

The Seventh Day Baptist Sabbath

What is this Sabbath Seventh Day Baptists observe?

Is the Seventh Day Baptist Sabbath God's seventh-day Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–15)? Do Seventh Day Baptists keep the *Sabbaths* described by God as "My Sabbaths" (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 19:3)?

Or is the Seventh Day Sabbath an example of the day described by God as "your Sabbaths" when the land did not have its rest (Leviticus 26:35)?

The difference between God saying "my Sabbaths" and God saying "your Sabbaths" completely changes the nature of the day.

When someone mentions sabbath-keeping, or, *Sabbath-ing*, we really need to know what they mean by that, because the quality or attributes they ascribe to Sabbath defines the nature of the entity. It's similar to the case of defining God. When Islam describes God, it describes a God who has quite different qualities to the God as defined by Christianity. Islam's god, therefore, is a different god to Christianity's God. So too, when people ascribe different characteristics or qualities to Sabbaths, then they are clearly talking about different things.

Last time we spoke, we hinted at this when we said that Christendom is generally confused about Sabbath. For there is an abundance of understandings and misunderstandings.

So, what is the nature of Seventh Day Baptist Sabbaths? And is it the same phenomena that God describes as when He says, "My Sabbaths" (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 19:3)?

The continuity of *Sabbath-ing*

Last time we spoke, we talked about the meaning of Hebrews 4:9, 10 within the context of Hebrews 4.

"So then, there remains a *Sabbath-ing* for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:9, 10).

We learned that *sabbath-ing* is described as a continuing experience. We learned that *sabbath-ing* remains, it is "left behind," within the New Covenant. Therefore, New Covenant *Sabbath-ing* retains its continuity and validity from the Old Covenant, just as the *Sabbath-ing* under the Old Covenant retained its meaning, continuity and validity from Creation. The argument of Hebrews 4 is that *Sabbath-ing* is a pointer to God's eternal rest, which has been available for people to enter since Creation. The strong implication of this passage is that the experience of *Sabbath-ing* informs us of the nature of God's rest.

So today, we will explore what the continuing experience of *Sabbath-ing* tells us about God's complete and total rest that He intends for you to have.

***Sabbath-ing* as refreshment**

So, let us begin by carefully thinking through today's key passage.

“So then, there remains a *Sabbath-ing* for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:9, 10).

The primary description of *Sabbath-ing* is as a “rest.” A “rest” from “works.” A rest from our works, which is motivated by God resting from His works.

There is no sense from this passage as to whether the works we are resting from is good or bad. Many people have read into this passage that the rest described here is a rest from “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19–21). Others have taken this passage to mean that there is a rest from “works of the law” (Romans 3:20). In this passage “works” are not being evaluated as good, bad or indifferent, because the primary works that our works are being compared to is God's good work in creation.

God created and intended humanity to work. For when humanity was first created,

“The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15).

The work described here was not laborious. It was not tedious. It was not burdensome. It was no punishment, but instead was a joy. It was a joy because God delegated to Man aspects of Himself. And God's work in creation was not laborious, it was not tedious, it was not burdensome, and certainly was no punishment. And yet God rested from His works. And scripture says that when God rested on the seventh day “He was refreshed” (Genesis 31:17).

So, no matter how good the works are from which we are resting, the intention of *sabbath-ing* is refreshment.

Resting from labour

After Man rebelled, the nature of Man's work changed. Man's work changed into something that requires “pain” in order to “eat” (Genesis 3:17). Man's work now required “the sweat of the brow” in order to “eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). Nature would now stand in opposition to Man's capacity to eat, for “thorns and thistles” would be brought forth by the ground (Genesis 3:19). The very ground from which Man was brought forth would stand against Him, creating pain and sweat, in order for Him to eat.

So, while quality of Man's labour changed significantly; the nature of *Sabbath-ing* did not change. The rest that was refreshing before Sin is even more refreshing now. The contrast between “work” and “rest” after Man's rebellion is greater than the contrast between “work” and “rest” as intended at creation.

So, when we reach the beginning of a Sabbath, we breathe a sigh of relief. For the work we do, no matter how appealing or unappealing, can be laid aside. Sabbath is intended to be a refreshing contrast.

When I was a boy growing up, my parents would often ask me whether I had completed all my homework. They wanted to know that my work was being done. So, I learned to love it when the sun went down on Friday, and I knew my parents wouldn't ask me about homework until at least sometime on Sunday morning. Sabbath was a relief and a delight, because I was able to lay aside my work.

Resting from ambition

Today's society celebrates achievement, possessions and success. Work is seen as an avenue to acquire capital, which, when wisely invested, makes one wealthy.

Last week, a man from the business below us in Balwyn drove to work a brand new Lamborghini. He parked the Lamborghini across two parking spaces in order to ensure no errant door would open and mark his new trophy. By driving to work his Lamborghini, he was signalling to the rest of us that he is successful; that he has achieved; that he is someone significant and special.

I'm sure you've heard of people selling the idea of "financial independence." There are many wealth creation courses that argue that "gaining financial independence" is an ultimate good. For when you have "financial independence," then you gain sovereignty and liberty over how you choose to spend your time.

What they are saying is that the way to reverse the curse is to become sovereign. They are saying, "You will be [sovereign] like God", "You will be [independent] like God. You know, I've heard that line somewhere before (see Genesis 3:5).

When you really think about what they're saying, they're really saying that you can reverse the curse—that you can enter the ultimate rest from "the sweat of the brow"—by gaining and acquiring wealth.

While the people spruiking this idea don't extend the thinking this far, what they're ultimately saying is that you can become independent by capturing the ability to command other people's "sweat." After all, in our society, that's what money does—it enables us to employ other people's "sweat" so that we may "eat." So, if you are "financially independent", you gain ultimate liberty by controlling other people's labour.

Do you notice that this is a subversion of what God offers? Today, God offers you rest, so long as you hear His voice, and respond in faith, and are obedient to Him. In Jesus we have dominion and sovereignty, an unburdening of our labours (Matthew 11:28); and in Jesus God truly reverses the curse. God reverses the curse in the Man who described Himself as "the Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8). Yet the world subverts this offer, and says, "No, the way to ultimate liberty is to control other people through your wealth, that you might eat sweat free." But Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Sabbath-ing reminds us that the striving for independence from God is what got us into this mess in the first place. Let us not seek liberty from God; let us seek liberty in God. Today, if we hear His voice, let us not harden our hearts, but respond in faith, belief, obedience.

Resting from greed

When people pursue wealth to achieve financial independence, they are often captured by the desire for money itself.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Money can become an end in itself. When it does, the desire for money enslaves the individual, and we call it greed. Greed, of course, is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). It is idolatry because it erects worship in the heart of Man which should be occupied by none other than God Himself.

Sabbath-ing calls us away from greed. It calls us away from the desire for independence from God. *Sabbath-ing* teaches us to look to God for liberty, freedom and redemption from the curse of sin and death.

Sabbath-ing is remembrance

Sabbath-ing is intended as a remembrance (Exodus 20:8–11; Deuteronomy 5:12–17). It is a remembrance of God. It is a remembrance that God is creator. It is a remembrance that God not only created, but He also rested. And not only did He create and rest, but He also redeemed. For by seeking independence from God, humanity became enslaved to self. But God reversed the curse, and liberated us from slavery. And so, *Sabbath-ing* is a remembrance not only of creation, but also of redemption.

Sabbath-ing is anticipation

Sabbath-ing is not only remembrance, but it is also anticipation. *Sabbath-ing* is anticipation of the eternal rest offered by God. In fact, Hebrews 4:9 uses the term *sabbath-ing* in order to describe what this rest from God is really like.

All the relief, the joy, the unburdening, the liberation that we actually experience by *sabbath-ing* is what is implied in this passage. By using the symbol *sabbath-ing* to describe the ultimate rest God offers, the author of Hebrews borrows from our experience of *sabbath-ing* to show us the qualities and nature of God's rest.

It's important to note that it is not the principle of Sabbath that teaches us about the quality of God's rest. Rather, it is the *sabbath-ing*, the on-going experience itself, that teaches us what we are anticipating.

Sabbath-ing is realised anticipation

But not only is *sabbath-ing* a looking forward to an eternal future, it is the window on the eternal present. For God does not promise us eternal life sometime in the future; He promises us that now (John 5:24). God does not promise His Presence sometime in the future; He promises us that now (Matthew 28:20; John 14:18; Hebrews 4:16). God does not promise us fellowship sometime in the future; He promises us that now (1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 John 1:9).

Is Sabbath a commandment?

So, why do we keep God's Sabbaths holy? And by "holy," we mean, separate, set apart.

Many Christians consider that Sabbath is a law that was kept under a different covenant in order to establish righteousness before God. They consider that we have been freed from this law by the covenant of grace, and therefore Sabbath is inapplicable to Christians today.

The quick answer is, "No, *something* is wrong about this assertion, because Hebrews 4:9, 10 says that *sabbath-ing* is left behind for the people of God." But how this fits with the rest of scripture requires a little more thinking. And we can do that.

When Israel camped before God at Mount Sinai, God said,

"If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples" (Exodus 19:5).

"If you will obey God's voice." Then scripture says,

"And God spoke all these words" (Exodus 20:1).

The "word" which God spoke said,

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep 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, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:8–11).

As Israel camped before God, they were consecrated and holy before Him, and God promised that if they heard His voice, then they would obey His covenant, and they would have no other gods before Him, and they would not make for themselves idols, and they would not take the LORD's Name in vain, and they would remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and they would honour their father and mother, and they would not murder, and they would not commit adultery, and they would not steal, and they would not bear false witness, and they would not covet their neighbour's belongings.

This is not described as law, or as a commandment. It is here described as God's voice, His word. Israel was actually hearing God's voice sound forth, and they were called to obey His voice.

But then Israel proved herself to be rebellious (see Exodus 32).

And so, when God spoke to a rebellious nation, He *then* gave Israel Sabbath as a command to be observed,

“Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. 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, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:12–17).

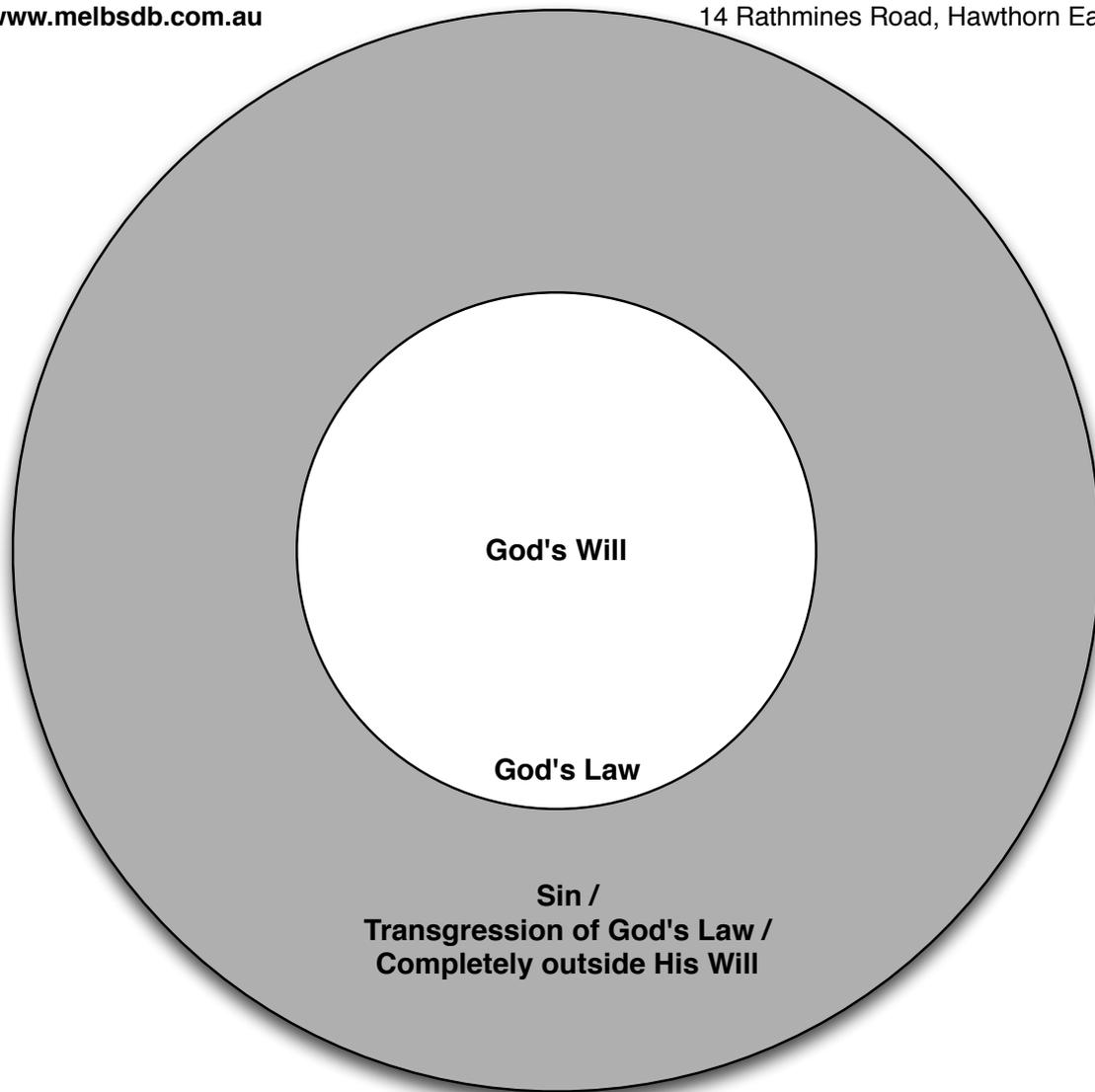
So, Sabbath was at first a word of God; and then, in the face of rebellion, it was presented as a commandment of God.

Let us understand what the Apostle Paul says about the law.

“Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine” (1 Timothy 1:8–10).

So, when Israel was rebellious, God called Sabbath a commandment. The law was given because of rebellion. Now, the law was consistent with God's will, but its enunciation as law was given because of rebellion.

This reminds us of the diagram we drew a number of months ago.



Mapping human behaviour against God's Will and His Law

If we're looking from the perspective of being a law-breaker, from a perspective of being outside of God's Will, then we perceive Sabbath as a commandment from God, as a law.

But if we're looking from the perspective of being a reborn child of God, as someone who listens to God's voice and obeys it out of desire and delight in the LORD, then we hear it as God's word to us. It is God's Will for us.

So, when people ask, "Aren't you liberated from the law?" You can answer, "I don't keep Sabbath as a commandment, I enjoy *sabbath-ing* because it is God's Will for us to do so."

After all, the whole point of the New Covenant is that God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10; Hebrews 10:9). The whole point of the New Covenant is that the people of God listen to God's voice and willingly obey it (Hebrews 8:10, 11).

And God will is that,

"There remains a *Sabbath-ing* for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:9, 10).

Is the Sabbath Jewish?

God's Sabbath is not the *Jewish* Sabbath.

The source of this question primarily stems from the Christian misconception that Sabbath is done away with under the New Covenant. We've already addressed this point. But there is also another sense in which God's Sabbath is not the Jewish Sabbath.

The Jewish Sabbath is bounded by rules and laws that spring from Jewish tradition. The Jewish Sabbath is way of keeping Sabbath prescribed the *halakhic* laws found in the Talmud. It was these traditions that Jesus disagreed with (Mark 7:8). It was because of these traditions that brought Jesus into conflict with the Pharisees over the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1–14; Luke 13:10–17; John 5:1–17; 7:22–24; 9:1–41).

Jesus disagreed, not only with the motivation for the Pharisaic traditions, but with who they were motivated by (John 8:39–41).

For those who listen to God's voice, knows that He gives Sabbath to be a blessing to Man, not a burden. Yet the Pharisees had created Sabbath as a burden. For them, the holiness of the day was found in a clutter of rules. For Jesus, the holiness of the day is found in hearing God's voice, and obeying it. For Jesus, the holiness of the day is found in coming face to face with the King of Glory. For Jesus, the holiness of the day is being filled with God's Spirit, and doing His Will.

Is the Sabbath a laissez-faire gift?

Some people argue that God made Sabbath as a gift for Man, and that it is up to Man to accept the gift or not—God doesn't mind or judge either way. "A gift," they say, "is only a gift if it comes with no strings attached."

Now, I can understand where this metaphor is coming from. But it really doesn't work at all. It doesn't work on the human level, nor does it work when applied to God. It doesn't work at the human level because gifts are frequently given with expectations. Who doesn't know of the experience of someone being insulted because you didn't treasure the gift they gave you? Just recently, the former parliamentarian, Peter Garrett, described receiving a "gift" from a union. He immediately returned the gift because he didn't want to be beholden to the giver. So, the notion of a "gift," as coming without any expectations is invalid on the human level.

An expectation-free gift is also invalid when applied to God. For salvation is described as a gift (Romans 5:15–17; 6:23), yet God holds people accountable for whether or not they accept it (Matthew 22:1–14).

But the fact of the matter is, while God blessed the Sabbath (Genesis 2:3), and created it for Man (Mark 2:27), nowhere is Sabbath described as a gift.

Jesus describes Himself as Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8), and Christians identify Jesus as Lord and God (Mark 16:19; John 20:28; Ephesians 4:4–6). For us to say, "God gave Sabbath to me, I can do with it as I please," is to disdain the true relationship

between ourselves and God. For God is without question our Lord and Master. We're not called into freedom *from* Jesus; we're called into the freedom *in* Jesus.

Is the Sabbath an end-time test of loyalty to God?

Seventh-day Adventists teach that the Sabbath is an end-time test of loyalty to God, and that on the question of the Sabbath the world will be divided into those who believe in God and those who reject Him. This particular interpretation of the Sabbath being a *special test* in the end times stems from Joseph Bates' particular reading of Revelation. Joseph Bates saw in Revelation the Millerite movement, the Advent movement, every reverse and twist and turn of his, James and Ellen White's movements. Joseph Bates read Revelation as a newspaper in which he found his own work and activity directly described. And Ellen White assumed this prophetic direction as her own, and it became baked into the Seventh-day Adventist psyche.

I'll say three things about this view.

Firstly, to believe this teaching requires belief in the Millerite experience as being inspired by God.

Secondly, what Joseph Bates called "present truth"—in other words, truth that God is now going to judge His people by (perhaps another word for the idea might be "testing truth")—has always been true. "Keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 14:12) was as valid a receipt of the word of God for the people who received the book of Revelation from the hand of the Apostle John as it is for us today. It didn't just start being true in 1844; and it won't be any truer anytime in the future.

Thirdly, this entire teaching is tinged with both fear and exclusivity. Fear, because of the threat of judgment; and exclusivity, because those who "keep the Sabbath" pride themselves as being the special and chosen people of God.

Clearly, when *sabbath-ing* is described as being available "Today" and defined as "whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his" cannot be describing the Seventh-day Adventist view of Sabbath. For there is no resting in Adventist Sabbatarianism; there is only keeping. There is no entrance into God's Presence; only a wistful and painful desire that one-day we might be with God.

The real Sabbath stands up

At the beginning of the previous message, I asked, "Will the real Sabbath please stand up."

I believe it has.

- For *sabbath-ing* is not the Jewish Sabbath, it is resting in God's *sabbaths*.
- For those who listen to God's voice, *sabbath-ing* is not given to us as law, but is revealed to us as God's Will?

- Sabbath was not abolished at the cross, its continuity and validity remains.
- Sabbath is not a work of the law, but is indeed the cessation of working.
- Sabbath is not a tiresome burden. For Jesus cleared aside the burdens that made Sabbath tiresome. Instead, Sabbath is a delight.
- Sabbath is not the plaything of man. Rather, it is our Lord Jesus Christ who is both Lord of the Sabbath and Lord of Mankind.
- Sabbath is not presented in the Bible as an end-time test of loyalty. It's validity and continuity, and its relationship with believers has not changed from the times of the first century through til now.
- *Sabbath-ing* in Hebrews 4:9, 10 is not explicitly about a freedom from works-righteousness. Seeing that meaning this passage is a reading of that meaning into the text that doesn't originally exist there. The cessation from works is not works righteousness, but from all works, good, bad or indifferent.
- And the *sabbath-ing* is given as a description of a current and continuing weekly experience which points to God's complete and total rest. It is not merely a principle that we have head knowledge but no experience of.
- *Sabbath-ing* contains the promise of an age in which we dwell in the Presence of God. But even better than that, it is also the revelation that that age intrudes on the present age, so that we may "taste the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" (Hebrews 6:5).
- *Sabbath-ing* is not a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. God created and blessed Sabbath for Man, and we have heard His voice.
- *Sabbath-ing* is a continuing experience, not an abstract principle.

Promises from God

I'd like us to finish by hearing the word of God.

"Thus says the Lord:

"Keep justice, and do righteousness,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my righteousness be revealed.
Blessed is the man who does this,
and the son of man who holds it fast,
who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it,
and keeps his hand from doing any evil."

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say,

"The Lord will surely separate me from his people";

and let not the eunuch say,

“Behold, I am a dry tree.”

For thus says the Lord:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,
I will give in my house and within my walls
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that shall not be cut off.

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
and holds fast my covenant—
these 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 peoples.”

The Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,

“I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered” (Isaiah 56:1–8).

“If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing your business on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honourable;
if you honour it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own business, or talking idly;
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13, 14).

References

This message is based on Hebrews 4:9, 10.