

The Sabbath

Our Lord has always been concerned about how His people spend their time. His first requirement was that Adam and Eve and their descendants should “dress and keep the garden” (Gen 2:15 – 17), and then cease from their labors on the seventh day of every week. 2500 years later Sinai, He embedded His Sabbath legislation in the heart of the Decalogue (Ex 20:8-11), and again declared it binding on every living soul. Through 6000 years of human history the weekly cycle has been altered (cf. Matt 5:17-19)

For 4000 years and in unbroken succession, the Jews and their ancestors have observed the Sabbath on Saturday, the seventh day of the week, in conformity to the requirement of the Decalogue. When Constantine signed a decree to honor the first day of the week as “the venerable day of the sun” in 321AD, it was the result of 180 years of controversy on the celebration of the Pasch (Passover) on Nisan 14 or on the following Sunday, and the desire of Quartodecimans (Christians who insisted on keeping specific days) to separate themselves from the persecuting Jews. Professed Christians who claim to observe the first day of the week in honor of the resurrection of Christ tacitly confirm that the day before in the seventh day. And if Sunday is the first day of the week, we can rest assured that Saturday the seventh is the Sabbath, and “remains” the day which its Lord requires all mankind to observe (Mark 2:27, 28 & cf Heb4:9-12)

Sabbath is a transliterated Hebrew word. There are biblical terms that have no known meanings, such as cherubim, amen, selah, Urim and Thummim and many others, including the word Sabbath. It would seem that God wanted us to search and use long phrases in their descriptions to express their full meanings.

Grammarians and lexicographers have given up on the translation of word Sabbath, and say that it simply means ‘rest’. Of course, this is true of the result of Sabbath keeping, but does not give the etymology of the term. While Seventh-day Adventist were discovering the peace and joy of the true Sabbath rest in the early and middle 1800’s, Robert Cox, an Edinburgh, England attorney, spent his lifetime collecting books and pamphlets on the Sabbath, although it appears he never was an observer of the seventh day. He published a two-volume work, ‘the Literature of the Sabbath Question’. In this work he covers every important statement made by the church fathers and the Jews, and he included the early church historians. He also wrote a book covering the same subject as related by reformers during the ‘dark ages’.

In his monograph, “Septenary Institutions”. Cox included several of the suggestions which have been made to provide an etymology (the history of a work as shown by breaking it down into basic elements or by tracing it back to its earliest known form and indicating its changing in form and meaning for the Hebrew word, Sabbath.

In the Hebrew triliteral, s, b, and th which forms Sabbath, the b is doubled by the degesh. Cox suggested that Sabbath consists of two syllables, sab and bath, and then proceeded to analyze them. Sab has ab, the Hebrew for Father (cf abbot and abbey) at its heart. The prefix s, an abbreviation of the Hebrew ish, meaning man or manly in the qualitative and

not the gender sense, a word with a meaning similar to that of latin sahib, (respectful sir). This syllable, sab, has the meaning ‘respectful father’, ‘reverend Father’ of some such equivalent.

The second syllable of the Sabbath, bath, consists of the Hebrew prefix b, which means in or at, and the Hebrew word oth (in some combinations ath or eth) meaning a sign. Together they designate a house of a resting place, as in Bath-sheba, “At the house-of-an-oath”, or Elise-beth, “God-is-the- oath-of-her-house”, of Beth-lehem, “At-the-sign-of-the-house-of-bread”. Cox’s definition is that Sabbath may mean an equivalent of, “at the sign (or resting place) of the Reverend Father”. This certainly fits well with Scripture – “is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the Lord the does sanctify you” (Ex 31:13,17; cf Ezek 20:12,20). The etymology certainly explains why there has been such an incredible satanic attack on our “Lord’s Day”, and why we see it as a last day trail; for it deals with the root of worship and relationship with our Lord.