

A Question ABOUT THE SABBATH

● “Why do you not observe the sabbath, and who changed this anyway?”

YOUR QUESTION is to the point, and we will make our answer to the point—then we will give the Scriptures which bear out the answer. We do not observe the sabbath simply because we are not Jews (Israelites) and are not of the Jewish religion. Christians were never commanded to observe the sabbath. All changes that have been made we attribute to Christ, as the Old Testament system was “nailed” to the cross when Jesus was crucified, whereupon the New Testament immediately came in force. Christians live by the New Testament.

The Old Testament Law was given to the Israelites when they were encamped at Mt. Sinai in their exodus from Egypt. It was here that God said to Moses, “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 doth sanctify you” (Exodus 31:13).

Later Moses reviewed the Law before the children of Israel. Listen: “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb (Sinai). The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all alive here this day” (Deut. 5:2, 3). Then Moses goes into the various laws of the covenant, and says, “And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the Lord commanded thee to keep the sabbath day” (Deut. 5:15).



Centuries later the prophet Ezekiel likewise rehearses how that God had brought them out of Egypt, gave them statutes and judgments, and then we have these words of God: “Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them” (Ezekiel 20:10-12).

Likewise read Nehemiah 9:13 and 14. He says the same thing, and further speaks to God (in reference to the event at Mt. Sinai) in this manner: “And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandest them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant.”

Therefore, in the face of this impressive array of evidence, we are made to conclude the following:

(1) The sabbath law was given to

the Jews at Mount Sinai as part of the Old Testament.

(2) There is no evidence that it was observed by man before then—in fact, it is said that God made it known to them, and not to their fathers.

(3) The sabbath was given as a sign between God and the Jews (Israelites), having to do with the exodus from Egypt.

Some may retort that God created everything in six days and “rested” the seventh day. This is true, but this information was given to the Jews in connection with the covenant God was giving to them. That is all it proves.

For lack of space we will abbreviate the rest of the answer. The Law of Moses was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24, 25), but we are no longer under the schoolmaster (the Law). The Old Testament was “nailed,” so to speak, to the cross with Christ (Colossians 2:14). The New Testament came in force when Jesus died on the cross (Hebrews 9:15-17). Inasmuch as this is true we don’t live (as Christians) by what we read in the Old Testament, but by what is in the New Testament. That is the reason Paul says, “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” (Colossians 2:16). Why? Because this is part of the Old Testament, and it has been “nailed” to the cross (Colossians 2:14). These things were merely a shadow (not the real and abiding) of good things to come (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). Justification cannot come by the Law of Moses (If so, why did Jesus die on the cross?). The Galatians were going back under this Law, and Paul remarked, “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years, I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed

upon you labor in vain” (Galatians 4:10, 11). He further warned them that if they would be justified by the Law they had fallen from grace (Galatians 5:4).

There is no evidence that the early church as such observed the sabbath. Paul went into the synagogues to preach Christ to Jewish people on the sabbath—WHY? That was when the Jews were gathered together, and he took advantage of this opportunity (as he would have any other) to preach Christ unto them. The Jews as followers of the Old Testament had come together on the day their Law directed. The early church rather, according to the record, met on the first day of the week to break bread and worship (Acts 20:7; 2:1, 42; I Cor. 16:2). There is no evidence that they even kept this day in the same sense as the Jewish sabbath.

Some may say that Jesus claimed he was also “Lord of the sabbath.” True. But, that doesn’t prove anything in connection with the New Testament, which did not come in force until Jesus died. Jesus lived by the standards of the Old Testament while here. During his ministry he went only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 10:5, 6; 15:24). It was only after the New Testament had come in force that the great commission was given. Being God in the flesh (and the Old Testament still being in effect) certainly he was “Lord of the sabbath.” However, that has no bearing on our situation today, being Christians. We must come this side of the cross to find the answer.

(We trust this has satisfactorily answered the question at the beginning of this article. If things are not clear, read the article again and look up the Scriptures).—JAMES E. GIBBONS □

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