

Assembling on the Sabbath

Question:

Although the Bible recognizes Saturday as the true Sabbath, is there a specific command that says you have to attend church services on that day?

Our Answer:

The command to assemble on the Sabbath is supported by both God's direct instruction to His people and by the example of champions of faith in both the Old and New testaments. First, let us look at the specific law addressing the issue of assembling on God's Sabbath. In Leviticus 23: 3 God specifically commanded His people to gather on the Sabbath.

"Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; you shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings."

The Hebrew word for "convocations" in this passage is *miqra*. Literally translated it means "an assembly," "a calling together," "an appointed meeting," or "a rehearsal." At this point it is important to understand what *miqra* does not mean. *Miqra* does NOT mean "optional, but we wish you would come." It does NOT mean "a good idea if you don't have other plans." Furthermore, despite what many "theologians" may argue, *miqra* does NOT mean "a nice tradition, but not essential for salvation."

When God directed Moses to speak His words, He was not being vague. On the contrary, God was being very clear. He was commanding the children of Israel to assemble on the days He would choose. At no time did God ever invite the Israelites to create their own weekly Sabbath or annual Festivals. Furthermore, He has never extended such an invitation to this very day. Mankind has invented all kinds of religious holidays, but never with God's blessing.

The New Testament

The New Testament also enjoins the honoring of the fourth commandment. One example that illustrates this point is found in the gospel of Luke. When recounting the death of the Messiah and His internment in the tomb, Luke indicates that certain women who were close to Jesus honored the Sabbath command.

And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. (Lk. 23:56)

Notice that these loyal servants of the Messiah honored the Commandment to keep the Sabbath. Now although this verse doesn't specifically mention assembling on the Sabbath, it invokes a command that required a "holy convocation" (Lev. 23:3).

Furthermore, there is no evidence in the scriptures that suggest that assembling was no longer a part of the command. However, there is evidence that attending Sabbath services was enjoined in the New Testament. The book of Hebrews clearly admonishes Christians to assemble together with those of like minds.

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Heb. 10: 23-25)

Today, some believe that technology now makes it unnecessary to attend Sabbath services with fellow believers. After all, one can now watch messages over television, or listen to them on the Internet or via telephone links. But notice that the author of Hebrews does not say that hearing messages is the reason to assemble. The reason God's people are to come together is to strengthen each other and to "provoke one another to good works."

However, we at ***Blow the Trumpet*** do understand that under very unique circumstances it may be necessary to keep the Sabbath and Holy Days at home. However, we also believe this is one of the most abused practices in the church today. It is our belief that those who are called according to God's purpose do themselves and the scriptures great harm by refusing to attend services with their brethren.

Perhaps the most compelling argument for attending Sabbath services is that Jesus and the apostles honored the Sabbath this very way. Consider the following examples.

The Example of Jesus and His Disciples

Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. (Mark 1:21)

And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. (Mark 6:2)

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. (Luke 4:16)

Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. (Luke 6:6)

Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. (Luke 13:10)

The example of Paul

But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. (Acts 13:14)

So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. (Acts 13:42-44)

Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures. (Acts 17:1-2)

And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 18:4)

Other Examples

It is clear that God's people assembled on His Sabbath and holy days. This was generally done in the synagogue, but not exclusively there. As persecution against God's people began to grow, meetings often took place in other venues such as homes.

There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.
(Acts 20:8)

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house and received all who came to him. (Acts 28:30)

And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. (Acts 16:13)

Should God's people assemble on the Sabbath? The answer to that question seems very clear. God created the Sabbath for man to come before Him and learn His wisdom. That day connects God's human family to His spiritual Family. It is hard for us to imagine a better place to do that than with His people.