

THE SABBATH - NOT BINDING TODAY

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CHAPTER ONE

The word “Sabbath” means “to cease” (from work) “to rest;” and relates to a commandment given to Israel by God to rest from their labour on the seventh day (Saturday) of each week (Deu. 5:12-14). The historical background to this commandment is in the book of Exodus. When God delivered Israel from Egypt and led them to Mount Sinai, He told Moses to say this to them: “If you are willing to obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be my special treasure above all people” (Ex. 19:5).

The people responded to this invitation by saying they were willing to obey all that the Lord commanded, even though they did not know at that stage, what this entailed. They understood that the covenant would involve terms and conditions - laws and commandments, as all covenants do, and they were willing to comply. Many references are made to this covenant in both the Old and New Testament. In the New Testament it is referred to as “the old covenant” in contradistinction to “the new covenant.” The old covenant was given by God through Moses and ratified by animal sacrifices. The new covenant came through Christ and was ratified by the blood of his sacrifice.

After Israel expressed a willingness to obey the covenant, God commenced to communicate the commandments verbally and audibly in a loud voice from Mount Sinai. The first 10 commandments are recorded in Ex. 20 and are known as the decalogue. They represent fundamental issues - foundation principles governing the covenant. They were inscribed on 2 tablets of stone by the finger of God, and placed inside a box called “the ark of the covenant” in the most holy place in the tabernacle. The fourth of these 10 involved the Sabbath: Ex. 20:8-11: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day: Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Now, the 10 commandments were not by any means the sum total of commandments involved in the old covenant. Many more were also given involving all sorts of things, including moral, spiritual and ethical issues; attitudes, relationships, and various ritual observances and ceremonies. At God’s dictation, these were written down by Moses in a book, i.e. in a

scroll of parchment, which was placed alongside the ark (some think in a pocket).

NATURAL AND SPIRITUAL REASONS

As far as the Sabbath was concerned, there were both natural and spiritual reasons for this commandment. The natural reason is indicated in Ex. 23:12 and Deu. 5:14 where we read that both humans and animals were not to do any work on that day in order that they might “rest” and be “refreshed.”

Quite apart from religious belief, most people accept that the pattern of 5 or 6 days work, followed by a shorter period of relaxation or rest, is a healthy one. Workaholics and unscrupulous masters (employers) might want work to be done all day and every day, but it is physically beneficial to have a day off to rest and recharge the batteries! The Sabbath was therefore a humanitarian provision of God for the well being of men and animals. It was a wise and beneficent institution, preventing Israelites from wearing themselves out by incessant toil.

As a result of men and women resting for a day, the question naturally arises as to what they can or should do with their time on their day of rest. This brings us to one of the spiritual purposes of the Sabbath. We are told in Isa. 58:13-14 that God wanted the Sabbath to be a holy day which His people delighted in treating as holy, honouring the Lord by not doing their own thing; not pursuing their own pleasures and not even talking about themselves and their own carnal or secular interests, desires and ambitions. They were not simply to abstain from work, slumber in idleness, yawning and grumbling over the tediousness of the day, regarding it as boring, and wishing it would hurry up and finish so that they could get back to their secular money-making course of life. No! They were to focus their minds and hearts on the Lord and talk about Him and His purposes and regard it as a holy, delightful and honourable thing to do (Mal. 3:16).

We read in Ex. 31:12-17 that God also intended the Sabbath to be a sign between Himself and Israel. The sign was that “in 6 days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.” We learn from this that by resting on the seventh day, Israel was a sign or witness, testifying to the fact that her God, Yahweh, created heaven and earth in 6 days and ceased on the seventh.

While the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt and burdened with labour under the whips of harsh taskmasters, they did not have a day’s rest each

week, but had to work every day. It is not surprising therefore that God instructed them to remember this each Sabbath day, as we read in Deu. 5:12-15: “Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it ... and remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought you out from there through a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. That is why the Lord thy God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” So the Sabbath day was a witness to both creation and deliverance from Egypt - a day in which the thoughts of the people were to be focussed on God and His Word.

It is sad that Israel had to be commanded to do this, but the flesh is so selfish and self-centred - so focussed on itself and its own carnal materialistic ambitions, that God found it necessary to attempt to force people by law to stop thinking and talking about themselves for one day in the week, and think and talk about Him.

In reality, true heart-felt devotion cannot be forced. Law cannot force people’s hearts toward God, any more than law can force people to love one another. However, the law was good in that it made God’s desires clear and was a challenge to all to take the steps that are necessary to conform from the heart and soul, and not just go through the motions, merely rendering a mechanical observance.

It is clear that God expected Israel to treat the Sabbath law seriously, not lightly. Failure or refusal to keep the Sabbath resulted in a very severe penalty. It carried with it the death penalty. In Ex. 31:12-17 it is declared 3 times that anyone who defiled the Sabbath by doing any work on that day, would be put to death.

Reference is made to a man in Num. 15:32-36 who ignored the Sabbath law and went out and worked by gathering sticks. Under instruction from God he was stoned to death. Israel’s disregard of the Sabbath law is specifically included among her sins which caused her to be conquered by Gentile nations and scattered among the nations (Ezk. 20:23-24). Prior to that, they were warned by the prophets about disregarding the Sabbath (Jer. 17:21-24. Am. 8:4-).

It should also be pointed out that ceremonial ritual was involved in the Sabbath law. We read this in Num. 28:9-10: “And on the Sabbath day two lambs of the first year without blemish and 2 tenths of an ephah of fine flour for a cereal offering, mixed with oil, and its drink offering (shall be offered). This is the burnt offering of every Sabbath, besides the continual burnt offering and its drink offering.” This ritual was part and parcel of the law of the Sabbath given by God to Israel. The Sabbath law was incomplete if this ritual was not carried out.

MORAL AND CEREMONIAL LAWS

According to the new Testament, the law of the Old Covenant has been done away - abolished in Christ and made obsolete, and has been superseded and replaced by the new covenant. See the epistle to the Romans, Galatians 3 and Hebrews 8 to 10.

However, because Jesus and the apostles reaffirmed some of the 10 commandments, such as not killing, not committing adultery or stealing; not bearing false witness and not coveting etc - commandments which were originally inscribed on stone tablets by God; some have concluded that when the New Testament says the law has been abolished, it does not mean or include the 10 commandments. And, because the Sabbath law was one of the 10, it is concluded that this law is still in force today and binding upon Christians. Those who hold to this belief view the law in 2 parts: a moral law and a ceremonial law. They see the 10 commandments inscribed by God on stone as being the moral law, and they see the other laws recorded in the book written by Moses as being the ceremonial law.

Being written in stone, they see the 10 commandments (“moral law”) as God’s primary, eternal and immutable commands, and therefore still in force today. But they see the other commandments which were written in a book, as being secondary and temporary laws, particularly the ceremonial ones involving animal sacrifices and accompanying rituals, which came to an end when Jesus was sacrificed for sin upon the cross.

In replying to this, it needs to be pointed out that the Bible never actually makes this kind of distinction between the moral and ceremonial laws. In fact, the phrases “moral law” and “ceremonial law” do not occur in Scripture. It is a man-made artificial distinction, not a divine distinction. Nowhere in Scripture is the old covenant confined to just ceremonial laws.

As we shall see, although it is quite true that both moral and ceremonial laws were involved in the old covenant, this double aspect never meant that there were 2 separate or distinct laws involved. Dividing the law into 2 parts and making a separation or distinction between them is never done in Scripture. Both the moral and ceremonial aspects had to be combined together to form the full and complete law which pertained to, and governed, the old covenant. If one of those aspects, or one part of one of those aspects had been ignored or removed, the divine legal constitution would have been immediately violated, being rendered flawed and incomplete.

This is evident in Jam. 2:10 which says that to ignore one little aspect

of the law had the effect of violating the lot. Death was not just the penalty for disobeying one of the 10. The same penalty applied equally to all the others. To break the least of all the commandments was to transgress the law, and it is clearly taught in Scripture that transgression of the law is sin and incurs the penalty of death.

It is important to understand that although the 10 commandments were initially inscribed by God on stone tablets, they were also written by Moses (at God's dictation) in a book. (There are nearly 50 references in Moses' writings to the Sabbath). The 10 commandments were not confined to the stone tablets. They were written in ink in a "book" as well as chiselled in stone.

This means that the "book" written by Moses contained more than just ceremonial laws. It contained the whole law -moral and ceremonial. It certainly included the Sabbath law. All 10 commandments, which includes the Sabbath, are referred to so many times in the book written by Moses, that it would be repetitious and tedious to quote them all. This means that the 10 commandments were equally part of "the handwriting of ordinances" referred to in Col. 2:14, because they were written by the hand of Moses many times. Moses did not treat the 10 commandments separately or put them in a preface or different columns. Both the 10 commandments and all the other laws are interwoven throughout the whole book of the law, and are treated as one individual whole. Together, they constitute the whole and undivided law of the old covenant.

So then, the question is this: If the 10 commandments were written by God on stone to indicate that they were primary and eternal commandments, and the others were in a book written by Moses because they were secondary and temporary; why were the 10 written in the book as well, alongside the others? As stated before: being written in the same book, made them fit into the same category of "the handwriting of ordinances" referred to in Col. 1:14 which have been "blotted out" and taken away by being nailed to the cross.

If God intended the 10 commandments to be separate from, and superior to the other commandments; and inscribed them on stone tablets for that reason, why would He tell Moses to write them in a book as well? After all, the "book" Moses wrote, included the book of Exodus, which contains the record of God inscribing the 10 commandments on stone, from which people would learn what those 10 commandments were, without them having to be repeated in the book. So why did God tell Moses (on so many occasions) to write the 10 commandments alongside the other commandments in the book he wrote?

WHY ONLY TEN VERBALLY PROCLAIMED?

In view of all this, it is natural that this question will be raised: “If all the laws, moral and ceremonial, had equal authority, why were the 10 commandments verbally proclaimed by God at Sinai, but none of the others?”

To answer this, we need to recall the circumstances when God proclaimed the 10 commandments at Sinai. Deut. 5:22 says: “These words (the 10 commandments) the Lord spoke to all your assembly in the Mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice, and He added no more. And He wrote them in 2 tablets of stone.”

The reason why God “added no more” is given in the following verses, and is confirmed in Ex. 20:18-. Nothing is said about God only wanting to proclaim the 10 because He only wanted 10 on stone and the rest in a book written by Moses. No such statement occurs in Scripture. No! The reason given is because the people were so terrified at hearing God’s voice, that they requested to be spared from having to hear any more. So they asked Moses to approach the Lord and hear the rest of what He had to say and then convey it to them.

Had the people not been so afraid of hearing God’s audible voice, and not asked Him to stop speaking, He would have carried on proclaiming the whole law verbally. And this could have resulted in more laws being inscribed on stone, instead of just 10. And so, instead of verbally proclaiming the rest of the law publicly, in a loud fear-inspiring voice to all the Israelites, God spoke them privately to Moses, who in turn wrote them in a book and communicated them to the people (Deu. 5:22-33). And so God “added no more” to His great loud voice out of the midst of fire and darkness, but He added many more laws with His still small voice, and used the voice of Moses to convey them to the people. And as all Bible scholars should know: a message whispered by God is no less inspired and authoritative than a message loudly proclaimed! And a message from God written in a book is no less inspired and authoritative than one written on stone.

It seems reasonable to conclude then, that God only wrote the 10 commandments on stone to be a memorial or witness to the fact that He spoke to the whole nation of Israel at Sinai with an audible voice from heaven. Such an event deserved to have a memorial. It was so unique as we read in Deu. 4:33: “Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of fire as you (Israel) have heard and survive?” However,

as has already been stated: the commandments on the stone tablets which were placed inside the ark of the covenant were no more valid, authentic or binding than those written in the book that was placed at the side of the ark.

A good example of what is being advanced here can be seen in relation to the pot of manna that was also placed inside the ark with the tablets of stone. The pot was put there simply as a reminder or memorial of the wonder-event of God providing food from heaven during the wilderness journey. The little bit of manna in the pot represented the whole lot that God gave to Israel. The manna in the pot was no more authentic or superior than the rest which never found its way into the pot.

IN A BOOK BEFORE STONE TABLETS

In passing, I would like to draw attention to something that is easily overlooked, namely: God gave the Sabbath law, and Moses wrote it in a book before it was written on a stone tablet. The Sabbath law was in a book before it was on stone! I am referring to Ex. 16 where we read that God commanded Israel to not venture out on the seventh day to look for manna. He said: “Tomorrow (7th day) is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord...”

This is why, when God later wrote the Sabbath law in stone, as recorded in Ex. 20:8, He said: “Remember” - “remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” In using the word “remember,” God was referring back to the previous occasion in Ex. 16 when He first instituted the Sabbath for Israel.

That the Sabbath law was written in a book before it was written on stone can also be seen if you follow the sequence of thought in Ex. 20 to 24.

Chapter 20:1-17 records how God proclaimed the 10 commandments to Israel at Sinai.

Verses 18 to 20 mention that God would have proclaimed more but didn't because of the people's request not to.

Chapter 20:21 to 24:3 goes on to explain how Moses then went up Mount Sinai to receive the “judgements” (rulings i.e. laws of God, which included the Sabbath as we read in 23:12).

Chapter 24:3-8 then tells us that Moses descended from the Mount and recounted to Israel “all the words of the Lord” (i.e. the 10 commandments 20:1-17) and all the judgements” (i.e. the other commandments referred to in 20:21 to 23:33). Moses then wrote them all

in a book (24:4, 7) which, according to v7-8, constituted God's "covenant" with Israel. The 10 commandments were not inscribed on stone until 40 days later (Ex. 24:9-18). And, incidentally, they were not on stone for very long when Moses smashed them to pieces due to Israel corrupting herself and violating the covenant (Ex. 32) while he was up the Mount.

Until new stones were inscribed, (which took at least another 40 days), the only record of the Sabbath law was in a book. Later on in Israel's history, the 2 stone tablets disappeared. Had the 10 commandments only been written on the tablets, and not recorded in a book, those laws would have disappeared also. As it turned out, the stone tablets were not as reliable or as enduring as the book! God's wisdom in having the laws written in a book and not only on stone is evident here!

While it is true that only 10 commandments were inscribed on stone due to Israel not wanting God to proclaim more, it is interesting to note that later in Israel's history, Joshua was commanded by God to write the whole law, not just the 10 commandments, on stone. This was done at Mount Ebal opposite Mount Gerizim, after Israel entered the promised land (Josh. 8:30-35. Deu. 27:1-8). God even encouraged the Israelites to inscribe His laws on the door posts and gates of their houses (Deu. 11:20).

In view of the way the 10 commandments are regarded by some as being the primary and superior laws, and all others as secondary and inferior, it is significant to note that the two most comprehensive moral commandments in the law were not listed among the 10 and were not therefore inscribed on the stone tablets. However, they were written in the book by Moses and are found in Deu. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18. The first one reads: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." The second one says: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."

These commandments, which were not included among the 10, were regarded by Jesus as the most important of all. He quoted them in response to the question put to him by a lawyer: "Master, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus answered him saying: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these 2 commandments hang (depend) all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

It is interesting that Jesus refers to the "first" and "second" commandment but does not quote the first and second commandments in

the decalogue. He quotes from the book written by Moses not the stone tablets. In view of the fact that these are the greatest commandments and the whole law depended on them, it is very strange indeed that they were not included among the 10 if the 10 are the primary commandments!

Not only that, but if all the laws written in the book by Moses are the ones that have been abolished, and only the 10 are eternal, then we would be forced to conclude that the 2 commandments regarded by Jesus as being the greatest, have been abolished. But there would clearly be something fundamentally wrong with such a view. What would you think if someone put forth the view that because those 2 important commandments re-affirmed by Jesus were written by Moses in the book, all the other laws written in that book, including all the ceremonial laws, must also still be binding today? This, of course, would be faulty reasoning. Well, the same applies to the view that the Sabbath must still be binding today because Jesus reaffirmed some of the other commandments among the 10.

As we shall see: unless the New Testament specifically re-affirms commandments in the law of the old covenant, we are in no position to assume that such commandments are binding on those who are under the new covenant. Otherwise, where do you draw the line? To start picking and choosing commandments out of the law in an arbitrary fashion, without New Testament approval and confirmation, could result in coming under the whole law, and this happened to Christians in New testament times and has happened since. It would be presumptuous to assume that certain laws in the old covenant are binding on Christians today if they are not re-affirmed by the New Testament.

DOES GOD CHANGE HIS LAWS?

It is sometimes claimed that the Sabbath was in existence before the law of Moses and was obeyed by all the patriarchs, and for this reason was one of the 10 inscribed by God on stone. But even if this were true, it would not necessarily make it binding today, because animal sacrifices were commanded by God in patriarchal times, but are not now binding. Circumcision was also commanded by God in the days of the patriarch Abraham hundreds of years before the law of Moses, but is not now binding.

A common fallacy often advanced in favour of the Sabbath law, is the claim that God does not change His laws. But God has changed many laws that He once established, because they were dispensational

observances planned for only a particular period in history. As we have seen, animal sacrifices and circumcision are 2 examples of this. As we shall see, the same applies to the Sabbath.

This is evident from the fact that the law of circumcision took precedence over the law of the Sabbath. Now, if the law of circumcision is no longer binding, and it was more important than the law of the Sabbath, then it would not be surprising if the law of the Sabbath is also no longer binding.

So then, the question that has to be asked is: If the Sabbath law, being one of the 10, was superior to, and transcended all the other laws written in the book, how is it that circumcision, one of those laws in the book (an alleged “ceremonial law”), took precedence over the Sabbath law? That this was the case is taught in John chapter 7.

The law required all male Israelites to be circumcised on the eighth day. But sometimes the day of circumcision would fall on a Sabbath, resulting in a conflict of laws. One law demanded that circumcision should take place, and the other, that no work be done. What law then was to be broken that the more important should prevail - the one written on stone or the one written in the book? Well, of these 2 laws, the Lord required the Sabbath to be broken. It was less important than the law of circumcision; for, unless an Israelite was circumcised, he could not keep the law.

There was also another important reason why the law of circumcision took precedence over the law of the Sabbath. In the words of Jesus in Jn. 7:22: “It originated not with Moses but with the Fathers.” This implies that the Sabbath wasn’t observed by the patriarchs; it originated with Moses. Circumcision, as we read in Gen. 17, was the token of the covenant God made with Abraham involving all nations, which was confirmed by Christ (Gal. 3:16-17), whereas the Sabbath was the token of the Mosaic covenant - a sign between only the nation of Israel and God. The Abrahamic covenant was superior to the Mosaic covenant, for it promised everlasting inheritance of the land, not merely a temporary inheritance, which only the law could give. The law of circumcision therefore took precedence over the law of the Sabbath.

It should be evident from this example that the laws written on the stone tablets were not greater or superior to those written in the book. Quite the opposite in the case of circumcision and there are other examples.

It should also be evident as stated before, that if the law of circumcision, being superior to the law of the Sabbath, has been abolished

in Christ; it would not be surprising if the inferior law of the Sabbath has been abolished also.

The law of tithing was also included among the laws written in the book by Moses (Lev. 27:30-32. Num. 18:20-24). The tithe had to be paid to the priests who administered the old covenant, who were of the tribe of Levi. No one else was entitled to it. But of course Jesus, of the tribe of Judah, has become high priest. And, as we read in Heb. 7:12: "When there is a change of priesthood, there is necessarily a change also in the law."

It is rather strange therefore that some Sabbath keepers who teach that laws written in the book by Moses have been abolished, yet regard the law of tithing as still binding. To justify this, some point out that some of the patriarchs tithed before the law was written (Gen. 14:20. 28:22). But, as already pointed out: the patriarchs also offered animal sacrifice and practised circumcision before the law was written by Moses! It should also be pointed out that the patriarch's tithing was voluntary not compulsory. They were not commanded by law to do it.

MORAL LAWS HARDEST TO KEEP

Those who divide the law up into 2 parts: the moral and ceremonial, tend to believe that the ceremonial laws were the hardest to keep. It is thought that they were more contrary to human nature and therefore more burdensome. Those who believe this feel that it justifies their belief that it is the ceremonial laws that have been abolished, not the moral.

This unfortunately reveals a lack of perception of human nature and human tendencies. Throughout Biblical history, God has had more of a struggle getting His people to set high moral standards than getting them to engage in rituals and ceremonies. It has, since time immemorial, been a weakness of human nature to feel satisfied spiritually by engaging in religious ritual rather than setting high moral standards.

Ritual and ceremony merely involves physical action which can be performed mechanically and clinically without the heart or affections or conscience being involved. The ceremonial arrangements under the law of Moses, including a full day's rest and relaxation on the Sabbath, were far easier and less demanding to carry out than the moral commandments such as not coveting etc. It is therefore a mistake to regard the ceremonial aspects of the law as being harder to obey than the moral, and limit the "handwriting of ordinances" removed by the cross of Christ, to only the ceremonial aspects. The handwriting of the law that was against the Jews was the whole of their law, for they were condemned by the whole of it,

even if they only failed to keep one little part of it!

THE “LAW OF THE LORD” AND “LAW OF MOSES.”

Now, because God Himself verbally declared the 10 commandments from Mount Sinai to Israel, and the finger of God inscribed them on stone, whereas the rest of the commandments were spoken to Moses and he wrote them in a book, some claim that the 10 commandments (moral law) are designated “the law of God,” and the rest (ceremonial laws) are “the law of Moses.” They then claim that only the law of Moses (Mosaic law) has been abolished, not the law of God. The Bible, however, never makes this distinction. It is an unfounded and unscriptural distinction. As in the case of dividing the law into 2 parts: the moral and ceremonial, so the dividing of it into the law of God and law of Moses, is an artificial man-made (or woman-made) division, and is not justified by the Word of God.

Anyone who has a Concordance and is willing to check all the texts containing the expressions: “law of the Lord” and: “law of Moses,” will soon discover that they are used interchangeably of the whole law given to Israel. Sometimes ceremonial laws are called “the law of the Lord,” and the 10 commandments are sometimes referred to as “the law of Moses.” For example, in 2 Chr. 31:3 reference is made to the animal sacrifices (ceremonial laws) being “written in the law of the Lord.” But such sacrifices were not among the 10 commandments inscribed on stone. They were written by Moses in the book, but they are called “the law of the Lord” not “the law of Moses.” The same applies in 1 Chr. 16:40.

In 2 Chr. 35:12, 26 the expression: “the book of Moses” is used interchangeably with: “the law of the Lord.” Neh. 10:28-29 refers to “God’s law which was given through Moses” and speaks of it as “the commandment of the Lord our God.” Lk. 2:22 refers to a ceremonial law as being “according to the law of Moses,” but v23 also refers to a ceremonial law and says it was “written in the law of the lord.” This is further confirmed in Lk. 2:39 where it says all the ceremonies performed were “according to the law of the Lord.”

It is clear from these examples that the expressions: “the law of the Lord” and: “the law of Moses” are synonymous. We must therefore conclude that the laws written by Moses in the book were as much part of “the law of the Lord” as the 10 commandments.

Our Lord Jesus, whose knowledge and authority cannot be questioned, attributed the fifth commandment in the decalogue to Moses.

It relates to honouring parents. He also joined with it as of equal authority, the penalty for disobeying it, which is not contained in the fifth commandment itself which was inscribed on stone, but which is in the book written by Moses. This is what Jesus said, recorded in Mk. 7:9-13: “Full well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition, for Moses said, honour thy father and thy mother, and whoever curses father and mother let him die the death.” In this statement, Jesus treats with equal authority, a law in the decalogue and a law in the writings of Moses, and attributes both to Moses!

We read in Gal. 3:10: “Cursed is everyone who does not always obey all things which are written in the book of the law.” Does this mean that only those who disobey the rules written in the book by Moses will be cursed, but not those who disobey the 10 written by the finger of God? That would of course be an absurd conclusion! Clearly, the expression “book of the law” includes both the 10 commandments and all the other commandments given by God at the hands of Moses. Jn. 1:17 puts it like this: “The law was given through Moses.”

Making a distinction between the law of God and law of Moses is a mischievous and dangerous doctrine, because it treats the latter as inferior to the former, as if to say that what God spoke audibly was more important and authoritative than what He spoke to Moses privately. But the truth of the matter is that God - the very same God who verbally declared the 10 commandments to Israel at Sinai, also declared the other commandments to Moses. All the commandments were equally inspired and equally authoritative. God alone was the source of all.

Time and again it is emphasized in Scripture that God spoke to Moses and commanded Him to write down what he heard. Because God was the source, the law given is called “the law of God.” But, because Moses was the channel or mediator through whom God communicated His law, it is sometimes referred to as “the law of Moses.” One designation refers to the source and the other to the channel.

One thing is absolutely certain: nothing that Moses wrote was his own private opinion personally conjured up in his own mind. As we read in 2 Pet. 1:20-21: “No Scripture is of private decision, or of the will of man, for holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS WERE PART OF THE OLD COVENANT

There is also another distinction which is sometimes made which is incorrect. In order to uphold the belief that the Sabbath law is still in force today, it is argued that the “old covenant” which has been abolished, did not involve the 10 commandments, but only the laws written in the book by Moses.

However, Scripture does not exclude the 10 commandments from the covenant that God made with Israel. It is impossible to exclude the 10 commandments from the old covenant. For example, we read in Ex. 34:28 that the Lord “wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the 10 commandments.” Nothing could be plainer than this. The covenant clearly involved the 10 commandments. They were not excluded from it. In the preceding verse (v27) God also told Moses to write down the words of the covenant that had been declared to him in the previous verses. Among these was the Sabbath (v21). It is evident from this that the Sabbath was part of the old covenant.

Deut. 4:13 confirms this: “And He (God) declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even 10 commandments, and He wrote them upon 2 tablets of stone.” Again in Deu. 5 the 10 commandments are enumerated and referred to as “the covenant” which God made with Israel. Other verses supporting these are in Deu. 9:9-15. 1 Kng. 8:9, 21.

Heb. 9:1 refers to the “first (former-old) covenant” and its “ordinances” (margin: “ceremonies”) and verse 4 links the 10 commandments with it, describing them as “the tablets of the covenant.” It is evident from this that both the moral and ceremonial aspects of the law were regarded as belonging to one and the same law - the law of the old covenant.

Heb. 8:7 teaches that this covenant was faulty, and v13 declares it was “ready to vanish away” in order to give place to the new covenant. The unavoidable conclusion to this is that the old covenant that was abolished, included the 10 commandments.

This is confirmed in 2 Cor. 3:6 where Paul says that the “letter” (i.e. the written code of the law) kills, but the Spirit gives life.” In response to this statement, some would like to conclude that Paul’s reference to the written code is to all the ceremonial laws written by Moses in the book, not the 10 commandments written by God on stone. But the very next verse disallows this conclusion, for it goes on to refer to “the ministration

of death written and engraven in stones.” And v9 refers to it as a “ministration of condemnation.”

It is made evident here that when Paul said the written code condemns and kills, he included the 10 commandments written in stones, which, he says, ministered death. Here, Paul plainly describes the 10 commandments as a dispensation of death, and the Sabbath law was, of course, one of these.

Does this mean, therefore, that all of the 10 commandments have been abolished, and that we can kill and steal, commit adultery and covet with impunity? By no means! As mentioned earlier, the major moral commandments were re-affirmed in the New Testament and are incorporated in the new covenant, and Christians are expected to obey them. Someone might say: “But, if the moral commandments are included among those that ministered condemnation and death in the old covenant, as stated in 2 Cor. 3, why have they been re-affirmed in the new? Would they not still minister condemnation and death?”



CHAPTER TWO

We have seen from 2 Cor. 3:6, 9 that the law, including the 10 commandments, ministered condemnation and death, and has therefore been abolished. This of course raises the question that if the law has been abolished, does this mean that we can kill and steal, commit adultery and covet with impunity? Also: if such moral commandments are included among those that ministered condemnation and death, why have they been reaffirmed in the New Testament? Would they not still minister condemnation and death?

The answer is “no,” and the reason for this is because these commandments are not in the same terms and context in the new covenant as they were in the old covenant. They ministered death because of the relationship in which they were placed in the old covenant, but they are in a different relationship in the new covenant. You see, in the old covenant, the ruling or governing principle was, as we read in Deu. 27:26 (Gal. 3:10): “Cursed is everyone who does not always obey everything written in the book of the law.” As has been pointed out in Jam. 2:10, one only had to break the law in one little point, and he became guilty of breaking it all, and was disqualified from attaining eternal life.

Just one transgression was like one drop of black dye being dropped into a glass of water, resulting in it all being discoloured; there would be black-out - death. It was like a mountain climber who has spent hours labouring to climb a mountain and almost reaches the top and slips and falls. Just one slip and it results in death. The law of the old covenant was as rigid, inflexible and unyielding as the law of gravity. Due to the weakness of the flesh or should I say, due to the power of sin in the flesh, it was impossible for anyone to render total obedience to the law. Sooner or later the propensity of sin in the flesh would assert itself causing everyone to transgress the law, i.e. commit an act of sin, resulting in falling short of the glory of God, and coming under the death penalty. As Rom. 6:23 puts it: “The wages of sin is death.” Therefore, from Adam to Christ, sin reigned unto death, for all sinned. Sin was the prince or ruler of the world.

This does not mean that God’s commandments were not good laws. No, as Rom. 7:12 says: “The law is holy, just and good.” And it is stated in Gal. 3:21 that if there was a law that could have given life, it would have been the law given by God to Israel. But to gain eternal life through the law required total 100 percent obedience - no slip-ups and no falls; not one drop of black dye, otherwise it ministered condemnation and death.

No one, except Jesus, due to his Divine begettal, was morally and spiritually strong enough to achieve this and lead a sinless life. He alone honoured the law by vanquishing sin, and established 100 percent righteousness. His sacrifice alone conquered and destroyed sin. The animal sacrifices under the law were powerless to achieve this. This is obvious by the fact that they had to keep being offered. If they were sufficient to deal the death blow to the sin problem, it would not have been necessary for them to keep being offered. After all, Jesus does not have to keep offering himself, because his one single sacrifice was completely efficacious. For this reason Jesus was raised from the dead, and has been given the power to save others. He alone qualifies as conqueror of sin, and Saviour, and only he can rescue others from death and bestow eternal life.

To everyone else under the law, even the best commandments could only minister condemnation and death due to the strict legal context and terms in which they were placed. In the old covenant therefore, there was no hope of eternal life, but only the bondage and curse of fear and death. This was all of course, a Divine arrangement. The law was designed to reveal sin and the sinfulness of the flesh. Without law, sin's existence would not be known. For example, without a commandment saying: "Thou shalt not covet," man would never know what a lustful coveting creature he is.

By his failure to keep the law, the law revealed how weak man is and how impossible it is to earn salvation by his own effort and deeds. The law was therefore designed to humble man and bring him to an end of himself and to the realization that to be saved there must be some other way other than by his own effort of keeping law. And there certainly is! Jesus came on the scene and said: "I am the way." And as we know, his "way" is the way of grace, not law - a way that forgives sin and does not condemn, making salvation a gift. It is not something we can earn or deserve or a reward for services rendered, but a gift of grace by the love of God. This is how God wanted it to be - like a father who loves to give gifts to his children and only expects appreciation and gratitude and respect in return. He would certainly not be pleased if his children snatched the gift and said: "we have earned this and deserve it," and treated it like wages instead of a gift. That would be pride and arrogance. God wants His children to be dependant on Him and sense their need for Him. That is why He has arranged for salvation to be a gift and not something that can be earned by doing this and doing that, observing this and observing that. We therefore read this in Jn. 1:17: "For the law was

given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

Faithful Israelites under the law therefore looked forward to the advent of the Messiah - the “seed” promised by God from the beginning by whom salvation would come. For this reason, the law is likened to a schoolmaster leading the nation to Christ. Paul taught that the law was “added because of transgression, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Gal. 3:19, 24). N.B: The word “till” indicates that there was a time limit to which the law of the old covenant would operate.

A new and better covenant was clearly required, which was not so legalistic, judgmental and condemning; in order for eternal life to be released. The terms therefore governing the new covenant had to be different from those governing the old covenant.

THE LAW OF CHRIST

There is however, a “law” involved in the new covenant and it is called “the law of Christ” in Gal. 6:2 and “royal law” in Jam. 2:8. But instead of being a ministration of condemnation and death, it is “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). It is called this because it liberates believers from the bondage of sin and death by grace, and offers hope of life.

This doesn’t mean that Christians are free to do as they please, but rather that when they sin, they are not immediately condemned to death, and disqualified from eternal life. As we read in 1 Jn. 2:1-2: “If anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is a propitiation for our sins.” Again in 1 Jn. 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” On what basis? Certainly not on the basis of the works of the law, but grace. When genuine repentance and confession takes place, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin and eternal life remains secure. “There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

As mentioned before, “the law of Christ” is referred to as “the royal law” in Jam. 2:8 and is defined in terms of loving our neighbour as ourselves, i.e. treating our neighbour as we would like to be treated - with dignity and respect. The royal law is therefore the rule of love; and love fulfils the law. Where love and grace are inscribed on the fleshly tablets of the heart, you don’t need laws on tablets of stone! If you love your neighbour as yourself and treat him how you yourself would want to be treated, you will not steal from him or commit adultery with his wife etc.

The “thou shalt nots” in the law were designed to teach this principle and inculcate it into the human heart.

It was good to tell a man not to kill, steal, bear false witness etc, but if love and grace is not graven in the heart, there is no guarantee that the mere prohibition of sin will prevent it. To have Christ in the heart is to have that love and grace, for he is the expression and epitome of it. And when this is the case, there is no need for law. Rom. 10:4: “Christ is the end of the law.” The law of Christ then, being the rule of love, is not burdensome and grievous to bear. The yoke of his law is, as he said, “light” and “easy” (Matt. 11:28-30), and it fills the heart with joy and peace like the law never could. True “rest” is therefore found in him. That is why he said: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” As we will see, as this study progresses: the Sabbath law of the old covenant takes on a new meaning and application in the law of Christ, i.e. the law of the new covenant.

SOME OLD LAWS ARE REAFFIRMED

As I have pointed out before, some of the 10 commandments are reaffirmed in the New Testament by Jesus and his apostles. In view of this, it may seem strange that some Scriptures teach that the laws of the old covenant have passed away, then other Scriptures re-affirm some of them in the context of the new covenant, and teach that Christians are expected to obey them. How can we reconcile this seemingly contradictory situation?

It may help to liken the old and new covenants to an old and new constitution. A new constitution is never devoid of every single clause in the old one. A new constitution usually reaffirms various clauses of the old constitution, because there are basic fundamental issues in a constitution that never change. However, other issues do change, necessitating a new constitution. So, when it is said that the old constitution has become obsolete and is abolished, this does not necessarily mean that every single clause in it no longer has any relevance. No! Some of the clauses will re-appear in the new constitution and sometimes with modification. But who would be foolish enough, upon discovering that some of the clauses in the old constitution have been re-affirmed in the new, to conclude that all the other clauses in the old must also apply in the new?

The same applies to an old and new telephone book. Due to some names and numbers becoming obsolete, due to death, or due to a new and

better system, many will not be printed in the new phone book. The old phone book becomes out of date and is discarded. But that does not mean that all the names and numbers become irrelevant and that none of them will be reprinted in the new one. And who would be silly enough to criticize the new book because it contains some of the names and numbers that were in the old one? Who would be silly enough to think that none of the names and addresses in the old book should be in the new? And who would be so unreasonable to say: "This is not a new book at all" because it reaffirmed some of the numbers in the old book? It would like-wise clearly be wrong to assume that the new covenant could not re-affirm any of the points or principles that were in the old covenant.

The question is therefore, which of the 10 commandments are re-affirmed in the new covenant? Is the Sabbath re-affirmed? A careful investigation reveals that 8 of the 10 are re-affirmed, which means 2 of the 10 are not re-affirmed:

1st. (Ex. 20:3): Matt. 4:10. Mk. 12:29. 1 Jn. 5:21. Eph. 4:6. 1 Cor. 8:5-6. Matt. 19:17.

2nd. (Ex. 20:4-6): 1 Cor. 10:14. Rom. 1:25. 1 Jn. 5:21. Gal. 5:20. Eph. 5:5.

3rd. (Ex. 20:7): No longer applicable: Matt. 5:34-35. Jam. 5:12.

4th. (Ex. 20:8-11): Abolished: Col. 2:16-17. Rom. 14:5. Gal. 4:9-11. Acts 20:7.

5th. (Ex. 20:12): Eph. 6:1-2. Col. 3:20.

6th. (Ex. 20:13): Matt. 5:21-22. Rom. 13:9. 1 Jn. 3:15. Gal. 5:21. 1 Pet. 4:15.

7th. (Ex. 20:14): Matt. 5:27-28. Heb. 13:4. 1 Cor. 6:9-10. Rom. 13:9. Gal. 5:19.

8th. (Ex. 20:15): Rom. 2:21, 13:9. 1 Cor. 6:10. Eph. 4:28.

9th. (Ex. 20:16): Rom. 13:9. Eph. 4:25, 31. Col. 3:9. 1 Tim. 3:8-11. 2 Tim. 3:3.

10th. (Ex. 20:17): Rom. 7:7. Eph. 5:3. Col. 3:5. Rom. 13:9. Lk. 12:15.

As can be seen, the first, second and fifth through to the tenth are the ones reaffirmed. The third and fourth are the ones not re-affirmed. The third relates to not taking the name of the Lord in vain, which relates to swearing a false oath in the name of the Lord. This is no longer applicable because the swearing of oaths is not permitted under the new covenant and is therefore irrelevant (Matt. 5:34-35. Jam. 5:12).

The fourth commandment of course, relates to the Sabbath and one will search the New Testament in vain to find a re-affirmation of this commandment. The Sabbath law is not re-affirmed on one single occasion

by Jesus or the apostles. For example, in Matt. 19:16-23 we read of an interview with one who asked Jesus what was necessary to gain eternal life. One would have thought that if the seventh day Sabbath was necessary to keep, that Jesus would have mentioned it. Significantly enough, he drew attention to some of the 10 commandments, but did not include the Sabbath. He referred to the commandments against murder, adultery, theft, perjury, neglect of parents and lack of thought for one's neighbour, and he added the words: "If you want to be perfect ... give to the poor," but made no reference to the Sabbath. It is evident from this that observance of the Sabbath was not necessary to attain to perfection or become complete.

It should be emphasized at this point that just because Jesus re-affirmed some of the 10 commandments, this does not give us license to assume that the rest of them must also be binding. The old covenant has been discarded and only those parts of it that have been re-affirmed are binding under the new covenant.

Coming back to the example of a phone book: Just because the phone numbers of 8 people in the new phone book are the same as in the old book, does not necessarily mean that the same applies to others. One needs to check the new phone book to see if they are still there. And so it is with the Sabbath. One needs to check the New Testament to see if it is still there and binding under the new covenant. Careful research reveals it is not.

ONLY ONE WAY TO KEEP THE SABBATH

If it be insisted that the Sabbath law be kept, the question that this immediately raises is: How should it be kept? Because this law is not taught or re-affirmed in the New Testament, we have no instructions there as to how it should be kept. This leaves us only one other place for instruction: the law of the Sabbath under the old covenant recorded in the Old Testament. Either that, or make up our own rules as we go along.

If we want to be Biblical, there is only one way to keep the law of the Sabbath, and that is according to the law! And the ruling principle of this law is the same as the law of circumcision i.e. those who insist on observing it, place themselves under an obligation to observe the whole law. Gal. 5:3: "With all solemnity I repeat my warning to every man who is circumcised, that he is obligated to keep the whole law."

We learn from this that if anyone picks out a part of the law of the old covenant that is not re-affirmed in the new covenant, be it circumcision or

the Sabbath, and if they insist on obeying it, they are under an obligation to keep the whole law, because it was a package deal. One could not pick and choose what laws they would observe. With the law it is all or nothing and to deviate in one small part resulted in violating the lot. A partial observance is unacceptable to God and will do no good.

If it be insisted that we rest on the seventh day because it was one of the 10 commandments, then it should be kept as it was expected to be kept when the 10 commandments were given at Sinai. This means that every other aspect of the Sabbath law must be kept also, not to mention all the other Mosaic ordinances including circumcision etc.

Keeping the Sabbath required doing no work of any kind (Ex. 31:12-17); not even sticks could be gathered for the fire (Num. 15:32-36). No fires could be kindled (Ex. 35:2-3); no loads could be carried (Jer. 17:21); no one was allowed to leave his place (Ex. 16:29); and anyone who violated the Sabbath law had to be put to death (Ex. 31:12-17. Num. 15:32-36). The Sabbath law also required Levitical priests to offer “two lambs of the first year without blemish as the burnt offering of every Sabbath” (Num. 28:9-10). And these 2 lambs had to be offered on the altar at Jerusalem.

The fact that this is the law of the Sabbath and there is no other or modified law of the Sabbath mentioned anywhere else in Scripture that we are commanded to observe, means this is how it would have to be observed if we wanted to obey the law. No one has the right to modify it to suit themselves or suit their situation in a Gentile country.

Such a law is of course impossible to keep, especially for Gentiles, except in one or two particulars. There is no altar at Jerusalem; no lambs can be offered by Levitical priests; (Christ’s priesthood has annulled the Levitical priesthood). The laws of the land prevent the death sentence from being carried out on all who violate the Sabbath law, and most of those who claim to keep the Sabbath break it anyway without any thought or fear of the death penalty. This results in coming under a curse, for the law clearly states: “Cursed is everyone who does not obey everything written in the book of the law.”

THE SABBATH WAS GIVEN TO JEWS NOT GENTILES

The law of the Sabbath was clearly delivered to the Israelites and not the Gentiles. As we read in Rom. 3:19: “Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law” i.e. to the Jews (Israelites) not Gentiles. The law was not given to the Gentiles; they were

never under it. The apostle clearly referred to the Gentiles in Rom. 2:10-12 as being “without the law.” The observance of the seventh day was only obligatory upon the Israelites so long as the law of the old covenant was in force. Speaking to Israel, God said this: “Verily my Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you” i.e. between God and Israel. God was not speaking to Gentiles (Ex. 31:13).

The Sabbaths belonged to the land and people of Israel, and could only be properly kept strictly according to the law while they resided in the land. This is evident from the fact that the law required 2 lambs to be offered as a burnt offering every Sabbath. And this offering, like all the other offerings, had to be offered by the Jewish priests upon an altar at Jerusalem and not in any other city in Israel. Israel would therefore not only have to be restored to her own land, but also reinstate the priesthood and rebuild the altar and temple at Jerusalem, before all the demands of the Sabbath law could be fully met.

It really is therefore, quite unsatisfactory for Gentiles in Gentile countries to claim that they are keeping the Sabbath simply because they do less work on Saturday.

NOT BINDING ON CHRISTIANS

Now, not only is the Sabbath law not re-affirmed in the New Testament, but it is actually rejected as being binding on Christians. And it is significant that the first heresy introduced into the early church was an attempt to superimpose the Jewish law upon the teaching of Christ. It was argued by some, as we read in Act. 15:6: “That it was needful ... to keep the law of Moses.” This teaching was vigorously opposed by the apostles who instructed the Gentile believers with these words: “We have heard that certain men have troubled you with words, saying, you must ... keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment.”

The apostles recommended a course of action to be adopted by Gentile believers in view of this teaching, and it is most significant that nothing is said about having to observe the Sabbath or other Jewish holy days. And, except for not eating blood, no food or drink restrictions were laid down either. The apostles decided that 4 restrictions should be introduced to make possible social interaction between Jews and Gentiles, but the Sabbath was not mentioned. Surely this is a significant omission! If the Sabbath was an eternal and immutable law, one would have expected it to be stated by the apostolic council, and to be included in the decrees that were formulated as a basis of co-operation between Jewish

and Gentile Christians. But it wasn't! No reference is made here, or anywhere else in the New Testament to the necessity of observing a Sabbath.

THIN EDGE OF THE WEDGE

The belief of some that special blessings are available for Christians who observe aspects of the law which have not been re-affirmed by Christ and his apostles, is like the thin edge of the wedge. I know of a case where a group of Christians started observing the weekly Sabbath, then the monthly and annual observances of the feasts, including the Passover and the rituals connected with it, not to mention food and drink regulations. In process of time, from seemingly innocent and harmless beginnings, a gap was created that widened more and more between those who got caught up in this and those who refused to get caught up in it.

Getting involved in ordinances of the law can easily lead to an unbalanced concentration and pre-occupation on the books of the law, resulting in not having full focus on Christ. Paul warns about this in 1 Tim. 1:4-7 where he refers to some in his own day who had “turned aside” from new covenant principles “into vain discussions, desiring to be teachers of the law...” He also wrote to Titus saying: “Avoid foolish questions and genealogies, and contentions and strivings about the law, for they are unprofitable and vain” (Titus 3:9).

We read in Col. 2:23 that Paul attributes carnal fleshly motivation to some in his day who were insisting on keeping ordinances of the law, including the weekly Sabbath, and monthly and annual festivals, along with food and drink restrictions. He says: “These rules seem to be wise and good from an outward appearance, for such devotion requires a strong will, self-humbling, rigorous discipline of the body; but they have no real value in controlling and conquering the evil thoughts and desires of the flesh. Instead, they simply pamper the flesh and make a person puffed up and proud.”

It does not automatically follow of course, that all who keep the ordinances of the law are motivated this way. But the fact that Paul attributes the keeping of such ordinances to such motivation, makes us aware of the possibilities and dangers, and should result in a very careful analysis by all who might be tempted to pursue the same course.

As I said before, pre-occupation with the law can lessen pre-occupation with, and focus on Christ. Why? Because focus on Christ involves focussing on his work and his achievement. But focussing on the

works of the law results in focussing on our own efforts and achievements. The flesh loves that and gets a buzz out of it, specially if the majority of Christians are not doing it! It creates a feeling of elitism, exclusiveness, uniqueness and superiority, and the human ego loves that!

ROMANS 14

Let us now turn to Rom. 14. Here, Paul says a Christian who is weak in the faith should be received into fellowship, but not to be judged and argued with over his opinions. It is evident from what follows that Paul initially had in mind a person who only ate vegetables, i.e. a vegetarian. He says: “For one has faith to eat all things, but another who is weak, only eats vegetables. Let not him who eats all things despise him who only eats vegetables, and let not him who only eats vegetables despise him who eats all things, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge (i.e. find fault with) another man’s servant? To his own master (Christ) he stands or falls. Yea, he shall be held up, for God is able to make him stand.”

After saying this, Paul continues his theme relating to tolerance of those who are weak in the faith by saying: “One man esteems one day above another: another man esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day (i.e. a particular day like the Sabbath) observes it in honour of the Lord. He also who eats (i.e.all things) eats in honour of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who does not eat all things, abstains in honour of the Lord and gives thanks to God.”

Paul’s reference to those who esteem one day above another in honour of the Lord is clearly to the Jewish Christians, some of whom wanted to observe the Sabbath. Having been brought up from childhood accustomed to observing the Sabbath day, it is not difficult to understand that some would wish to continue doing so, visiting the Synagogue as they had done all their life, linking up with all their friends and family. Paul’s verdict on this is that it was permissible to do so provided they do it in honour of the Lord and did not judge (criticize and condemn) those who didn’t observe the Sabbath day, or try to impose the same restriction on them.

It should be evident from this section of Scripture that if Christians were expected to esteem one day above others by keeping the Sabbath, Paul would have said so, for this is the very issue he is dealing with. But he didn’t. If Christians were under a law of God strictly commanding

them to esteem the seventh day above others, Paul would not tell them that they can decide in their own mind whether or not to esteem one day above another. Quite the opposite. If I was a Sabbath keeper, I would be challenged by this!

It is also challenging to note that Paul's reference to those who esteemed one day above another is in the context of those who are weak in the faith. It is not a sign of strong and mature faith to be setting aside one particular day above another in honour of the Lord, because to do so is to revert to the law of the old covenant which Paul describes in Gal. 4:9 as "weak" - "weak and beggarly." Jesus has called us to bear the cross and rest from sin and self and self effort "daily," and worship God in spirit and truth every day; not one day in particular, but every day alike.

In passing, it should also be observed that Paul's comments in Rom. 14 indicate that, as in the case of circumcision and some of the hygiene and dietary practices in the law of Moses; the benefits of the Sabbath, as a day of rest, can be enjoyed without coming under the law and without incurring the burden of the law. Paul's reason for allowing people to observe the Sabbath had nothing to do with upholding and imposing the law. If it was a binding law, Paul would have expected all Christians to keep it and esteem the seventh day above others.

GALATIANS 4:10

It was the idea of superimposing the law, with its seventh day observance, that helped to establish the great apostasy which ultimately developed in the church. It called for this rebuke from the apostle Paul: "After having acknowledged God, or rather are acknowledged by Him, how can you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements? Do you desire to be in bondage again? You observe days and months and times and years. I am afraid for you lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Gal. 4:9-10). "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth ... This only I desire to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit; are you now ending and seeking perfection and completeness in the flesh?" Because the doing of the works of the law became a source of pride and boasting to the flesh, Paul made reference here to those who were engaged in this as being "in the flesh."

Some of course claim that when Paul criticized the Galatians for observing days, that he did not mean the weekly Sabbath, but other

monthly and annual holy days. But there is no authority in Scripture for discriminating between the weekly holy days in the law and other holy days. The children of Israel were under compulsion to observe all the holy days set apart in their law. They were never told that one was more important or necessary than another. Transgression of monthly or annual holy days incurred the same penalty as transgression of the weekly Sabbath. If Paul believed that the Lord wanted Christians to observe the weekly holy day, he would surely have made that exception clear when he spoke against the observance of days. But he didn't! He made no exceptions because there aren't any. None of the holy days in the law, be they weekly, monthly or annual, are binding on Christians. This is particularly evident in Col. 2:16-17.

COLOSSIANS 2:16-17

“Let no man therefore judge you in relation to food and drink or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath. These things are a shadow of things to come, but the solid reality is Christ.”

The context of this statement is significant. In the previous verses Paul stresses that Christians are made complete in Christ without the works of the law. In v8 he issues a warning to “beware lest any man rob you (of freedom in Christ) through philosophy and vain deceit, based on the traditions of men ...” To give an example, Paul then goes on and explains how that literal physical circumcision under the law has been replaced by a spiritual circumcision in Christ. Circumcision is now “in the spirit” and not “in the letter” (Rom. 2:29).

The term: “letter of the law” signifies the literal physical application of the law’s ordinances. According to Paul, the literal application of these ordinances is “carnal” because they pointed to higher and deeper truths in Christ and must be applied in a spiritual manner. As we read in Rom. 7:6: “We should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.” Again in 2 Cor. 3:6: “God has made us able ministers of the new covenant; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life.”

In Col. 2:14 Paul says that through Christ, God has “blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us ...” He then goes on to say: “Let no man therefore judge you in relation to food and drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath. These things are a shadow of things to come, but the solid reality is Christ.”

What Paul is saying here is this: “In view of the fact that the old covenant with its ordinances is cancelled, do not allow those who insist on observing those ordinances to criticize or condemn you for not keeping to the old rules and regulations relating to foods and drinks and holy days. Such things were only a shadow of better things to come; the solid reality is Christ.”

In Col. 2:16 the Authorised Version says: “Sabbath days” and on this basis some have argued that Paul was not referring to the Sabbath i.e. the weekly Sabbath, but other monthly and yearly Sabbaths which were kept at various times during certain feasts.

However, the word “days” in Col. 2:16 in the Authorised Version is in italics, indicating it has been inserted by the translators and does not belong to the original text. Literally, it should read: “Sabbath.” The word “Sabbath” can only properly refer to the Sabbath, which was the weekly one.

That it must refer to a weekly observance is confirmed by the fact that it is preceded by a reference to monthly and annual holy days. The word “holy day” comes from a Greek word meaning “feast” or “festival” and relates to annual events in the Jewish calendar. The same word is translated “feast” in Lk. 2:41 and 22:1 in relation to the annual Passover, and in Jn. 7:2 to the annual event of tabernacles.

The “new moon” in Col. 2:16 relates of course to monthly observances, for the new moon occurs on a monthly basis.

So then, the three terms “holy day, new moon and Sabbath” refers to annual, monthly and weekly holy days under the law. All three of these were merely shadows, not solid realities. The same systematical order is quite common in Scripture: Num. 28. 1 Chr. 23:30-31. 2 Chr. 2:4. 8:13. 31:3. Neh. 10:33. Isa. 1:13. Ezk. 45:17. Hos. 2:11.

Nowhere in Scripture is an exception made of the weekly Sabbath in the sense of saying that only this holy day should be observed by Christians but not the others.

Under the law, Israel had to observe all the holy days in their calendar. They were not told that one was more necessary to be observed than another. Failure to observe the monthly or annual holy days constituted “sin” every bit as much as failure to observe the weekly Sabbath. Actually, the keeping of monthly and annual holy days would have been less of a burden than the keeping of a weekly holy day, because they didn’t have to be kept so often. So why should the monthly and annual observances be abolished and the weekly one remain?

Here’s another thought: Why is the Sabbath day now kept by some

without the accompanying sacrifices and ceremony that the law of the Sabbath required? Why has the observance of the day been kept and the other associated ordinances dismissed? Where is the Biblical authority for doing this?

Why has both observance of the monthly and annual holy days and their accompanying ritual been dismissed by many Sabbath keepers? Why not continue to observe the monthly and annual holy days without their accompanying ritual as in the case of the weekly holy day?

So then, in Col. 2:16 Paul clearly places annual, monthly and weekly holy days in the same category as belonging to “the handwriting of ordinances” which merely foreshadowed things pertaining to Christ, and which have been cancelled by the cross.

Therefore he says, don’t let anyone criticize or condemn you for not conforming to food and drink regulations prescribed by the law, and for not keeping the annual and monthly holy days and the weekly Sabbath. It is evident from this that the Sabbath law is not binding upon those who are under the new covenant in Christ!



CHAPTER THREE

In what way then, it will be asked, was the Sabbath a shadow of things to come in Christ? Well, in the same way that circumcision was a one day event involving the cutting off of flesh, and pointed to a daily spiritual principle in Christ of crucifying the lust of the flesh; so the one day a week Sabbath pointed to a daily resting and ceasing from doing the works of self - of sin and the flesh.

As circumcision is no longer according to the letter of the law, but of the heart and spirit, so also is the Sabbath. Instead of the Sabbath being just one particular day in the week that was treated as holy, and during which God's people honoured Him and spoke about Him and delighted in Him, ceasing from doing the works of self and the flesh, so also in Christ, the spiritual principle of the Sabbath is applied every day. In the words of Jesus in Lk. 9:23: "If any man will follow me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily" i.e. every day. Christ's followers deny themselves every day of the week, not just one day.

The principle of the Sabbath therefore has a place in the life of Christ's followers, but not in the restricted sense of a mere seventh day observance. The letter of the law is replaced by the spirit, which involves a daily application of Sabbath principles. Rom. 14:5 relates to this when it refers to those who esteem every day alike, but those who were weak in the faith esteemed one day above another. And so Paul said: "We are delivered from the law, that ... we should serve in newness of the spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" Rom. 7:6.

"COME UNTO ME ... AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST"

Jesus hinted at this spiritual application of the Sabbath when he said: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). The original Greek word translated "rest" is *anapausis* and is a word consistently used in the Greek Old Testament for the Sabbath rest. From this we conclude that in Christ we find the true Sabbath, which involves following his example of a daily dedication to God and a daily ceasing from the works of sin and the flesh. In other words, treating each and every day as a holy day; esteeming every day the same as a day to serve God. In Christ, sin has been vanquished and the burden of it has been rolled away from all who come to him and follow him. The yoke of bondage caused through sin and death has been removed from all who identify with the cross. They are now, as Paul puts it in Eph.

2:6 “sitting” i.e. seated (resting) with Christ in heavenly places, no longer striving to do the works of the law, and no longer active in sin and the flesh. Such is the true rest in Christ to which the Sabbath pointed. After all, as is clearly testified in Col. 2:16-17, the Sabbath was only a shadow of things to come, but Christ is the substance or solid reality.

The daily dedication of Christians to Christ, following his example of living holy sanctified lives to the glory of God, is the greatest “sign” possible by which witness and testimony is given to God - a far greater sign and witness than a formal one day a week observance, as under the law. The one day each week during which the Israelites kept the Sabbath and were required to focus less on themselves and more on the Lord, was a constant reminder designed to train and discipline them to have a more God-centred attitude every day, such as was manifested by Christ. As we read in Gal. 3:25: “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ ... but after that faith comes, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”

It is sad that the Israelites were so selfish and self-centred that they had to be compelled by law to spend one day a week focussed on God. They were too carnal and rebellious to be able to do this every day although true Israelites like David did. His attitude was: “every day will I bless Thee” (Ps. 145:2). Hence, as Gal. 3:19 says: “The law was added because of transgression, till the seed (Christ) should come to whom the promise was made.” As pointed out before, the word “till” indicates there was a time limit to the period during which the law would be in force. It was only to be in force till Christ came!

“IT IS FINISHED.”

When Christ on the cross declared: “It is finished,” the veil of the temple was ripped from the top to the bottom (Jn. 19:28-30. Matt. 27:51). Being ripped from the top showed that it was the work of God not man, otherwise it would have been ripped from the bottom. In this action God showed that He and His glory had left the temple and departed from the holy of holies.

In ripping apart the veil and exposing the sacred place to the public view, God showed that the law and its ministry were finished and done away with, for the veil was integral not only to the structure of the temple but also to the structure of the law. Just as the tearing of a contract makes it null and void, so the tearing of the temple veil brought to an end the old contract of the law, for the law could not be fully kept without the veil. How significant it was therefore, that when Jesus said: “It is finished,” the

veil was ripped apart! Access to God is now gained, as we read in Heb. 10:19-20 “by a new and living way, through the veil, which is his (Christ’s) flesh.” This again demonstrates how the law was a shadow of things to come in Christ.

HEBREWS 4:9-11

Heb. 4:9-11 also reveals that the Sabbath was but a shadow of something to be revealed in Christ. Verse 4 makes the point that God rested on the seventh day from all His works, and v3 says that although God’s creative work was finished ages ago, the rest He had from this work was prophetic, pointing to another Divine rest He had in mind for His people to enter in the future.

The Israelites who came out from the bondage of Egypt did not enter into that rest. Because of their hardness of heart and unbelief, God swore in His wrath, saying: “They shall not enter into My rest” (Ps. 95:11. Heb. 3:7-19). Seeing they were already observing the Sabbath, that was clearly not the rest God had in mind.

Neither did Joshua give them the promised rest. Heb. 4:8 points out that if Joshua had given Israel the true rest to which God’s seventh day rest pointed, there would have been no need for God to have promised the rest hundreds of years later through David, who He inspired to write about it in Ps. 95:7-11.

Now, in view of the fact that the Sabbath rest was being kept in Moses and Joshua’s day, it is clear that the rest God had in mind in Ps. 95:7-11 was neither the seventh day Sabbath, nor the inheritance of the land in Joshua’s day.

The writer of Heb. 4 goes on to explain that one can only enter the true Sabbath rest by faith and must first have ceased from his own works. This immediately indicates that the rest did not relate to anything in the law, for, as we read in Gal. 3:12: “The law is not of faith.” So, well after David’s time, the promised rest was not fulfilled, but still remained open. As we read in Heb. 4:6: “The promise remains and some get in - but not those who had the first chance, for they disobeyed God and failed to enter.”

The writer then goes on to say this in v7-11: “But he (God) has set another day for coming in, and that day is today. He announced this through David long years after man’s failure to enter, saying in the words already quoted, today when you hear him calling, do not harden your hearts against him. If Joshua had given the people the rest that God had

promised, God would not have spoken later about another day. So there is a Sabbath rest still waiting for the people of God, and whoever enters that rest foreshadowed by God's rest, will cease from his own works as God did from his. Let us therefore labour to enter into that rest, so that none of us will fail as they did because of their lack of faith. For we who have believed do enter into that rest" (v3).

It is evident from this passage of Scripture that God's rest on the seventh day after finishing His work of creation, was designed to point forward to a specific "Sabbath rest" in His son Jesus, in which people, by faith in him, might "cease from their own works" on a daily basis, as is signified by the word "today." In its context, the word "today" means "on a daily basis." It is not referring to any particular day, but is a general term relating to each and every day in a Christian's life.

In this passage of Scripture it is evident that the "Sabbath rest" is defined as "ceasing from our own works." And it is clear that this is not referring to abstaining from physical manual work such as digging the garden, mowing the lawns or painting the house on a Saturday. No! The reference to ceasing from our own works relates to ceasing from the works of the flesh i.e. the sins of the flesh. And it is stated that Christians have to "labour" to enter into this rest. The reason for this is because diligent effort is required in order to come to the place where we cease from being self-centred and cease from the works of the flesh and its sins that so easily beset us. Jesus put it like this: "Strive (agonize) to enter the straight gate" (Lk. 13:24).

Fleshly lusts war against the soul (1 Pet. 2:11); they fight and strive against God and drive us in directions contrary to the way of God, making rest and peace impossible. Unless we commit ourselves to being Christ centred, and strive to follow his example of crucifying the flesh, we will not be able to enter the promised rest and have peace with God and tranquillity of mind. The word "labour" in Heb. 4:11 can therefore be related to the effort required to crucify the flesh and put to death its sinful carnal desires. Those who are prepared to engage in such a labour or battle, will enter into the promised rest of God. The Sabbath law given to Israel was a type or foreshadow of this rest. It was a constant pointer to the ultimate purpose which redemption and deliverance in Christ would fulfil.

Under the law, once a week on the Sabbath day, Israel remembered her redemption and deliverance from the burden and bondage of Egypt. However, in Christ we remember every day our redemption from the burden and bondage of sin! As a royal priesthood, Christians daily

consecrate themselves to the lord's service and minister to Him. Each and every day their minds and hearts are focussed on Him.

PRIESTS EXEMPT FROM SABBATH

While we are on the subject of priests, it should be pointed out that under the law, the priests in the temple were exempt from the law of the Sabbath. Instead of the Sabbath being a day of rest to the priests, their work was doubled - they did twice as much work than on other days because extra offerings had to be made on the Sabbath day (Num. 28:9-10). As far as the priests in the temple were concerned, no day of the week was more holy than another, for every day was devoted to the Lord's service. Because every day was holy to them, one day in 7 could not be different from the rest. The priests did not therefore observe the Sabbath law; they did not rest on that day. Jesus referred to this to defend his disciples when they were accused by the Pharisees of working on the Sabbath day. He said: "On the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless" (Matt. 12:5).

This also, like the rest of the law, was a shadow of things to come in Christ. Being appointed by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedec, Jesus did not have to cease from doing the work of God on the Sabbath days. In fact, he seemed to deliberately choose the Sabbath to do work for God which he knew the Jewish religious leaders regarded as being a violation of the Sabbath law.

Being God's appointed priest, the Sabbath was subservient to him and not he to the Sabbath. For this reason he said: "For the son of man is Lord (master) even of the Sabbath day" (Matt. 12:8). Another reason for this can be seen in Heb. 7:11-14 where the point is made that the priests who ministered under the law of the old covenant, had to be from the tribe of Levi. Jesus however, our high priest, is from a different tribe - the tribe of Judah, and this change of priesthood necessitates a change of the law!

And so the disciples of Jesus, who are the temple of God and priests of the new covenant (1 Pet. 2:5, 9), are exempt from laws such as the Sabbath. They render a daily service of sacrifice to God and are not concerned about esteeming one day above another or treating one day as being more holy than another. Those who insist upon a rigid observance of the Sabbath law as laid down in the law of Moses, virtually exclude themselves from that priestly class whom Christ considers his own, not to mention the new covenant. You cannot expect to hold on to the law of the old covenant and be priests of the new as well! That would be a

contradiction.

THE MILLENNIAL REST

It is interesting to note that the Jewish Rabbis interpreted the group of Psalms to which Ps. 95 belongs, as prophetic of Messiah's reign on earth. This is another valid application of the Sabbath rest. Iranaeus, the Bishop of Lyons during the latter part of the second century, and others, also viewed the Sabbath as being a symbolic foreshadow of the future kingdom of God on earth. Scripture seems to support this application. Isa. 11:10 for example, refers to Christ's millennial reign as a "rest." This is how it reads: "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, who shall stand as an ensign of the peoples; to him shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious."

The Hebrew word for "rest" here is the same in Ps. 95:11 which is quoted in Heb. 3:4 and is related to the rest that is fulfilled in Christ and his kingdom. Other Scriptures in which the word "rest" relates to this are: Jer. 30:8-10. Ps. 132:8. Isa. 66:1. Ps. 72.

During Christ's millennial reign and kingdom on earth; wars, famines, pestilences, poverty will be abolished; and the iron rule of Christ will come down heavily on crime and violence. Rest and peace will prevail upon earth among all nations as never before during the rule of man. The rule and reign of Christ will truly be a glorious rest. "They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid" (Mic. 4:4).

There are all sorts of lessons that can be learned in the days selected by God for various events appointed in the law of the old covenant given to Israel. The fact that the rest of Christ's reign on earth will, according to Rev. 20, be for 1,000 years; and if it was foreshadowed by the seventh day Sabbath, would suggest that the one day Sabbath represented a 1,000 year rest period.

According to Ps. 90:4. 2 Pet. 3:8, one day to the Lord is a 1,000 years to us. In view of this, many have believed that the 1,000 year reign of Christ will be the seventh millennium in history from the time that sin entered the world, which has caused so much toil and labour and burden for man. Because we do not know how long it was after man was created that he sinned, we do not know when the seventh millennium officially commences. But we do know that from the time of creation, the seventh millennium begins in the early part of our twenty first century. This conclusion is reached on the basis of Bible chronology which indicates

that there were approximately 2,000 years from Adam to Abraham; approximately 2,000 years from Abraham to Christ and approximately 2,000 years from Christ to the year 2,000 A.D.

However, as I have stated: the year 2,000 A.D. could not be the beginning of the seventh millennium and no one knows when it will commence, because it would need to be dated from the time when Adam first sinned, and we are not told how long after he was created that this took place. But the signs of the times clearly indicate that we are in the last lap of human history, living on the threshold of Christ's return. The fact that so many of the end time prophecies are coming into focus at this particular time in history indicates the seventh millennial Sabbath is not far away.

THE EIGHTH MILLENNIUM

During the Sabbath millennium, the mortal population of the earth which survives Armageddon, will be brought into subjection to Father God through the rule of Christ and his saints (1 Cor. 15:25-26). This shall be followed by the eighth millennium. Circumcision, which was performed on the eighth day, foreshadowed this, for all mortal sinful flesh will be cut off at that time.

At the end of the seventh millennium - the millennial reign of Christ, the second and final resurrection and judgement will take place. All who remain upon the earth after that in the eighth millennium and thereafter will be immortal - equal with the angels. This will be the time referred to by Paul in 1 Cor. 15 when God will be "all in all."

The seventh millennium rest therefore, is purely a transitional phase - a means to an end but not an end in itself. The eighth millennium, however, represents the ultimate in the Divine plan, and circumcision on the eighth day foreshadowed this. This is another reason why circumcision was more important than the Sabbath, and took precedence over the Sabbath law as was pointed out earlier.

It stands to reason therefore, that if the law of circumcision is no longer binding, even though the eighth millennium to which it pointed is still yet to come, that the inferior law of the Sabbath is not likely to still be binding, even though the seventh millennium to which it pointed is still yet to come!

If it be argued that the Sabbath should be observed until the seventh millennium comes, it would also have to be argued that circumcision should continue until the eighth millennium. This would clearly be a

wrong conclusion.

SABBATH BINDING DURING THE MILLENNIUM

Reference should be made to the fact that Isa. 66:23 informs us that during the millennial reign of Christ, “it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship” i.e. before the Lord at Jerusalem. The “all flesh” who will do this refers to the mortal population over which Christ and his immortal saints will reign (see verse 24). And if the reference to coming “from one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another” means the monthly observances and the weekly Sabbath will be reintroduced and in force at that time, they will certainly not apply to the immortal saints, who, like Jesus their high priest, will be Lord of the Sabbath and all other holy days, and will minister every day as kings and priest of the most high God, being “ministering spirits” like the angels.

Certain Scriptures do indicate that during the millennium, in order to discipline the lawless and rebellious mortal population and bring it into subjection to God, some of the Mosaic laws will be reinstated, such as annual, monthly, weekly and daily observances, even including animal sacrifices (Ezk. 44:24. 45:17. 46:104. Zech. 14:16-19). But it is important to note that these laws will be binding on the mortal subjects in the kingdom not the immortal rulers.

Sometimes the references to the importance of keeping the Sabbath in Isa. 56:1-2 and 58:12-13 are quoted to support the belief that the Sabbath should be kept today. But it is overlooked that the message in these verses is addressed to Jews living in Old Testament times under the old law covenant, not Christians living under the new covenant. However, as pointed out, lessons can nevertheless be drawn from these verses if we apply the “spirit” of the Sabbath law.

The same applies to Jesus’ prophecy in Matt. 24:20 regarding the future flight from Jerusalem and the need to pray that it “not be on the Sabbath day.” It is easy to overlook the fact that the prophecy relates, as v16 points out “to those who are in Judea” i.e. Jews. Judea in the land of Israel is the centre stage of the prophecy.

JESUS RESTED FROM HIS LABOURS

In considering the various ways in which the Sabbath was a shadow of things to come in Christ, it should not be overlooked that after

finishing the work the Father gave him to do; Jesus, while suspended upon the cross, cried out with a loud voice: "It is finished" (Jn. 19:28-30). He then "rested from his labours" on the seventh day in the tomb and abode in there and did not go out until the Sabbath was at an end. But on the eighth day, the first day of the new week, he rose from the dead and walked out of the tomb, having spoiled principalities and powers, and blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against those who were bound by them under the law.

The Sabbath day observance under the law then, can also be seen as a beautiful foreshadow of the greatest Sabbath event in history - the one in which Jesus rested after his great labour of love combating sin and nailing it to the cross in his body of flesh.

JESUS DID NOT DESTROY THE LAW

The words of Jesus upon the cross: "It is finished" can also be related to another statement he made when he said he came to fulfil the law. The full statement is recorded in Matt. 5:17 and reads like this: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I have not come to destroy but fulfil."

Seeing that the Sabbath was part of "the law," Jesus' statement that he came not to destroy the law is sometimes quoted as proof that we should still keep it, and therefore observe the Sabbath. But if this were the case, why just single out the Sabbath, for it was by no means the only ordinance in the law. If Christ's statement means Christians must keep "the law," this would not merely involve the Sabbath, but the whole law down to the finest details. After all, after saying that he did not come to destroy the law but to fulfil, he went on to say: "For verily I say unto you; till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or one tittle shall pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18).

A "jot" is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and a "tittle" is a small mark - a minor stroke placed over a word for any purpose, e.g. to mark an abbreviation or to distinguish certain Hebrew letters from one another.

Jesus was therefore saying that he did not come to destroy the smallest detail of the law but to fulfil. Such a statement obviously included every single ceremonial detail. Therefore, if this statement must be taken to mean that the law is still binding today, then this would involve the whole law - every jot and tittle, not just parts. It clearly cannot mean that so what does it mean?

Well, to start with, it should be noted that Jesus' reference to not destroying but fulfilling is not only made in relation to the law, but also the prophets. He said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but fulfil."

If we can ascertain how Jesus fulfilled the prophets, we will have some idea how he fulfilled the law. Jesus fulfilled the prophets by accomplishing what they predicted. Constantly throughout his ministry, the Gospels state that he did certain things "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by - the prophet." (Matt. 4:12-16. 8:16-17. 12:14-21. 13:34-35. 21:1-5. 26:53-54. 27:7-10, 35).

Lk. 24:44 is a particularly good example. Jesus said: "These are the words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me."

The prophets predicted many things concerning Jesus, and when he accomplished them, they were fulfilled, but they were not destroyed. The prophetic records were not ripped or burnt up or regarded as obsolete simply because they were fulfilled. They did not "pass away" into the abyss of oblivion. They remained on record as an everlasting witness and testimony to the Divine purpose which was centred in, and fulfilled by Christ, for all to read and study and be enlightened by. The principle can be compared with a person who "finishes" a book, but doesn't destroy it. Very few throw a good book away when they have finished reading it.

There were several ways in which Jesus fulfilled the law. He fulfilled it by meeting its requirements, i.e. by obeying it and never transgressing it. Also by loving others he fulfilled it because love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10). Jesus also fulfilled the law in that he accomplished the things that the ceremonial and ritual ordinances foreshadowed, especially the animal sacrifices. As we have seen: he turned shadow into substance, and symbol into solid reality. But in so doing he did not "destroy" the law. It forever remains on record with all of its types and shadows for Christians to study in greater depth, relating it all to the Lord and master.

TREASURES OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE LAW

In Christ all the types have been withdrawn. He gave a spiritual significance to the law. Instead of the sacrifice of animals, he presented himself as "the Lamb of God" offered for the sins of the world. In place of circumcision, he set forth the principle of a day by day repudiation of the

flesh. Instead of the Sabbath, he inculcated a day to day rest from the striving to serve self and works of the flesh.

Paradoxically, the law concealed truth in the very process of revealing it. It both conveyed and veiled its lessons through its observances and ordinances. As Paul says in Rom. 2:20: it had “the form of knowledge and of the truth.” And so the Psalmist prayed: “Open my eyes that I may see wondrous things out of your law” (Ps. 119:18).

Countless treasures of knowledge and wisdom are embodied and buried beneath the surface of the law. Our Lord Jesus and the apostles often appealed to the authority of the law on issues of principle and many examples could be given. Such examples make it clear that although Jesus came to fulfil the law, he by no means destroyed it. It forever remains as an eternal valid witness to the eternal purpose of the Father in His son, and can teach us, through plain statements; types, symbols, ceremonies and rituals, many glorious principles pertaining to the salvation and kingdom of Christ.

WAS PAUL BOUND BY THE SABBATH LAW?

Throughout his missionary journeys, it was Paul’s custom to visit a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day (Act. 13:14. 17:2). On this basis, some believe that Paul was bound by the Sabbath law and we should be also. Such a conclusion however, overlooks certain elementary facts.

Visiting a synagogue on a Sabbath day does not necessarily prove that the visitor is bound by the law of the Sabbath. I myself have visited synagogues on a Sabbath day, but I do not observe the Sabbath law. The reason I went was because I wanted to meet and speak to a Jewish community about religious matters, and the best way to do this is by going to a synagogue on Saturday.

It is stated in the book of Acts that it was Paul’s custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, but is never stated that it was his conviction that he had an obligation to God to keep the Sabbath law, and there is a difference! Elsewhere in his writings he makes it clear that Christians are not under such a law. Naturally, while he was with a Jewish community, he would do as they did, as was his policy, but this cannot in any way be construed to mean he was bound by the same laws. There is a difference between rendering custom to whom custom is due, and being bound by those customs!

If Christians must follow Paul’s example to the last letter without

exercising discernment, then why stop at merely making the Sabbath a rest day? It seems strange to quote the example of Paul visiting a synagogue on a Sabbath day as proof that the Sabbath should be kept, yet not keep it as he did by observing it in a Jewish synagogue.

The fact that Paul spent the Sabbath day in a synagogue with the Jewish community, and not in a house with the Christian community, is proof positive that the Christian community did not have meetings on the Sabbath day, for we could hardly imagine Paul spending the day in the synagogue with Jews who did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, while the Christian community was having its meeting elsewhere!

JEWISH MEETINGS NOT CHRISTIAN

The meetings that Paul attended in the synagogues were Jewish meetings, arranged by the Jews for the Jews. They were not Christian meetings. The Christians met in private homes for their meetings, not in Jewish synagogues!

If Paul's attendance in a Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day must be interpreted to mean he believed the weekly Sabbath was binding upon Christians, then the same would have to apply to the annual observances of the law and other rituals like circumcision, vowing vows etc, because there are references to Paul doing these as well.

During his second missionary journey, Paul visited Ephesus and stayed there for a time. The Christians there wanted him to stay longer, but he wanted to move on, saying: "I must keep the forthcoming feast (Passover) in Jerusalem" (Act. 18:21). Also, during his third missionary journey, we read in Act. 20:16 that he "determined to sail past Ephesus ... for he was hurrying, if possible, to be at Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost."

The feast of Passover and Pentecost were both annual feasts kept by the Jews in accordance with the law of the old covenant. They were some of the "holy days" referred to by Paul in Col. 2:16 which were "a shadow of things to come" and which were done away in Christ. Why then, did Paul keep them if they had been abolished?

To start with, let us ask the question: "Whose feast was it that Paul was keeping? Was it a Jewish or a Christian feast?" The answer is clear enough; it was a Jewish feast. Such a feast is referred to in Jn. 2:13 as "the Jews' Passover," and in Jn. 5:1 and 6:4 as "a feast of the Jews." The Jews, not the Christians, gathered from all around the world to keep it (Act. 2:5-11). They had to assemble at Jerusalem because the altar was situated

there along with the temple. In accordance with the requirements of the law, the temple and altar had to be at Jerusalem, and the people had to gather there to keep the feasts.

During the feast, animal sacrifices were offered and the Levitical priests officiated, not Christians. These feasts that Paul attended were not arranged and administered by Christians for Christians! They were Jewish festivals and were conducted according to the strict requirements of the law, right down to the last detail.

If therefore, Paul's attendance at such feasts must be interpreted to mean that Christians must keep the law concerning such events, then we must also conclude that all the laws concerning animal offerings and the Levitical priesthood apply too. All were part and parcel of the same law and were inseparably linked.

Moreover, we would also have to conclude that we must make annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to keep the feasts. After all, Paul did and was very determined to do so, even though it meant sailing great distances. Who are we to pick out the bits that suit us and conveniently ignore the rest? If the law must be kept, it must be kept according to the law - to every last jot and tittle!

Under the law, the feast had to be kept at Jerusalem and an altar had to be there upon which animal offerings were offered by Levitical priests. This is what took place when Paul attended the feasts, and if his attendance means we must do the same, then this is how it must be done.

Also consider this: In Act. 16:3 we read that Paul circumcised Timothy. But how foolish it would be to conclude from this that Christians must be circumcised. Paul makes it very clear in his writings that circumcision is not necessary. He actually makes the point in Gal. 2:3 that Titus, a Gentile Christian, was not required to be circumcised. Why then, did Paul circumcise Timothy but not Titus? The reason is given in Act. 16:3: "Because of the Jews."

Titus was a full-blooded Gentile whereas Timothy had Jewish blood because he had a Jewish mother. Because Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him on his journeys which involved preaching to the Jews, he circumcised him to remove all occasion for Jewish prejudice, in order to gain a more receptive audience.

ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN

Paul sums it all up for us in 1 Cor. 9:19-23: "Though I am no man's servant, yet have I made myself servant to all, that I might convert

more. While working with the Jews, I live like a Jew in order to win them; and even though I myself am not subject to the law of Moses, I live as though I were when working with those who are, in order to win them. In the same way, when working with Gentiles, I live like a Gentile, outside the Jewish law, in order to win Gentiles. This does not mean that I don't obey God's law; I am really under Christ's law. Among the weak in faith I become weak like one of them, in order to win them. So I become all things to all men, that I may save some of them by whatever means possible. All this I do for the Gospel's sake, in order to share in its blessings." (1 Cor. 10:31-33 and Rom. 14:13-21 enumerate similar principles).

We learn from all this that it was Paul's policy, while working among the Jews, to live like them. He conformed to Jewish customs and laws in order to reach those who were subject to them. For this reason he circumcised Timothy, kept the weekly Sabbath and annual feasts. He even went so far as to shave his head, go through the motions of a ritual purification and offered animal sacrifices, as we read in Act. 18:18. 21:17-27.

It is specifically stated in Act. 21:20-21 that it was because the multitudes at the feast in Jerusalem were "zealous for the law" and had heard that Paul taught it was not necessary to be circumcised and keep the customs of the law, that Paul conformed to certain of the customs. It was purely and simply an act of expediency designed to defuse an explosive situation and avoid the evil intentions of the adversary.

It would be as wrong to conclude that Christians should keep the Jewish Sabbath and feasts etc because Paul did, as it would be to conclude that Christians should be circumcised because Paul insisted that Timothy should. The Jewish situation dictated Paul's actions on these occasions and we need to keep this in mind to get a balanced view.

AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS

Paul wanted to keep the feasts at Jerusalem for the same reason Jesus waited for the feast of Pentecost to arrive before pouring out the Holy Spirit. The reason is stated in Act. 2:5: "Jews from every nation were dwelling at Jerusalem." During the feasts, multitudes of Jews from all around the world assembled, and such occasions provided a great opportunity to witness. On the day of Pentecost when the first witness was given through the Holy Spirit, 3,000 souls were won for Christ (Act. 2:41). No wonder Paul was always keen to be at Jerusalem during the

feasts!

Jesus also made a point of attending the feasts because of the opportunity to reach many people. We read in Jn. 7 that when the feast of tabernacles arrived, the brothers of Jesus expected him to go to Jerusalem to “show thyself to the world” (i.e. to the Jews from all around the world who had come to the city for the feast). Jerusalem, on such occasions, was a very effective platform for preaching. For this reason Paul never missed an opportunity to be there. His attendance had nothing to do with wanting to be under the law. Not once in his epistles does he instruct Christians to keep Jewish feasts or the Sabbath.

Paul clearly made a practice of going to the synagogue on the Sabbath day for the same reason he attended the Jewish feasts - to witness to his countrymen concerning Jesus Christ. Readings were taken from the law and the prophets every Sabbath day in the synagogue (Act. 13:14-15, 27). As we read in Act. 15:21: “From old time Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read in the synagogue every Sabbath day.” Such reading provided an excellent opportunity to witness to the Lord Jesus because Moses and the prophets testified concerning him. And this is what Paul did. This was his reason for going to the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day, as we read in Act. 17:1-3: “And Paul, as his manner was, went into the synagogue of the Jews, and for 3 Sabbath days he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening (the scrolls) and proving that Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead, saying, Jesus whom I preach to you, is Christ.”

Again we read in Act. 18:4: “And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and Greeks.” Also Act. 19:8: “And he went into the synagogue, and spoke boldly for 3 months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.” We are told in Act. 13:44 that as a result of these efforts of Paul in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, that “on the next Sabbath day, almost the whole city came to hear the Word of God.”

TO THE JEWS FIRST

It is evident from the book of Acts that as Paul travelled from city to city during his missionary journeys to preach the Gospel and establish Christian communities, his policy was to start at the Jewish synagogue. The reason for this is indicated in Act. 3:25-26 where Peter, speaking to the Jews, said this: “You are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in

your seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up His son Jesus, sent him to bless you, by turning away every one of you from his sins.”

It was to the Jewish people that the oracles of God had been committed (Rom. 3:2). The Lord, as we read in Ps. 147:19-20, “declared His Word to Jacob; His statutes and His judgements to Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation.” Israel was the nation, as we read in Rom. 9:4-5 to whom pertained “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, Christ came.”

The Jewish people then, were the custodians of the very Word of God which promised and declared the Lord Jesus Christ. They were the people whose ancestors were given the promises concerning Christ. Their ancestors were, in fact, the ancestors of Christ himself according to the flesh, due to Mary being a direct descendant of David and Abraham. The land of Israel constitutes the “promised land” - the land that will form the nucleus of Christ’s world-wide kingdom, of which Jerusalem will become “the city of the great king” (Ps. 48).

In view of Israel’s unique position in the Divine scheme of things, it was inevitable that they should firstly be approached and informed about Christ. Jesus himself, during his earthly ministry, insisted that the Jewish people should “first be filled” (Lk. 7:27). He therefore commissioned his disciples to confine their preaching activities to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and told them not to go “in the way of the Gentiles” (Matt. 10:5-6).

So then, even after the way for the Gentiles had been opened, Paul still made it his policy when he visited each city to preach, to approach the Jewish community first, giving them first refusal before turning to the Gentiles in that city (Act. 13:14-41. Ch. 18. 19:1-10). And the best time and place to do this was on the Sabbath day in the synagogue.



CHAPTER FOUR

It is evident that Paul used the seventh day rest observed by the Jews to talk to them about Jesus in their synagogues. That is where Paul usually was on Saturdays: in a Jewish synagogue, not with the church. Saturday was given over to share with the Jews and evangelize among the Gentiles. Saturday was the “Gospel outreach” day. This being the case, on what day did the apostles meet with their Christian brethren for communion, and to confirm and strengthen each other in the faith?

There is no doubt that the early Christian communities met for communion on a set day, but it was the first day of the week, not the seventh. Act. 20:7 says: “upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until after midnight.”

Now, before proceeding any further it should be pointed out that the word “week” in this verse comes from the Greek word “Sabbaton” from which the word “Sabbath” is translated. On this basis, some have thought that this teaches that the Christians met on the Sabbath day - the seventh day not the first day.

In response to this, the question is: How could the words ‘upon the first day of the Sabbath’ mean the Sabbath day? How could the Sabbath, being the seventh day, be called the first day? It would be like saying “upon the seventh day of Friday,” which would be a contradictory statement.

This same expression: “the first day of the Sabbath” occurs in all 4 Gospels and clearly refers to the first day of the week, not the seventh. These 4 references are in Matt. 28:1. Mk. 16:1-2, 9. Lk. 24:1. Jn. 20:1, 19. Take Mk. 16:1-2 for example, which says: “when the Sabbath was past,” (i.e. when the seventh day was over) Mary Magdalene and others went to the tomb “very early in the morning” i.e. on the morning of the first day. However, this is how it reads: “Very early in the morning, the first day of the week” (Sabbaton). Here, the expression “first day of the Sabbath” clearly refers to the first day of the week, being the day that Jesus was raised from the dead. Mk. 16:9 is quite explicit: “when Jesus was risen early, the first day of the Sabbaton.”

Why then, it will be asked, is the first day expressed as “the first day of the Sabbath?” A possible answer lies in the fact that the word “of” comes from the Greek word “ek” which means “out of” or “from.” It would therefore not be tinkering with the text to read it as “the first day from the Sabbath” or “the first day arising out of the Sabbath” i.e. the first

day after the Sabbath. The diligent student will recognize that there are many occasions in the Bible, especially in the old King James Version, where the word “of” means “from.”

It should also be pointed out that although the Greek word Sabbaton is often translated “Sabbath,” and refers to the seventh day, there are also cases where it is translated “week” and does not refer to the seventh day. For example: Lk. 18:12: “I fast twice in the week” does not refer to fasting twice on the Sabbath day! Jn. 20:19 refers to Jesus after his resurrection appearing to his disciples on “the first day of the week” (Sabbaton). The reference in 1 Cor. 16:2 to putting money aside for a special collection on “the first day of the week” (Sabbaton) is clearly referring to the first day from the Sabbath which is the first day of the week, the day that the church gathered together to break bread.

There can be no doubt that the early Christian community met on the first day of the week. Christians today who meet on the seventh day reverse the apostolic custom. As we have seen, the apostles used the opportunity of the Jewish seventh day rest to visit the synagogue and proclaim Christ to the Jews, whilst on the first day they gathered with their Christian brethren in houses to break bread together and to minister the Word. Christians today who keep the Sabbath do the opposite. They meet on the seventh day, and use the first day to evangelize.

Since the Sabbath ended at sundown, it would seem from Act. 20:7 that Christians held their meeting in the evening after the Sabbath had ended. Many Christians were slaves and would not be at liberty to attend a meeting during the day. But the fact that the meetings were held on the first day, shows that the apostles avoided using the Sabbath and chose the first day instead to assemble together.

Another example of the apostles assembling together on the first day of the week is in Jn. 20:19 which was quoted earlier. It reads: “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled ...”

Reference has also been made to 1 Cor. 16:1-2 which relates to Christians setting aside a monetary contribution for a fund for the poor on the first day of the week. It can be inferred from this that their gatherings took place on the first day of the week. The exhortation in Heb. 10:25 to not forsake the gathering of themselves together confirms that there was a stated time and place for assembling.

THE RESURRECTION DAY

The early Christians no doubt met on the first day of the week because it was the day that Jesus rose from the dead - a day of gladness not sadness as on the seventh day when he lay dead in the tomb. It was, of course, on the first day of the creation week that God said: "Let there be light and there was light." So also on the first day of the week "the true light" came forth from the darkness of death in the tomb "like dew from the womb of the morning." It is a day to be much remembered by his people, because it assures them of their justification in him, and their own resurrection to life. The first day, being the eighth day, is the day of circumcision and signifies the cutting off of the sins of the flesh and the rising in newness of life in a glorious immortal spiritual body. The first day of the week is therefore a far more appropriate day to meet to remember Christ than the seventh day and for this reason the wisdom of God chose it!

The first day is also notable on account of the special interviews which occurred between Jesus and his disciples after his resurrection. See Matt. 28:1, Mk. 16:2. Lk. 24:1. Jn. 20:1, 19, 26.

Since the use of Sunday as a day of Christian worship arose from the fact that on that day Jesus rose from the dead, some believe that the reference to "the Lord's day" in Rev. 1:10 on which the apostle John received the revelation, was the first day of the week.

For example, Eusebius (vol. 1. page 509) quotes Irenaeus as referring to the Lord's resurrection on the first day as "the Lord's day." Even under Moses, the Sabbath was "the seventh day" not "the Lord's day."

Having said all that, it should also be pointed out that the phrase "the day of the Lord" occurs frequently in Scripture, especially in Joel's prophecy where it is a theme of end-time events. It is expressive of Divine intervention and judgement, and not the Sabbath day. Seeing that the book of Revelation is mostly about the coming Divine intervention and judgement, it is possible that the reference to John being "in the spirit" on the Lord's day may relate to that i.e. John was projected by the Holy Spirit into the end-time era which will climax with Christ's return.

SABBATH NOT CHANGED TO FIRST DAY

It should now be pointed out that the observance of the first day by Christians was not a transfer of the Sabbath from the seventh day to a first day. The Sabbath was not changed from the seventh day to the first

day. The seventh day Sabbath was not replaced by, or substituted for the first day by the early church. It was never taught or intended by the early church for the first day to be regarded as a substitute for the Sabbath day.

There are no instructions in the New Testament that there should be abstinence from work, and avoidance of the usual duties of life on any day of the week. Such an observance would in fact not have been possible or practical among the large body of slaves in the early church. God did not command it then, and no Divine command has been given since, that either the seventh or the first day should be kept as the Jews were commanded by the law to keep their Sabbath.

While it is true that the early Christians met on the first day of the week to break bread, it should be noted that there is no actual record of God commanding it to be done on a particular day. There are no commands about exactly when communion should be held. The important statement about this is in 1 Cor. 11:26 where Paul says: “For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you declare the Lord’s death till he come.” It can be inferred from this statement that breaking bread in remembrance of the Lord can be done as often as one desires. Reference is made in Act. 2:46 to some doing it every day on an individual basis. But other Scriptures already looked at, indicate that the church decided to do it as a body once a week, on the first day.

THE CONSTANTINE CONNECTION

Now, some maintain that the custom of observing the first day of the week came from the Roman Emperor Constantine. They point to the law that Constantine established in 328 A.D. commanding that: “All judges, city people and craftsmen shall rest on the venerable day of the sun.” It is sometimes thought that this command was the origin of the custom to make Sunday a day of Christian worship instead of Saturday. As a result, the Roman Catholic church has been blamed for perpetuating the first day instead of the seventh day, and accused of changing the Divine times and seasons.

However, as has been pointed out from the New Testament, Christians long before Constantine, assembled together on the first day. It was because they met on Sunday, that Constantine established his law concerning that day. The Christians did not, of course, as did Constantine, superimpose the Sabbath rest on the first day and treat it as a substitute for the Sabbath. Neither did they regard the first day as a substitute for the pagan worship of the sun!

Some of the early reformers, especially John Knox, also advocated the view that by worshipping on a Sunday, some sort of New Testament Sabbath is being kept. But there is no support for this view in the New Testament. The weekly Sabbath was always on the seventh day and only on the seventh day. It was never on the first day.

The writings of the early church leaders clearly reveal that it was the custom of the Christians to not observe the Sabbath but assemble together on the first day. Here are some extracts from early church writers:

Ignatius, a disciple of the apostle John and the Bishop of Antioch, wrote to the Magnesians in the early years of the second century, saying: “Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables. For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace.” He then goes on to say: “Those who were concerned with old things, have come to newness of confidence, no longer keeping Sabbaths, but living according to the Lord’s day, on which our life, as risen again through him, depends.” (Taken from “The Ante-Nicene Fathers” vol. 1. pages 62-63).

Justin Martyr, the first great Christian apologist around the middle of the second century (140 A.D.) asserts that: “Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly; since it is the first day in which God made the world; and Jesus Christ, our Saviour rose on that day from the dead.”

Justin Martyr describes the Christian worship on Sunday as follows: “On the day called Sunday, there is made a gathering into the same place of all who live in city or country, and the memoranda of the apostles, or the writings of the prophets are read as long as may be. Afterwards, the reader having ceased, the president makes verbally the admonition and exhortation to the imitation of these excellent things. Then we all rise and pour forth prayers. Then the bread and wine are taken.”

In his “dialogue with Trypho” Justin Martyr explains why the Christians do not keep the law of Moses, submit to circumcision or observe the Sabbath. He affirms that:

1. True Sabbath observance under the new covenant is the keeping of a perpetual Sabbath, which consists of turning from sin on a daily basis.
2. The righteous men of old, Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah and the like, pleased God without keeping the Sabbath.
3. God imposed the Sabbath upon Israelites because of unrighteousness and hardness of heart. (Taken from “The Ante-Nicene Fathers” vol. 1 pages 199-200, 204, 207).

Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons during the latter part of the second

century, viewed the Sabbath as symbolic of the future kingdom of God, “in which the man who shall have persevered in serving God shall, in a state of rest, partake of God’s table.” (Taken from “The Ante-Nicene Fathers” vol. 1. page 481). He refers to Abraham as one who believed God (Gen. 15) “without circumcision and without observance of Sabbaths.”

Anatolius (A.D. 270) says: “The obligation of the Lord’s resurrection binds us to keep the Paschal Festival of the Lord’s day” (i.e. the day he rose from the dead).

Eusebius (about 324 A.D.) wrote: “We do not regard circumcision, nor observe the Sabbath, because such things as these do not belong to Christians.”

Tertullian, at the beginning of the third century, said: “We have nothing to do with Sabbaths or the other Jewish festivals, much less with those of the heathen.” (Taken from “The Ante-Nicene Fathers” vol. 3 page 70).

In another work he says that those who would contend for the continued obligation of Sabbath keeping and circumcision, must show that Adam, Abel, Noah, Enoch, Melchizedec etc also observed these things. His view of circumcision, and the law in general, is in accord with the council at Jerusalem in Act. 15 and Paul’s clear teaching.

He goes on to say that the Sabbath was a figure of rest from sin and typical of man’s final rest in God. Together with the other ceremonial regulations of the law, the Sabbath was only intended to last until a new law giver should arise who should introduce the realities of which these were but shadows. (Taken from “An Answer To The Jews” Ch. 2 and “The Ante-Nicene Fathers” vol. 3. pages 153, 155, 156).

From these testimonies we see that the church did not observe the Sabbath and met on the first day of the week instead, long before Constantine formally and officially instituted the observance of a rest on the first day. Constantine clearly did not originate the custom of the church to meet on the first day of the week! It was because it was the custom of the church to meet on Sunday that Constantine ended up establishing it as the day of worship.

Sometimes those who believe the Sabbath should be kept today, produce a chart which presents a long unbroken line of people dating back to New Testament times, who have kept the Sabbath. It is thought that this proves it should be kept. Unfortunately this does not provide any sort of proof at all. Roman Catholics also produce a chart which presents a long unbroken line of Popes in order to prove that they are Peter’s successors

and the true church. But as is well known, the foundation of their doctrine is false.

In view of the fact, as the New Testament testifies, Christians in the first century were getting entangled in the law and were ending up observing holy days, new moons and the Sabbath; it is not surprising that others in succeeding ages continued to do the same. To produce a chart demonstrating this is really self defeating. When it comes down to the nitty gritty, what we need is not charts, but Scriptures. Unfortunately there are none which teach that the Sabbath should be kept today.

Coming back to Constantine's decree that Sunday should be a day of rest: one good result that came from this was that it secured legal liberty for Christians to freely assemble on that day. His decree can therefore be seen as a providential act of God. And, of course, the release from work one day a week is beyond question a blessing physically. The break from routine is good in every way, and allows the machinery of life to work longer and more easily than if working continuously and uninterrupted. There is clearly a stamp of Divinity in such an arrangement.

However we cannot argue on the basis of physical benefits that might accrue from it. For example, it is an acknowledged fact among many medical authorities that circumcision has certain benefits and advantages, yet Paul insisted that the law of circumcision was no longer binding, and the same applies to other points of the law as well, like diet.

WHEN DID THE SABBATH LAW START?

It is sometimes claimed that the Sabbath law was in existence before Moses, and was known and obeyed by all the patriarchs from the dawn of creation. But even if this were true, it would not necessarily make it binding today. Both animal sacrifices and circumcision were commanded by God in patriarchal times, but are not now binding. And remember: circumcision took precedence over, and transcended the Sabbath! Therefore, if circumcision has been done away, it is to be expected that the same would apply to the Sabbath.

There are no passages of Scripture which explicitly state that the keeping of the Sabbath was binding on anyone prior to God giving the law to Israel in the days of Moses. While it is true that we read in Gen. 2:3 that "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it He rested from all His work which He created:" these words do not constitute a command for man to observe this day. What we have quoted here is simply a record of an act of God; man is neither spoken to nor spoken

about. Adam was never commanded to remember the seventh day or any other day to keep it holy; and there is no record in Scripture of him ever doing so.

It has already been pointed out (p.33) that it is taught in Heb. 3 and 4 that God's rest on the seventh day after finishing His work of creation, pointed to an ultimate rest in Christ, in which people, by faith in Him, might daily cease from their own works, i.e. the works of the flesh. It did not point to an observance once a week and therefore cannot be quoted to support the one day a week Sabbath. Nowhere in Heb. 3 and 4 is the statement in Gen. 2:3 quoted to support observance of the sabbath day.

Paul explicitly states that the law "was added" because of sin (Gal. 3:19). This indicates that the Sabbath law could not have been given at the time of Gen. 2:2 when God sanctified the seventh day, because sin had not entered the world at that stage.

It is fundamentally wrong to imagine that a law checking sin could exist before sin existed. It is sometimes claimed that the 10 commandments written on stone in the days of Moses were originally given in Eden before Adam and Eve sinned. But none of those commandments would have had any relevance to Adam and Eve at that stage. They could not worship idols for there were none to worship. They could not honour mother or father for they did not have an earthly mother or father. They could not commit adultery because they were the only man and woman on earth. They could not steal for there was no one to steal from or any possessions to steal. They could not bear false witness against their neighbour for they had no neighbours.

They could not have kept a Sabbath because they were created on the sixth day and were only one day old when God rested on the seventh day. They had not done a single day's work!

When God issued the law of the Sabbath among the 10 commandments given to Israel, He said: "Six days you shall labour and do all your work: but the seventh day is a Sabbath ..." The use of the word "labour" is significant and important, as this was an aspect of man's life that did not exist in his early days in the garden of Eden. Only after Adam and Eve sinned did God sentence them and their descendants to hard labour and toil in order to produce their necessary food. Reference is made to this in Gen. 3:17-19. Ps. 104:23.

To issue a law to rest from labour when no labour was involved would have been pointless. The garden of Eden in which Adam was placed was a paradise. There were no weeds, thistles or thorns. A minimum of work was required, but nothing like the "sweat of the brow"

type of labour and toil that eventuated after the curse and expulsion from the garden.

Reference therefore in Gen. 2 to sanctifying the seventh day before sin entered the world cannot be regarded as a law or command like that given later to Israel. You may repeat the sentence one thousand times that “God rested on the seventh day and sanctified it,” but you can never turn it into a commandment to man.

Since the keeping of God’s commands is of the utmost importance to Him, He has always been careful to express His will in plain terms, so that man clearly knows what is required of him. In the case of Adam, God made it clear what He required of him. He only gave him one simple commandment which involved not eating fruit from one particular tree. Surely just as clear a command would have been given concerning the Sabbath had God wanted it to be observed. But there is no record of such a command, until the days of Moses.

Had the Sabbath law been given to man before the advent of sin, labour and toil, it would have been a case of man being made for the Sabbath. But, because the Sabbath was provided to give rest and relief to man from the labour and toil caused by sin, Jesus said; “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” Mk. 2:27-28.

This confirms that the law was added after the advent of sin, which means the statement in Gen. 2:2-3 which was made before sin was committed, could not have been a law or commandment given to man to keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath was clearly “made for man” to provide rest in his burdened, sin-stricken state. It was a beneficial arrangement provided by God as a result of sin.

WHAT IS THE RELEVANCE OF GENESIS 2:1-3?

“**W**hy is it then,” it may be asked, “that the statement concerning God resting on the seventh day is made in Gen. 2, and why did God quote it when He gave the 10 commandments to Israel, to explain the Sabbath law?” Well, to start with, it should be noted that God did not quote Gen. 2 to prove that man had previously been commanded to keep the Sabbath since creation. No! He says nothing about a previous commandment for man. He quotes Gen. 2 as the reason for commanding Israel to keep the Sabbath, and this commandment came 2,500 years after Gen. 2. Because this is the reason for Israel being commanded to keep the Sabbath, we cannot assume that others before Israel were keeping it for the same reason. Such a conclusion would be an assumption.

It must be remembered that it is generally accepted that Moses was the historian who wrote the book of Genesis. And when it is recalled that it was written for the nation of Israel after the giving of the law, the statement in Gen. 2:3 can be seen in another light. It does not necessarily mean that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it at that time, immediately after creation. Rather, it can be seen as Moses' explanation to Israel as to why God gave them a law sanctifying or setting apart the seventh day i.e. God chose the seventh day rather than any other day, because He Himself ceased from His creative work on that day. The Sabbath therefore became a reminder to Israel that God Himself had created all things in 6 days and ceased on the seventh day, having completed that work.

If the Sabbath law was in force from the beginning to the time of Moses, a period of about 2,500 years, covering the whole book of Genesis, and involving many generations of many people, you would expect to find some reference to it. There are references to animal sacrifice and circumcision and other observances, but not to the Sabbath. No! not one single reference or hint.

Up until the time of the flood, there is no account of Sabbath keeping. While it is true that years are divided up into weeks consisting of 7 days, there is no reference to man resting on the seventh day. During the 100 years that Noah built the ark and preached to the people, there is no reference to resting from work on the seventh day or of preaching the Sabbath. We are told that the generation of that time was sinful and had corrupted God's way, but it is never stated that their sins involved breaking the Sabbath. God commanded Noah certain things both before and after the flood (Gen. 6:22. 7:5), but there is no reference to the Sabbath. The same applies to Abraham etc.

There is no doubt that certain laws of God were in place prior to Moses, and the book of Genesis testifies to this, but there is not a single reference to the Sabbath being one of these laws. Gal. 3:17 records Paul as saying that the law came 430 years after Abraham. In Paul's writings, the word "law" is a term used almost exclusively for the law given at Sinai which included the Sabbath. We learn from this that although Genesis testifies to Abraham and the other patriarchs having a law-code, it was not the same as the one given at Sinai, which involved the Sabbath.

During Israel's sojourn in Egypt, God referred to circumcision and the importance of it, but not the Sabbath (Ex. 4:26-27. 12:43-49. Josh. 5:5).

SABBATH FIRST INSTITUTED IN DAYS OF MOSES

It is inconceivable that Israel, being enslaved by Pharaoh, forced to labour for him making bricks to build buildings, would be permitted to cease work on even one day of the week. Pharaoh said to Moses: “Who is the Lord that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord” (Ex. 5:2). Such a monarch was not likely to give Israel one day a week off to serve their God, even if it was their custom to do so. Had it been their custom to rest every seventh day they would have come into immediate conflict with the Egyptians, but nothing is said anywhere that would show that there had been any conflict on that account.

Pharaoh’s negative reaction: “You make them rest from their burdens,” when Moses asked for Israel to be released to hold a feast to the Lord, reveals how Pharaoh would have reacted to them having a rest every seventh day of the week. Lack of rest in Egypt, in fact, was one of the things Israel was to call to mind when they were finally given the Sabbath law. We read in Deu. 5:14-15 that when God instituted the Sabbath, He reminded Israel that they had been slaves in Egypt i.e. always working and never resting. He then states that this was one of the reasons for commanding them to keep the Sabbath.

It should be very clear from all this that Israel knew nothing about, and was not under a Sabbath law while sojourning in Egypt!

This brings us to the time of the Exodus, and several important points come under notice. Prior to the Exodus, the Lord started to instruct the people and issue some laws which were to become part of their national guide. He began by instituting the feast of the Passover and the feast of unleavened bread, and He reinforced circumcision (Ex. 12). No reference, however, is made to the Sabbath.

The nation left Egypt on the fourteenth day of the first month and reached a point in their wilderness journey on the fifteenth day of the second month, when provision was made for feeding them with manna (Ex. 12:8. Ch. 16). Four Sabbaths would have intervened during this period had Sabbath keeping been observed, but there is no account of the nation halting and camping for this purpose. Such omission is very significant!

God, at that stage, had clearly not commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath, yet had made it clear that they must observe circumcision, once again demonstrating that circumcision took precedence over the Sabbath. For this reason, the apostle Paul, in his writings, when setting out to prove that Christians are not under the law (which includes the Sabbath and

other holy days) emphasized that circumcision is no longer binding (Col. 2). He knew that once it is proved that circumcision is no longer binding, all the other laws of lesser importance like the Sabbath, immediately disappear with it.

The first direct contact with Sabbath keeping is recorded in Ex. 16, three weeks before Israel reached Sinai. Two things took place: manna was given as a food supply, and the Sabbath was also instituted as a weekly day of rest.

Ex. 16:5, 22 gives the first hint of the Sabbath, and is amplified in v23, 29. The Sabbath was therefore instituted before they reached Mt Sinai, after departure from Egypt, and was later confirmed at Sinai and incorporated as the fourth commandment in the decalogue. The command to “remember” the Sabbath, which was attached to the fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8), refers back to God’s first instruction to keep the Sabbath, recorded back in Ex. 16:23. It does not, as some have supposed, refer back to the reference to God resting on the seventh day in Gen. 2:2-3.

Now, let us note how it came about that Israel was commanded to keep the Sabbath, as recorded in Ex. 16. It soon becomes clear that the children of Israel knew nothing about, and had not observed the Sabbath prior to receiving the manna. This is evident from their surprise when a double portion of the manna fell on the sixth day. Had they been in the habit of keeping the seventh day they would have also been in the habit of providing more food on the sixth day to last over the seventh day Sabbath.

Not only were the people of Israel surprised and perplexed, but so also were the rulers of the tribes. We read this: “All the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses.” Moses then explained what they were to do, for he said: “Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord.” It is clear from this that this law was new to them; they had never heard about it before. This was the first time that Israel had heard about a Sabbath rest.

At the instruction of God, Moses changed the Jewish calendar, making the departure from Egypt “the beginning ... the first month of the year” (Ex. 12:2). From this new date the Sabbath commenced, and on this point Moses himself required instruction - instruction that he passed on to the people saying: “This is that which the Lord has said: tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord” (Ex. 16:23).

If this law was so well known, and its day of observance understood, why the need for such instruction? Why did Moses and the people have to be told when the seventh day was? Was Moses so ignorant of such a basic

fundamental law of God as to have to be told when the Sabbath day was on God's calendar? It was clearly a new law to them, set before them by God for the first time. "See," said Moses to the people, "for the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why He has given you on the sixth day, two day's supply of bread" (v29-30).

That this was something new to Israel is further indicated by the fact that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather manna. Had they been accustomed to resting on the seventh day, they would not have done this. Naturally, they did not find any manna that day.

NOT THE SEVENTH DAY IN MAN'S CALENDAR

So then, God changed Israel's calendar and brought it into line with His own. Before they could keep the Sabbath, they had to be informed when the seventh day was according to God's calendar. This reveals that not only was the Sabbath not being kept prior to the Exodus, but that it was impossible to keep, for no one knew when the seventh day was in the Lord's calendar.

We learn from this that the Sabbath could not be just any old seventh day so long as it came after six days labour. It was confined to a definite specific day in God's calendar. Not just any seventh day was acceptable to God. Therefore, when God wanted His people to observe this day, He revealed it to them, and set it in place in their calendar.

Where then, does that place those today who feel they should keep the Sabbath, because no one knows when the seventh day is according to the Divine calendar. It cannot be fixed with exactitude. The seventh day on our calendar is not necessarily the seventh day on God's calendar!

It is impossible to fix the true seventh day, due to the various alterations made to the calendar. This is due to the inability of our calendar of 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, to correctly match the diurnal rotation of the heavens. It is said that the Julian calendar of B.C. 45 "was adjusted to correct the extensive errors which had crept into the civil year, as compared with that represented by the sun." Then again, further corrections were made in the Gregorian calendar of September 3, 1753, eleven days being cancelled from the calendar to bring it into line with the seasons.

Some who teach that the Sabbath law is binding today, condemn Rome as being responsible for "changing times and seasons," but they do not realize that the changes were necessary to bring the calendar into line. Even now, astronomers claim that in time another correction will be

necessary, involving one complete day.

Incidentally, the beast in Dan. 7 who will “change times and laws” (v25) is not as some Sabbath keepers claim, the Roman Catholic church, but an irreligious secular power that is anti-Roman Catholic. We see this in Rev. 17 where the Roman Catholic church is depicted as a harlot and v16 refers to her being destroyed by the beast. The end-time beast will be an irreligious, anti-god power (2 Thes. 2:4) who will change and violate Divine institutions and persecute and put to death many of God’s people.

Coming back to the subject in hand: It is evident that the seventh day in God’s calendar cannot be fixed with exactitude. If He wants us to observe the Sabbath, He would have to reveal to us when the seventh day is on His calendar, as He did to Israel. The fact that He hasn’t, indicates it is not important for us to keep it. Those who go ahead anyway, and use the seventh day on man’s calendar as a Sabbath, may discover that it is in reality another day, and not the seventh at all!

ONLY GIVEN TO ISRAEL

All these facts teach us that the Sabbath law was given exclusively to Israel. Only Israel alone could keep the Sabbath on the true seventh day. The Sabbath law is expressly stated to be a sign between Israel and God. Ex. 31:17: “It is a sign between Me (God) and the children of Israel.” God does not say that the Sabbath was to be a sign between Himself and the Gentiles.

This law was clearly not observed previously by Israel’s ancestors, because it is stated in Deu. 5:2-3 that: “The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our ancestors, but with us, who are all of us here alive this day.” This statement of Moses is irrefutable testimony clearly fixing the time, the place and the people with whom God made the covenant, of which the Sabbath formed a part. The whole weight of Biblical testimony makes it impossible for the Sabbath law to have been in vogue before Moses. As we have seen, Gal. 3:17 says the law came 430 years after Abraham, which means it did not exist prior to Moses. Neh. 9:14 plainly declares that God made known “the holy Sabbaths” by the hand “of Moses His servant.” This implies that prior to Moses, the holy Sabbaths were not known or observed.

As pointed out earlier on page 10, it is implied in Jn. 7:22-23 that the Sabbath law originated in Moses’ day and was not observed by the

patriarchs. These are the verses which teach that the law of circumcision took precedence over the law of the Sabbath. The reason Jesus gave for this was because circumcision did not originate with Moses, but with the patriarchs. This clearly implies that the Sabbath was not observed by the patriarchs, but originated with Moses. If the Sabbath originated with, or was observed by the patriarchs as well as circumcision, the argument of Jesus would have been negated.

The law of the old covenant was clearly delivered to the Israelites and not to Gentile nations. Rom. 2:14-15 makes this point by saying the Gentiles “have not the law.” The Gentiles were therefore not under the law and were not judged by the law. Rom. 3:19 makes this clear by saying: “Whatsoever the law says, it says to those who are under the law.” Not being under the law, the Gentiles were not amenable to it and therefore did not observe circumcision, the Sabbath and other holy days etc.

The nation of Israel was originally selected by God as His special people above all other nations. We read this in Deu. 7:6: “Thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God. The Lord thy God has chosen you to be a special people to Himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth.” God did not recognize nor have dealings with any other nation. As we read in Am. 3:2: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”

It is certainly clear from Ps. 147:19-20 that God had never revealed to other nations the laws that He gave to Israel. This is how it reads: “He revealed His Word to Jacob; His statutes and His rulings to Israel. He has not dealt so with any other nation, and as for His rulings, they (other nations) have not known them.” For this reason the Persian king who ruled the world in Esther’s time was told that the laws observed by the Jews were “different from all nations” (Est. 3:8). God “suffered all other nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16).

It can be inferred from such testimonies that Gentile nations prior to Israel and contemporary with Israel, did not observe the Sabbath. The Sabbaths belonged exclusively to the land and people of Israel, and could only be properly and fully kept according to the law while they lived in the land. This is evident as we have seen from the fact that the law required 2 lambs to be offered with other things by priests from the tribe of Levi on an altar at Jerusalem every Sabbath. All of this was part and parcel of the Sabbath law and to fail in one point of the law violated the whole law and made the Sabbath observance incomplete. It is therefore impossible, particularly for Gentiles, to keep the Sabbath according to the

law. They do not know when the true seventh day is according to the Divine calendar, and even if they did, they could not fulfil the requirements of the Sabbath because they do not have any priests from the tribe of Levi to offer offerings, and neither do they have an altar at Jerusalem to offer them upon.

As pointed out earlier, Heb. 7 teaches that because Jesus our high priest is from the tribe of Judah and not the tribe of Levi (to which the priests under the law had to belong for the law to be fulfilled), such a change in priesthood makes it necessary to change the law. This change has eliminated many aspects of the law of the old covenant. The Sabbath is one of those laws that have been eliminated, along with the other monthly and annual holy days.

Having said that, it should also be remembered that we are told in Rom. 14 that if someone wants to esteem one particular day above another for special devotion to God, he or she can do that if they want to, for God is being glorified by this. Such individual preferences are allowable provided those who exercise them don't think they are commanded to do so by the law, and provided they don't judge or condemn those who don't do the same, and treat them as law-breakers or inferior Christians.

Paul's teaching makes it clear that he was against anyone imposing the law on others, and that includes the Sabbath. It would be a fundamental and serious error to believe or teach that keeping the Sabbath made one superior or elite. And it would be equally as wrong to regard the observance of one particular day above another, be it the seventh day of the week or any other day, as being necessary for salvation. Salvation hinges on much deeper and more spiritual issues than putting your feet up and doing no work on a Saturday or Sunday!

AN EX SABBATH KEEPER'S TESTIMONY

By way of conclusion, I would like to quote the words of one who used to be a leader and teacher for 28 years in a church that believed the Sabbath should be kept today:

“Years passed. Then it came about that I used every minute I could get, for several weeks, carefully and prayerfully examining all the evidence on the Sabbath, the law, the sanctuary, the visions, etc, till I had no doubt that believing the Sabbath law was binding today was a delusion.

“I laid the matter before the leading men of the church, resigned all the positions I held, and asked to be dismissed from the church. As soon as I took my stand firmly, to be a free man and to think for myself, a great

burden which I carried all these years rolled off. I felt like a new man. At last I was out of bondage. I never regretted the step I took.

“After keeping it 28 years; after having persuaded more than a thousand others to keep it; after having read my Bible through verse by verse more than 20 times; after having scrutinized to the very best of my ability, every text, line and word in the Bible having the remotest bearing upon the Sabbath question; after having looked up all these, both in the original and many translations; after having searched in lexicons, concordances, commentaries and dictionaries; after having read armfuls of books on both sides of the question; after having read every and all the early church fathers upon this point, and having written several works in favour of the Sabbath, which were satisfactory to my brethren; after having debated the question more than a dozen times, I am fully settled in my own mind and conscience that the evidence is against the keeping of the seventh day.”

