

The Sabbath

From Eden To Sinai

By George Dellinger

One of the most common arguments used against the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, is that there is no evidence of its having been observed by anyone from its institution at creation until it was given as one of the Ten Commandments. Those who raise this argument would have us believe that all of history from Eden to Sinai passed without one single Sabbath being kept.

It is the purpose of this study to examine the records of Scripture and history to determine once and for all whether it is true that the Sabbath was not observed between Adam and Moses, or whether the real truth is that there is considerable evidence of Sabbathkeeping in the books of **Genesis** and **Exodus** before the giving of the Decalogue.

In addition to Scripture, we shall call as witnesses many authors, men who were not at all biased in favor of the seventh day, but whose honest statements support what we believe to be the truth.

The Sabbath was created at the very beginning of human history. In **Genesis 2:1-3** we read that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day. The Hebrew word translated sanctified in **Genesis 2:3** and hallowed in **Exodus 20:11** is *qadash*, a word meaning to hallow, to pronounce holy, to consecrate, to set apart for holy use. ¹

There is no denying that God was here setting aside the Sabbath as holy time. Is it logical to believe that God first created man, then the Sabbath, and then failed to mention to man that the seventh day was holy time? Certainly not! God must have immediately explained to Adam all about His sacred seventh day. We might say that God preached a sermon to Adam and Eve on the first Sabbath of human history, telling them how to observe His day as He wanted it to be observed.

Speaking on this point, John Newton Brown says: When it is therefore said by the inspired historian that God sanctified the seventh day, I must understand him to say that God set it apart (from the other six days of labor), to be religiously employed by man. ²

Jonathan Edwards says in one of his sermons: What could be the meaning of God's resting the seventh day, and hallowing and blessing it, which He did, before the giving of the fourth commandment, unless He hallowed and blessed it with respect to mankind? . . . And it is unreasonable to suppose that He hallowed it only with respect to the Jews, a particular nation, which rose up above 2000 years after. ³

In **Mark 2:27**, Jesus says: The Sabbath was made for man. The Greek has an article before man, so the phrase could be rendered, The Sabbath was made for the man. This is a likely reference to Adam, the first man and representative of the whole race that descended from him. This reasonable conclusion that Adam kept the Sabbath is held by Jewish writers. Solomon Goldman says: Both Philo and the Rabbis assumed that the first man emulated his Maker and rested on the Sabbath.⁴

John Kitto says: . . . the most judicious commentators agree that Adam and Eve constantly observed the seventh day, and dedicated it in a peculiar manner to the service of the Almighty; and that the first Sabbath . . . was celebrated in Paradise itself, which pious custom [was] transmitted from our first parents to their posterity.⁵

The Pulpit Commentary tells us: Precisely, as we reason that the early and widespread prevalence of sacrifices can only be explained by an authoritative revelation to the first parents of the human family of such a mode of worship, so do we conclude that a seventh-day Sabbath must have been prescribed to man in Eden.⁶

These are sensible and logical conclusions. It is just not reasonable to think that God would make the Sabbath for man and then keep it from him for over 2000 years until Moses. So the only fair conclusion is that Adam and Even were keeping the Sabbath from the very beginning.

The very fact that the seven-day week existed, is good evidence the Sabbath also existed. Joseph Scalinger is quoted as saying: The septenary arrangement of days was in use among the Orientals from the remotest antiquity.⁷ The arrangement of time into weeks of seven days carries with it the Sabbath, and Scaliger's statement is only one of many from authorities that the seven-day week is as old as the human race.

Here is another valuable statement from a magazine that the week is a time unit that, unlike all others, has proceeded in absolute invariable manner since what may be called the dawn of history.⁸

A week of seven days is frequently met with in Scripture. In **Genesis 7:4** and **8:10 and 12** we see that Noah was acquainted with a seven-day week. Unless the Sabbath was their pivot of time, people then could not have used such a measure of days. In fact, the marginal rendering of **Genesis 7:10** is on the seventh day, a reference to nothing but the Sabbath. We may be sure that Noah, a just man who walked with God (**Genesis 6:9**), knew about and kept God's seventh-day Sabbath.

In **Genesis 29:27-28**, we read that Jacob fulfilled a week for Rachel. The week here is not synonymous with the seven years Jacob served Laban for Rachel, nor does it mean seven years passed before Jacob married Rachel. The language shows Jacob married Rachel one week after he had married Leah, and then he served Laban another seven years, as explained in **verses 29-30**.

In **Genesis 50:10**, we find that Joseph mourned for his father Jacob seven days, that is, one week. So Joseph knew about the seven-day week.

Exodus 7:25 mentions a seven-day period in the time of Moses just before the Exodus. This is certainly an exact week, for we read, seven days were fulfilled. In addition, **Numbers**

12:14-15 mentions a seven-day period following Israel's departure from Egypt and before they arrived at Mt. Sinai.

Again, in **Judges 14:10-18**, we read that Samson's marriage feast lasted for seven days, another reference to the week.

Once again, in **Job 2:13**, we are told that Job's three friends sat and grieved with him for seven days and seven nights—a complete week.

So it is obvious that a seven-day week with the seventh-day Sabbath was familiar to the patriarchs. It is as John Dudley has written: Adam, when put in the Garden of Eden, was placed in a state of trial, and must have been subjected to the same laws, both moral and religious, as now are and ever have been obligatory on all his descendants.⁹

Of course he was subject to the same laws, and so were and are his descendants. And one of those unchanging laws is the law of the Sabbath.

Martin Luther wrote: Adam . . . held the seventh day sacred; that is, he taught on that day his own family.¹⁰ Luther is right. Having been told by God that the Sabbath was to be observed, he not only did so himself, but he certainly would have taught his family by precept and example to do the same.

This is proven in **Genesis 4:3**: And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD, and in **verse 4**: And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof.

The words in process of time are translated from the Hebrew *mikkets yamim*, meaning at the end of the days. This can only be telling us that on the Sabbath, Cain and Abel, with the rest of Adam's family, gathered to worship God. Adam Clarke says, it is more probable that it means the Sabbath, on which Adam and his family undoubtedly offered oblations to God, as the divine worship was certainly instituted, and no doubt the Sabbath properly observed in that family.¹¹ Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say it was probably on the Sabbath.¹²

Another commentary has this to say: More likely this phrase denotes the Sabbath . . . the end of the weekdays. And as it is plain that the Sabbath was observed as holy time since its formal institution by God in Paradise, it was doubtless kept holy by such appointments of worship as would distinguish the day.¹³

There is nothing in nature that can be pointed to as measuring the week; only the Sabbath marks it. And only the Sabbath could come at the end of days. Clearly, the family of Adam and Eve kept every Sabbath sacred unto the Creator.

There is another interesting corroboration of the meaning of at the end of the days in **II Samuel 14:25-26**. We read that Absalom polled his head The Hebrew for at every year's end is from the end of days to days, that is, at stated times. This reference, while of course not a reference to the Sabbath, nevertheless shows such Hebrew expressions as are found here and in **Genesis 4:3**, refer to definite and specific stated times, one of which is the Sabbath.¹⁴

James Gilfillian, in his book on the Sabbath, has some valuable things to say about the account of the worship of Cain and Abel. He says: Cain and Abel came together for Divine service. They were not the only persons present, as appears from Cain's postponement of his murderous deed till he and his victim were out of the sight of others in the field.¹⁵ He goes on to point out that the Hebrew word for brought is used never in reference to private and domestic sacrifices, but always of such as were in the times of the Jewish polity brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.¹⁶

As Gilfillian remarks earlier: The prevalence of public worship, with its various accessories, necessarily implies the obligation and observance of a Sabbath.¹⁷ Yes, without question, Cain and Abel, like all the family of Adam, regularly observed the Sabbath. In so doing, they were keeping an institution given to Adam at the very beginning.

The next man of God with whom we meet, was certainly keeping the Sabbath, is Enoch. In the Old Testament apocryphal books, in Jubilees 4:18, we read of Enoch that he recounted the Sabbaths of the years.¹⁸

Lange, in his *Commentary*, says: Enoch, we cannot hesitate to believe, kept holy Sabbath, or holy seventh day¹⁹

Genesis 5:24 says Enoch walked with God. **Hebrews 11:5** says he pleased God. Unless he was keeping God's laws, including the Sabbath, Enoch could have neither walked with God, nor pleased Him. To suggest that he did not know about the Sabbath when his ancestors did is to suggest God dealt differently with men from generation to generation, something utterly contrary to God's nature.

Here is an interesting quotation from the Church Father Tertullian, who was certainly no friend of the Sabbath: . . . Adam observed the Sabbath . . . Abel, when offering to God a holy victim, pleased Him by a religious reverence for the Sabbath; . . . Enoch, when translated, had been a keeper of the Sabbath²⁰

Next we come to Noah. We have already seen that he was well aware of the week. This man who walked with God (**Genesis 6:9**) certainly knew and kept the Sabbath. The reference to Noah building an altar to worship God in **Genesis 8:20**, follows Sabbath references in **verses 10 and 12**, which suggests he built an altar and worshipped God immediately upon leaving the ark, very possibly on the following Sabbath.

Here is another proof that Noah kept the Sabbath. Peter calls Noah a preacher of righteousness (**II Peter 2:5**). **Psalms 119:172** says of God: All Thy commandments are righteousness. So righteousness amounts to being a commandment keeper. If Noah preached commandment-keeping to those around him, then he kept the commandments himself, and one of the commandments he certainly was keeping was the Sabbath.

Our next witness is Job, a man we have already seen knew of the week. This man is described by God Himself in **Job 1:8 and 2:3** as perfect and upright, fearing God and eschewing evil, a man like whom there was no one else in the earth. Job was so careful about the possibility of sin that we read in **Job 1:5** that he offered burnt offerings for his children after they had feasts because they might have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. He did this continually. Here was a man who truly feared and served God. Such a man certainly would have kept God's Sabbath.

We even find hints that Job may have been directly involved in conducting worship. In **Job 4:3-4** we read that he had instructed many and his words had upheld him that was falling. The patriarch says of himself in **Job 30:28**: I stood up, and I cried in the congregation. Finally, in **Job 42:8-9**, God commands Job's three friends to offer seven bullocks and seven rams as a burnt offering while Job prays for them. When they did this, God accepted Job. All of this could have taken place the very next Sabbath.

Moving on from Job, we pass through the patriarchal period, a time when some claim there is no hint of Sabbath observance. But this claim is unfounded and will not stand up. Matthew Henry says in his *Commentary*: Sabbaths are as ancient as the world; and I see no reason to doubt that the Sabbath . . . was religiously observed by the people of God throughout the patriarchal age.²¹

Lange, whom we quoted above, says this:

To object that the Bible, in its few brief memoranda of their [the patriarchs'] lives, says nothing about their Sabbath-keeping, any more than it tells us of their forms of prayer and modes of worship, is a worthless argument.²²

Joseph H. Hertz says: Abraham . . . Isaac . . . Jacob. The Patriarchs are often represented as having observed the Sabbath.²³

In a prayer used in Jewish afternoon Sabbath services, the following statement occurs in reference to the Sabbath: Abraham was glad, Isaac rejoiced, Jacob and his sons rested thereon.²⁴

Cunningham Geikie has this to say about Abraham: No details are given of the creed of Abraham, but . . . it must have included all that was true in the popular beliefs of Chaldea. This would imply his knowledge of the Sabbath; for the seventh day, by a tradition handed down from Eden, was holy in his Eastern native land, and was honored by the cessation of all work on it.²⁵

Of course the patriarchs kept the Sabbath. What do we read of Abraham? In **Genesis 26:5**, God says, Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. That has to include the Sabbath.

Furthermore, Abraham would have passed on the true worship of the true God to his children and their children, including Isaac and Jacob, for we read in **Genesis 18:19** that God said:

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD.

One function of patriarchal worship we find mentioned a number of times is the building of altars: Abraham in **Genesis 12:7-8, 13:4 and 18, and 22:9**; Isaac in **Genesis 26:25**; Jacob in **Genesis 33:20 and 35:1, 3 and 7**. Also, **Genesis 21:33** tells us that Abraham planted a grove and called on the name of the everlasting God. In every case (except probably the sacrifice of Isaac) building an altar and calling upon God must have included Sabbath worship.

Next we come to Moses and Aaron. It is frequently suggested that Israel, while living so long in bondage in Egypt, forgot the Sabbath and perhaps were not even able to keep it under the hardships of their slavery. But there is considerable reason to think this is not true.

Certainly **Joshua 24:14** tells us at least some of the Israelites served false gods in Egypt. But there is no reason to assume this means every one of them did. God always preserves for Himself a remnant, however small (cp. **I Kings 19:18**). While some or many of the Israelites may have worshipped Egyptian idols, the family of Moses is proof that not all did, and **Exodus 1:17** mentions the midwives who feared God.

Furthermore, the Midrash records the following: He [Moses] saw that they had no rest, so he went to Pharaoh and said: If one has a slave and he does not give him rest one day in the week he dies; similarly, if thou wilt not give thy slaves one day in the week rest, they will die. Pharaoh replied: Go and do with them as thou sayest. Thereupon Moses ordained for them the Sabbath day for rest.²⁶

Further along we find this: . . . the Israelites possessed scrolls with the contents of which they regaled themselves . . . each Sabbath, assuring them that God would redeem them. Thus because they rested on the Sabbath, Pharaoh said to them: Let heavier work be laid upon the men, that they may labour therein: and let them not regard lying words . . . let them not take delight or rest on the Sabbath day.²⁷

In **Exodus 5:1 and 10:9** we read that Moses and Aaron said to Pharaoh that he should let Israel go to keep a feast unto God. Gilfillian points out the feast may have been the Sabbath because of Pharaoh's words in **Exodus 5:4-5**: Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? . . . ye make them rest [sabbatize] from their burdens. He then adds that immediately upon leaving Egypt they kept the Sabbath (**Exodus 16**), and that in **Exodus 12** the Passover references to seven days, to rest from work, and keeping a holy convocation, all suggest Israel was already well acquainted with such things.²⁸

Perhaps the most striking proof that the Sabbath was well-known before the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai, is found in **Exodus 16**, three to four weeks before Israel arrived at Mt. Sinai. In this chapter the Sabbath is seen as something known and accepted. But whether new or not, this is emphatically before the giving of the Ten Commandments.

In **verses 22-24**, Israel was told to gather enough manna for two days and promised that it would not breed worms or putrefy (stink). In **verse 25** Moses tells them the next day is the Sabbath, and he repeats it in **verse 26**. When some of the people broke the Sabbath by looking for manna on that day, **verse 27**, God angrily demands to know how long Israel was going to refuse to keep His laws, specifically the Sabbath, **verses 28-29**. So then the people rested on the Sabbath, **verse 30**.

If the Sabbath was so new to Israel, just announced to them in fact the day before, it is understandable some could have been confused about its proper observance. In such a case, God's anger hardly seems justified if He had just introduced the Sabbath the day before. No, Israel had long known of the Sabbath, and God's anger was aroused because some of the people failed to honor His day as He had directed.

The Sabbath was a well-known institution in Israel, something they had been acquainted with long before this time. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us: The Sabbath is first met with in connexion [*sic*] with the fall of the manna . . . but it there appears to be an institution already well-known to the Israelites.²⁹

Adam Clarke has this to say: There is nothing in either text or context that seems to intimate that the Sabbath was now first given to the Israelites, as some have supposed: on the contrary, it is here spoken of as being perfectly well known, from its having been generally observed.³⁰

Joseph H. Hertz, speaking of **Exodus 20:8**, comments: The use of the word remember may indicate that the institution was well-known to the Israelites, long before their manna experiences; that it was a treasured and sacred institution inherited from the days of the Patriarchs.³¹

Samuel Wakefield, in discussing the mention of the Sabbath in this case, says that it was the recognition of an institution which had been observed from the beginning, and had never been either forgotten or suspended. He adds, There is not the slightest intimation in the passage that the event which it records was the original institution of the Sabbath, but rather, he says, The contrary seems to be the natural inference from the whole narrative. The Sabbath is spoken of exactly in the manner in which a historian would speak of a well-known institution.³²

Yes, when God says in **Exodus 20:8** to Remember the Sabbath day, He is referring to something Israel already knew, or they could not have remembered it. Sir Charles Marston writes: The very word Remember presupposes that the Sabbath day was already in existence³³

Another writer observes: The use of remember in connection with the fourth commandment implies that the weekly rest day was not a new institution. It was observed before Sinai was reached. The Sabbath was a recognized institution long before the days of Moses.³⁴

Wakefield, in discussing the giving of the Ten Commandments, makes the following remarks: We are not to suppose that the Decalogue imposed new duties upon men which had never been before required. It only enjoined those which had been previously instituted . . . The giving of the Decalogue, therefore, did not originate the laws which it contains, but was only a republication of them in a new and convenient form, and under circumstances which were calculated to make them most solemnly impressive.³⁵

He then offers these cogent observations:

The fourth commandment contains two distinct allusions to the previous institution of the Sabbath. The first is in the clause Remember the Sabbath day, which represents the Sabbath as having been previously instituted The second is in the reason assigned for keeping the Sabbath. It is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God the day in which He rested from all His creative work. Wherefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. Thus the seventh day was set apart from the beginning as a holy day of sacred rest.³⁶

Charles Buck says the fact that the Sabbath is not mentioned in the patriarchal age is no proof against it, any more than it is against its existence from Moses to the end of David's reign, which was near 440 years.³⁷

We have seen that the Sabbath was generally observed from Adam to Moses, and, as Buck says, it was certainly observed during the reign of David, a man after God's own heart (**I Samuel 13:14**). There are many references in the Psalms to worshipping before God and in God's house, all of which imply Sabbath worship and Sabbath-keeping.

The evidence is now complete, irrefutable, and satisfying to any honest mind. The Sabbath was kept by God's faithful people from Adam to Moses, honored and observed by those who walked with God. To say there is no indication of Sabbath observance between Adam and Moses is to show a total lack of knowledge of the facts.

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