

WHY God Revealed Sabbaths to Israel

History proves that Gentiles, shortly after the flood, knew the Sabbath began at man's creation. Then why did God have to reveal which day was the seventh day? Had time been lost?

by Herman L. Hoeh

GOD CALLED Israel out of Egyptian slavery to perform the most important mission any nation has been given in all the history of mankind. Israel is not God's "favorite" people, or "pet" nation. They were not chosen for any goodness of their own (Deut. 7:6-9).

God called them so He could reveal *Himself* as Creator and Ruler of the universe—so that through them He could reveal his *plan*, his laws, and his blessings to all nations (Deut. 4:5-9).

In order that Israel would NEVER forget that God was Creator, Sustainer and Supreme Ruler over all the creation, He revealed to them the ONE GREAT SIGN by which they could always remember *who He is*. That sign was a *constantly* recurring piece of time—the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath.

Sabbath Known Before Moses

In the preceding issue of "The Good News," we proved that the Sabbath which God revealed *had already existed from the creation of man* (Gen. 2:1-3). ARCHEOLOGISTS HAVE FOUND THAT THE GENTILES, SHORTLY AFTER THE FLOOD — BUT CENTURIES BEFORE MOSES—WROTE ON CLAY TABLETS THAT GOD SET APART THE SEVENTH DAY AS A HOLY DAY OF REST AT CREATION.

Since the Sabbath was holy time from the creation of man the *patriarchs of old kept it holy*. Notice what God said of Abraham. He "*obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*" Genesis 26:5). This could not have been said of him if he *broke* the Sabbath, because the Sabbath command had been a *law* since the creation of man. That such observance is not directly mentioned does *not* disprove the fact that Abraham and the other patriarchs observed that day. They kept God's commands!

Why the Sabbath Was Not Observed in Egypt

Now remember that the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt. They were

not permitted to observe the Sabbath. The Egyptians had neither a Sabbath nor a seven day week. They lost both because their ancestors turned away from God—refused to keep His Sabbath—at the time of the building of the Tower of Babel.

They possessed a thirty-day month which they divided into three equal parts of *ten* days each (*Rest Days*, p. 245). The planetary week of seven days was a *later* Egyptian development from which the present pagan names of the days of the week were derived (*Encyclopedia Biblica*, p. 5291).

Even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob observed God's sabbath their descendants *lost it* during centuries of slavery. That's why God had to reveal again exactly which day was the Sabbath. He did this by *not* sending manna on that day and by sending a *double* portion on the sixth day of the week (Exodus 16).

Notice that the seventh day—which was sanctified at man's creation as the Sabbath—was in existence before the Old Covenant was made at Sinai. The rest of the holy Sabbath to God (Ex. 16:23) and God's law were *already* in force before they arrived at Sinai (Ex. 16:28).

Note Israel's rebellion against the rule of God. Ever since leaving Egypt they refused to obey Him. "How *long* do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?" No wonder Moses had to warn Israel that by sabbath breaking they would forget the God of Creation who brought them out of Egyptian slavery (Deut. 5:15)!

The Sabbath a SIGN to Israel

The seventh day is a sign to the nation Israel so they would never forget who God is (Exodus 31:12-17). All other nations forgot God BECAUSE THEY FORGOT HIS SABBATH SHORTLY AFTER THE FLOOD. Israel *alone* had the sign to prove that God—the Lord of heaven and earth—was in their midst. The Sabbath also signified that Israel was *God's nation*, chosen for a special duty.

Any nation without that sign was not God's people. The Gentile countries were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, *having no hope, and without God in the world*" (Ephesians 2:12).

Notice how vital the SIGN is! *Converted Gentiles must receive this sign in order to be grafted into spiritual Israel and become God's people.*

Sabbath Law is Spiritual, Not Ceremonial

The entire law that God revealed to Israel is spiritual, said Paul in Romans 7:14. The Sabbath is spiritual because it deals with man's spiritual relationship to his Creator and his neighbor. It is a holy piece of time, not a religious rite. The Sabbath is NEVER termed a ceremony or ritual in Scripture. It is a *spiritual* law regulating our relationship to God, who is spiritual.

When Israel was organized into a nation, the spiritual law governing the Sabbath was *also* described and explained in words—in *letters* of the alphabet—on tables of stone.

Since Paul said the law of God was *spiritual*, it is obvious that merely writing the Sabbath law into a *material* covenant *did not originate* the Sabbath any more than writing the "law of gravity" in a book institutes gravity! Neither can the abolition of the Old Covenant do away with the Sabbath since it did not originally bring it into existence. The Sabbath had to be included in the Old Covenant because the seventh day existed during the time of enforcement of the Old Covenant.

Now let's consider another question.

Was the Sabbath for Worship?

Certain groups contend the Sabbath was originally not meant for worship but only rest. Hence they claim the right to invent their own days of worship. Notice the false assumption that the Catholic Church claims:

"It is well to bear in mind also that the Sabbath law . . . set Saturday aside

not as a day of special worship but as a day of rest . . ." "As for devoting Saturday to special ceremonies and acts of worship, this never had been the law of God anyway, but merely a custom" (from the pamphlet, "Yes . . . I condemned the Catholic Church," pp. 3-4).

Did God or Jewish custom make the Sabbath a day of worship? *What does the Bible say?*

Notice Moses' account in Leviticus 23:1-3 "And the Lord spake unto Moses saying . . . the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, *an holy convocation.*"

Moses said the Lord made the Sabbath a day for a "convocation," or commanded assembly, in order to worship God. *It was not custom* that set the Sabbath apart for worship. *God made it a day of worship.* Since the Eternal God, and not the Jews, set the Sabbath apart as a day of worship forever, *no church has the right* to invent its own day of worship by tradition. God is to be honored and worshipped on His Sabbath (Isaiah 58:13) even if you are all alone.

Beside giving Israel the Sabbath so they would never forget that God is the Creator and Ruler, the Eternal also gave them MEMORIALS of His Plan for mankind. These memorials were seven annual festivals.

WHY the Seven Annual Festivals?

The heathen nations had their idolatrous festivals to commemorate the mysteries of their religions. These were counterfeits of the Holy Days that God revealed to His physical Church—the Congregation of Israel—upon removing them from Egypt. While the pagan feasts led the heathen into sin, God's festivals were *memorials* to commemorate Israel's coming out of the sins of Egypt—a picture for His church of the plan of God in delivering the world from its sins, its sorrows and sufferings.

It is customarily believed among critics that God's holy festivals are derived from the pagan festivals of the Canaanites who lived in Palestine before the entrance of Israel under Moses. This assumption is utterly false. It has never once been proved from history. The festivals found among the heathen were different days filled with idolatrous revelry, something never connected with the festivals God revealed to his servant Moses for all generations to come (Acts 7:38).

The God-given occasions were based on the agricultural harvests of Palestine as a type of the spiritual harvest of human beings.

These festivals were not Canaanitish feasts, nor Jewish feasts, nor the feasts of Moses. Not once in all the Old Testament are these days called "feasts of Moses" or "Jewish feasts." They are

the "feasts of the Lord," "My holy days."

Were Feasts Instituted for Sacrifice?

The annual festivals given to the Congregation (Church) of Israel began to be instituted while the nation was still in Egypt, before the Old Covenant was ratified at Mount Sinai (Exodus 5:1; 12:1-51; 24:8). These days which were ordained FOREVER naturally had to be continued through the Old Covenant period, but they did not cease when the Old Covenant ended. What the Old Covenant did not institute, could not be taken away with its abolition.

But many people ask, "Weren't the annual festivals instituted for the purpose of Levitical sacrifices?"

GOD SAYS NO!

"For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you" (Jer. 7:21:24).

Notice it. When God first commanded His Holy Days, He didn't mention sacrifices for sin. Sacrifices to be offered by the Levites were added later to these days (Leviticus 23), as on the sabbath, and every day of the week (Exodus 29:38). But some will ask, "What about the passover? Doesn't that contradict what Jeremiah was inspired to write?"

NO!

It is really further proof that the constant round of ritualistic offerings was not a part of the original institution of these annual Sabbaths. Notice what God says of the passover lamb (Exodus 12).

It was to be killed by every family group, not just the Levites. The passover lamb is the only sacrifice whose ordinance is commanded forever in connection with these days as originally instituted (Exodus 12; Deut. 16) It is the ONLY sacrifice mentioned in the civil law codes (Exodus 23:14-18; 34:22-25). For this reason Jesus had to substitute unleavened bread and wine—symbols for the slain lamb (Luke 22:8-20).

But no other sacrifice was commanded on these days originally. Jesus never gave substitutes—different symbols—for any sacrifice except the passover lamb. This agrees with the inspired statement of Jeremiah.

The sacrifices mentioned in Leviticus 23 and elsewhere were added later because of sin.

Annual and Weekly Sabbaths NOT Related

Failing to understand the sacred calendar, a number of sects have wrongly concluded that the annual Sabbaths occurred on Sundays, or else that the weekly Sabbath was originally Sunday. Let's examine why this could not possibly be true.

Annual sabbaths have no relationship with the seventh day of the week. They are specific days of the calendar months. The new moons that begin the months (Numbers 28:11) are totally unrelated to the cycle of a seven day week. This is very obvious since a sacred month has 29 or 30 days, not four weeks or 28 days. For this reason the festivals may fall on any day of the week in successive years, but always on the same day of the month (except Pentecost).

Certain denominations also argue that since the fourth commandment demands six days of work per week, that the annual sabbaths must correspond with the weekly sabbath. What's wrong with this argument?

A quick examination of the last high day in the festival of unleavened bread shows that it falls six, not seven, days after the first high day or annual sabbath. Also the day of Atonement, a solemn sabbath, falls nine, not seven, days after the festival of trumpets. Therefore the annual sabbaths can not possibly correspond to the weekly sabbaths which are always seven days apart. The fourth command does not exclude annual occasions on other days throughout the year.

It is opportune here to note that the new moons, repeated along with the sabbaths and annual festivals (Col. 2:16) are not once called sabbaths nor holy convocations. They are not found in the complete list of festivals. This disproves entirely the contention of some that originally the new moon was more important than the weekly sabbath, and from which certain critics believe the sabbath emerged. New moons are neither sabbaths nor commanded assemblies. Voluntary meetings were sometimes held on the new moons (2 Kings 4:23). Their special importance is found in that they mark the beginning of months for us.

The Church in the wilderness received the knowledge of the plan of God through the annual festivals—memorials commanded forever. These days were not given to punish Israel for sin as many "church fathers" supposed centuries later. THEY ARE HALLOWED PIECES OF TIME TO BE KEPT HOLY.

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