

the taste of
SABBATH

How to Delight in God's Rest

STUART BRYAN

canonpress
Moscow, Idaho 

Published by Canon Press
P.O. Box 8729, Moscow, ID 83843
800.488.2034 | www.canonpress.com

Stuart Bryan, *The Taste of Sabbath: How to Delight in God's Rest*
Copyright © 2009 by Stuart Bryan
Scripture taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.
All emphases are the author's.

Cover and interior design by Laura Storm.
Printed in the United States of America.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored
in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission
of the author, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bryan, Stuart (Stuart W.)
The taste of Sabbath : how to delight in God's rest / Stuart Bryan.
p. cm.
ISBN-13: 978-1-59128-068-2 (pbk.)
ISBN-10: 1-59128-068-0 (pbk.)
1. Sabbath. 2. Sunday. I. Title.
BV111.3.B78 2009
263'.1--dc22

2009038895

09 10 11 12 13 14 15

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For my parents
who taught me to feast;
And for my wife
with whom I share the feasting.

CONTENTS

Preface	9
1 } A Perpetual Ordinance	11
2 } From Sabbath to Lord's Day	27
3 } Lord of the Sabbath	47
4 } A Typical Sabbath Day	65
5 } Call the Sabbath a Delight	85



Preface

Children rarely turn out the way we expect. In the beginning we receive the bundle and dream over him our images of growth. Then the growth comes and the youth standing by our side is the one imaged by God, not us. “The mind of man plans his way, but God directs his steps.” We glance at our child and note, with a start, what God did in the years between.

This book strikes me much the same way. Glancing at it now that it’s all grown up, I hardly recognize the swaddling infant I sent off.

She was conceived as a sermon series while I was preaching through the Gospel of Mark. Endeavoring to help my congregation apply Jesus’ teaching on the Sabbath in our modern context, I developed a short series on the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day. As I studied for the sermons, I was forced to reckon repeatedly with Mark’s heavy dependence upon Isaiah 40–66. He self-consciously interprets Jesus’ ministry in light of God’s promise

through Isaiah to vindicate His Name in all the earth. The more I studied Isaiah, the more I came to understand Mark—and the more I understood Mark, the more I understood Jesus—and the more I understood Jesus, the more I understood the Sabbath. Thus the infant was born.

She was sent off to Canon Press, and they were kind enough to nurse and nurture her. The editing work began. Frank Ewert wrote with critiques, suggestions, alterations, and evaluations pushing me to clarify and strengthen the arguments I had made. He recommended changes of organization to clarify thought, kept pestering me about my numerous prepositional phrases, and by and large made a nuisance of himself. He was an excellent editor.

And now the young woman stands before me—where'd she come from? Mark and Isaiah still figure large in her pages, but the discussion is broader and the case, I trust, stronger than originally made. I find myself humbled, giddy, and profoundly grateful—grateful to God who directed the steps.

After reading the book you may yet conclude, “Stronger? I would have hated to see the first draft!” If so, the fault is all mine. But for those who read and appreciate what's written, join with me in giving thanks to the Father who has gifted us so richly and who has qualified us to enter His rest through Christ. Got to love those prepositions!



CHAPTER 1

A Perpetual Ordinance

Introduction

Every Sunday our congregation hosts a question and answer session following the service. We affectionately call it “Filling up the Corners” after an incident in Tolkien’s *Fellowship of the Ring*. Bilbo invites his friends and relations to a grand feast in celebration of his “one hundred and eleventieth” birthday.

After the feast (more or less) came the Speech. Most of the company were, however, now in a tolerant mood, at that delightful stage which they called ‘filling up the corners’. They were sipping their favourite drinks, and nibbling at their favourite dainties and their fears were forgotten. They were prepared to listen to anything, and to cheer at every full stop.¹

¹J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 28.

And so, having feasted on the Word of God in worship, we break out the drinks and dainties (coffee and donuts in our case), sit in a circle, and ask and answer questions about the sermon. After preaching a sermon on the relationship between the Old Testament Sabbath and the Lord's Day, I asked those who could remember what things looked like when there was a broad cultural consensus restricting work on the Lord's Day.

One reported that when he was a child, he distinctly remembered how quiet things were on Sunday. Grocery stores alone were open for business, and most of their aisles were roped off with only necessities offered for sale. But by the time he was a teenager, all that had changed. The restrictions were gone and more and more businesses stayed open. The noise grew.

Why the change? Among the various reasons given, the most poignant was the lack of clear teaching in the Church. The Church always leads culture, and in this area, the Church lost its moorings. Thus, the breakdown of consensus in the Church over the relationship between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day led to the breakdown in our culture at large.

This lack of consensus has not changed in subsequent years. If anything, it has deepened. This to such an extent that, according to N. T. Wright, the Bishop of Durham, most Christians have given up any hope that a renewal of Sunday Sabbath observance will ever emerge in England or America again. Indeed, many would fight against such a proposal.

Diversity of Opinion

Consider, briefly, four of the most common positions articulated by conscientious Christians today. First, some believe the Old Testament Sabbath is completely abolished, and thus no day of the week is different from another. Arguing from Paul's comments in Romans 14, these Christians argue that each individual

church is free to establish times for corporate worship at its discretion. It is only a matter of convenience that leads most Christians to choose Sunday as the day for corporate worship.

Others believe, like our first group, that the Old Testament Sabbath is completely abolished, but they insist that in the Christian era it has been replaced by the Lord's Day—a day which has little or no connection with the Old Testament Sabbath. This has been the position of the Roman Catholic church which, with its view of church tradition, is able to argue that such a replacement has divine sanction. Some evangelicals also hold this position and generally argue that the references to worship on the first day of the week in the New Testament substantiate this change.

Still others believe that the Old Testament Sabbath is binding in the exact form in which it was originally given, and that Christians should therefore worship on Saturday. The various "Seventh Day" Christian groups that have emerged in the last couple of centuries advocate this view. Though a minority position in Christendom, many have been persuaded by their arguments and the seventh day churches continue to grow in strength and number.

Finally, some believe—and this will be my contention below—that the Old Testament Sabbath is still binding but has undergone a transformation and been fulfilled in the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath. This was the near-unanimous position of the Puritans, both in England and in America. Through their influence and persuasiveness, it became the predominant position in the English speaking world and led to the establishment of Sunday blue laws in some countries. Work on Sunday was taboo; worship expected.

Given this disparity of opinion over the relationship between the Old Testament Sabbath and Christian worship, it is no surprise that Wright expressed such pessimism about the

future of Sunday Sabbath observance. Few have hope that it will be renewed. I'm one of those few. The Puritans managed, through the faithful preaching of the Word of God and the beauty of transformed lives, to create a national consensus that favored Sunday Sabbath observance. If God could accomplish this through them, then He can do the same thing through His Church today; particularly if, in our presentation of the case for the Lord's Day, we show its beauty, integrity, and delight.

This book is one small effort to accomplish that task. It does not pretend to be a thorough treatment of the issues surrounding the observance of the Lord's Day. It does not deal with all the relevant biblical texts. It does not deal with all the counter arguments. What it does do is reflect on the beauty of the Sabbath particularly in light of the books of Isaiah and Mark. Why these books? Because I have been preaching on the Gospel of Mark, and Mark depends heavily upon Isaiah for his presentation of the good news about Jesus Christ. Often overlooked because of its relative brevity, the Gospel of Mark is a treasure trove of wisdom and instruction for us as the people of God. Not only does Mark give us a vivid portrayal of the life of our Lord, he repeatedly relates his story back to the expectation for a new exodus proclaimed by Isaiah.² In so doing, he shows us how to read and apply the Old Testament in our own day.

Keep Justice

Given the diversity of opinion over the relationship between the Old Testament Sabbath and the Lord's Day, why do I maintain that the Old Testament Sabbath is still binding but has undergone a transformation in the Christian era? It will be helpful to answer this question in two parts. Let us first answer the question

²See Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

of the binding nature of the Sabbath and then, in the next chapter, look at why it has been changed to the Lord's Day.

Let's begin with the first question: is weekly Sabbath observance still required of the people of God? Or, stated another way, did God intend for the Sabbath to be a perpetual (continuing) ordinance? To answer this question, it will be helpful to consider Isaiah 56:1–8. Isaiah reveals a number of things about the nature of the Sabbath that will help us to answer our question and understand why the Sabbath command is still binding today.

¹Thus says the Lord:

“Keep justice, and do righteousness,
For My salvation is about to come,
And My righteousness to be revealed.

²Blessed is the man who does this,
And the son of man who lays hold on it;
Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
And keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

³Do not let the son of the foreigner
Who has joined himself to the Lord
Speak, saying,

“The Lord has utterly separated me from His people”;
Nor let the eunuch say,
“Here I am, a dry tree.”

⁴For thus says the Lord:

“To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths,
And choose what pleases Me,
And hold fast My covenant,

⁵Even to them I will give in My house
And within My walls a place and a name
Better than that of sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
That shall not be cut off.

“Also the sons of the foreigner
 Who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him,
 And to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants—
 Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
 And holds fast My covenant—
⁷Even them I will bring to My holy mountain,
 And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
 Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
 Will be accepted on My altar;
 For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”
⁸The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,
 “Yet I will gather to him
 Others besides those who are gathered to him.” (Is. 56:1–8)

In this passage God is issuing a two-fold command to the people of Israel in light of His promise to deliver them from exile: “Keep justice, and do righteousness” (v. 1). These two basic commands are repeated in different ways throughout the text. For example, in verse 2 we are told, “Blessed is the man who does this.” What is “this”? Keeping justice and doing righteousness. “And the son of man who lays hold on it.” What is “it”? Again, keeping justice and doing righteousness. Then notice, in Hebrew parallelism, the way that God restates “keeping justice and doing righteousness” at the end of the verse:

Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,
 And keeps his hand from doing any evil.

According to this parallel, keeping justice means keeping the Sabbath and doing righteousness means keeping one’s hand from doing evil. This parallel is repeated throughout verses 1–8. In verse 4 God makes a promise to the eunuchs who (1) “keep My Sabbaths” and (2) “choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant.” Again we read in verse 6 that God promises to bless the foreigner who (1) “keeps from defiling the Sabbath”

and (2) “holds fast My covenant.” Isaiah makes quite clear that “keeping justice” is the equivalent of “keeping the Sabbath.”

It may strike us as a bit odd that Isaiah connects the Sabbath with the preservation of justice. But this reveals how out of touch we are with the Sabbath legislation in the Old Testament and how individualistic we are in the way we approach the law—reading it only in light of our own individual lives and not also in light of the broader societal impact that God’s laws have. For if we go back to the law, we soon discover that the Sabbath was intimately connected with the preservation of justice in Israel. In particular, the Sabbath was instituted for the benefit of those who could be most easily exploited in society: servants, slaves, and immigrants—in other words, the poor and needy.

We read, for instance, in Exodus 23:12:

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, *that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.*

Likewise the second giving of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy states the reason for the Sabbath command as follows:

¹²Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: *you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.* ¹⁵And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut. 5:12–15)