

God's Memorial Day

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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It is possible that the teaching presented here is new to someone listening today. You are invited to test all things by Scripture, and see whether these things be so. Acts 17:11. Next Monday, here in America we will observe what is called "Memorial Day."

Perhaps it is true, as has been noted (See www.memorialday.org), that "traditional observance of Memorial Day has diminished over the years. Many Americans nowadays have forgotten the meaning and traditions of Memorial Day. At many cemeteries, the graves of the fallen are increasingly ignored, neglected." For some Americans today, Memorial Day has become a convenient three-day weekend to go camping or enjoy that first outing at the beach. Have a picnic; corn on the cob and watermelon. Watch a car race on TV.

The roots of Memorial Day go back to the conclusion of the American Civil War. Many are the towns and cities which lay claim to having been the first to honor the fallen in the effort to save the Union. Waterloo, New York, was officially proclaimed by President Lyndon Johnson in May of 1966 as the birthplace of Memorial Day.

It was designed as a day for reconciliation at the close of a bloody battle whose objective was division. In his General order number 11, on May 5, 1868, General John Logan, national commander of the Grand Army of the Republic proclaimed the first Memorial Day which was observed May 30th of that year. Flowers were placed on the graves of Union as well as Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. The state of New York officially recognized Memorial Day in 1873 and by 1890 it was honored by all the northern states. The South refused to acknowledge the day, instead honoring their dead on a variety of different days until the close of World War I, when the holiday was changed from honoring just those who died in the Civil War to honoring Americans who died fighting in any war. Although originally designated as May 30 of each year, Congress passed the National Holiday Act of 1971, making Memorial Day fall on the last Monday of May, thus ensuring a three-day weekend. There is currently a drive to restore the holiday to its original date of May 30.

It is appropriate to reflect on the sacrifices which gave us and preserved our freedoms. Freedom isn't free, as someone well noted. Living in a country which allows freedom of worship, as well as many other freedoms is a luxury not afforded to many in today's world. We should be grateful to those whose blood was spilled allowing this to be. It is appropriate to be reminded of what it cost to have a country in which such blessings are enjoyed. Recognition of those blessings, as long as it

doesn't conflict with the teachings of God's Word, is fitting for the Christian, who realizes that all power comes from God. We have much for which to be grateful living in this country. So I invite you to remember and reflect. Fly a flag if you have one.

God's counsel to His people as they emerged from Egypt and began the trek toward the Promised Land, was to remember the evidences of His goodness and leadership. Israel was taught, "Hear, O Israel; The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

In other words, the people were invited to think about God and His ways throughout the day. Parents were encouraged to find ways to teach their children, in whatever activity they might be engaged, lessons of God. They were advised to take the "everyday" and find a lesson of the "sacred." With that spirit and from that perspective, I invite you to consider "God's Memorial Day." Yes, by all means come Monday, give attention to the legacy of the past and be thankful for the blood of those who gave all to bequeath to you a land of opportunity. But let your mind go beyond our national Memorial Day and find in it an illustration of God's Memorial Day.

Is it important to God that we "remember"? Quite obviously! He knows how prone we are to forgetting. The very journey of Israel from Egypt to Canaan is "exhibit A" to that process. Instead of constantly reminding themselves of His blessings as they were counseled to do by Moses, they "soon forgot His works. They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt." Psalm 106:13, 21. We should always be mindful of the things God has done for us and the blessings He has given us, "lest we forget."

But is there a more specific understanding of the Memorial Day of God? Yes, there is.

There is one day above all others which is a day of remembrance appointed by God Himself. God entrusted the writing of His Word to prophets and seers, but He Himself spoke, He Himself wrote with His own finger the Ten Commandments. In the very bosom of the Decalogue we find God's Memorial Day. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but 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 manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8-11.

This is the commandment which identifies the Author of this law. It is the LORD, "Yahweh," a name taken from the Hebrew verb "to be;" the "One Who is; the One Who causes to be." This is the commandment which has more words than any other. I took the time to count the words in the Ten Commandments and found them to be, in my New King James translation, 297 words. I

wanted to find out what was the middle word of the Decalogue. The 149th word of the Ten Commandments would have 148 words before it, and 148 words after it. It would be the middle word. What is the 149th word in the Ten Commandments? Shall I tell you what I found? The 149th word is the word "Sabbath." "The Sabbath" (as counted out in the NKJV) is literally the heart of the Ten Commandments.

This is the commandment which contains more information on God's plan of salvation than any other, as we'll discuss later. This is the commandment which begins with the word "Remember." It is the commandment which most of the Christian world has forgotten. The Sabbath is God's Memorial Day.

Let us reflect on the beauty and purpose of this divine institution. It was established by God Himself as He concluded the work of creation. The roots of the Sabbath take us back to the very beginning of life on this planet. "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done and He rested (Hebrew *Shabbat*) on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 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 2:1-3. Question: how many Jews were alive when God made the Sabbath? None. The name "Jew" is derived from "Judah," one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Judah wasn't born till some 23 centuries after creation. The Record is clear that the establishment of the Sabbath predates the Jewish race by millennia. It is not a "Jewish" institution. Jesus explained its origin with the words, "The Sabbath was made for man (mankind; not one specific race)." Mark 2:27.

What was the purpose of the Sabbath as instituted by God? Did He need to rest? Was He, the Omnipotent One, tired by His work? A careful look at the meaning of the word "Sabbath" will shed light on this question. *Shabbat* in Hebrew has as its first meaning "to cease; to stop." A "Sabbath" is a cessation. We are being told that God's work came to a completion; a point of finality. He had not run out of energy, but He came to a pause as He brought to a finish the creation of this world. We recognize that sometimes a pause is important and doesn't necessarily imply fatigue. In the construction of music, the "rests" can be as important as the playing of notes. We can "rest" at the completion of a project and enjoy the work of our hands, whether we are physically tired or not.

The concept of "rest" in Scripture is one of "fulfillment" and "peace." Let's look at a few instances in which this principle is highlighted. Following the Flood, before the New World was dry enough for Noah and his family to leave the ark, the patriarch "sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had abated from the face of the ground. But the dove found no resting place for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth." Genesis 8:8, 9 They had to remain in the ark a while longer till they could find "rest" in the "new" earth.

The "new world" of Canaan to which Israel journeyed was defined as its "rest." Before crossing Jordan, Israel was told, "as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the LORD

your God is giving you.” Deuteronomy 12:9. Joshua advised, “Remember the word which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, saying, ‘The LORD your God is giving you rest and is giving you this land.’” Joshua 1:13. The term “rest” was indicative of the completion of God’s plan in placing Israel within the borders of Canaan. The temple constructed by Solomon was, in a particular sense, to be a “house of rest for the ark of the covenant.” I Chronicles 28:2.

Conversely, the people were counseled that should they disobey the LORD and go into captivity they would forfeit this “rest.” If they worshiped idols, the LORD would “scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known--wood and stone. And among those nations you shall find no rest, nor shall the sole of your foot have a resting place; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, and anguish of soul.” Deuteronomy 28:64, 65. In Hebrews 4, the author refers to the future rest of the redeemed in Heaven’s Canaan.

The institution of marriage was considered a state of “rest.” After the death of her two sons, Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, “the LORD grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.” Ruth 1:9.

So, the “rest” signified the fulfillment and peace experienced, whether in Canaan, in the final resting place of the ark in the temple or as a couple in marriage. This rest was given by a loving Creator God Who designed a perfect world. In the perfect world He had made He placed two beings, Adam and Eve, who shared the peace and fulfillment He provided in a new world, an Edenic “Canaan;” in the garden “sanctuary;” in their marital relationship of “rest.” All of these contributed to their rest and tranquility in their loving relationship with Him. Their first full day of life was spent in the Sabbath rest, touching on all these beautiful components. What could be better than that?

This beautiful scene was interrupted by an arch-deceiver who promoted the idea that a higher estate could be achieved by removing themselves from a relationship with a loving Creator; by disobeying His beneficent command. Things changed, drastically. Absolute harmony and peace were replaced by guilt, shame and fear. Limitless life was replaced by the prospect of death.

But some things didn’t change. The character of our loving God didn’t change. His purpose in the marital bond as a source of unity and strength didn’t change. His purpose in the day of rest, the Sabbath, didn’t change. Here’s something to consider: We are justified in expressing outrage at the current attempts to undermine the institution of marriage, by the attempts made to equate same-sex union with the divinely ordained institution of marriage. How can this be? we rightly reason. It is the perversion of something made by God Himself. Who on earth has the right to do that? No one.

Take the next step, then. Marriage was one of two institutions made by God in Eden.

The other was the Sabbath. It was the Lord Who rested, blessed and sanctified the seventh day as holy to Himself. It is not “my” Sabbath. It is His Sabbath. It is the “Sabbath of the Lord.” Who has

authority to tamper with this divine institution which dates back to the very origins of this earth? No one. Mortal man has no more right to tamper with the “day of rest,” the Sabbath, than he does the “bond of rest,” marriage. Both were made by God.

In fact, we would point out, as important as the institution of marriage is, its sanctify being preserve by the seventh commandment, if anything, it is outshone by the fourth commandment, both in position and in length.

There’s a good reason why God began the fourth commandment with the word “remember.” He knew humans would be prone to forget. Our world has forgotten many of the principles taught by the Sabbath. The first and most obvious one being the creatorship of the eternal God. We did not emerge from primordial ooze; we are the engineered result of a Master Designer. If the Sabbath had been faithfully kept through the centuries the theory of evolution would never have gained traction.

The Sabbath reminds us that we’re saved by grace and not works. Through true Sabbath-keeping, we “rest” in His salvation and from our own attempts to earn favor with Him through our own efforts. True Sabbath-keeping could never be legalism! It teaches us that we can’t work our way to heaven. We can only fall on His mercy and allow Him to save us.

True Sabbath-keeping teaches us that it is God Who sanctifies us. Just as He took a world without form and void and exercised His creative power day by day, so He changes us by His power into a new life. All these are powerful lessons of godliness.

Through the influence of Satan, mankind has to a large degree lost sight of God’s holy day. Satan’s strategy began as soon as the Sabbath was given. Through most of the 4,000 years of the Old Testament, he concentrated on inducing God’s people to disregard the day of remembrance. The result was the removal of God’s blessing and national captivity. When they returned from Babylon, the people committed themselves to Sabbath-keeping. Now Satan’s strategy changed, influencing leaders to heap upon the Sabbath rigorous and meaningless proscriptions, thus obscuring the beauty and significance of God’s holy day. Meaningful relationship was replaced by multitudinous requirements.

Satan’s objective was two-fold. He desired that the central lesson of the Sabbath be lost, as well as preparing the way for the rejection of the Messiah. Think of this: even as God sent His message through the spokesman John the Baptist to “prepare the way” for the reception of the Messiah, so Satan sent his message through his spokesmen, deceived Jewish leaders, to “prepare the way” for the rejection of the Messiah, by all the superfluous rules added by man.

When Jesus came and attempted to bring Sabbath reform, a return to the true meaning and message of the holy day, many were led to reject Him as one who was a lawbreaker; that is, one who broke the (added) rules imposed by human hand. Think of the numerous incidences in the Gospels in which the Sabbath was at issue. How many times did Jesus heal someone on the Sabbath? Was this an accident? Was this mere coincidence? No. It was the design of the master

strategist, Lucifer. Did Jesus do away with the Sabbath? Not at all! He restored it to its rightful place. He dusted from it the debris which had piled upon it by deceived minds.

Satan then launched another attack in the early centuries of the Christian era, causing well-meaning men and church leaders to erect a false Sabbath, constructed on the faulty foundation of human wisdom. The pen of the Papacy struck through the precepts of the fourth commandment and replaced it with an institution of its own making, the day ascribed to the worship of the sun, one of the ordinary days of labor according to the Word of God.

One may say, "Well, I have received Christ as my Savior and had found my soul's rest in Him. Therefore I am free from obeying the commandment literally and can choose any time of the week to worship." Is this reasoning biblical? What does the Word teach us? What if Noah said, "I appreciate what You're telling me, Lord, about a coming Flood, but I don't think I'll literally build a boat"? What if an Israelite father told his first born son, "The Lord has instructed us to slay a lamb, but I don't think I'll bother to literally put the blood on the doorposts"? What if Rahab of Jericho said to the Hebrew spies, "Thanks for telling me about God and salvation, but I don't think I'll bother to literally hang a scarlet rope from my window"?

Can we safely take that approach to something God wrote with His own finger in stone and began with the word, "Remember"? No! How dare we think that disobedience to such a simple, wise, beneficial and express command of the Lord could be excusable! Just because centuries have gone by since papal authority attempted such a change; just because nearly all the Christian world follow her lead in this will not provide an excuse for anyone on the day of judgment.

Revelation's last warning message is a call to return to the worship of the Creator God, the One Who made us, the One Who saved us. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth--to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people--saying with a loud voice, 'Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him Who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.'" Revelation 14:6, 7.

Earlier this year we scheduled a Gospel concert at our church. We placed ads in the newspaper and announcements in the local church bulletins. I sent an e-mail to the vocalist a week or so in advance, just to confirm the details. Almost immediately I received a telephone call from him, pointing out that I had the date wrong. The concert was the following Saturday night, not the one I had announced. I didn't want to embarrass him on the phone; I knew I was right. I figured I could go back to our previous emails, find the original communication in which we laid plans, then forward that back to him and correct his error. I was sure I was right. Guess what? When I went back, I found out I was wrong! I had the wrong day!

We respectfully request that all those who love God; all those who accept Him as their Creator and Redeemer, go back to the "original communication" (the Bible) and prayerfully research the question. Make sure you have the right day! If someone handed you a copy of a "revised" United

States Constitution, would you accept it? If God instituted the Sabbath in Eden; if God wrote it as part of the Ten Commandments; if He is calling us back today to obedience as an expression of our loyalty and allegiance, should we not obey?

Our American Memorial Day holiday was about relationship; healing and reconciliation following a divisive event. Even though the Sabbath was instituted prior to mankind's fall, God would use it as a tool today to effect healing and restoration. It is all about time being used to bring about a better relationship between Him and us.

The Sabbath is a day that reminds us that He made us. It is a day that reminds us that He is saving us. It is a day that reminds us that there is an eternal "rest" in the Heavenly Canaan, when we'll feast at the marriage supper of the Lamb, when the Lord Himself will "rest in His love" and rejoice over us with singing. Zephaniah 3:17. It is one of God's greatest gifts. It is God's Memorial Day.