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A Bible Study**

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WHO CHANGED THE SABBATH?

BY RICHARD JORDAN

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Exodus 20:8

In many church gatherings the fourth commandment of the Decalogue is publicly read each week. Generally those who observe this practice call Sunday the Sabbath, and yet when pressed as to why they "keep" the first day of the week rather than the seventh, Sunday instead of Saturday, confusion quickly sets in. While a few argue for Saturday, most seem to think that the Sabbath has been changed and that now Sunday is the so-called "Christian Sabbath." But has the Sabbath Day indeed been changed? and is Sunday really now the Sabbath? Let us see what God's Word says on this subject.

Although most people who seek to observe the Sabbath are not readily familiar with Exodus 31, this chapter contains one of the most descriptive and instructive passages in the Bible on the subject of Sabbath day observance.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

"Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for IT IS A SIGN BETWEEN ME AND YOU throughout your generations; THAT YE MAY KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD THAT DOTHTH SANCTIFY YOU.

"Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

"SIX DAYS MAY WORK BE DONE; BUT IN THE SEVENTH IS THE SABBATH OF REST, HOLY UNTO THE LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

"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 FOREVER: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.

'And He gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon Mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Ex 31:12-18).

Here Moses clearly shows that Sabbath day observance was "a sign" between the Lord and the children of Israel (vs. L3,17; cf Ezk. 20:20) to be kept throughout their generations, that Israel might know that "I am the Lord that doth sanctify thee."

The "Sabbath of rest" was to be kept "holy unto the Lord" as a ceremonial observance, given as a perpetual reminder of Israel's covenant relationship with and separation to the Lord. Recall His words to them through Moses; "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself.

"Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: "And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:4-6).

Israel was to be His "peculiar treasure," and as such He reminded them of their place, privilege and responsibility by this "sign" of Sabbath day observance. There is not one line of Scripture to indicate that God gave the observance of the Sabbath to anyone but Israel. In fact, the Scriptures seem clear that was not given to anyone before Moses, for we read in Neh. 9:13,14:

"Thou camest down also upon Mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments and true laws, good statutes and commandments;

..And MADEST KNOWN UNTO THEM THY HOLY SABBATH, and commandedst them precepts, statutes and laws. BY THE HAND OF MOSES THY SERVANT."

1(Some would object to our calling the Sabbath Day a ceremonial observance. They point to a supposed threefold division of the Law: moral, ceremonial and civil. But this argument breaks down when it is noted that the Ten Commandments contain all thru of these elements.)

AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LAW

The observance of the Sabbath Day, then, was a part of the law given through Moses, and this explains both the exacting instructions and the sever penalties which accompany it.

A particular day was to be kept, not merely "one in seven." "The seventh is the Sabbath of rest" (Ex.31:15). And so demanding were the accompanying regulations that later Israel was told:

"Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day" (Ex.35.3).

This would make "cooking the Sabbath day dinner" a bit difficult--to say nothing of keeping warm in the winter! From passages like Ex.16:22-26 it appears that they were to make all the necessary preparations for the Sabbath of rest on the previous day so as not to be in violation of these exacting regulations.

And the penalty for breaking this "holy Sabbath" was equally heavy:

". . .everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people".

". . .whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death"(Ex. 31:14,15). In Num. 15:32;36 we see this sentence swiftly carried out against a man "gathering sticks on the Sabbath day"--possibly to "kindle a fire."

One reason the Sabbath day was used as a "sign" of the Mosaic Covenant is intimated in the words: "...for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:17). Just as God had perfected His work of creation in six days and then "rested and was refreshed," in like manner He had given Israel a work to do as His representative nation--His witness before the nations--and this work was to result in the promised "times of refreshing" (Acts 3: 19). Israel's Sabbath day was, of course' only a type of that coming day of kingdom blessing and rest, the future age when this groaning creation shall finally be "delivered from the bondage of corruption" and find true rest. Concerning that time we are told:

"Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.

"And My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings and in quiet resting places" (Isa.32:16-18).

ISRAEL'S FAILURE

Israel failed sadly in her responsibility. Thus when our Lord appeared on the scene He was forced to lament even over the temple itself:

"Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? But ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11:17).

Hence, in a touching invitation, we see Him offering Himself to those who so futilely labored under the "burden" of keeping the Law:

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I WILL GIVE YOU REST.

"Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and YE SHALL FIND REST UNTO YOUR SOULS.

"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mat. 11:28-30).

Israel's only hope of finding her true Sabbath of rest lay in her Messiah, "the Lord of the Sabbath." Here it is interesting to note that the Scripture's first mention of "rest" is found after the completion of creation (Gen. 2:1-3). But God's rest was soon broken, for in the very next chapter we see Him seeking fallen man and working in his behalf, slaying an innocent animal to provide him a covering.

Thus our Lord came to Israel "seeking that which was lost," and saying:

". . . My Father worketh hitherto, and [now] I work" (John 5:17).

How touching to hear His words to the Father on the eve of His crucifixion: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4), and then, as He hung upon the cross he said:

"...IT IS FINISHED: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost" (John 19:30).

Indeed, He had finished redemption's work by His all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. And Heb. 10:12 says:

"After He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, [He] SAT DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD."

How blessed!! Our Lord "sat down"..for the work was completed, finished, with nothing left undone.

OUR REST

"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" (Heb. 4:9, 10).

Just as God rested in His perfect work of creation; just as our Lord Jesus Christ ascended and sat down to rest in His perfect work of redemption; just so we are now bidden to "enter into His rest."

Today, Christ is the believer's only Sabbath, our only resting place. We ceased from our labors, not on the Sabbath Day, but the very moment we enter by faith into "His rest," the result of His finished work at Calvary, where He died "the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

And what about "Sabbath day observance" today? Gal. 3:19 tells us that the Law was added "till" something happened-and this something has happened. "We were kept under the law, the Apostle says, "shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed." But now with the revelation of the mystery through Paul that faith has come, and thus Paul declares by divine inspiration:

"BUT NOW the righteousness of God WITHOUT THE LAW is manifested. . .

"We declare, I say, AT THIS TIME, His righteousness, that He might be just and Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:21, 26; ct. Gal. 3:23-25). And it is Paul who goes on further to say:

..FOR CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS to everyone that believeth"(Rom 10:4).

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon or of the Sabbath days:

"Which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ" (Col.2:16,17).

Who changed the Sabbath? Well, "the Sabbath day" remains unchanged; it is still the seventh day, Saturday. However, God Himself has changed the Sabbath -our resting place---from a day to a person . Now we are to rest in Him who died for our sins and rose again as proof that the debt is fully paid.

This no doubt explains why the Scriptures show Paul and the disciples meeting on "the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7; cf. I Cor. 16:2). Thus, meeting on the day of His resurrection, they celebrated His finished work of redemption and their new-found "life in Christ Jesus."

And so it is with us. Ah, but this is never a day of rest" for us--far from it! Rather we will gladly toil right through Sunday that others may "find rest in Him."

A CLOSING WORD

Believers today are, of course, free to set aside any particular day for special worship and study. In the dispensation of grace, no day is set above any other. Hence Paul wrote to the Roman Christians:

"One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

"He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. . ." (Rom. 14:5,6).

Down through Church history, and even in some lands today, believers have found it very difficult to set aside a definite time for Christian fellowship, Bible study and worship services. How we should praise God for the privilege so freely given to us in this "land of the free" to have a regular day each week which we can devote more wholly to the worship and service of Christ. And how sad to see increasing multitudes of believers forsaking the assembling of the saints, and using even this opportunity for their own pleasure and enjoyment. Surely all excuses for such behavior will be insignificant and meaningless when we "stand before the judgment seat of Christ" and "give account" of ourselves to God.

Rather than using our liberty "for an occasion to the flesh," may we "by love serve one another" (Gal. 5: 13), taking to heart Paul's exhortation:

"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph.5:14-16).

NO WORD STANDS ALONE

Hal Bekemeyer

"No man is an island," says the song, and much the same can be said of any word in any language.

One of the arguments set forth against the reliability of the King James Bible deals with the issue of the vernacular of the original languages. It is suggested that, since many of the original words have meanings peculiar to the Greek or Hebrew languages, no translation could ever demonstrate the total depth of the intended meaning.

Despite the fact that I am a proponent of the KJV, I must admit that this particular charge is true. It is not possible to translate from one language to another and capture the full depth of meaning of every word in every place. To fail to acknowledge this truth would be vainly impractical.

In this light, however, would it be true to say that a translation is "errant" because it does not possess the "fullest depth" in every instance? This is where the rub comes, and it is here that I would have to disagree with the conclusions of the "original language only" brethren.

The truth of the matter is that "inerrancy" has to do with the accuracy of the words on the page and not some attributed depth of meaning.

When we say that the KJV is inerrant we do not even pretend to suggest that its language is not subject to expansion and explanation of word and thought. The suggestion in itself is ridiculous.

No word in any language (including Greek and Hebrew) can be said to "stand alone." In the English language we employ the dictionary to discover the full range of definition in a word. This is also true concerning the "original" Biblical languages. In order to discover the "fullest" meaning of any word we would utilize a lexicon. The word is rare

that can portray it's fullest depth in and of itself. This truth can be easily demonstrated from the Word of God.

Nehemiah successfully completed the task that God had put before him. He pleaded his cause to Artaxerxes, the king and obtained permission to rebuild Jerusalem. He marshaled the materials and the laborers to achieve this monumental task. Finally, he personally supervised the work despite tremendous political and military opposition. The result of all this was the return of "the people" within the walls of Jerusalem.

This remnant of God's "chosen" gathered themselves together "as one man" in the street before the water gate. They called to Ezra, the scribe, to bring the book of the law before them, and he did so. Ezra caused God's Word to be read to the people and this is the manner in which it was done:

"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

"And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law" (Neh. 8:8,9). Each word was read "distinctly" to demonstrate accuracy. We can see that the reading, in and of itself, was insufficient, however, for afterwards the 'sense" (the depth of meaning) was also given. The priests were among the people teaching them the full meaning of the Word of God.

Even when reading strictly from the Hebrew it was necessary to carefully demonstrate the meaning. Rare is the word, though perfectly chosen, that can be said to reflect the total "depth of meaning" by itself.

The issue of "accuracy" is distinct from the issue of "depth of meaning." A word can be completely accurate and yet at the same time have it's "total depth" incompletely realized. This is why preachers (good ones) define and expand the thought and meaning of every word. This was true when the Word was available only in the "original" and it is true today.

The KJV is God's Word for English speaking people. It is accurate and totally reliable in every way. But there is more that is needed. It needs to be preached. It needs to be understood. It needs to be believed. Most of all, it needs to be incorporated into the lives of those who read it.

THE WORD OF GOD

To think what God helps us do by giving us His word;

It guides us through the stormy times our hearts and souls assured.

He teaches us exactly how to raise our family;

He teaches us to witness and to live separately.

He's sealed us with His Spirit, leading us within;

Convicting us, guiding us steering us from sin.

He shows us that His word is pure, inspired and preserved;

He clearly shows us that our place in heaven is reserved.

Christians read the Word of God and when done rightly-divided,

I promise you one thing my friend, you will get excited!

Leslie Mills Baxter
