



Sunday, November 13, 2022

Lesson Text: Exodus 31:12-18; **Time of Action:** 1445 B.C.; **Place of Action:** Mount Sinai

Golden Text: "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you" (Exodus 31:13).

I. INTRODUCTION. Since the beginning of the church, the Sabbath Day, or the seventh day has been kept holy. I can remember when businesses were closed on Sunday so that people could worship God and spend time with their families. Sadly, not only has the Sabbath Day become secularized, but the church has also increasingly remained silent on the sanctity of this day. The Scriptures clearly indicate that the idea of keeping a special day of the week came from God Himself and for His reasons. Studies have shown that people need one day in seven for both physical and mental rest. This week's lesson describes how believers are to view one day a week as our Sabbath Day of rest.

II. BACKGROUND FOR THE LESSON. After the Hebrews were released from Egyptian bondage, Moses led them to



Mount Sinai, where God gave him His Law which included the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 19:1-3: 20:1-17). The fourth and most extensive commandment dealt with the Sabbath Day. Our lesson text takes place after God called Moses to Mount Sinai for the second time (see Exodus 24:3-18). During this time, God gave Moses instructions for the tabernacle and the Aaronic priesthood (see Exodus 25:1-31:11). When the LORD finished giving those instructions to Moses, He reminded him of Israel's Sabbath Day obligations that were given earlier as part of the Ten Commandments. This was probably necessary in order to prevent anyone from working on the tabernacle on the Sabbath. Even though preparing the tabernacle was a sacred task, God wanted the people to know that there were no exceptions when keeping the Sabbath. Our lesson begins with God speaking to Moses and giving additional details concerning the Sabbath Day observance.

III. SABBATH DAY COMMAND (Exodus 31:12-13)

A. The LORD speaks (Exodus 31:12). Our first verse says **"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying."** After giving Moses the directions for both the tabernacle and the Aaronic priesthood, **"the LORD"** continued to speak **"unto Moses saying"** what follows in the next verses concerning the Sabbath.

B. The Sabbath as a sign(Exodus 31:13). In this verse, God said to Moses **"Speak thou also unto the**



children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you." God began by telling Moses to speak to **"the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep,"** indicating how important it was to observe the Sabbath Day rest. God went on to say that the Sabbath Day rest **"is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you."** Observing, or keeping the **"Sabbath"** Day was a **"sign"** of the covenant Law between God and Israel. **Note: *Just like the Jews, Christians also have a special covenant relationship with God. Ours is through the LORD Jesus Christ. It was established by His death for our sin and His resurrection for our justification. We enter into the covenant by faith in Christ which results in a new birth by the Holy Spirit (see Hebrews 8:6-13). The covenant is signified by our worshipping together on the LORD's Day as well as recognizing the LORD's Supper and baptism (see I Corinthians 11:20-34; Hebrews 10:25; Romans 6:1-5). However, neither of these ceremonies will save us; they are only observed as testimonies to our faith in Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross. All of this is by grace given to us by God without any works on our part (see Ephesians 2:8-9). Nothing that we can do would add to, or subtract from God's action in saving us, and bringing us into this special covenant relationship with Him.*** By keeping, or observing the **"Sabbath,"** every Israelite would identify himself with **"the LORD that doth sanctify you."** In other words, Israel



would have no doubt that it was God who was sanctifying or setting them apart to holiness. Sanctification is more than just consecration or cleansing; the word also means "to set apart" or "to separate." Therefore, by taking a day of rest from work, the nation of Israel was doing something different from all the other nations. They were placing their trust in God to help them complete their work in six days. They trusted Him to make their crops grow. The question is, are we able to trust God enough to observe His day of rest, and let it be a testimony to others? **Note: God is holy, completely set apart from everything that's unclean. Therefore, He also wants Israel to be a holy nation (see Exodus 19:6). God also desires the same thing for Christians and has declared us to be a holy nation (see I Peter 2:9). Observing, or keeping the Sabbath Day through rest and worship (see Leviticus 23:3) was the outward proof that the Jews were a sanctified or holy people. As such, they were the LORD's unique possession (see Ezekiel 20:12, 20) and so is the church (see Ephesians 1:14).**

IV. REJECTING THE SABBATH DAY (Exodus 31:14-16)

A. The serious consequences for violating the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14). This verse goes on to say "Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people." Moses was also to tell



the Hebrews that **"Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you."** Again God stressed the importance of keeping **"the Sabbath"** declaring that **"it is holy unto you"** meaning that it is designed for Israel's benefit as well as for God's honor. As Jesus said, *"the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath"* (see Mark 2:27). **Note: *The "Sabbath Day" was to be viewed and observed as "holy" by Israel, and they should consider it a sacrilege to profane it. There's no doubt that the covenant sign of "the Sabbath" was for Israel only, and not for the church. The pronouns "Ye" and "you" are plural and refer to all of Israel. We must remember that Israel was supposed to be God's witness of Himself to the non-Jewish nations (see Isaiah 43:10, 12).*** To show how serious God was, and how severe breaking **"the Sabbath"** command was, God said **"every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death."** Now that's serious! The word **"defileth"** here means to treat **"the Sabbath Day"** like any other day. For a Jew to do this, would be a capital offense against God, and therefore worthy of capital punishment. In other words, that person **"shall surely be put to death."** The LORD reiterated this by saying **"for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people."** Certainly, being killed for defiling **"the Sabbath"** by doing **"any work therein"** is the same thing as being **"cut off from among his people."** The **"Sabbath Day"** was a holy time for the Jewish nation. It was an important part of their relationship with God and therefore breaking it had some severe consequences. It was so important to God that He declared that **"every one that defileth it shall surely be put to**



death." A Jew could defile, or break the "**Sabbath**" commandment by working on that day. The consequences for anyone found doing this was that they would "**surely be put to death.**" The seriousness of defiling "**the Sabbath Day**" was demonstrated when a man who gathered sticks on "**the Sabbath Day**" was directly ordered by the LORD to be put to death (see Numbers 15:32-36). An Israelite was to devote that day to rest and not do any regular work on it. They were to do all their work during the other six days. Those who were to observe the "**Sabbath Day**" command included the Israelites' families, servants, foreigners in their households, and even their animals. **Note: As Christians, observing Sunday as our "Sabbath," or day of rest is vital to our faith. When we set aside that day, we are showing that God is more important than our job, our to-do-list, and even that sports game on television. We honor God when we honor the first day of the week. If we expect to grow spiritually, keeping Sunday set apart is not optional. Sometimes we may feel pressured not to keep Sunday special, but God deserves the best. If we treat Sunday lightly, we are telling God that He does not have first place in our lives, and that honoring Him is not important. The LORD is not asking for much. He only asks that we set aside one day for communing with Him. This does not mean we stay in church all day. Let's be real, most of us, if not all of us will soon lose focus if we are in church too long. However, after worship service we can still spend some quiet time with God by simply recalling His goodness toward us. He longs to spend time with us, to relax with us, to give us an opportunity to rest with Him. The benefits of one day in seven are tremendous—physical rest, spiritual**



refreshment, and reflection. This is why God created a day of rest and why we should observe it.

B. The sacred duty of keeping the Sabbath (Exodus 31:15-16).

1.(vs. 15). This verse goes on to say **"Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death."** So there would be no misunderstandings about what God expected His people to do on the **"Sabbath,"** He repeated parts of verses 9 and 10. The LORD said **"Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD."** God was showing that there is a difference between the **"six"** working **"days"** and the **"seventh"** day. During any week, all kinds of **"work"** could be done during **"six days"** but the **"seventh"** day **"is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD."** God calls the **"seventh"** day **"the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD"** because it is separated from common use and designed for the honor and service of God. As Christians, we observe the LORD's Day, or Sunday as our day of **"rest"** and worship. By observing it, we are taught to **"rest"** from worldly pursuits and the service of the flesh, devoting ourselves and all we are, have, and can do to God's glory. **Note: *The "Sabbath" Day had two purposes: it was a time of "rest" and a time to remember what God had done. We need "rest." If we don't take time out from the hustle and bustle of life, it loses its meaning. In our day, as in Moses' day, taking time out is not***



easy. However, God reminds us that without the "Sabbath," a day of "rest" and remembrance, we will forget the purpose for all our activity and lose the balance that is crucial to a faithful life. We must make sure that Sunday, our "Sabbath" or day of "rest" provides a time of "rest," refreshing and remembrance as we also worship.

2. (vs. 16). God continued to say in this verse, **"Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant."** The word **"Wherefore"** refers back to the repetition of the fourth commandment in the previous verse. Since the **"Sabbath"** Day is to be a day of rest and holy unto the LORD (see vs. 15), God said **"the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations."** Again, the command is to **"the children of Israel"** and not to the church. **Note: We must be careful not to consider ourselves as Jews or the "new Israel," because we have trusted in Christ and we are Christians. Therefore, we are not under the order of the laws and sacrifices of Judaism which have all been fulfilled in Jesus Christ (see Galatians 3:23-25; Hebrews 10:1-14). Although Sunday is the Christians' day of worship, it would be wrong to apply the Old Testament "Sabbath" law to the New Testament church. This is because the "Sabbath" institution was closely tied to the ceremonial traditions and religious practices of Israel. Nowhere in the New Testament is the Jewish "Sabbath" ever restated as a religious**



practice or requirement to be observed by the Christian church (see Romans 13:9; 14:5-6, Galatians 4:10-11; Colossians 2:16-17). This is because the "Sabbath" was a distinctive Hebrew or Jewish institution, meant for Jews and not the church. When repeating the commandments, Jesus left out the "Sabbath" Day command (see Matthew 19:17-21; Mark 10:17-21; Luke 18:18-22). However, the principle that one day in seven should be set aside for worship is held by the Christian church (see Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2). The observance of the "Sabbath" formed a major part of the covenant that God made with Israel at Mount Sinai (see Ezekiel 20:12, 20). It distinguished them from the other nations. The command to observe the "Sabbath" was a law intended for the people of Israel to distinguish them as God's people. God's people were "to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant." As long as the Mosaic "covenant" made at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:1-8) was in effect, the "Sabbath" was to be the sign indicating that the Israelites were conforming to that "covenant." For the Jews, keeping the "Sabbath" was to be "for a perpetual covenant" meaning a lasting sign of the "covenant" between God and Israel.

V. THE BASIS FOR THE SABBATH DAY (Exodus 31:17-18)

A. The covenant sign (Exodus 31:17). God



continued to say in this verse **"It 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."** Here **"the LORD"** reiterated what He said earlier (see Exodus 31:13) that the Sabbath Day **"is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever."** Just like the rainbow was a **"sign"** between God and creation that He would never destroy the earth by water again (see Genesis 9:11-17), observing or keeping the Sabbath Day was also a **"sign"** of the covenant Law between God and **"Israel."** God then gave His reason for the **"sign"** of the Sabbath Day. He said it was because **"in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed."** God reminded **"Israel"** that in the Creation, He had worked **"six days"** and **"rested"** one day (see Genesis 2:1-3). God wanted His people to do the same thing to show they were set apart to Him. The fact that **"on the seventh day he (God) rested, and was refreshed"** should not be taken to mean that after His Creation God was tired as we might be after we work **"six days."** The word translated **"rested"** is the Hebrew word *"shabbath"* from which the word Sabbath comes. It means *"cessation from labor,"* or *"rest."* The word **"refreshed"** here comes from a Hebrew word meaning *"to breathe."* To say that God **"rested, and was refreshed"** is using an anthropomorphism, which means using human terms to describe a quality or characteristic of God so that we can better understand Him. However, this should not be understood to mean that the eternal God literally needed rest or refreshment after His creative work was finished.



B. The covenant stone (Exodus 31:18). Our final verse says **"And he (God) gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."** "Moses" had been on "Mount Sinai" for forty days with the LORD (see Exodus 24:18; 34:28). At the end of the forty days we are told that God **"gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone."** Earlier, God had promised to give "Moses" these "tables" when He called him up into "mount Sinai" (see Exodus 24:12). Now, when God **"had made an end of"** or finished **"communings (or speaking) with him (Moses) upon mount Sinai,"** He was sending him back down to the people with the **"two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."** The **"two tables of testimony"** also called **"tables of stone,"** contained God's commandments for Israel, and the Ten Commandments in particular (see Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:4). They are called **"tables of testimony"** because this written law testified to both the will of God concerning Israel, and His good-will towards them. It would also be a **"testimony"** against Israel if they were disobedient. Although there were many other commandments given to **"Moses"** at this time, the Ten Commandments were at the very heart of the covenant God made with Israel. The fact that the commandments were **"written with the finger of God"** is another anthropomorphism, using human terms to help us better understand God's work. Since God has no fingers, this statement most likely means that these commandments were



“written” with the power of God (see Exodus 8:17-19; Luke 11:20) without the use of any instrument. Regardless of what is really meant here, one thing is clear, all of God’s commandments came directly from Him. **Note:** *The Sabbath command was and still is an important part of Jewish life. It was a perpetual sign of the Mosaic covenant. However, Sabbath observation is not a binding regulation for the new covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-33; Hebrews 8:6-11). It is the only one of the Ten Commandments that is not repeated in the New Testament. Because Jesus Christ was resurrected on the first day of the week, Christians now reserve Sunday as the LORD’s special Day (see John 20:19; I Corinthians 16:2). Yes, today most Christians celebrate the idea of a day of rest on Sunday, the first day of the week. But it still has the same purpose as the Sabbath—to remind us that there is more to life than work.*

VI. Conclusion. Do you follow a church service with a stop at the grocery store, or with an afternoon of yard work? Doing either is not wrong, but God wants something better for us. He created the concept of a day of rest for mankind’s benefit. This week’s lesson has taught us that God wants His people to regularly experience refreshment for their bodies and minds. Setting aside a day to rest and reflect on God restores us. A day of rest provides the energy we need to complete our duties during the regular work week. A day of rest also witnesses to our neighbors and community that we



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take our faith seriously and love God. A day of rest also can include good works. After all, Jesus healed on the Jewish day of rest (see Mark 3:1-5).

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