



"What God wants is a people who freely submit themselves to Him and His laws."

—Mark Galli

**19-Feb-16**

## **The Signs of God (Part Two)**

In Part One, we saw that [God](#) is serious about how His people regard the various signs that He has given ([Numbers 14:11](#), 22-23). One of them, found in [Deuteronomy 11:18](#), is the engraving of God's words in our hearts and lives, and binding them on our hands—our works and other activities—so that the divine words influence everything we do. Obedience to God's words becomes a sign to us because it is a testimony that there is a God who wants us to learn to live as He does.

Secondly, obedience is a sign to other people. A distinct difference exists between those who live according to God's instructions and those who do not, and the difference cannot be hidden. The correct actions become a sign—a witness—even without any preaching, which is why God's words are symbolically bound to the hand rather than the tongue. It is easy to *say* the right things, but the sign only comes through the *doing*. Through the prophet Isaiah, God says,

These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. ([Matthew 15:8-9](#); [Isaiah 29:13](#))

In [Deuteronomy 4:1-14](#), [Moses](#) writes that the commandments, statutes, and judgments would make the nations around Israel stand in awe when they saw the Israelites' manner of life and what it produced. They would recognize the [wisdom](#) and the understanding within God's law. If the Israelites had been faithful to bind God's words to their hands, it would have served as a poignant communication to the surrounding nations. It may not have caused them to change their ways, but it still would have been a sign. Yet, as we know, the way of life practiced by most of the Jews of the first century was not a faithful testimony of how God wants mankind to live. What was bound to their hands was their own traditions rather than God's law.

Thirdly, obedience becomes a sign to God. It is a symbol that an individual is committed to living as He lives. [Isaiah 66:2](#) says that God will look on—favorably—him who is poor and contrite in spirit and who *trembles* at His word. The trembling indicates that the person holds His words in such high esteem that he would not dare ignore them. Our solemn respect for God's instructions signal to Him that we will respond positively to anything He says, and He responds by looking on us with favor.

Within this broad sign of obedience are specifics that God also identifies as signs themselves. One example is seen in [Exodus 31:13](#), 17:

Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. . . . It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

Even though obedience in general is a sign, the keeping of the Sabbaths is identified as a sign of its own. Mainstream Christianity will more or less

uphold the other nine commandments, but it has soundly rejected the one commandment that God specifically instituted as a sign.

Along the same lines as [Deuteronomy 11:18](#), keeping the [fourth commandment](#) also becomes a sign to the individual, as well as to those around, and to God. However, this sign contains a couple more facets that add to its gravity. Verse 13 declares that a result of keeping God's Sabbaths is that we are continually reminded of God's sanctification—that He has set us apart for His purposes. His sanctification is directly tied here to keeping the Sabbaths holy. This means that, if the Sabbaths stop being a sign (through being treated like any other day), then God's sanctification stops as well. As we saw in Numbers 14, we dare not take any sign of God lightly, but this one in particular is such a core part of our sanctification that it should evoke even more consideration and gravitas.

These verses also show that the Sabbaths are a sign of who God is, as well as who faithful Israel is. To put it another way, the Sabbaths are a sign of the God who creates and who redeems. (The Creator aspect is found in the fourth commandment in [Exodus 20:11](#), and the Redeemer aspect appears in its reiteration in [Deuteronomy 5:15](#).) By the same token, the Sabbaths are also a sign of who is being created and who is being redeemed.

But is this sign *only* for "the children of Israel," as the verses mention? On the contrary, [Mark 2:27](#) says that the [Sabbath](#) was made for—or "on account of"—*mankind* (Greek, *anthropos*: "human beings"), not simply Israel. It was instituted on the seventh day of Creation ([Genesis 2:2-3](#)), millennia before there were any Israelites. God taught Israel about the Sabbath even before He gave the Ten Commandments and the terms of the covenant (see [Exodus 16:1-30](#)).

So when He begins the fourth commandment with the word "Remember," He refers to the Sabbath having existed from creation for all mankind, and not created simply for one nation. Thus the fledgling first-century church—the "[Israel of God](#)" ([Galatians 6:16](#))—is shown still keeping the Sabbath after Christ's crucifixion, both Jews and Gentiles alike ([Acts 13:14-15](#), 42-44; 15:14-21; 16:12-15; 17:2; 18:1-11).

To get an idea of the seriousness and depth of this sign, consider what happened to ancient Israel. [Ezekiel 20:10-24](#) shows that Israel greatly defiled God's Sabbaths, and verse 12 repeats the fact that the Sabbaths are a sign and that they are instrumental for sanctification. Despising this sign was one of the main causes for Israel's captivity and scattering.

This critical sign thus also became a judgment, because the people who forgot the sign of the Sabbath also forgot who they were. The house of Israel—the northern ten tribes—does not even know its own identity today. The house of Judah did better about holding onto this sign, so the Jews at least know who they are.

In Part Three, we will examine a few more signs of God.

- David C. Grabbe

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by Charles Whitaker

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