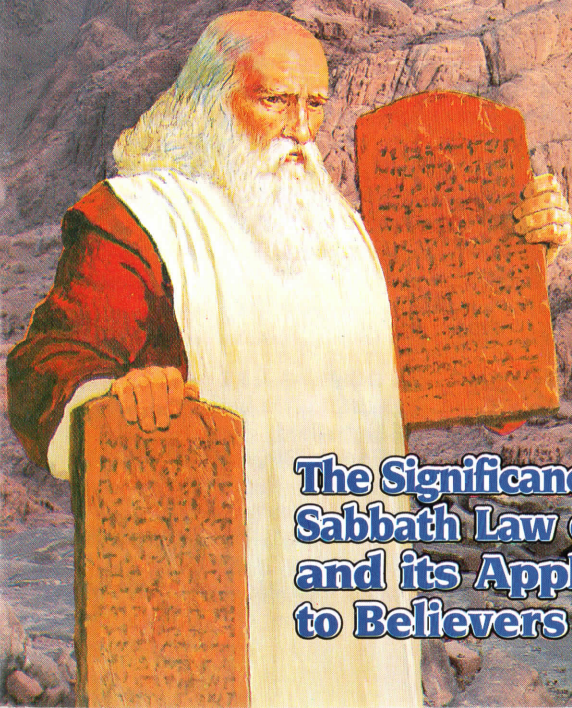


The True Sabbath

*A Future Day of
Rest for All People*



**The Significance of the
Sabbath Law of Israel
and its Application
to Believers Today.**

THE SABBATH LAW figured prominently in the religious life of Israel. It was defined in the law of Moses, and required every person to put aside his daily occupation on the seventh day of each week, and devote that time to worship. The law was designed to draw the nation to their God, and remind them that all material and religious benefits derive from Him. God expected His people to respond in devotion to Him. *Unfortunately, the law was generally misused.* People ceased their labor, but devoted the time to personal relaxation, and neglected the real design of the law: the honoring of God's will. Most religious groups today reject entirely the sabbath principle; but a few insist upon it being scrupulously maintained as a seventh day observance, and make it a matter of salvation. Both attitudes are wrong. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that the ritual observance of the Mosaic law has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and that no longer is there the requirement for sabbath worship in that manner. But the Bible also teaches that the *law of the sabbath* still applies in a spiritual sense, and will be re-introduced when the Lord Jesus Christ establishes his kingdom on earth. *The sabbath is a prophecy of great times ahead.* Read of these principles in the booklet now in your hands.

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The True Sabbath

The Significance of the Sabbath Law and How it Should Be Kept by True Believers

AS THE NATION OF ISRAEL assembled before Mount Sinai on their journey to the Promised Land, they heard the voice of an Angel of God providing them with a series of laws designed to govern their daily life and national development. Among the list of instructions were directions concerning the weekly occupations of the families. There was to be a balance between activity and rest; between labour and worship. The newly-formed nation was to understand the benefits of co-operating with God in the material circumstances of life, as well as in the religious observances He required. These were codified in a summary of God's laws known as **The Ten Commandments**, listed in Exodus 20.

The fourth of these ten commandments specified one day in every seven to be exclusively devoted to God: ***"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it"*** (verses 8-11).

The word "sabbath" means "rest." The people were ordered to refrain from their normal labor on that day, and to devote the time to doing the will of God and observing His strict requirements. They were not permitted to "gather sticks" (to engage in menial labor; compare Numbers 15:32), cook food, nor travel long distances. Death by stoning was the penalty for breaking any of the sabbath's many restrictions (Numbers 15: 32-36).

However, despite its importance under the Mosaic Law of Israel, seventh-day observance has no claim on the Christian today — notwithstanding the demands of some religious bodies to the contrary. Although Israel was given specific directions

concerning how the sabbath day was to be kept, no such laws to believers are to be found anywhere in the New Testament. Yet, although a believer is not required to observe the seventh-day sabbath in the way demanded of Israel, he is called upon to acknowledge its teaching in a daily way of life, which will cause him to "rest" (sabbath) from the "works" of sin, and devote his life to performing the will of God. And this is not limited to one day in seven, but to *every day of the week*.

In fact, the true believer will apply the spiritual significance of the sabbath in a more thorough way than was seen generally in the way that Israel performed it.

The Difference in God's Two Great Covenants with Mankind

The law given to Moses was no longer actively applicable after the nation of Israel rejected the Redeemer that God had sent to save them. In fact, the covenant of Moses, including the literal and formal observance of the seventh day, was fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ, and thereafter was no longer needed as laws for individual performance. It was replaced by a greater covenant that had already been set before mankind. There is a special reason why this was so.

The Mosaic covenant was the lesser of two great covenants that God made with man. It was made with the nation of Israel, and ratified with the blood of animal sacrifices. The other one was actually made earlier with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5,18,21), but treated as greater, because it was confirmed by the sacrifice of Christ (Galatians 3: 8; Romans 15: 8) .

The Mosaic covenant legislated in regard to the lives of Israelites, but because human nature is essentially evil, every person fell short of its requirements. It therefore demonstrated that all were sinners, and were therefore doomed to death. The Law taught that a person had to look beyond the Law for redemption unto eternal life which could only come through the grace and mercy of God (Romans 7:13). Faithful Israelites looked forward to the advent of a Redeemer promised of God through whom alone salvation could come. For that reason, the Law is likened to a schoolmaster leading the nation to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Paul taught that it was "added (i.e. to God's laws previously given to mankind) because of transgressions till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" (verse 19).

That seed was the Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the requirements of the Law by his perfect obedience and sacrifice; thus removing its curse by providing for the forgiveness of sin which, in contrast, the Law only emphasised and illustrated.

Why then serve the Law? Why observe the Sabbath?

Some organisations (amongst them the **Seventh Day Adventists**, and the **"Plain Truth" Worldwide Church of God**) admit that the covenant made with Moses has been taken out of the way. They cannot help doing so, because that truth is plainly taught in Scripture (Hebrews 8:13). But they claim that the covenant removed did not include the Ten Commandments, and because the fourth commandment relates to the keeping of the sabbath, they reason that it is still binding on Christians today. They suggest that the keeping of the sabbath on Saturday is essential to salvation.

We shall show that this is incorrect; that the Ten Commandments formed the very foundation of the Mosaic Covenant, and were fulfilled in Christ. Though nine of them are re-affirmed in the New Testament, the law relating to the sabbath is pointedly excluded.

The Ten Commandments Were Part Of The Mosaic Covenant

The Ten Commandments were engraven on two slabs of stone which were placed in the ark of the Covenant, in the Tabernacle at which the people of Israel worshipped. In describing the first (or Mosaic) covenant with its ordinances of divine service and its sanctuary (Hebrews 9:1), Paul referred to the Ten Commandments as "the tables of the covenant" (v. 4) a covenant which, in the previous chapter, he declared was "ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:13).

If the Ten Commandments were part of a covenant that was abrogated and "vanished away", then, obviously, the obligation to observe them would cease unless they were re-affirmed — as Christ did to nine of them.

Paul's teaching that the Mosaic covenant *included* the Ten Commandments, is endorsed by the Law itself:

"The Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel... And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the TEN COMMANDMENTS" (Exodus 34:27-28). "He (God) declared unto you His covenant, which He com-

manded you to perform, even TEN COMMANDMENTS” (Deuteronomy 4:13; see also ch. 5:13).

Throughout the history of Israel, the same identification of the covenant of Moses with the Ten Commandments was preserved. When the ark of the Covenant was placed in the Temple built by Solomon, it was observed:

“There was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt” (1 Kings 8:9). Those two tables of stone, inscribed with the Ten Commandments, are identified with the Mosaic covenant which Paul taught was done away in Christ. Verse 21 states: “I (Solomon) have set there (in the Temple) a place for the ark, wherein is *the covenant of the Lord*, which He made with our fathers, when He brought them out of Egypt.” There was nothing in the ark but the two tables of stone inscribed with the Ten Commandments which is the essential basis of the whole covenant to Israel through Moses. The evidence cannot be refuted that, since the Ten Commandments *formed part of the Mosaic covenant*, they would be no longer binding when that covenant lapsed.

The Mosaic Covenant Taken Away

The Bible further reveals that the Mosaic covenant was but a temporary ordinance that was removed at the beginning of the Christian era. In Hebrews 8:7-10, Paul taught that the covenant made with the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt was to be replaced by a new and better covenant through Christ. He said: “In that He (God) saith, a new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (verse 13).

In the next chapter, he taught that this covenant which was ready to “vanish away,” incorporated the “tables of the covenant,” or the Ten Commandments (see verse 4).

Does that mean that all the laws of the Ten Commandments are out of date, and that we can dishonor God, or kill and steal with impunity? By no means. Nine of the commandments have been restated in the commandments of Christ, for they proclaim eternal verities; but the fourth commandment, relating to the seventh day rest, was never re-affirmed by the Lord nor the Apostles. There is not a single command in the New Testament

requiring believers to observe the seventh day as a sabbath, but there is much to the contrary.

Contrariwise, **Seventh Day Adventists** discriminate between the “law of Moses” and the “law of God,” claiming that the former (written in a book) comprised the *ceremonial* ordinances of the Law, and the latter (inscribed on stone) concerned its *moral* requirements — and that the former was abolished, but the latter was not!

The Bible does not support that claim. Firstly, “the book” to which they make reference contained much more than mere ceremonials, and included the whole of the law as recorded in the early books of the Bible; and secondly, the Bible uses the terms “law of Moses” and “law of God” interchangeably (2 Chronicles 31:3; Numbers 31:21; Joshua 23:6).

Moreover, how is it possible to exclude the Ten Commandments from the covenant that Paul taught had to be done away, seeing they are so completely identified with it throughout Scripture? Does not Paul describe them as “the tables of the covenant” (Hebrews 9:4)? Does he not, in 2 Corinthians 3:7, refer to that covenant as “the ministration of death, *written and engraven in stones*”?

These words show, without doubt, that the Ten Commandments formed part of the covenant “done away” in Christ; otherwise they would not be identified with the “ministration of death.”

How could the Ten Commandments be used in that relationship since they teach eternal verities? The answer is, because they formed the basis of the Mosaic Covenant. As individual truths, nine of the commandments were re-affirmed by Christ and the Apostles, though not in the form in which they were presented to Israel. In the Mosaic Covenant, they were accompanied by the words: “Cursed is every one that continueth not... to do them” (Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10). The Mosaic Law did not provide any hope of eternal life, for its enactments were continually broken by the people, who thus came under its curse.

In Christ, however, there is provision for forgiveness of sins. The “law of Christ” (1Corinthians 9:21) restates nine of those commands and provides *a new meaning* to the remaining one (the sabbath law). In contrast to the “ministration of death”,

Christ's law is the "perfect law of liberty" (James 2:8-12; 1:25), because it liberates the true believer from the bondage of sin by forgiveness, and offers the hope of life.

When Did The Sabbath Law Commence ?

Some claim that the Sabbath law was known and obeyed by all the antediluvians from the dawn of creation; and, therefore, is not limited to the Mosaic Covenant. But even if this were true, it would not necessarily follow that it is binding today, for animal sacrifice was introduced at the very beginning (Genesis 4), and yet has now been superceded; the law of physical circumcision was given by God to Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11), but was also superceded in Christ.

It is true that time was divided into weeks of seven days from the beginning, but the Sabbath Law as such, establishing the seventh day as holy, to be observed in a special manner, was not recorded until after Israel had left Egypt. It is true that Genesis 2:3 declares: "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made," but there is no *command* in those words to observe the day as was later set before Israel. They were written by Moses for the people of Israel to explain to them why they were later required to observe the day. God declared to Israel: "It (the Sabbath law) is a sign between *Me* and the *CHILDREN OF ISRAEL* for ever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:17).

Nothing is revealed concerning the sabbath law until the time of Moses. It was not until the people were about to leave Egypt that the Jewish calendar was established. God told Moses that the departure from Egypt was to mark "the beginning... the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12:2). Only later, was Moses instructed in the sabbath law, and passed the information on to the people: "This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord" (Exodus 16:23).

If the sabbath law was universally known from the beginning of creation, as is alleged, why was there such a need to explain it in the fashion Moses did? Some suggest that the people had forgotten all about the law whilst in Egypt. But if there were such a fundamental law as is claimed, why was it not

taught the people before they left Egypt? Why was Moses himself ignorant of it? Why was some time allowed to pass after the nation left Egypt before it was explained to the people at Sinai (see Exodus 16:1,23), so that, until then, they did not keep the sabbath?

It is obvious from these facts, that the sabbath law was then given for the first time as an ordinance for Israelites to keep.

Thus Moses told the people: "The Lord hath given you (*not all mankind*) the sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days" (Exodus 16:29-30). Also: "Thou (*God*) madest known unto them (*Israel*) Thy holy sabbath... by the hand of Moses Thy servant" (Nehemiah 9:14). And, indicative of their general ignorance about the law: "they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they brought him unto Moses... and put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him" (Numbers 15:32-36). Even Moses was at first ignorant of the implications of the sabbath day, and what was involved in its keeping. Consider these significant facts:

1. During the 2,500 years from creation to Moses, before Israel was called out of Egypt as a separate nation unto God, there is no reference to the sabbath (except Genesis 2:2 which we have explained).

2. Once the nation was formed, the sabbath was established as an ordinance, and as a sign between God and Israel. Gentile nations were never subject to this law.

3. After the resurrection of Christ, when the Jewish nation was exiled and the Gospel was preached unto Gentiles, the formal observance of the sabbath ceased.

Why should it then cease? Because the sabbath was the token of "a rest" that Israel did not achieve (Hebrews 4:6), but which Christ is able to provide (Hebrews 4:3; Matthew 11:28-30) This "rest" is **from the works of the flesh through the forgiveness of sins** which is freely available through him. The sabbath therefore was part of the law designed to emphasise the reality of sin, and reveal to Israel the necessity for a Redeemer who had not then appeared to the nation.

The Significance Of The Sabbath

The Mosaic Covenant demanded that on every seventh day,

Israelites should rest from their normal labor and devote the time to God. They were not to perform the menial activities of daily life. A true Israelite, however, did not limit his service in divine things merely to *that one day*, for it was "his delight" to constantly engage in worship (Psalm 1:2). He not only observed the ritual letter of the law, but also its spirit, by daily striving to rest from the works of the flesh and perform the will of God. But there was no true rest (or sabbath) for him until the sin-bearer should appear; instead, there was a constant reminder of sins which Christ's offering subsequently covered (Hebrews 9:15). The sabbath rest presented the believer with an ideal to which he never completely attained.

God declared: "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth" (Isaiah 58:13-14).

The true keeping of the sabbath, therefore, required not merely rest from labor, but the positive dedication of the time to doing God's pleasure, finding delight in His ways, honoring Him by word and action.

How often should a true believer strive to do that?

Obviously *every* day! Not just one in seven.

But because the Israelite failed to do this completely, and the Sin-bearer had not then appeared, there was a constant reminder of the need of resting from the works of sin which the weekly sabbath emphasised.

In Christ, all the shadows of the Law became realities. He gave spiritual substance to its formalism. Instead of the sacrifice of animals, he presented himself as "the lamb of God" offered for the sin of the world. In place of a literal circumcision, he set before men a circumcision "that is of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men but of God" (Romans 2:28-29). Instead of a sabbath rest he provides a true rest from the works of the flesh by enjoining Divine principles as a daily way of life, and providing an effective cover for sin when it is committed.

Christ invites us to the true sabbath rest, not one day in

seven, *but every day*, when he says: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I *will give you rest*." The original Greek word translated "rest" is *anapausis*, and is constantly used in the *Septuagint* (Greek Old Testament) for the sabbath rest. Jesus condemned the empty, meaningless formalism of the Jewish leaders, with its insistence upon the seventh-day rest without an appreciation of its spiritual significance. He deliberately emphasised this to the Jews, by allowing his disciples to do that which was considered "not lawful to do upon the sabbath day" (Matthew 12:1-2). He did this because he was "Lord even of the sabbath" (v. 8), and therefore had the power to change the law in regard to it.

In Christ alone is to be found the true sabbath rest.

The lessons of the sabbath, therefore, have a place in the life of a believer, but not as a seventh-day observance. Neither the seventh day nor the first day has been enjoined by Christ for that purpose, but every day. Paul taught: "We are delivered from the law that... we should serve in the *newness of spirit* and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7: 6).

Some Were Exempt From The Sabbath Law

In permitting his disciples to do that which "was not lawful to do upon the sabbath day," the Lord was not defying the Law, for it supplied its own precedence for such action.

Even during the period of the Mosaic Covenant, there were some in Israel who were exempted from the sabbath law, who were not required to put aside one day in every seven as a day of rest. This fact demonstrates that under certain circumstances, the SABBATH LAW WAS NOT BINDING!

Those exempted from sabbath restrictions were the priests engaged in the service of the Temple. Jesus drew the attention of the Pharisees to that fact: "Have ye not *read in the law*, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath and *are blameless*?" (Matthew 12:5).

Instead of the sabbath being a day of rest for the priests, their work was actually doubled (Numbers 28:4, 9-10). To them, the day was no more holy than any other day, for their entire lives were devoted to the Lord's service. Thus they "profaned the sabbath": they did not keep it as a holy, separate, work-less day, and yet they were accounted "blameless," because their service was a daily sabbath, and therefore every

day, to them, was "holy" unto the Lord.

This is the stand adopted by true followers of Christ. They are accounted as priests, for Peter wrote: "Ye are a royal priesthood" (1Peter 2:9). Their lives are a daily pilgrimage towards the Kingdom of God, in that they try to glorify God in action, in even the menial tasks of life (see Ephesians 5:22; 6:1-5). As they are called upon to manifest the *spirit of the sabbath law every day*, no day to them is more holy than another, so that they "profane the sabbath" but "are blameless," because they are not really under that law.

Christ advanced this fact to explain the action of his disciples. He desires his followers to manifest the attitude of the priests in the temple who "profaned the sabbath", by giving God a daily service, and not placing emphasis upon special or particular days (Colossians 2:16,17).

That is the stand adopted by Christadelphians.

The Law Of Circumcision Greater Than The Sabbath Law

On another occasion, the Lord condemned the formalism of the Jews in regard to the sabbath by drawing attention to another law which *took precedence* over the sabbath and which they were commanded to obey even though it might require the breaking of the sabbath.

This greater law related to the rite of circumcision.

The Law of Moses required that on the *eighth* day a Jewish boy should be circumcised. But sometimes the eighth day of a boy's life fell on a sabbath. The question then arose as to *which law was the greater*, and which law should be broken to fulfil the other. Should circumcision be waived and the sabbath observed? Or should the sabbath be waived and the rite of circumcision observed?

The Law taught that precedence should be given to the rite of circumcision because (and let the reader note this if he believes that the sabbath law was binding prior to the days of Moses) circumcision came from Abraham, and the sabbath from Moses. Christ explained: "Moses gave you circumcision (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers — *i.e. Abraham*); and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man. If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?" (John 7:22-23).

If the law of circumcision took precedence over the sabbath law, on what grounds can some teach that the sabbath law is binding on believers, but the law of circumcision is not? Only by closing their eyes to the Scriptural facts.

Why should the law of circumcision take precedence over that of the sabbath? Because circumcision was the token of the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 17:10-11) that was confirmed by the perfect sacrifice of Christ (Romans 15:8); whereas the sabbath was the token of the Mosaic covenant (Exodus. 31:17), confirmed by inefficacious animal sacrifices (Hebrews 9:19). As the Abrahamic covenant superseded the Mosaic covenant (Hebrews 8:8), so the Law beautifully taught this principle by superseding the importance of one by the other.

A Prophecy in Type and Ritual

The New Testament shows that circumcision still has a place in a believer's life through the spiritual lessons it portrays. Whilst the rite itself is no longer enforced (Galatians 5:11), its spiritual significance is certainly retained (Romans 2:28-29). Whereas the sabbath was celebrated on the seventh day of the week, the rite of circumcision was practised on the eighth day of a boy's life. There is a significance in this, for prophetically in Scripture, a day can represent a "thousand years" (2Pet. 3:8).

The sabbath points forward to the seventh millennium (each a thousand years) from creation, which will witness a time of **national rest** from sin and evil through the righteous reign of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jeremiah 3:17; Psalm 72). Then, the world will turn to God (Isaiah 2:2-4), and Jerusalem will become the centre of divine worship (Zechariah 14:16).

The Lord will be assisted in that day by his resurrected and immortalised followers (Romans 2:7; Matthew 19:29; 1Corinthians 15:23, 51-56), who, as a royal priesthood, will reign with Christ on the earth (Revelation 5:9-10). This great **sabbath of a thousand years**, will witness immortal guides and rulers, reigning over the mortal populations of the earth, judging and rejecting sinners (Isaiah 65:17-25), and bringing mankind into subjection to God. Universal peace and righteousness (a **resting** from sin) will follow, for men shall forsake their own ways and "delight themselves" in the Lord (Micah 4:1-4; Psalm 37:11).

This millennial rest, which the sabbath rest foreshadowed, will be followed by the eighth millennium of which the rite of circumcision was a type. Before it is inaugurated, "the last enemy, even death, shall be destroyed," and God shall be revealed "all and in all" (I Corinthians 15:24-28). All who have been rebellious during the thousand years' reign of Christ will be "cut off" in death, whilst immortality will be granted those who have proved themselves worthy of it (Revelation 20:5-6, 12-15). Death will be abolished from the earth, so that the eighth millennium illustrates and fulfils that to which circumcision (the token of the Abrahamic covenant) pointed: the cutting off of mortal flesh from the earth, and the complete revelation of God's purpose in creation, for the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters do the sea (Numbers 14:21).

How The Sabbath Should be Observed Today

The sabbath, today, is binding on believers in much the same way as is the law of circumcision. But only in their symbolic application as taught by the apostles. Paul wrote of circumcision as being "of the heart; in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Romans 2:28-29). He explained that a "spiritual circumcision" is not "of the flesh," commenting: "In whom (Christ) also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (his crucifixion); buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith..." (Colossians 2:11-12).

The literal rite of circumcision cut off a portion of flesh; spiritual circumcision does likewise in a figurative sense (Colossians 3:8-11). A person circumcised spiritually, denies himself, that he might follow Christ. The first act of obedience that Christ requires of such, is a baptism into his name, based upon sound knowledge (Mark 16:16) — for, by total immersion in water the believer is typically "cut off" from life in a figurative death.

As circumcision is to be performed in a spiritual sense, what of the sabbath? The Bible says: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the *sabbath days*; which are a shadow of things to come, but the body (*i.e., the reality*) is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

The sabbath is set forth as a shadow of something to be revealed in Christ as explained in Hebrews 4:4, "There remaineth therefore a rest (*sabbath* — see margin) to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath *ceased from his own works*, as God did from His. Let us labor therefore to enter into *THAT REST*, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief" (Hebrews 4:9-11).

A true follower of the Lord observes the sabbath in a figurative sense when he *daily* strives to cease from his own selfish works, and follows the pattern set by Christ. Paul exhorted such to "labor to enter that rest," for it is the only one of real consequence in the sight of God and Christ.

That is the way in which the sabbath should be observed today. And it should be observed, not one day in seven, but every day of our lives.

Like the priests in the temple who were not brought under the sabbath law, but observed its principles daily, so the lives of believers should be a daily pilgrimage toward the Kingdom of God. Every day will then be made holy unto Him.

The Danger Of Sabbatarianism

The first heresy introduced into the early Christian communities was an attempt to superimpose the Jewish law upon the teaching of Christ. Those heretics asserted "that it was needful... to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5). The teaching was vigorously refuted by the Apostles who instructed Gentile believers: "We have heard that certain have troubled you with words, saying, Ye must... keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment" (Acts 15:24).

At the same time, the Apostles recommended that there were certain aspects of the Law that Gentile believers were advised to keep (see vv. 24-29), but it is most significant that the keeping of the seventh-day sabbath was not among them.

But why was it not included in the recommendations of the Apostles on this occasion? Because the Law was fulfilled by Christ, and the institution of the sabbath was exclusively a feature of the Law (Galatians 4:9-10). In fact, Paul condemned the imposition of Sabbatarianism: "One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike; *let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind*" (Romans 14:5).

Paul showed that the observance of one day above another

was a matter of little consequence. The Jewish Christians, doubtless, wished to continue observing the sabbath as a day of rest; and there was no harm in them doing so, so long as they *did not try to impose* the same restrictions on their Gentile brethren, or assume that their observance of the seventh day permitted them to avoid the regular meetings established by the Apostles (Acts 2:41-42).

It appears as though some of the Jewish Christians were doing this, elevating the sabbath above the meeting instituted by Christ. This, indeed, may have called forth Paul's rebuke to the Hebrews: "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10:25).

He warned them against stressing certain days, like the sabbath: "Ye observe days, and months, and times and years. I am afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain," he wrote (Galatians 4:9-10).

The New Testament stresses neither the seventh nor the first day as of special significance, but emphasises that every day must be used as an opportunity to serve and worship God aright.

The Apostles Met Together On The First Day

But though the New Testament does not demand that either Saturday or Sunday be elevated as a holy day, as the Law did the former, the early communities of believers met regularly for religious communion on the first day of the week, and not the seventh. Thus: "Upon the **first day** of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..." (Acts 20:7). "Concerning the collection for the saints... upon the **first day** of the week let every one lay by him in store" (1 Corinthians 16:2).

If the Apostles met for communion on the first day of the week, what did they do on the seventh day? They were able to attend the synagogues where the Jews were gathered together, in order to proclaim to them the doctrine of the risen Christ. Paul did this at Antioch (Acts 13:14, 44), Corinth (Acts 18:4), and at Ephesus regularly for three months (Acts 19:8). At Thessalonica "Paul, *as his manner was*, went in unto the synagogue of the Jews, and three sabbath days *reasoned with them* out of the Scriptures" (Acts 17:2).

The Apostles used the Jewish sabbath as opportunity for serious disputing with the Jews, and met with the believers on

the first day of the week. Indeed, the records of history show that it was always the habit of Christians to assemble together on the first day of the week; and this practice dates back to Apostolic times as we have shown from the record of the Acts.

Here are confirming extracts from early ecclesiastical writers: **Eusebius** (about AD324) wrote: "We do not regard circumcision, nor observe the sabbath, because such things as these do not belong to Christians". **Anatolius** (AD270) said: "The obligation of the Lord's resurrection binds us to keep the paschal festival on the Lord's day" (the first day when he rose from the dead). **Justin Martyr** (AD140) stated: "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." He describes the Christian worship thus: "On the day called Sunday there is made a gathering into the same place of all that 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." **Ignatius** (about AD100), a disciple of John, wrote: "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 whom our life, as risen again through him, depends."

These statements from the records of ecclesiastical history demonstrate that the early believers did not observe the sabbath under the law as alleged, and furthermore reveal that the claim, so confidently advanced by **Seventh Day Adventists** and others, that the custom of holding religious meetings on a Sunday owes its origin to the 4th century decree of Constantine, is quite incorrect. Constantine merely confirmed by specific law that which had been the practice of Christ's true disciples in earlier Apostolic days.

Does God Change His Laws ?

A common fallacy is the claim that God does not change His laws, and since the law of the sabbath was established by God, it is still binding. But, in fact, God has changed many laws in the past. He decreed the law of physical circumcision.

He laid down the principle of animal sacrifice. He commanded that all Israelites worship in Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 12:5-7).

Those laws were changed, and given a new meaning in Christ. So, also, has the law of the sabbath. The Law of Moses was to act as a schoolmaster *leading men to Christ* (Galatians 3:24). When Christ came, there came a change in the law, causing Paul to proclaim that "it was added because of transgressions *UNTIL* the seed (*Christ*) should come" (verse 19).

By illustrating the reality of sin, the Law brought all men under its curse, for all were guilty of transgression. It therefore revealed the need of divine grace and forgiveness; but it could not provide this itself. This was revealed in Christ, who, through the forgiveness of sins, can deliver mankind from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13), and bring him under his own glorious "law of liberty" (1 Corinthians 9:21; James 1:25).

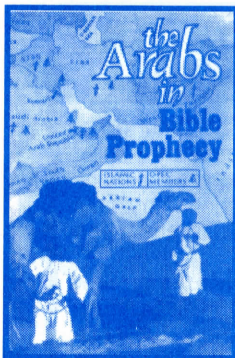
Christ's requirements are: **Firstly**, a sound understanding of the Gospel; **Secondly**, obedience thereto through the waters of total baptism; and, **Thirdly**, the manifestation of right ways of life in obedience to his commands (Matthew 28:19-20).

Those who fulfil these obligations will be "keeping the sabbath" in its true, spiritual import day by day, and will not need one day in seven to remind them of their responsibilities in that regard. They will come to comprehend the significance of Paul's statement: "The letter killeth but the *spirit giveth life*" (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Those who so act will be able to confidently anticipate the *coming sabbatical rest*, when Christ shall reign on earth and they will be clothed with immortality, no longer shackled by our mortal nature with its trials and temptations. "Let us labor therefore to *enter into THAT rest*" (Hebrews 4:11).

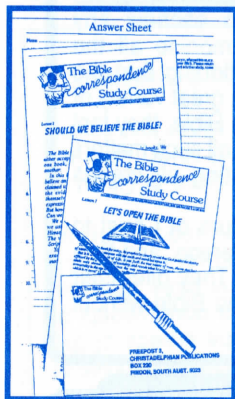
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