



# **The Sabbath: Must Christians Keep It Today?**

Roger D. Campbell

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). This is the fourth of the famous ten commandments which Jehovah gave to the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Is the Sabbath law still binding today? Is it only for Christians? Is Sunday the Sabbath for Christians? The Bible says, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). Thus, our answers to these and all religious questions must be based on the word of God. The Sabbath — Must we keep it today?

## **1. Which day of the week is the Sabbath?**

In Exodus 20:9,10 it is written, "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." Thus, the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, or Saturday. Please note that the word "Sabbath" does not mean worship or day of worship, but rather it means cessation from labor, or rest.

## **2. Does Genesis 2:2,3 show that God has wanted men of all ages, even from the creation, to keep the Sabbath as a holy day?**

These verses say, "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." Please notice that in these two verses the Bible speaks about GOD, and about what GOD did. These verses do not mention mankind, they do not mention any command that God gave to man, and they do not mention man keeping the Sabbath. There is simply no proof in these verses in Genesis two that God wanted all men of all ages to keep the Sabbath.

### **3. Since the Sabbath was part of the ten commandments, should we not keep it today?**

As noted above, the Sabbath was the fourth of the ten commandments (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12). But the first few verses of these two chapters plainly show that the ten commandments were given ONLY to the nation of Israel. The ten commandments were only one part of the law of Moses, a law which included more than six hundred commands. If we say that we ought to keep the Sabbath because it was part of the law that God gave His people at Mt. Sinai, then by the same logic we ought to say that we are obligated to keep all of that law. Paul pointed this out to those who were trying to bind one part of the law of Moses (circumcision): "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law" (Galatians 5:3). The New Testament teaches that Jesus abolished the law of Moses, the Old Testament law. "For he (Jesus) is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace" (Ephesians 2:14,15).

### **4. Is there any New Testament verse that directly says that the Sabbath was done away?**

No. But, neither does the New Testament directly say that the feast of Pentecost is no longer binding. But does that mean that we must still keep the feast of Pentecost? No! The New Testament says that Jesus blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Colossians 2:14). The "handwriting of ordinances" refers to the law of Moses, and the context plainly shows that this includes the Sabbath (2:16).

### **5. Is it correct to say that Jesus abolished the law of Moses or ceremonial law, but did not abolish the law of God, the ten commandments?**

Is there really a difference between "the law of Moses" and "the law of God," as some claim? Consider this example. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary took Him to the temple in Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice and present Him to the Lord. They did this "according to the law of Moses" (Luke 2:22), or, "As it is written in the law of the Lord" (2:23). In these verse, "the law of Moses" and "the law of the Lord (God)" are the same. The quotation in Luke 2:23 is from Leviticus chapter 12. Please note: what is said in Leviticus 12 about such sacrifices is NOT part of the ten commandments, yet the Holy Spirit calls this command part of "the law of the Lord." Therefore, the law of the Lord or law of God included more than the ten

commandments. Consider also Nehemiah 8:1,7,8,13,14,18. In these verses the Holy Spirit records that Ezra read to the Israelites from a book, and the message which he read to them is called "the law of Moses," "the law," "the law of God," and "the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses." Obviously, the law of Moses and the law of God are one. Thus, when the Bible says that Jesus abolished the law, it means all of the Old Testament law, including the Sabbath.

### **6. Does the Bible say that the Sabbath is a sign?**

Yes, it does. But, a sign between whom? Jehovah said, "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath...it is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever" (Exodus 31:16,17). Dear friend, the Sabbath is not a sign between God and Christians, but was a sign between God and one nation only, the nation of Israel. Consider this: if the Sabbath was a sign for all men, then how would it be a special sign between God and the Israelites?

### **7. Did not God give the Sabbath to man forever?**

The Bible says that God gave the Sabbath to Israel "for ever" or as a "perpetual covenant" (Exodus 31:16,17). The feast of Tabernacles was also given to Israel "for ever" (Leviticus 23:41,39). Does that mean that Christians must keep the Tabernacles feast? Of course not. Jonah said that he was in the fish's belly "for ever," (Jonah 2:6), yet in fact he was in there "three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17). Thus, "for ever" does not always mean time without end or until the second coming of Jesus. "For ever" simply means the complete duration of a set period of time. The Sabbath had to be kept for ever only in the sense that it was binding throughout the entire period that the law of Moses was in effect.

### **8. Why did God give the Sabbath law to Israel?**

God chose the seventh day as the day in which the nation of Israel was to rest, because that was the day in which He Himself rested after six days of creation (Exodus 20:11). But with what purpose was Israel to keep the Sabbath? Jehovah said to Israel, "But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God...and remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:15). Jehovah commanded the Israelites to keep the Sabbath in order to remember that they had been slaves in Egypt and that God delivered them! Christians were never slaves in Egypt, so it is not possible for us to keep the Sabbath in order to remember that the Lord delivered us from physical slavery. The

Sabbath was given only to Israelites, and God made His Sabbath known to them at Mt. Sinai (Nehemiah 9:13,14).

### **9. What about punishment for breaking the Sabbath law?**

The Sabbath law required complete rest from labor (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). What if one did not obey this law? "...a Sabbath of rest to the Lord; whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death" (Exodus 35:2). "Every one that defileth it shall be put to death" (Exodus 31:14). Once a man violated the Sabbath in the Old Testament, and Jehovah commanded the people to stone him to death (Numbers 15:32-36). Thus, if we claim that we must keep the Sabbath because it was part of God's law, then this means that we would also be required to kill anyone who broke it, for that was God's law also!

### **10. Is Sunday the Christian's Sabbath?**

In fact, there is no New Testament passage that says that the first day of the week (Sunday) is a Sabbath or day of rest for Christians. The first day of the week is extremely important to the followers of Jesus, for on that day the Lord Jesus rose from the dead (Mark 16:9). In the first century disciples of the Christ assembled on the first day of the week to break bread (take the Lord's supper) (Acts 20:7) and to give contributions (1 Corinthians 16:2). Without doubt, in the New Testament the first day of the week or Sunday is the special day of worship for Christians. But, in the bible this day is nowhere called the Christian's Sabbath or day of rest.

The Sabbath — Must Christians keep it today? The Sabbath law, which required rest from physical labor on the seventh day of the week, was a command that Jehovah gave only to the nation of Israel. But the law of Moses, including the Sabbath law, was abolished when Jesus died on the cross. Today we must teach men to observe all things that Jesus commanded His apostles, for Jesus possesses all religious authority (Matthew 28:18,20). The Sabbath law is not a part of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Therefore the Sabbath is no longer binding on anyone living today.

"The Sabbath, Must Christians Keep It Today?" by Roger D. Campbell © 1995