

WHY HAVE CHRISTIANS ABANDONED THE SABBATH?

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

The Pharisees and Sadducees accused Jesus of disobeying the Law of God, especially the fourth commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Supposedly Jesus violated the fourth commandment by, for example, healing people on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 10:13-17; Luke 14:1-6), and by defending His famished disciples’ choice to pluck grains while traversing a field on Saturday (Mark 2:23-28). Amazingly, the Pharisees claimed that healing people on the Sabbath was sinful. And they considered plucking grains to be prohibited work on the Sabbath.

Hogwash! Jesus answered these absurd claims by affirming that He came not “to destroy the Law or the Prophets,” and that not one iota of God’s law shall be abolished until “heaven and earth pass away.” Heaven and earth have not passed away; according to Jesus, neither have God’s laws (the Ten Commandments, the Holy Days and festivals, dietary regulations, etc.)

The Old Testament – specifically the first five books written by Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy) – contains these laws. Moses wrote that God rested on and sanctified (to make holy) the seventh day. Later, God reconfirmed the holiness of the Sabbath: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, ***these are My feasts***. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings’” (Leviticus 23:1-3). Therefore, the Sabbath and Holy Days do not belong only to the Jewish people. Rather, they are God’s Feasts.

Subconsciously, many Christians disagree. They believe that Jesus nailed the Law (including the seventh-day Sabbath and God’s Holy Days and Feasts) to the stake, commonly referred to as the cross. This is false. As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus would magnify the Law: “The LORD is well pleased for His righteousness’ sake; He will exalt the law and make it honorable” (Isaiah 42:21).

Jesus magnified the Law by spiritualizing it. Obeying the letter of the Law was no longer enough; we must obey both the letter **and** spirit of the Law. For example, in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22). In other

words, in God's eyes, unjustifiable and extreme anger is a sin. Lust is also a sin: "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

What is sin?

The definition of sin is the transgression of God's law: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). Thus, whenever we break God's commandments, including Sabbath observance (the fourth commandment), we commit sin. By realizing we are sinners in need of God's mercy, we therefore acknowledge the monumental importance of accepting Jesus as our sin offering: "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a *sin offering*" (Romans 8:3).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus died so that we may "not perish." He became our sin offering (Romans 8:3). Jesus' sacrifice removed the penalty, or curse, of the Law from us: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Because sin is defined as the transgression of God's Law (I John 3:4), and because everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), then we're doomed without the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf

We're not doomed if we accept Jesus and His sacrifice as our sin offering. However, upon such acceptance, should we continue to sin by breaking God's commandments, including the observance of the holy Sabbath? "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:1-2). By calling God's Law good and holy (Romans 7:12), Paul expects us to obey God's commandments. He also expected us to observe the seventh-day Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset).

Jesus, the Pharisees, Paul, and You

Jesus obeyed the law of God, including the Sabbath and Holy Days and Festivals (e.g. Passover, John 2:13 & 23; Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day, John 7:10-14 & 37). Indeed, in response to criticism that He broke the fourth commandment, Jesus called Himself the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8). By doing so, He authoritatively claimed that healing someone on the Sabbath is not a sin. And this title ("Lord of the Sabbath") affirmed the seventh-day Sabbath's importance and relevancy.

Jesus restored the Sabbath to its proper meaning: a delightful day of rest. By the first century the Sabbath had become a burden. "If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on *My holy day*, and call the Sabbath a delight, the *holy day of the LORD* honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 58:13-14). Unfortunately, people were unable to experience the Sabbath as a "delight" because the Pharisees had made it a burden.

The Pharisees originated in the time of the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid rule, from 166 to 159 BC. Originally known as Jewish puritans, the Pharisees were zealous for the Law and

opposed the Jewish priests who dabbled in Hellenism. Despite their tarnished reputation, the Pharisees started with good intentions. They encouraged spiritual revival in the synagogues, in the schools, and in their missionaries. During the Hasmonean period, around 140 BC, the Pharisees became the dominant sect of Judaism.

“Central to their teaching is the belief in the two-fold Law: the written and the oral Torah. What this in effect meant was the recognition of a continuing tradition of interpretation of the Law in the debates and sayings of the elders” (*Oxford Companion to the Bible*, pg. 589). These elders belonged to the generations following the exile of the Jewish people into Babylon, after Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest of Judea and Jerusalem in 586 BC. These elders rightly believed that God had punished Israel because of their sins. In attempting to prevent this from reoccurring, over several centuries they constructed elaborate rules to protect the Law from being broken. These rules were later codified in the *Mishnah* and Talmud.

“The Mishnah includes Sabbath-desecration among those heinous crimes for which a man was to be stoned. This, then, was their first care: by a series of complicated ordinances to make a breach of the Sabbath-rest impossible” (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, pg. 509). Jesus condemned these burdensome ordinances: “Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them. They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments. They love the place of honor at banquets and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called Rabbi by men” (Matthew 23:1-7).

The Pharisees and other Judaic sects that emerged from the Babylonian exile created an elaborate, burdensome system of extra-biblical rules and regulations which sometimes undermined the very essence of God’s law: “Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ‘Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.’ And He answered and said to them, ‘Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘he who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’ But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,’ he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition” (Matthew 15:1-6).

It’s vital to understand that Jesus did not break the Law of God; nor did He violate the Sabbath. Rather, He condemned these extra-biblical ordinances which made both the Law of God and the Sabbath a burden.

The apostle Paul was once a Pharisee. In his trial before Agrippa, Paul said, “In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that *I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest of our religion*” (Acts 26:2-5).

Saul (his name was later changed to Paul) was a self-righteous Pharisee who persecuted Christians: “Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went

to the high priest, and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do.' The men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and the Lord said to him in a vision, 'Ananias.' And he said, 'Here I am, Lord.' And the Lord said to him, 'Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight.' But Ananias answered, 'Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Your saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.' But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel'" (Acts 9:1-15).

Paul testified about Jesus to the Gentiles and Israelites. He continuously emphasized justification and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus the prophesied Messiah. Nowhere in his epistles did he teach that Jesus nailed the Law of God, including seventh-day Sabbath observance, to the stake. On the contrary; Paul called the Law of God holy and good, and he obeyed it: "I do serve the God of our fathers, believing *everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets*" (Acts 24:14).

Paul obeyed the Law of God. He observed the Sabbath and Holy Days and Festivals, and urged others to do the same: "Therefore let us celebrate the **feast**, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:8). Here Paul was urging the **gentile** Corinthians to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Paul did not claim that this Feast belonged only to the Jewish people. Moreover, this Feast is one of God's Festivals and Holy Days, as is the Sabbath.

Paul took exception to the claim that strict observance of the Law can save people. First, everyone has sinned (Romans 3:23), so it's foolish to claim salvation by obeying the Law of God. Secondly, if you can obtain salvation by strictly observing the Law, then you don't need Jesus. That is heresy.

The Law of God leads us to Jesus: "Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). By realizing we are sinners in need of God's mercy, we thus acknowledge the necessity of accepting Jesus as our "sin offering" (Romans 8:3)

We're sinners when (not if, but when) we break God's Law, including the seventh-day Sabbath (fourth commandment). Therefore the Law cannot save us; only Jesus can. Our faith in the saving grace of Jesus leads us to salvation: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2). And "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith

in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Galatians 2:16).

Paul did not criticize the Law itself but rather the self-righteous belief that people can obtain salvation solely by obeying it. Salvation cannot be obtained, said Paul. It’s a gift from God.

Jesus did not redeem us from the Law, but from the penalty (death and eternal separation from God) incurred by breaking it (Galatians 3:13). Furthermore, Jesus, Paul and the other apostles obeyed the Law of God. They observed the Sabbath and God’s Holy days and Festivals. However, they taught that strict observance of the Law, Sabbath, and Holy Days and Festivals (if it were possible) will not save you. Salvation cannot be obtained. Rather, we’re justified by faith in the saving grace of Jesus.

God commands observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (the fourth commandment). Jesus and the others observed the seventh-day Sabbath. Why should we be any different?

The Early Church

“The divine authority of Moses and the prophets was admitted, and even established, as the firmest basis of Christianity” (Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Volume 1, pg. 451). In his magisterial history of the decline of the Roman Empire until the fall of Constantinople in 1452, Gibbon includes a succinct and insightful history of the early centuries of Christianity. He affirms what most scholars believe, and indeed, what the Bible states: early Christians were considered a sect of Judaism.

The earliest Christians kept the law of God as found in the first five books of Moses. They observed the Sabbath, and God’s Holy Days and Festivals. They did not observe Easter and Christmas; those celebrations, which are rooted in paganism, arrived centuries later. As we’ve already seen, Jesus Himself validated the Law and Holy Days of God (“Matthew 5:17-19).

Heaven and earth have not passed away. According to Jesus, neither have God’s laws and holy days (including the seventh-day Sabbath). Man, however, has ignored Jesus’ teachings and replaced them with worldly traditions. “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the *tradition of men*, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

What happened?

The divergence of early Christianity from God’s laws, Holy Days and Festivals took a long time. “The first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were all circumcised Jews; and the congregation over which they presided *united the law of Moses with the doctrine of Christ*....But when numerous and opulent societies were established in the great cities of the empire, in Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome, the reverence which Jerusalem had inspired to all the Christian colonies insensibly diminished. The Jewish converts, or as they were afterward called, the *Nazarenes*, who had laid the foundations of the church soon found themselves overwhelmed by the increasing multitudes, that from all the various religions of polytheism inlisted (sic) under the banner of Christ” (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1, pg. 453, emphasis mine).

Luke records that Roman and Jewish authorities labeled the apostle Paul as a leader of this sect of the Nazarenes: “For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up

dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). These Nazarenes (or earliest Christians) believed not in the destruction of God’s laws, holy days, and festivals. Instead, they clung to the belief in their validity and permanence (Matthew 5:17-19).

The Roman and Jewish authorities considered the Nazarenes (or earliest Christians) to be a sect because they believed that Jesus had fulfilled the role of the prophesied Messiah. That was the main difference between the earliest Christians and other Jews. (Other differences involved the role of Mosaic Law in salvation and the sacrificial system.)

During the second half of the first century, the Jewish people in Judea revolted against Roman rule. Josephus is our primary source for the first Jewish revolt of 66-70 AD. He describes their unhappy ending during the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman general Titus (son of Roman Emperor Vespasian). “But when they went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses wither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest; and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is of such as died by the famine; they then stood in a horror at this sight, and went out without touching anything. But although they had this commiseration for such as were destroyed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood. And truly so it happened, that though the slayers left off at the evening, yet did the fire greatly prevail in the night, and as all was burning, came that eighth day of the month Gorpheus [Elul] upon Jerusalem; a city that had been liable to so many miseries during the siege, that, had it always enjoyed as much happiness from its first foundation, it would certainly have been the envy of the world” (Josephus, War of the Jews, Book 6).

The Romans sacked Jerusalem, killing many of its inhabitants and destroying the Herodian temple in which Jewish people worshipped. “The ruin of the temple, of the city, and of the public religion of the Jews, was severely felt by the Nazarene” (Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. 1, pg. 453). In the aftermath of this revolt, the Roman Emperor renamed Jerusalem *Aelia Capitolina*, and ordered a general persecution against the Jewish religion. In order to escape persecution, the Nazarenes appointed a gentile bishop to lead them. This bishop convinced many of them to renounce Mosaic Law and the Holy Days and Festivals found in Leviticus 23. However, some Nazarenes did not comply with this order. “The name of Nazarenes was deemed too honourable for those Christian Jews, and they soon received from the supposed poverty of their understanding, as well as of their condition, the contemptuous epithet of *Ebionites*. In a few years after the return of the church of Jerusalem, it became a *matter of doubt and controversy, whether a man who sincerely acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah, but who still continued to observe the law of Moses, could possibly hope for salvation*” (ibid, pg. 455, emphasis mine).

The Nazarenes (or Ebionites) melted into obscurity: “The unfortunate Ebionites, rejected from one religion as apostates, and from the other as heretics, found themselves compelled to assume a more decided character; and although some traces of that obsolete sect may be discovered as late as the fourth century, they insensibly melted away either into the church or the synagogue” (ibid, pg. 455).

The separation of Christians from God's laws, Holy Days and Festivals was almost complete by the end of the first century. Then, in 135 AD, a false messiah named Bar Kochba led a second revolt against Roman rule. "The one thing that does happen in the second revolt, though, is [that] the self-consciously apocalyptic and messianic identity of Bar Kochba forces the issue for the Christian tradition. It appears that some people in the second revolt tried to press other Jews, including Christians, into the revolt, saying, 'Come join us to fight against the Romans. You believe God is going to restore the kingdom to Israel, don't you? Join us.' But the Christians by this time are starting to say, 'No, he can't be the messiah -- we already have one.' And at that point we really see the full-fledged separation of Jewish tradition and Christian tradition becoming clear" (from *Jews and the Ancient World*, companion text from the PBS Frontline special, *From Jesus to Christ, a portrait of Jesus' world.*)

From the Sabbath to the "Lord's Day"

As already noted, the earliest Christians obeyed the Law of God, including the Holy days and Festivals that begin with Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23). We have seen how the forces of history led later Christians to renounce Mosaic Law and God's festivals and holy days. These laws (such as the seventh-day Sabbath) and Holy Days and Festivals were considered *too Jewish*, and no one wanted to be associated with the persecuted Jews in the last and first halves of the first and second centuries. Therefore, they sought replacements; hence the transfer of the holy Sabbath to the first day of the week, and the creation of Easter and Christmas as replacements for Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles.

The latent paganism of the gentile converts also contributed to the gradual renunciation of God's laws, Holy Days, and Festivals, as found in the Old Testament.

"By the end of the first century CE, the first day of the week was celebrated as the day of the Lord, to which Christian observance was transferred" (*Oxford Companion to the Bible*, pg. 665). Nowhere in the Bible did Jesus or His apostles authorize this transfer of the Sabbath to the first day of the week, in commemoration of Jesus' resurrection.

Most Christians believe that Jesus died on Friday and rose on Sunday. Only two days separate Friday from Sunday. Under this scenario, Jesus was dead for two days. But Jesus predicted that He would be dead for three days: "But He (Jesus) answered and said to them (the Pharisees), 'An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'" (Matthew 12:39-40). Jesus would be dead three days and nights before His resurrection. Therefore, He did not die on a Friday and rise on a Sunday.

"But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has risen'" (Luke 24:1-6).

Jesus' disciples "did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9). So three of His disciples - Mary Magdalene, the mother of James (her name was also Mary), and Salome - "brought spices" to Jesus' tomb, in order to anoint His dead body. Because they observed the seventh-day Sabbath and therefore believed that preparing spices was

prohibited work, they rested on Saturday. “Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. And his appearance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said’” (Matthew 28:1-6).

Jesus rose before their arrival shortly after the Sabbath. Therefore, God must have resurrected Him on Saturday. And because He was dead three days and three nights, He died on Wednesday.

“Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31). Many Christians believe Jesus died on a Friday because the next day was supposedly the seventh-day Sabbath. Yet John called this Sabbath a “high day.” *High Days* refer not to the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) but to the commanded days of rest (hence the designation Sabbath) during the Holy Days and Festivals. “Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. *On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work*” (Leviticus 23:6-7). The first day of this Feast was a Sabbath because work was prohibited. The usage of *high day* denoted the difference between the weekly Sabbath (on Saturday) and the special Sabbaths occurring on the first and last days of the Festivals.

Thus the “Sabbath” mentioned by John referred not to the weekly Sabbath but to the First Day of Unleavened Bread in 31 AD, which fell on a Thursday. Jesus was therefore killed late on Wednesday and rose three days later, late on Saturday.

The transfer of the observance of the biblically-sanctioned seventh-day Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) to the first day of the week, in commemoration of Jesus’ supposed resurrection on Sunday, therefore rests on a false premise. Jesus was not resurrected on the first day of the week; He rose on Saturday. Moreover, Jesus and the apostles, including Paul, never authorized the transfer of the Sabbath to Sunday.

The seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), its practical significance

The seventh-day Sabbath (our Saturday) had two practical purposes: it was a commanded day of rest from work and chores, and it reminded people of creation.

We need rest. Without it, our bodies would break down and stress would increase, along with the risk of hypertension and other stress-related ailments. God thus recognized the importance of rest by creating the Sabbath. As He rested from His work after creation, we, too, must rest from work and chores.

The seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), its universal significance

The fourth commandment says “Remember the Sabbath Day...” Usage of the word “remember” implies that the Sabbath predates the Ten Commandments. In fact, the Law of God predates Moses. For example, God created the Sabbath as a sanctified day of rest during (re)creation

week. And laws concerning murder (Commandment #6), adultery (Commandment #7) are found throughout the book of Genesis.

God blessed Abraham because he obeyed His laws: “Abraham obeyed Me and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws” (Genesis 26:5). Moreover, the “LORD said, ‘The outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave’” (Genesis 18:20). God defines sin as the transgression of His law (I John 3:4). As egregious sinners, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah must have been breaking God’s laws.

Moreover, “The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:5). Whose laws? Whose ordinances? Whose covenant? God’s, of course.

“Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27). God created the Sabbath as a day of rest for man, not just for the Israelites.

God chose the Israelites for several reasons:

- a) “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but *because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt*” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). God chose Israel because He loved them, and because of the promise delivered to Abraham, who obeyed God’s laws (Genesis 26:5);
- b) Israel served as a vehicle in God’s plan to redeem mankind. The prophesied Messiah (Jesus) would come through Israel; and
- c) God wanted to preserve His laws: “What advantage then has the Jew, or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God” (Romans 3:1-2)

Preservation of the Law through the Israelites had two purposes: (i) obviously the Law of God would be kept alive among mankind, and (ii) by obeying these laws, Israel would serve as an example to other nations: “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the *sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’*” (Deuteronomy 4:5-6). The law of God, and the seventh-day Sabbath, would be magnified through an obedient Israel. Unfortunately, rarely was Israel obedient to God.

The seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday), a sign between God and His people

The Sabbath is practical: resting from work rejuvenates our bodies and minds. The Sabbath is universal: long before Abraham was born, during (re)creation week, God “made the Sabbath for man,” not just the Israelites. And the Sabbath is a sign between God and His people.

“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. ***It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever***; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed’” (Exodus 31:12-17)

These scriptures seemingly imply that the Sabbath is a sign between God and only Israel. But the foregoing sections demonstrated that the (i) Sabbath was created long before the advent of Israel; (ii) “Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath;” and that (iii) Israel was to serve as an example to other nations in obeying the perfect laws of God, including the Sabbath. In other words, God’s laws would shine through an obedient Israel.

Although God said to Moses that the Sabbath serves as a perpetual sign between Himself and Israel, we must remember that God’s plan is sequential. God chose a man (Abraham) and then a nation (Israel). But God’s plan did not end with Israel; nor should we expect that His laws, including the Sabbath, apply only to Israel.

The seventh-day Sabbath, its prophetic significance

“Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘as I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest,’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: ‘and God rested on the seventh day from all His works;’ and again in this passage, ‘they shall not enter My rest.’ Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. ***So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God***” (Hebrews 4:1-9).

Whereas the previous reasons for the Sabbath are practical, the reason stated in Hebrews 4 is prophetic: the Sabbath represents the millennial rest for God’s people. God’s people will enter that rest upon Jesus’ return: “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming....” (I Corinthians 15:20-23).

God’s people will enter the millennial rest because they obeyed “the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17). They obeyed God’s laws, including the fourth commandment demanding Sabbath observance, and held to the testimony of Jesus, the self-proclaimed “Lord of the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath: made for man and God's people

It's clear that the seventh-day Sabbath (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset) has not been nailed to the cross. The inspired biblical authors (Paul, Peter, etc.) did not transfer Sabbath observance to Sunday. And the "Sabbath was made for man," not just for the Israelites.

The seventh-day Sabbath remains a sign between God and His people. Because of its practical and prophetic significance, and because it's the fourth commandment of God, Christians should keep the Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. After all, those Christians who obey the commandments of God (including the fourth commandment, the Sabbath) and hold to the testimony of Jesus will enter into the millennial rest of God. If you want to be in the Millennium, and in God's Kingdom, acting as a king or priest (Revelation 5:10), then you should begin to keep the Sabbath.

You may copy and distribute this information only to friends and family without changes, without charge and with full credit given to the author and publisher. You may not publish it for general audiences.

This publication is intended to be used as a personal study tool. Please know it is not wise to take any man's word for anything, so prove all things for yourself from the pages of your own Bible.

**The Church of God, Ministries International
1767 Stumpf Blvd.
Gretna, LA. 70056**

More FREE literature is available at our Internet Web Site:

www.thecogmi.org

**© Copyright 2010 The Church of God Ministries International. All rights reserved
The activities of the Church of God, Ministries International are paid for by
tithes, offerings and donations freely given by Christians and co-workers who are
dedicated to preaching the gospel according to Jesus Christ.**