-10, it says, "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all

that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy".

The first word in this law is "remember". In fact, it's the only commandment that reminds us not to forget it. God in his infinite wisdom knew that it was the one law everyone would either seek to change, or completely forget.

Horizontal Relationships

The first sentence is an introduction, "remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy". What follows is an explanation as to how to keep it holy. A few things are required, firstly laboring six days. This is a part of the horizontal relational aspect of the law.

Laziness affects the people around you. Imagine if everyone stopped working and decided to live a life full of leisure. Our economies would crash, everyone would starve, and the world would probably collapse into destruction. The Bible tells us to go to the ant and see how it works. Its work does not only benefit itself, but it benefits the entire colony. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever". Laziness is counterproductive in the kingdom of God. It's self-centered and breaks the relational aspect of the law of God. Thus, God requires us to work because of its benefit to ourselves and those around us.

He also requires rest. This commandment takes the relational aspect a step further. Every Sabbath, not only are you commanded to rest, but you are also to allow your family, your employees, your cattle and even your guests to rest. We see both a sociological relationship an environmental relationship in this law. By promoting rest within your community, you are honoring the Sabbath.



How might you share the message of Sabbath rest in your community? Start by inviting your neighbor, your friend or your family over for Sabbath lunch. One of the best benefits of the Sabbath is that it promotes fellowship. If the Sabbath is relational, then by fellowshipping with one another and sharing in the blessing of the Sabbath, we can strengthen our horizontal relationships with those around us.

Vertical Relationships

God never intended us to be constantly on the go. He wants us to find rest in Him. Psalm 62:1 says, “Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him”. This brings us to the vertical relational aspect. The Sabbath was not instituted for the Hebrew alone. The last portion of this commandment echoes the story of creation in the book of Genesis. Before the Abrahamic line began, before the flood and even before the fall of mankind, God instituted the Sabbath.

It is important to note that God is all powerful. Nowhere in Scripture does it indicate that God requires rest because He is tired.

The work of the six-day creation did not wear Him out. For humans, rest serves to replenish and heal our tired and weary bodies. But for God it functions differently. In resting on the Sabbath day, God made it blessed and holy. His act of resting led to a blessing. By resting He showed that the seventh-day Sabbath was not arbitrarily chosen but had a significant purpose.

There are two reasons God rested, to hallow the seventh day and to teach us. God rested to show us that in resting we are mimicking the lifestyle that He crafted for us. We are functioning within in the context of His law, which is an expression of His love, and an explanation of His character. By following the fourth command-

ment, you are growing into His likeness and reflecting His character. This is the vertical relational aspect of the fourth commandment.

The Glory of the Sabbath

When Moses came down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments in His hand, his face shone brightly. His face was so bright that it actually made the Israelites afraid. Moses reflected God’s glory because he had been in God’s presence while the commandments were given.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit”. Through complete surrender and seeing the glory of God through his law (including the Sabbath), we will be changed from one degree of glory to another. The Sabbath is the crowing jewel of God’s creation, both in the story of Genesis, and in the Ten Commandments.

**THE SABBATH LAW
IS GOD’S AVENUE
FOR BLESSING OUR
HORIZONTAL
AND VERTICAL
RELATIONSHIPS.**

The Sabbath law is God’s avenue for blessing our horizontal and vertical relationships. It not only brings us closer to those around us, but it also brings us closer to God. The Sabbath reflects the goodness and glory of God, and it is our calling to reflect God’s glory as well. God’s solution to your broken relationships, with Him and others, can be remedied by beginning to keep the Sabbath.

Won’t you give keeping His Sabbath a try? You just might be surprised about how God uses it to bless your relationships.

By: Elijah Ramjattan

Bible Q&A

When Should the Sabbath be Observed?

For thousands of years the Jews have observed Sabbath from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. Seventh-day Adventists and other biblical Sabbath keepers do the same. Are we simply following the Jews' example and assuming that they know what they are doing? Or do we get our guidance from the Bible? In order to answer this, we must go back to the beginning.

“So the evening and the morning were the first day” and “the evening and the morning were the second day” and so on (Genesis 1:5, 8). In the creation narrative, the first half of each day began at “evening” and the second half of the day began at “morning.” This means that God marked off each day from sunset to sunset. The seventh day, on which God rested, was no different.

“Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:3).

It was God who first kept the Sabbath from sunset to sunset. The Jewish people have always understood this. When God commanded the Israelites at Mount Sinai to “remember the Sabbath day,” He pointed to creation as its origin. This makes it clear that the day is to be honored from sunset to sunset (Exodus 20:8–11).

On the Friday afternoon that Christ died, referencing the approaching sunset, Luke tells us that “Sabbath drew near” (Luke 23:54) and that the women who prepared spices and oils to anoint Christ's body “rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56). From creation to Sinai to Jesus the Sabbath began at sunset on the sixth day (Friday) and ended at sunset on the seventh day (Saturday). According to Scripture, it's the same today and will be forever (Isaiah 66:23). Let us rejoice in this sacred time from now to eternity!



TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

Loving Bible Optics? Or not so sure? We'd love to hear your thoughts about it. Please stop by www.godled.org/bible-optics-survey and take our five minute survey today. Thank you!



A Sacred Sign Since Creation

DID YOU KNOW THERE IS A SPECIAL SIGN THAT SETS GOD'S PEOPLE APART FROM ALL OTHERS?

God says the Sabbath “is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever” (Exodus 31:17) and Jesus taught that the Sabbath was not only for the Jews, but all mankind (Mark 2:27). From Genesis to Revelation, God’s faithful followers have kept the seventh-day Sabbath. It is THE sign that designates God’s people.

What follows is a brief history of the Sabbath day from creation until the time of Christ. An honest study of the Scriptures reveals that Sabbath observance is an inextricable part of our relationship with God and that those who forget the Sabbath also forget God. Let us remember.

In the Beginning

“God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work” (Genesis 2:3). Following God’s example, Adam and Eve rested every seventh day, keeping the Sabbath holy. Noah also kept the Sabbath for he was a “righteous man” (Genesis 6:9 ESV) who obeyed the commandments of God (Deuteronomy 2:25). Noah’s father Lamech was 56 years old when Adam died, so he would have had the opportunity to speak personally to Adam and keep Sabbath with him.

God testified that “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Genesis 26:5). There’s no reason why Abraham’s obedience would not have included Sabbath-keeping.

“The Sabbath was honored by all the children of Adam that remained loyal to God” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 80)

In Egypt

When Abraham’s descendants lived in Egypt, their years of bondage led them to lose sight of, and neglect, God and His Sabbath. Then Moses came and showed “his people that obedience to God was the first condition of deliverance. The efforts made to restore the observance of the Sabbath [came] to the notice of their oppressors” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 258). That’s why Pharaoh exclaimed, “Look, the people of the land are many now, and you make them rest from their labor!” (Exodus 5:5).

In the Wilderness

After God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians and brought them through the Red Sea, He began to feed them with manna. The bread from heaven fell for six days and then ceased on the seventh. For this reason, they were commanded to collect a double portion on the sixth day. The additional manna collected would feed the Israelites for two days, allowing them to rest on the Sabbath. For forty years this cycle continued as a reminder of the sacred obligation of the Sabbath (Exodus 16:35).

God was teaching them to put complete trust in Him. He was to be their provider and sustainer. This was the same lesson taught to Adam and Eve in the garden. The seventh-day Sabbath is a weekly reminder of this indispensable truth (Exodus 31:13).

Sadly, it seems the Israelites didn’t learn this lesson very well, for we find among the reasons that the first generation of the Israelites was not able to enter the promised land, “My Sabbaths they greatly polluted” (Ezekiel 20:13–24).



At Sinai

When God commanded the children of Israel to remember the Sabbath day at Mount Sinai, it wasn't simply a command to keep it from that point forward. It was a command to remember its sacred origin and meaning. The language of the fourth commandment makes it clear that the Sabbath's roots are in creation (Exodus 20:8–11). The Sabbath is the sign of God's authority.

Because God is our Creator, He is worthy of worship. Observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is a statement of allegiance to Him and a demonstration before all creation of who we serve. It's a "perpetual covenant" (Exodus 31:16) between Yahweh and His children.

"Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater" (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 336)

Approaching Exile

Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promised a blessing upon those who kept the Sabbath. He proclaimed that Jerusalem would "remain forever" (Jeremiah 17:24–25). But they were also warned, "if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day . . . then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jeremiah 17:27).

God recalled an oath He had made to Israel in the wilderness. "I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols" (Ezekiel 20:23–24).

At the time of Ezekiel's prophecy this had been partially fulfilled and was about to be completely accomplished. Due to Israel's unfaithfulness, including profaning of the Sabbath day, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem. The city and temple were burned to the ground and the inhabitants carried away (2 Kings 25:8–11). To forget the Sabbath is to forget God. The results are always disastrous.

After Exile

Nehemiah reminded the Jews that Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem because of their violation of the fourth commandment. He inquired, "Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath" (Nehemiah 13:18).

Zealous efforts were made to bring about Sabbath reform. Nehemiah commanded that the gates of Jerusalem be kept shut on the Sabbath and placed watchers there to prevent merchandise from entering the city on that day. He even

NEXT ISSUE: THE SABBATH IN BIBLE PROPHECY!

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE SABBATH FEATURES LARGELY IN BIBLE PROPHECY? NOT ONLY DOES IT MATTER FOR OUR DAILY WALK WITH GOD TODAY, BUT IT HOLDS HUGE END-TIME SIGNIFICANCE. JOIN US NEXT MONTH AS WE UNPACK THE SABBATH'S PROPHETIC SIGNIFICANCE.

“HAD THE SABBATH ALWAYS BEEN SACREDLY OBSERVED, THERE COULD NEVER HAVE BEEN AN ATHEIST OR AN IDOLATER”

(ELLEN G. WHITE, PATRIARCHS AND PROPHETS, P. 336)

threatened physical violence to the merchants who camped outside Jerusalem on the Sabbath saying, “If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!” (Nehemiah 13:19–21).

Threatening Sabbath-breakers with physical violence is not the course God is asking us to take, but we would do well to have such a zealous spirit and high regard for the law of God.

Jesus and the Sabbath

“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27–28).

During the time of Christ, the Sabbath reflected the selfish character of men rather than the love of God. The rabbis had burdened the Sabbath with myriad restrictions and these empty formalities were a mockery to God. Communion with God, the true intent of the Sabbath, was thwarted. Its observance was devoid of love.

Christ refused to conform to the requirements of the rabbis. Instead, He kept the Sabbath out of love for God and His law. The Lord of the Sabbath made it clear that the Sabbath was still binding (Matthew 5:17–19). He attended religious gatherings on the seventh day (Luke 4:16) and taught that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:12). When Jesus died on Friday afternoon, He once again “blessed the Sabbath day” (Genesis 2:3) as he rested in the tomb.

From the beginning, Jesus made the Sabbath to be a blessing to all mankind. It has always been and will always be a sign between Him and His loyal followers. From Genesis to Jesus, God’s faithful have honored the seventh-day Sabbath and when the Spirit’s work is complete among His people, we will all be Sabbath-keepers (Isaiah 66:23). Praise the Lord!

By: John Cloud



Nelson Mercado
Pastor

Our goal is to help you grow in your understanding of key Bible teachings, gain a Biblical perspective on what is happening in our world today, and find tools to share your faith more effectively.

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