

The Sabbath Written By The Finger Of God

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Classification of the precepts given through Moses—The Sabbath renewed—Solemn ratification of the covenant between God and Israel—Moses called up to receive the law which God had written upon the stone—The ten commandments probably proclaimed upon the Sabbath—Events of the forty days—The Sabbath becomes a sign between God and Israel—The penalty of death—The tables of testimony given to Moses, and broken when he saw the idolatry of the people—The idolaters punished—Moses goes up to renew the tables—The Sabbath again enjoined—The tables given again—The ten commandments were the testimony of God—Who wrote them?—Three distinguished honors which pertain to the Sabbath—The ten commandments a complete code—Relation of the fourth commandment to the atonement—Valid reason why God himself should write that law which was placed beneath the mercy-seat.

When the voice of the Holy one had ceased, "the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was." A brief interview followed,¹ when God gave to Moses a series of precepts, which, as a sample of the statutes given through him, may be classified thus: Ceremonial precepts, pointing to the good things to come; judicial precepts, intended for the civil government of the nation; and moral precepts, stating anew in other forms the ten commandments. In this brief interview the Sabbath is not forgotten:—

"Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest; that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed."²

This scripture furnishes incidental proof that the Sabbath was made for mankind, and for those creatures that share the labors of man. The stranger and the foreigner must keep it, and it was for their refreshment.³ But the same persons could not partake of the Passover until they were made members of the Hebrew church by circumcision.⁴

When Moses had returned unto the people, he repeated all the words of the Lord. With one voice all the people exclaimed, "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do." Then Moses wrote all the words of the Lord. "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people; and they said, All that Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." Then Moses "sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you."⁵

The way was thus prepared for God to bestow a second signal honor upon his law.

"And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there; and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written, that thou mayest teach them... . And Moses went up into the mount, and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud.⁶ And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount; and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights."⁷

During this forty days, God gave to Moses a pattern of the ark in which to place the law that he had written upon stone, and of the mercy-seat to place over that law, and of the sanctuary in which to deposit the ark. He also ordained the priesthood, which was to minister in the sanctuary before the ark.⁸ These things being ordained, and the Lawgiver about to commit his law as written by himself into the hands of Moses, he again enjoins the Sabbath:—

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 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. 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. 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. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God."⁹

This should be compared with the testimony of Ezekiel, speaking in the name of God—

"I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which, if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover, also, I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them... I am the Lord your God: walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God."¹⁰

It will be observed that neither of these scriptures teaches that the Sabbath was made *for* Israel, nor yet do they teach that it was made *after* the Hebrews came out of Egypt. In neither of these particulars do they even seem to contradict those texts that place the institution of the Sabbath at creation. But we do learn, 1. That it was God's act of giving to the Hebrews his Sabbath that made it a sign between himself and *them*. "I gave them my Sabbaths, TO BE a sign between me and them."

This act of committing to them the Sabbath has been already noticed.¹¹ 2. That it was to be a sign between God and the Hebrews, "that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them."

Wherever the word Lord in the Old Testament is in small capitals, as in the texts under consideration, it is Jehovah in the Hebrew. The Sabbath, then, as a sign, signified that it was Jehovah, i.e., the infinite, self-existent God, who had sanctified them. To sanctify is to separate, set apart, or appoint to a holy, sacred, or religious use.¹²

That the Hebrew nation had thus been set apart in the most remarkable manner from all mankind, was sufficiently evident. But who was it that had thus separated them from all other people? As a gracious answer to this important question, God gave to the Hebrews his own hallowed rest-day. But how could the great memorial of the Creator determine such a question? Listen to the words of the Most High: "Verily my Sabbath," i.e., my rest-days, "ye shall keep; for it is a sign between me and you... It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed." The Sabbath, as a sign between God and Israel, was a perpetual testimony that he who had separated them from all mankind

as his peculiar treasure in the earth, was that Being who had created the heavens and the earth in six days, and rested on the seventh. It was, therefore, the strongest possible assurance that he who sanctified them was indeed Jehovah.

From the days of Abraham, God had set the Hebrews apart. He who had previously borne no local, national, or family name, did from that time until the end of his covenant-relation with the Hebrew race, take to himself such titles as seemed to show him to be their God alone. From his choice of Abraham and his family forward, he designates himself as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; the God of the Hebrews and the God of Israel.¹³ He brought Israel out of Egypt to be *their God*,¹⁴ and at Sinai he joined himself to them in solemn espousal. In this way did he set apart or sanctify unto himself the Hebrews, because all other nations had given themselves to idolatry. Thus the God of heaven and earth condescended to give himself to a single race, and to set them apart from all mankind. It should be observed that it was not the Sabbath which had set Israel apart from all other nations, but it was the idolatry of all other nations that had caused God to set the Hebrews apart for himself; and that God gave to Israel the Sabbath which he had hallowed for mankind at creation as the most expressive sign that he who thus sanctified them was indeed the living God.

It was the act of God in giving his Sabbath to the Israelites that rendered it a sign *between himself and them*. But the Sabbath did not derive its existence from being given to the Hebrews as it was; for it was the ancient Sabbath of the Lord when given to them, and we have seen¹⁵ that it was not given by a new commandment. On the contrary, it rested at the time upon existing obligation. But it was the providence of God in behalf of the Hebrews, first, in rescuing them from abject servitude, and second, in sending them bread from heaven for six days, and preserving food for the Sabbath, that constituted the Sabbath a gift to that people. And mark the significance of the *manner* in which this gift was bestowed, as showing who it was that sanctified them. It became a gift to the Hebrews by the wonderful providence of the manna—a miracle that ceased not openly to declare the Sabbath every week for the space of forty years, thus showing incontrovertibly that He who led them was the author of the Sabbath, and therefore the Creator of heaven and earth. That the Sabbath, which was made for man, should be given to the Hebrews in such a manner, is certainly not more remarkable than that the God of the whole earth should give his oracles and himself to that people. The Most High and his law and Sabbath did not become Jewish; but the Hebrews were made the honored depositaries of divine truth, and the knowledge of God and of his commandments was preserved in the earth.

The reason on which this sign is based, points unmistakably to the true origin of the Sabbath. It did not originate from the fall of the manna for six days, and its cessation on the seventh; for the manna was given in this way because the Sabbath was in existence; but because that "in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed." Thus the Sabbath is shown to have originated with the rest and refreshment of the Creator, and not at the fall of the manna. As an INSTITUTION, the Sabbath declared its author to be the Creator of heaven and earth; as a *sign*¹⁶ *between God and Israel*, it is declared that he who had set them apart was indeed Jehovah.

The last act of the Lawgiver in the memorable interview was to place in the hands of Moses the "two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God." Then he revealed to Moses the sad apostasy of Israel, and urged him to hasten down to them.

"And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand; the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables... And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the

dancing; and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount."

Then Moses inflicted retribution upon the idolaters, "and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men." Moses returned unto God, and interceded in behalf of the people; and God promised that his angel should go with them, but that he himself would not go up in their midst, lest he should consume them.¹⁷ Then Moses presented an earnest supplication to the Most High that he might see his glory. This petition was granted, saving that the face of God should not be seen.¹⁸

But before Moses ascended, that he might behold the majesty of the infinite Lawgiver, the Lord said unto him—

'Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first; and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou breakest... And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him."¹⁹

Then Moses beheld the glory of the Lord, and he "made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped." This interview lasted forty days and forty nights, as did the first, and seems to have been spent by Moses in interceding with God that he would not destroy the people for their sin. The record of this period is very brief, but in this record the Sabbath is mentioned. "Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest,"²⁰ thus admonishing them not to forget in their busiest season the Sabbath of the Lord.

This second period of forty days ends, like the first, with the act of God in placing the tables of stone in the hands of Moses. "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread nor drink water. And he²¹ wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments." From this it appears that the tables of testimony were two tables of stone with the ten commandments written upon them by the finger of God, which proves that the testimony of God is, in truth, the ten commandments. The writing on the second tables was an exact copy of that on the first. "Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write," said God, "upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou breakest." And of the first tables, Moses says: "He declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tablets of stone."²²

Thus did God commit to his people the ten commandments. Without human or angelic agency, he proclaimed them himself; and not trusting his most honored servant, Moses, nor even an angel of his presence, himself wrote them with his own finger. "Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy," is one of the ten words thus honored by the Most High. Nor are there two high honors the only ones conferred upon this precept. While it shares them in common with the other nine commandments, it stands in advance of them in that it is established by the EXAMPLE of the Lawgiver himself. These precepts were given upon two tables with evident reference to the twofold division of the law of God; supreme love to God, and love of our neighbor as ourselves. The Sabbath commandment, placed at the close of the first table, forms the golden clasp that binds together both divisions of the moral law. It guards and enforces that day which God claims as his; it follows man through the six days which

God has given him to be properly spent in the various relations of life, extending over the whole of human life, and embracing in its loan of six days to man all the duties of the second table, while itself belonging to the first.

That these ten commandments form a complete code of moral law, is proved by the language of the Lawgiver, when he called Moses up to receive them, "Come up to me into the mount, and be there; and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written."²³ This law and commandments was the testimony of God engraved upon stone. The same great fact is presented by Moses in his blessing pronounced upon Israel: "And he said, the Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from Mount Paran, and came with ten thousands of saints; *from his right hand* went a fiery law for them."²⁴ There can be no dispute that in this language the Most High is represented as personally present with ten thousand of his holy ones, or angels. And that which he wrote with his own right hand is called by Moses "a fiery law," or as the margin has it, "a fire of law." And now the man of God completes his sacred trust. He rehearses what God did in committing his law to him, and what he himself did in its final disposition: "And he wrote on the tables, according to the first writing, the ten commandments, which the Lord spake unto you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them unto me. And I turned myself, and came down from the mount, and put the tables in the ark which I had made; and there they be, as the Lord commanded me." Thus was the law of God deposited in the ark beneath the mercy-seat.²⁵

The top of the ark was called the mercy-seat, because all those who had broken the law contained in the ark beneath the mercy-seat could find pardon by the sprinkling of the blood of atonement upon it.

The law within the ark was that which demanded an atonement; the ceremonial law, which ordained the Levitical priesthood and the sacrifices for sin, was that which taught men how the atonement could be made. The broken law was beneath the mercy-seat, the blood of sin-offering was sprinkled upon its top, and pardon was extended to the penitent sinner. There was actual sin, and hence a real law which man had broken; but there was not a real atonement, and hence the need of the great Antitype to the Levitical sacrifices. The real atonement, when it is made, must relate to that law respecting which an atonement had been shadowed forth. In other words, the shadowy atonement related to that law which was shut up in the ark, indicating that a real atonement was demanded by that law. It is necessary that the law which demands atonement in order that its transgressor may be spared, should itself be perfect, else the fault would, in part at least, rest with the Lawgiver, and not wholly with the sinner. Hence, the atonement, when made, does not take away the broken law, for that is perfect, but is expressly designed to take away the guilt of the transgressor.²⁶ Let it be remembered, then, that the fourth commandment is one of the ten precepts of God's broken law, one of the immutable, holy principles that made the death of God's only Son necessary before pardon could be extended to guilty man. These facts being borne in mind, it will not be thought strange that the Lawgiver should reserve the proclamation of such a law to himself; and that he should entrust to no created being the writing of that law which should demand as its atonement the death of the Son of God.

Endnotes:

¹Exodus 20 - 24.

² Exodus 23:12.

³See also Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14; Isaiah 56.

⁴Exodus 12:43-48.

⁵Exodus 24:3-8; Hebrews 9:18-20.

⁶Dr. Clarke has the following note on this verse: "It is very likely that Moses went up into the mount on the first day of the week; and having with Joshua remained in the region of the cloud during six days, on the seventh, which was the Sabbath, God spake to him."—*Commentary on Exodus 24:16*. The marking off of a week from the forty days in this remarkable manner goes far toward establishing the view of Dr. Clarke. And if this be correct, it would strongly indicate that the ten commandments were given upon the Sabbath; for there seems to be good evidence that they were given the day before Moses went up to receive the tables of stone; for the interview in which chapters 21-23 were given would require but a brief space, and certainly followed immediately upon the giving of the ten commandments. Exodus 20:18-21. When the interview closed, Moses came down to the people, and wrote all the words of the Lord. In the morning he rose up early, and, having ratified the covenant, went up to receive the law which God had written. Exodus 24:3-13.

⁷Exodus 24:12-18.

⁸Exodus 25-31.

⁹Exodus 31:12-18.

¹⁰Ezekiel 20:11,12,19,20.

¹¹See chapter 3 of this work.

¹²To sanctify, *kadash*, signifies to consecrate, separate, and set apart a thing or person from all secular purposes to some religious use."—*Clark's Commentary on Exodus 13:2*. The same writer says, on Exodus 19:23, "Here the word *kadash* is taken in its proper, literal sense, signifying the separating of a thing, person, or place from all profane or common uses, and devoted it to sacred purposes.

¹³Genesis 17:7,8; 26:24; 28:13; Exodus 3:6, 13-16, 18; 5:3; Isaiah 45:3.

¹⁴Leviticus 11:45.

¹⁵See chapter three.

¹⁶As a sign, it did not thereby become a shadow and a ceremony; for the Lord of the Sabbath was himself a sign. "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion." Isaiah 8:18. In Hebrews 2:13 this language is referred to Christ. "And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against." Luke 2:34. That the Sabbath was a sign between God and Israel throughout their

generations, that is, for the time that they were his peculiar people, no more proves that it is now abolished than the fact that Jesus is now a sign that is spoken against proves that he will cease to exist when he shall no longer be such a sign. Nor does this language argue that the Sabbath was made for them, or that its obligation ceased when they ceased to be the people of God; for the prohibition against eating blood was a perpetual statute for their generations; yet it was given to Noah when God first permitted the use of animal food, and was still obligatory upon the Gentiles when the apostles turned to them. Leviticus 3:17; Genesis 9:1-4; Acts 15.

The penalty of death at the hand of the civil magistrate is affixed to the violation of the Sabbath. The same penalty is affixed to most of the precepts of the moral law. Leviticus 20:9, 10; 24:15-17; Deuteronomy 13:6-18; 17:2-7. It should be remembered that the moral law embracing the Sabbath formed a part of the CIVIL code of the Hebrew nation. As such, the great Lawgiver annexed penalties to be inflicted by the magistrate, thus doubtless shadowing forth the final retribution of the ungodly. Such penalties were suspended by that remarkable decision of the Saviour that those who were without sin should cast the first stone. But such a Being will arise to punish men, when the hailstones of his wrath shall desolate the earth. Our Lord did not, however, set aside the real penalty of the law, the wages of sin, nor did he weaken that precept which had been violated. John 8:1-9; Job 38:22, 23; Isaiah 28:17; Revelation 16:17-21; Romans 6:23.

¹⁷This fact will shed light upon these texts which introduce the agency of angels in the giving of the law. Acts 7:38, 53; Galatians 3:19; Hebrews 2:2.

¹⁸Exodus 32 and 33.

¹⁹Exodus 34; Deuteronomy 9; 10:1, 2.

²⁰Exodus 34:21.

²¹The idea has been suggested by some from this verse that it was Moses, and not God, who wrote the second tables. This view is thought to be strengthened by the previous verse: "Write thou these words; for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel." But it is to be observed that the words upon the tables of stone were the ten commandments; while the words here referred to were those which God spoke to Moses during this interview of forty days, beginning with verse 10 and extending to verse 27. That the pronoun *he* in verse 28 might properly enough refer to Moses, if positive testimony did not forbid such reference, is readily admitted. That it is necessary to attend to the connection in deciding the antecedents of pronouns is strikingly illustrated in II Samuel 24:1, where the pronoun *he* would naturally refer to the Lord, thus making God the one who moved David to number Israel. Yet the connection shows that this was not the case; for the anger of the Lord was kindled by the act; and I Chronicles 21:1 positively declares that *he* who thus moved David was Satan. For positive testimony that it was God and not Moses who wrote upon the second tables, see Exodus 34:1; Deuteronomy 10:1-5. These texts carefully discriminate between the work of Moses and the work of God, assigning the preparation of the tables, the carrying of them up to the mount, and the bringing of them down from the mount, to Moses, but expressly assigning the writing on the tables to God himself.

²²Exodus 34:1, 28; Deuteronomy 4:12, 13; 5:22.

²³Exodus 24:12.

²⁴Deuteronomy 33:2. That angels are sometimes called saints or holy ones, see Daniel 8:13-16. That angels were present with God at Sinai, see Psalm 68:17.

²⁵Deuteronomy 10:4, 5; Exodus 25:10-22.

²⁶I John 3:4, 5.
