



## SHOULD WE KEEP THE SABBATH?

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When God revealed the 10 commandments for the children of Israel to keep, the fourth commandment was to “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.” Since that time, the Sabbath Day was viewed as the most significant day of the week by the Hebrews. Historically, one of the worst signs of spiritual apostasy and neglect was when God’s people would profane the Sabbath Day. Whenever a revival later took place, the Sabbath was restored to its rightful place in Jewish life. It was a serious thing to defile or neglect the Sabbath. The first time the word ‘sabbath’ is used in the Bible is in Exodus 16. This is where God was raining down manna in the Wilderness, and the people were told to gather it for bread to eat.

Moses told them beginning in verse 23, ***“And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that today; for today is a sabbath unto the Lord: today ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day.”***

Why was this day significant to them, and should it be significant to us? Our study today is this: "SHOULD WE KEEP THE SABBATH?"

There is no doubt that the seventh day of the week was set apart by God as a special day. To the Jew it was to be a day of rest and a day of corporate worship or as the Old Testament calls it a holy convocation. It was serious sin for God's people to disregard the Sabbath or to profane it by treating it as just any other day. God literally wrote it in stone along with nine other MORAL laws when He revealed the 10 commandments in Exodus 20... God said "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Exodus 20:8-11). In fact, in Exodus 31, God said a man who defiled the Sabbath Day was to be put to death. That tells us that the Sabbath was a holy day that was to be strictly kept and was central to the life of His people. But 3500 years after God gave that commandment, is the Sabbath to be a holy day to us -- or -- was it rather an Old Testament shadow of a better reality in the Lord Jesus?

Let me give you 2 passages of scripture to think about as we begin today: The first being Hebrews 8:3-6. The inspired writer says, "For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises." So, the Old Testament law with its ceremonies and sacrifices served as a mere shadow or a preview of what we now have in Christ Jesus. We now have a 'better covenant, established on BETTER promises.' Those things before were only a shadow.

Now then, in Colossians 2, the apostle Paul uses some similar language: In verse 14 he writes: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." Continuing in verse 16: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." So, Paul says the keeping of Sabbath days was merely a shadow of something better to come. Shadows are images that are created by light shining on a solid object. That causes a shadow to be cast onto the ground or on a wall. The shadow is not the substance; it's merely a vague picture of the substance. Paul says that the keeping of Sabbath days was a shadow or a picture of the substance, which is Christ and the salvation found in Him. The Sabbath isn't the substance; it was merely the picture or the preview of what was to come in Christ Jesus. Now, we'll talk

about that passage more in a few minutes... but the New Testament clearly shows that the Sabbath Day was a shadow of what was to come in Christ.

Where did the idea of keeping the seventh day as a Sabbath come from? It's important to see the development of the seventh day as a special day: The word Sabbath just means a cessation or a time of rest. God first established the seventh day of the week as His own day of rest in the creation. Genesis 2:1-3 says: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Now, there's no doubt that God made the 7<sup>th</sup> day a special day from the beginning. God established a principle that we identify with even now... and that is that the body needs a day of rest. But God is God, and God never sleeps nor slumbers, He is a spirit and not confined to time and space and the limitations of physical existence. God was establishing a precedent for man's own well-being: that a man physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually needs a time of rest and refreshment. Jesus later said in Mark 2:27, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath:" In other words, it was not originally designed as a day for a man to keep but rather as a day to keep the man.

Interestingly, did you know the only explanation for the arrangement of a seven-day week comes from the Bible record of creation? Think about it: there is absolutely NO basis in the lunar calendar for the week as we know it. Days are defined by one full revolution of the Earth upon its axis. Months are defined by the phases of the moon. And years are defined by the orbit of the Earth around the sun. But what is the basis of a week? In six days, God created the heavens and earth and rested on the seventh. And God sanctified the seventh day as a day of rest and rejuvenation. But it is not until the formation of the Hebrew people and their subsequent flight out of Egypt and their time in the wilderness that God enjoined the Sabbath upon the people as a religious observance. Isn't it interesting that we read nothing in the book of Genesis, which covers nearly 3,000 years of history about the Sabbath as a holy day or a day of religious observance? It was when God gave the law through Moses that the Sabbath became a day of worship and a day that was given spiritual significance. There is not one mention of mankind observing the Sabbath until mere weeks before the 10 commandments were given upon Mt. Sinai. When Moses later gave the law concerning Jewish holy days in Lev 23:3, he said "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings." The word 'convocation' means a public meeting or assembly. In other words, it wasn't until the law of Moses was given, that the Sabbath had any significance beyond being a day of physical rest for man's own good... When the law was revealed... the Sabbath became an appointed day of worship and a day to be kept sacred and holy and it was an identifying mark of the Jew who was faithful to God. But now, Paul said in Colossians 2:14, as we noted a moment ago... that the old law with its ceremonies and stipulations had been nailed to the cross. It was taken out of the way... And he says don't let any man judge you in meat, drink, or in respect of a holy day, the new moon, or of the sabbath days... he said 'those things were a shadow of things to come... but the body or the substance is Christ.'

Then later, in Hebrews 4, the Hebrew writer gives us a hint as to what the Sabbath was a shadow OF... Heb 4:3-11: "For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." So, the Hebrew scribe is telling us that the rest that God established for man on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the creation week was a foregleam or a shadow of the rest that we ultimately have in Christ Jesus and will enjoy eternally when the labor of life is over. So the keeping of the Sabbath day was a shadow and not the substance. It was given to the Jewish nation not the Christian church.

Now, there several arguments that people will try to make against that and I want to consider some of them with you:

First, some will say that when Paul said in Colossians 2 that the law of Moses was taken away and therefore, we aren't to be judged by the keeping of Sabbath Days; that those Sabbath days merely referred to special or yearly Sabbaths and not to the weekly observance of the Sabbath. Admittedly, there were what were called 'high Sabbaths' in the Old Testament. Not just Saturday! Again, the word sabbath itself doesn't mean seventh or Saturday. It means to rest or to cease. God declared that Saturday was to be a holy Sabbath for the Jews. But there were yearly Sabbaths, and this was the Passover Sabbath, which came each year. So, people who insist on keeping the Sabbath will argue that all Paul was referring to in Colossians 2:16 was these high or yearly Sabbaths that pertained to the ceremonial law as opposed to the moral law. Well, let's look again at Colossians 2:16. Paul names three things – three types of observances – and he says those things are not binding upon Christians today... holy days, the new moon, and the sabbath days. Well, what is a holy day referring to? Holy days were ANNUAL observances; they came each year. The new moon was a MONTHLY observance for it comes every 28-29 days. So, what category would Sabbaths fit into? Holy Days are yearly observances... new moons are monthly observances... the keeping of the Sabbath is a WEEKLY observance. Not only that, but in Romans 7, Paul is in a more sweeping, over-arching dissertation, showing that Christians are no longer under bondage to the law of Moses which brought death and condemnation but we enjoy liberty in Christ Jesus... and He was talking about the role of Mosaic law and said in verses 6-7: "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." So,

you see, the 10 commandments were also part of the law that Paul says we are delivered from... We now serve God according to a new and better way – the law of Christ Jesus.

Someone else will then argue: “But how can the law of the Sabbath be done away when God said it was to last forever?” Now this question arises from Exodus 31:16-17 “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.” That sounds as though the Sabbath Day was to be observed as long as the earth stands and time goes on. But notice that’s the only thing to which God attached the word ‘forever’. In Leviticus 16:34, God said the Day of Atonement with its animal sacrifice and the placing of sins upon the scapegoat – God said, “This shall be an EVERLASTING statute.” But no Christian today would think of sacrificing an animal. We understand that the figure has been fulfilled, and we now enjoy the real thing in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Then there’s the Passover. Exodus 12:14 calls that an “EVERLASTING ordinance. But believers in Jesus don’t keep the Passover today... because we understand what the New Testament means when it says that Christ is our Passover in 1 Corinthians 5:7. So all of these things in the Old Testament are spoken of as “everlasting, forever, and perpetual. You see, what the word ‘forever’ means is “continuously” and just as the Day of Atonement and the Passover were to be continually or perpetually kept until the death of Jesus and institution of the New Covenant. So it is with the Sabbath.

Third, some will argue that the Old Testament prophesied that the Gentiles would keep the Sabbath. Well, first, keep in mind that the Sabbath commandment included a provision for the “stranger who is within your gates.” (Exodus 20:10) It also made allowance for the stranger among them to keep the Passover and be circumcised (Exodus 12:48-49). Then in Isaiah 56 says that the mercy of God would even reach to Gentiles or to those who took hold of His covenant. He says it would extend to those who didn’t pollute His Sabbaths. God said He would bring them into His holy mountain, and they would come into the House of Prayer. But, my friend, if God is saying there that Gentile Christians would observe the Old Testament Sabbath today, then He is also saying they would literally offer sacrifices and burnt offerings in the New Testament church. Look at Isa 56:6-7. He says. “...everyone that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: **THEIR BURNT OFFERINGS AND THEIR SACRIFICES SHALL BE ACCEPTED UPON MINE ALTAR**; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.” You see, what proves too much doesn’t prove anything. So, if you have Sabbath Keeping for Gentiles in the church, you also have animal sacrifices for Gentiles in the church. If not, then why not?

Another might say – but didn’t Jesus honor the Sabbath? Didn’t Jesus go to the synagogue every Sabbath, according to Luke 4:16? Well, Jesus and His 12 disciples were Jews who all lived under the time of the Jewish law. That law, as Paul showed in Colossians 2, was not fulfilled and taken out of the way until Jesus died. Jesus and His disciples also kept the Passover. But we don’t do that today. Neither are we told to keep the Sabbath today. And later, when Paul went

to the synagogues on the Sabbath, that's merely because that was where Jews were gathered, and Paul would have an opportunity to reason with them about the scriptures and teach them about Christ. In fact, every time the Sabbath was referred to in the book of Acts, it was referring to the activity of the Jews who thought they were still living under the law and hadn't come to faith in Christ. There was still a temple in Jerusalem where Mosaic worship took place and sacrifices were offered for 40 years after Jesus was crucified... but in A.D. 70, God used the invasion of Titus to destroy the temple and forever end that form of worship and the practice of that old economy.

Friend, the fact is, the literal observance of the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week as a special or holy day is of no significance to the Christian who NOW can lay hold on the **actual thing** that the whole concept of a Sabbath prefigured or pointed forward to. Lay hold of the rest we may NOW have every day and forever in Christ Jesus, the Lord.

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