

Sunday or Sabbath

When considering the Sabbath or Sunday, many believers are not sure where to place themselves as both are quite different in the light of New Testament worship as we shall see. Some may insist it should be held on a Sunday while others may prefer a Saturday. In order for us to fully appreciate just what was kept by the early church we must first take it back to its Jewish origins.

In the beginning the Sabbath was the symbolic emblem of the Mosaic Covenant. For as long as the covenant was in effect the Sabbath law was mandatory. However the Pharisees developed a large body of law in addition to the mosaic commandments, known as the Mishnah. In fact throughout history they have elaborated on each of the 613 commandments, and added hundreds of new laws to each existing law. For example to the mosaic law that said 'Remember the Sabbath to keep it Holy' the Pharisees added 1500 new laws on how to keep it.

I have to say to you now that there is no New Testament teaching expressing mandatory Sabbath keeping as mandatory Sabbath keeping is exclusively an Old Testament principle. Further more this is just as true for Jews as it is for gentiles.

THE SABBATH CONTROVERSY

If we look in our bibles to Luke 6:1:- "Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grain fields and his disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands."

Now according to the 1500 laws which were binding concerning the Sabbath, this scripture shows a violation of four of them:

FIRST:-By plucking the wheat they were guilty of reaping.

SECOND:-By rubbing the wheat in their hands they were guilty of threshing.

THIRD:-By mowing the chaff they were guilty of winnowing.

FOURTH:-When they ate the wheat they were guilty of storing.

It was precisely for these reasons that Jesus rebuked the Pharisees time and time again throughout the gospels. That is not to say He didn't love the Pharisees, their zeal was commendable they simply went too far. They wouldn't even walk on the grass on a Sabbath in case they stepped on a wheat-stalk and committed these same violations of the law.

What we have to understand is that the Sabbath to the Jew is known as Queen Sabbath, the most important thing in their calendar. It's sometimes looked upon as the bride of Israel they are taught that Israel was created for the purpose of the Sabbath.

Now if we take a look at Luke 6:3 again we will see that Jesus dealt with the Pharisees firmly but lovingly by pointing out 6 things;

- 1) He first showed them what King David did { Sam:21:3-6 } when he ate the shewbread.
{ He then went on to show that the Mosaic law did not forbid a non-Levite to eat shewbread. Pharisees taught the complete opposite. So by their reckoning, King David should have been stoned. }
- 2) He next showed how they do not permit work of any kind on the Sabbath, and yet the priests in the temple did certain works on Sabbath, in fact they did more sacrifices on this day than any other.
- 3) The third point Jesus makes is that He is greater than the temple and as such can say what is and is not allowed.
- 4) His fourth point of reference is a quote from Hosea 6:6 which taught in prophecy that works of necessity were permitted on Sabbath { For instance, healing was a work of mercy, and eating was a work of necessity }
- 5) The fifth thing He points out is that He alone is the Messiah, and as such could decide what was right and what was not, so long as He did not break the law of His Father { mosaic law }
- 6) His sixth and final point was "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" This was the main point they failed to grasp. The Sabbath was made to give Israel a rest from their labours and not to bind them up.

The Church in part has developed this type of Pharisaism, it is often taught that Sunday is the new Sabbath and for many it is chiselled in stone showing no mercy for those who break it. However nowhere in scripture is this taught as Sunday always was and always will be in Jewish reckoning the first day of the week. Sabbath started at sundown on Friday { approx 6 o'clock } evening and ends { approx 6 o'clock } Saturday evening on the 7th day of the week.

However, in the New Testament we are not obligated to keep a Sabbath as such - in point of fact it is well documented that the early Church had meetings after synagogue.

We must as those who believe in the truth turn away from all things that will cause new believers to stumble especially things that are un-biblical, kept simply because of tradition.

The Gospel message is supposed to be a releasing message- not one that binds up. Some people won't drive on Sunday - won't spend money on Sunday they say it's wrong for others to work on Sunday. If this was the persuasion of us all we would have no doctors, nurses, bus drivers not to mention bakers, farmers, ambulance drivers, or any of the emergency services - The country would come to a stop. Pharisaism in the Church is an unacceptable and very sad thing. The most important thing is that we meet and often not which day so long as we rest one day in seven.

THE ARGUMENTS USED FOR SABBATH KEEPING

One argument that is often used in favour of mandatory Sabbath keeping is that Sabbath is a creation ordinance. The scripture they use is found in Genesis:2:2-3

"And on the seventh day God finished 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 hallowed it because that in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made"

If this was a creation ordinance it would be mandatory on both Jews and Gentiles alike. However in the New Testament the Gentiles are grafted into the Jewish root making the one new man and there is no mandatory, ruling that this ordinance should be obeyed. Furthermore if it is accepted as a creation ordinance it would still not be obligatory to all in the same wave

Dr Arnold Fruchtenbaum puts the case best when he says "Marriage is a creation ordinance {Genesis 2:18-25}but this does not make it obligatory for all ". In fact celibacy or singleness is considered to be an equal option. even superior{1 Cor:7: 1-7}.

This passage is proclaiming God's creative power as well as His triumphant rest. Therefore mandatory Sabbath keeping in the Biblical sense as in Exodus 31:15-17. is best kept when like the LORD we rest, especially in the New Testament for we are not under law but under grace. This is where we can find scriptures in the New Testament such as Mark 2:27 and Col. 2:16 also Heb.4: 1 - 16 Furthermore, I would make this point that appears to cause many to stumble from Exodus 31:17

"It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever"

This word "forever" is the word "**olam**" in Hebrew transliteration, and it means "Till the end of a period of time". and does not mean for eternity. Therefore what period of time would the writer Moses have in mind when he was putting together the book of Exodus simply the time of which the mosaic law was to last. For the LORD had made it known to him that he was going to raise up a Prophet. like himself from among his brethren {Deut..18:18-19}and this is what is meant in Heb .11:39 when it. states "All these. having obtained a good testimony through faith - did not receive the promise" what promise - the promise of HIS rest that only Y'SHUA could bring. The law of Moses has been fulfilled by the death of Y'SHUA. that we can now enter HIS rest. I would further endorse my argument by saying why should we persist in trying to keep a Sabbath from the Mosaic law when more weightier matters have been left out such as the sacrificial system. There is simply no Biblical sense in keeping some Mosaic Laws and not others.

SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

It is generally believed that Sunday worship began universally with the law of Constantine in 321 or possibly AD 364 with the council of Laodicea. However it has been already established that Sunday worship was a universal practice outside the land of Israel by the beginning of the second century.

While Sunday was a day of worship it was never viewed as a Sabbath. What happened later was that successive church councils began to ratify the practice already common and then apply Sabbath rules to it from the Old Testament till we have what remains today.

This can be seen in the writing of Barnabas {C.AD 100} Ignatius {AD70} Justin Martyr {AD 145-150 } and Irenaeus {AD 155-202 } plus what can be found in the edict of Laodicea {4th century AD}.

It is noted that they did not change the day of worship from the seventh day to the first day of the week rather they endorsed what was already being taught from the early church in Jerusalem.

This is further seen in Acts 20:7 which proves a Sunday worship is incorrect as the scripture says

"**Now on the first day of the week** when the disciples came together to break bread."

In the Jewish culture the first day of the week begins on Saturday evening after the Shabbat {6.p.m} so the believers in some cases met together Saturday evening, others would meet on Sunday. However this is no grounds for enforcing Sunday worship . It simply means one in seven.

Even the Talmud implies that first day observance began with Jewish believers so as not to offend the Nazarenes {B.Tanit 27B} it is not wrong to meet on Sunday neither is it wrong to meet on Saturday; it's merely whatever is convenient.

THE COMMUNION

Scholars generally agree that the communion came from the Passover seder and that the communion comes from the third cup, the cup of Redemption or as the apostle Paul called it the cup of Blessing (1.Cor: 10:16). There are other thoughts on the matter, some have alluded that it came from the Kiddush . There is however no connection between the two, as the Kiddush uses challah bread which is leavened and the Passover and subsequently the LORD's supper uses unleavened bread

Another well known scholar from Jerusalem Joseph Shulam, has suggested that it may not have come from the seder at all but from the se'udat-mitzvah or banquet of completion which is a kind of graduation set by a rabbi for his students when they have finished their studies.

This was quite common at the time of Jesus since HE would have known he was about to die on the cross. Certainly in rabbinical terms it would make sense as both these events happened on the 14th of Nisan. This would appear to also solve the discrepancy between the gospel of John and the other synoptics on the timing of the last supper {John: 13.29& 18+28}.

There is no doubt that Jesus was in this most blessed of ceremonies which is seen through the Passover meal displaying himself as the Pascal or Kapparrah Lamb, a continual offering for sin.

The Rabbis tell us that the lamb as an offering was first required in the book of Genesis 3:20-21 after GOD had asked Adam to name the animals and he had his favourite of them all which was the lamb. After he and Eve had sinned GOD had told them that they must pay a price for their disobedience and this price was their most treasured possession the lamb it had to be sacrificed and GOD clothed them with its skin {Gen:3.21 } or tunics as it says in the Bible, so they would learn not to sin.

The pattern was continued in the Tabernacle where the LORD gave orders to the priests to offer the lamb {Exodus 29:38-46}. In verse 40 of this same scripture we see it was to be offered with a hin of wine {one gallon} as a drink offering. This was to be the first proto-type seen for the communion.

The scripture shows there was a lamb offered at either end of the day. This was for a continual sacrifice to GOD. It also sanctified both Aaron and all the priests as well as the Temple continually and set apart this period of time unto GOD. After the second Temple period the lamb was no longer used as the Jews no longer had a temple. However in the days of Jesus they were still being offered and the period of time as with today was set apart by the two giant candlesticks which were found in the outer court of the Temple which when they were lit, illuminated the whole of Jerusalem.

There are candlesticks used in the Passover seder on either side of the table . Later on in the Temple about 950BC the lambs were brought by all the people on the 14th& 15th of Nisan. They were first inspected by the priests for any blemishes as only a spotless lamb was acceptable . They then had their throats cut and the blood was drained and then sprinkled round the alter as the required offering. It is noteworthy that Jesus was slaughtered at the same time as the lambs where being killed for the feast.

The people would then take the remains of the lamb home and eat it. There was at any one time in the Temple as many as 30.000 sheep slaughtered by approximately 500 priests .This provided a lamb for a house. And Jesus said "**Take this and divide it among yourselves**" for the bread; "**This is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me**" and for the wine; said "**This is the new covenant in my blood , which is shed for you** " {LUKE 22; 17} Here Yeshua was and is the eternal lamb of GOD sacrificed once for all to permanently remove all sin.