

THE MOSAIC LAW AND THE CHURCH

The Mosaic Covenant was made between God and the nation of Israel. Believers today belong to a different people of God, the church. The Mosaic Covenant has not been transferred from Israel to the Church.

The Mosaic Covenant must not be arbitrarily divided into artificial categories (e.g., ceremonial, civil, moral). All of the Mosaic Covenant has been fulfilled in Christ and none of it is binding upon believers today.

The Mosaic Covenant has tremendous value for believers today in teaching us about the character of God, the seriousness of sin, the blessings that accompany obedience and much more. The Mosaic Covenant illustrates the high standards that God holds and makes clear the sinfulness of man (Rom 3:20). The Mosaic Law was designed to teach man of his need for a Savior (Gal 3:24: "Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith"). The Israelites failed to achieve righteousness under the Mosaic Law because they pursued it by works and not as if it were by faith (Rom 9:32). "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4).

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING ON THE SABBATH

The following is an abbreviated summary which focuses on *my conclusions*. Others have different views, but I believe other conclusions are based on either inaccurate study of the individual texts or (more often) a theological assumption which is unbiblical (church=Israel). It is important to distinguish between the issue of the *value of rest* and that of a biblical command to not work on the seventh day.

CREATION

After creating the world, God rested on the seventh day. Scripture does not say that the seventh day continues until today, nor does it say that God continued to rest. It does not say that God rests every seventh day. Nothing in the passage (Gen 2:2-3) indicates that mankind was to rest on the seventh day of each week. Thus, it is not a universal command on all people.

THE MOSAIC LAW

The fourth commandment requires man to cease from working on the seventh day of the week (Exod 20:8-11). This commandment is unique in the Ten Commandments because there is nothing inherently *moral* about this practice (unlike prohibitions on idolatry, murder, and adultery). This commandment was God's *gift* to his people whom he had just redeemed from slavery, a life in which they had *no rest*. God required not only the Israelites to cease work, but they were not to make their servants or animals work.

The uniqueness of the commandment is explained in Exodus 31:12-17 as a sign of the covenant (cf. Ezek 20:12). Just as the rainbow signifies God's promise never to destroy the earth by water again, so the Sabbath is a symbol of the nation of Israel's covenant with its God. For this reason, to violate the Sabbath was a particularly grievous sin because it was effectively a rejection of the covenant relationship (Num 15:32-36).

ISAIAH AND THE PROPHETS

The prophets recognized that violation of the Sabbath required punishment. There was no equivocation on the matter: to work on the Sabbath was a wicked matter (Ezek 20:21; Jer 17:24-27). Those who honored the Sabbath would be richly blessed (Isa 56:2-6; 58:13-14)

JESUS

In the centuries before Jesus' birth, the Jewish leaders were very concerned to help the people keep the Sabbath (cf. Neh 13:15-22). This led them to devise a list of 39 categories of creative labor that were forbidden on the Sabbath.

Jesus criticized the manmade traditions which were often used as a substitute for obeying God from the heart (Matt 23:23-24). Jesus kept the Sabbath as commanded in the Mosaic Law but he did not keep the manmade traditions. Furthermore, he declared that he was greater than the Sabbath (Mark 2:28).

With his death on the cross, Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic Law. Thus the Mosaic Law has reached its goal and been brought to completion (Rom 10:4). None of its commandments are binding on believers in the church today.

PAUL AND THE APOSTLES

The change from strict adherence to the Mosaic Law to freedom from the Mosaic Law took some years after Jesus' death. This difficult transition is reflected in some of the challenges in the early church (Acts 15; Galatians). Paul allowed believers to observe the Sabbath as a matter of conscience, but he clearly did not require it (Rom 14:5-6). He declared that the Sabbath was a shadow of things to come, the reality of which is found in Christ (Col 2:16-17). Christ gives rest to those who come to him (Matt 11:28-30). He will give eternal rest to those who persevere in the faith (Heb 4:8-11).

A day of rest may be observed by Christians today but as a matter of freedom. Thus one may choose to rest on Saturday, Sunday, or another day. One may choose to rest by only doing spiritual activities; another may choose to rest in another way. An individual may choose to work all seven days, recognizing that the time is short and there is much work to be done (John 5:17; Eph 5:16; Heb 4:11).

A believer may *not* keep Sabbath as a means to gaining favor with God (cf. Gal 4:9-11; 5:2-6), nor may he command others to keep the Sabbath (Rom 14:22). Any rest (spiritual or physical) observed today should direct our hearts to long for the ultimate and lasting rest that God has promised (Heb 4:11). Christians should distinguish between resting/worshipping on one day of the week and keeping a "Christian Sabbath." The former is a freedom we have in Christ and in our country. The latter implies that we are under the obligations of the Mosaic Law.

WHY IT MATTERS

As a matter of conscience: The one who believes that resting one day a week is commanded by God must follow his conscience. To violate one's conscience is to sin (Rom 14:23).

As a matter of correct interpretation of Scripture: Believers must learn how to interpret the Bible accurately. Some may incorrectly assume that believers can simply pick and choose which commands they want to obey. Thinking through the matter of the Sabbath requires understanding the relationship of the Church to the Mosaic Law and the Old Testament.