

# The 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Creation

## Why is the 7<sup>th</sup> day so important to Jews and Christians?

In **Hebrews 4:4**, the author of Hebrews writes, “For somewhere he has spoken about **the seventh day** in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’”

So here’s a New Testament scripture that takes us all the way back to the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation. And why would it do that? Because, **verse 10**, whatever that rest was that God took on the 7<sup>th</sup> day is something **we** can experience too, “for **anyone who enters God’s rest** also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.”

**The 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation, therefore, is an open invitation to humanity to join God in his rest.** The Israelites, however, never understood what that meant so they never got to experience it. Does that really matter, though? Well, it certainly mattered to the author of Hebrews, because to Christians he writes in **verse 1**: “Therefore, since **the promise of entering his rest still stands**, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For **we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did**, but the message they heard was of **no value to them**, because those who heard it **did not combine it with faith.**”

There are several points in that verse meant for Christians to understand:

- 1) First of all, that the rest God took on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation is **still open** to humanity, so it’s something we can still enter today.
- 2) Secondly, that the rest God took on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation is, in fact, **the gospel**, and that gospel has never changed. It’s the same message for us today as it was for the Israelites.
- 3) Thirdly, that the rest God took on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation was “**of no value**” to **the Israelites** because they didn’t “combine it with faith.”

Clearly, then, the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation is still enormously important. And the Israelites NOT recognizing that fact is ALSO of enormous importance to us Christians. But why?

**Hebrews 3** fills in that part for us, because it shows us what God was up to with Israel. He was taking them to a Promised Land and all they had to do was trust him. To prove their trust they were given a “**time of testing in the desert**,” **verse 8**, which was tough going for them but, **verse 9**, “for forty years (they) saw what I (God) did.” God demonstrated time and time again that he could be trusted to see them safely through. The Israelites, however, “hardened their hearts” against him (verse 8).

And why was that? Because of “sin’s deceitfulness,” **verse 13**. It created “a sinful, **unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God,**” **verse 12**. Despite all God’s miracles proving his love and care for them, “**Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways,**” **verse 10**. They never trusted him. But this is what sin does, just as it did to Adam and Eve. It took the Israelites’ eyes off God, off his purpose for them, off the way he was going about fulfilling his purpose, and off the obvious miracles that **proved** he was fulfilling his purpose for them.

And that made God angry, **verse 11** - “**So I declared an oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’**” Now that’s interesting, that the greatest expression of God’s anger was preventing Israel from entering his rest. It shows how important that rest was. It also shows what happens to people who are given a chance to enter God’s rest but stubbornly refuse to “**hold firmly (to God) till the end,**” **verse 14**. NO TRUST, NO REST. And that, **chapter 4:3**, is the key message for CHRISTIANS too, because “**we WHO HAVE BELIEVED enter that rest.**” We’ve also been given the chance to enter God’s 7<sup>th</sup> day rest, and **belief is still the key to entering it**. But belief in what exactly? It’s belief (verse 3) that “**his work has been finished since the creation of the world.**”

That’s an amazing statement that, understandably, takes some believing, because it’s saying God completed all that needed to be done by the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation. That’s why he rested. And all we need do to join him in that rest of his is to believe his work is completed and to hang on to that belief “firmly till the end.” It won’t be easy because we learn from Israel that a heart can be hardened by sin to lose confidence in God’s completed work, so it takes “**effort to enter that rest,**” **verse 11**. What effort? Making sure we’re resting as God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, **verse 10**, “**for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.**” In other words, don’t add any work of our own to God’s completed work. To insist on some work of our own to enter God’s rest is just plain “**disobedience,**” **verses 6 and 11**.

**The gospel, therefore, is about entering God’s rest through faith in God’s completed work on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation.** And that takes us back to **Genesis 2:2-3** where the story of the 7<sup>th</sup> day begins: “**By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing, so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.**”

Three things we learn from these verses - that:

- 1) The 7<sup>th</sup> day was the only day in all seven days that was “holy.”
- 2) The 7<sup>th</sup> day was holy because that’s when God’s work of creation was finished.
- 3) The 7<sup>th</sup> day was also the only day without an “evening and a morning.”

Put them all together and the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation takes on enormous importance. It’s THE most holy day of all time because that’s the day God finished his work of creation, AND it’s a day that never ends.

The 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation, therefore, is an ETERNAL rest, as we also see in **Genesis 3:22** when God says that man “**must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.**” So right there in the Garden of Eden humanity could have lived forever. If Adam and Eve had trusted God and not eaten the forbidden fruit, they could have eaten off the Tree of Life instead and entered God’s unending 7<sup>th</sup> day of rest right there and then. But to enter that rest they had to trust him, just as Israel had to trust him. Trust was the key.

And further proof that the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation rest is eternal is that “**the promise of entering his rest still stands,**” **Hebrew 4:1**. Just because Adam and Eve and Israel all failed the test of trust it doesn’t mean the 7<sup>th</sup> day rest came to an end. Nor was it completed at any time in history either, **verses 8-9**, “**For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, therefore, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.**” In other words, God’s eternal Sabbath-rest on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation is still open. It wasn’t a ‘one-day-wonder’ that ended at sunset that first Saturday. Instead it marked the beginning of God’s unending rest. And the remainder of the Bible AFTER that is the story of human beings either entering God’s eternal rest or failing to enter it, depending on whether they trusted God or not.

The best example of that, of course, is Israel, and especially the time God introduced a “SABBATH DAY” on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week to them.

The story begins when Israel is just 6 weeks out of Egypt and they’ve already had enough of Moses, accusing him of deliberately starving them to death. So God says to Moses in **Exodus 16:4-6** “**I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.’** So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, ‘In the evening you will know that it was the Lord who brought you out of Egypt...’”

Through this little test of obedience the Israelites would be left in no doubt that God himself had rescued them from Egypt. So, **verses 21-25**, “**each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much - two omers for each person - and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses.**” Now comes the important bit, because Moses then says to them, “**This is what the Lord commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’**”

They followed instructions and “**saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. ‘Eat it today,’** Moses said, ‘**because today is a Sabbath to the Lord.**’” And so, **verse 30**, “**the people rested on the seventh day.**”

And for the next 40 years “the Israelites ate manna,” **verse 35**, which provided for their needs perfectly “until they reached the border of Canaan.” Every Sabbath Day for the next 40 years, therefore, the Israelites had their proof that God would take care of them **for nothing more on their part than trusting him**. It was a marvelous picture of the rest God opened up on the 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Creation and the means by which we enter it.

Then in **Exodus 31:12-13** God said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.’” And in **verse 16**, “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant,” and **verse 17**, “It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”

The Sabbaths were an everlasting covenant between God and Israel in memory of God resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation. And why did God make such a covenant with them? **Verse 13**, “so that you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy.” The purpose for Israel observing Sabbaths was to remind them that **GOD was making them holy**. This was what resting on the Sabbath every week told them, that **there was nothing they need do but simply trust God to provide**. He’d done it already with the manna, and now he’d do it again with their holiness. And note that it wasn’t keeping the Sabbath Day that made them holy, it was GOD who made them holy, which is what RESTING on the Sabbath Day was to remind them of, to trust God and let him provide.

Unfortunately, they didn’t trust God to provide. But God hasn’t forgotten his covenant to make them holy, **Romans 11:26-27** - “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’” That’s why the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath is so important to Jews because it’s the sign of THEIR covenant with God that he will deliver and save THEM.

But that’s NOT the sign for Christians and it was never meant to be, **Ephesians 2:12**, because as “Gentiles by birth” (verse 11) we are “excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise.” The covenants and promises given to Israel were never meant for us, so they aren’t the sign that Christians look to for THEIR salvation. “BUT NOW IN CHRIST JESUS,” **verse 13**, “you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”

That’s the sign of OUR salvation, it’s the blood of Christ. It’s “IN HIM,” **Ephesians 1:7**, “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.” The Jews, however, stumble over Jesus Christ, so their lifeline to God in the meantime is still the Sabbath Day - “UNTIL,” **Romans 11:25**, “the full number of the Gentiles has come in.”

God hasn't rejected Israel (verses 1-2) and he still loves them (verse 28) but, **verse 11**, "because of their transgression, **salvation has come to the Gentiles** to make Israel **envious.**" God is now using Gentiles to reach his beloved Israel. How? **Romans 9:30-33** - "What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, **who did not pursue righteousness**, have obtained it, a righteousness that is **by faith**; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the 'stumbling stone.' As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and **the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.**'"

God has Gentiles trusting in Jesus Christ for their salvation and righteousness, and that makes Israel jealous because, **verse 4**, "THEIRS is the adoption of sons; THEIRS the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises." Salvation was all theirs, but they "stumbled," and now they have to watch Gentiles "attaining" righteousness and salvation instead, because they do trust.

But here's the gospel message about entering God's rest BY TRUSTING. It's not by "pursuing a law of righteousness," it's "by faith." It's not by obedience to the law, it's by "trusting in him." It's not by any work of our own, it's by "resting from our own work, just as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:10). Israel never did understand that part though, even when they rested every week on the Sabbath Day, so they never entered that wonderful state of rest that God was offering them, based entirely on trust that HE would make them holy. Gentiles, however, DO understand that it's GOD who makes them holy, so they trust HIM to do it for them - which is exactly what keeping the Sabbath Day was supposed to teach Israel (Exodus 31:13), but they never got it.

So God gives them another chance to get it, this time through Gentiles who DO "know God's ways" (Hebrews 3:10). What "ways"? That God is asking nothing more of us than trust, based on the obvious fact in Scripture that God has already provided everything we need for salvation and holiness in his Son.

And why does God give Israel another chance through us Gentiles? Because he promised in Exodus 31 he would make Israel holy. But they never understood that holiness comes by trusting God to provide, so God has us Gentiles understand and believe it instead, to become effective instruments in God's hands for saving Israel.

"Effective" being the key word, because there's only one way of entering God's rest and that's by trusting, and there's only one group of people who can demonstrate trusting and that's Christians. But it takes "effort" to do that effectively (Hebrews 4:11) because we're surrounded by religious people who depend on works for their righteousness. So what effort is required of us to be effective? The same effort asked of Israel, that we "**hold firmly to the end**" to Jesus as our only means of entering God's rest. Because the clear message of the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation is that "**anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his**" (verse 10).

Any hint coming from Christians, then, that there's any kind of work we do that will make us more holy, is just plain wrong. And wrong for several reasons, because God elected us Gentiles:

- 1) To wake up his beloved Israel to what they fell short of when the gospel was preached to them, which was **lack of faith**, not more works (Hebrews 4:1-3).
- 2) To pursue righteousness purely **by faith in Jesus Christ**, not by any works or noble efforts of our own (Romans 9:30-33).
- 3) To believe that Christ is **the end of depending on the law** for righteousness (Romans 10:4).
- 4) To preach openly that **"Everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,'"** Romans 10:11-13. God's rest is open to anyone who **trusts in Christ** to save them, not in themselves or in their own works.

Does keeping a Sabbath Day remind us of all this? No, because keeping the Sabbath Day didn't work for Israel, did it? All that physical resting from their work still didn't get the message across that trust is the key to entering God's rest. Instead they ended up trusting IN THE DAY for their righteousness, and so much so that even when Jesus turned up in person, they didn't look TO HIM as their Saviour, they looked to the law.

That's why it's so important that Christians don't place any importance on a Sabbath Day, because the reason God calls us Gentiles is to show his beloved Jews that entering God's eternal rest is based purely on faith in Jesus Christ making us holy, not in a day (or any other work we perform) making us holy.

But what do we Christians do instead? We make Sunday a Sabbath Day, or say Saturday is still a Sabbath Day for Christians, and make those DAYS seem holy and even necessary for holiness. But that's no help to the people God called us Gentiles to reach because we're only reinforcing the idea in Jewish heads that A DAY OF THE WEEK is still important. It's not. The only day of any importance to all humanity is the 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Creation, God's eternal rest. And the only way we enter that rest is by faith in the one who made that eternal rest possible for us in the first place, Jesus Christ.

That's why, **Hebrews 3:7**, **"the Holy Spirit says: 'TODAY, if you hear his voice.'"** Following and trusting Jesus TODAY is the key - today or any day - because the eternal 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation is open TODAY to anyone on faith alone (Hebrews 4:3).

And the Jews need to see Christians believing that, because that's what God elected Christians for. Jews see that it doesn't matter to us Christians which day we meet on. It's far more important to us **why** we meet together. It's to "hear his voice," the voice of the one who promises to see us safely into God's eternal rest - that began and never ended on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of Creation - based entirely on faith in him.