

Question: "Are Christians to observe the Sabbath day as did Israel?" (Part 1)

The Lord gave the Ten Commandments to Israel through His prophet Moses at Mount Sinai. The fourth of these commandments is: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Exo 20:8). The weekly Sabbath was kept on the seventh day of the week. This would correspond with the day we call "Saturday". Some religious groups still "keep the Sabbath" today. Is the observance a part of what it takes to be faithful and pleasing to God today?

The Purpose of the Sabbath:

"Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six day shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and made it holy." (Exodus 20:8-11).

There was more than one purpose fulfilled in the Israelites keeping the Sabbath. **First, it was to cause them to ponder God's creative power** (Exo 31:12,13; 15-17). As the people rested from their labor on the seventh day of the week, they recalled how that God had created the world in six days, and ceased His work on the seventh day.

A second purpose pertains to the fact that Israel had recently been delivered from bondage in Egypt. They had suffered a heavy burden there. There had been a great amount of toil. They were now free of that servitude; they had rest from their slavery. Their observance of the Sabbath was also to remind them as a nation of how God had delivered them from slavery (Deu 5:13-15).

The Sabbath Was Not Given To All Mankind:

Sabbatarians (those who keep the Sabbath today) believe that all faithful men and women of God from Adam onward are to keep the Sabbath holy. The Scriptures, however, show us that the Sabbath was only for the nation of Israel while the Law of Moses was in effect. This would cover the years from about 1400 BC to 30 AD.

Moses recorded the account of creation in the book of Genesis. He explains that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. But no command to specially observe the seventh day of the week and no reference to anyone specially observing it are found until a commandment was made known through Moses in the wilderness. This was at the time manna was given in the wilderness to the wandering Jews.

In that account, Moses used the word "Sabbath" for the first time (Exo 16:23). It is obvious from the text that the Israelites were not familiar with observing the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath was not known before that time (Neh 9:13-14). Though God had issued commandments before giving the ten commandments to Moses at Mount Sinai, there had never been a covenant between God and man regarding the Sabbath (Deu 5:2-3).

Finally, the Bible specifically states that the Sabbath was given to Israel as a sign between them and God (Eze 20:12; 18-20). How could the Sabbath have been a sign between Israel and God if everybody else had been given the same commandment to keep the Sabbath? It would be like all the ranchers branding their cattle with the same brand! No, the Sabbath was only for Israel to keep, not for everybody.

I will have more on this topic next week. Study your Bible and search the Truth. Write us for a free Bible correspondence course by mail. Thanks for reading!

Note: {Do not include what follows in newspaper article.}

"There are eternal principles intended from the beginning by God for man, but which he chose to introduce at a specific time in man's history. Much of the "human relations" law given through Moses was what God intended for man from the beginning (consider divorce, capital punishment, worship by faith, etc.). Some of these principles were later refined -or should I say finally clarified - in the giving of Christ's law."