Genesis - Commentaries by George Christopher Willis

The Seven Feasts of Jehovah: Leviticus 23, Sabbath, The

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"And He (God) rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made." (Gen. 2:2)

“Keep the Sabbath day to hallow it, as Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee.... And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and that Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence with a powerful hand and with a stretched-out arm; therefore Jehovah thy God hath commanded thee to observe the Sabbath day." (Deut. 5:12, 15 N.T.)

“Remember the Sabbath day to hallow it.... For in six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the Seventh day." (Ex. 20:8, 11 N.T.)

“There remaineth therefore a Sabbath (rest) for the people of God." (Heb. 4:9 R.V.)

The Sabbath is the first feast of Jehovah given to us in this wonderful chapter. Because it comes first, it calls us to consider it in a special way, and we may understand that it is very important.

“Sabbath" means "rest," and we should understand clearly that in the Bible, whether in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, having a share in God's rest is what marks God's people. This is their special privilege. As God says, "Verily my Sabbath (rest) ye shall keep; for it is a sign between me and you." The form of the rest may change, as we shall see, but a share in God's rest is always the sign between God and His people.

God established this rest in the beginning at creation. God rested, and He called man to share in His rest. It is true that sin came in and spoiled God's rest, so that the Lord Jesus said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work.”

Later in Deut. 5:12-15 we see that the Sabbath was given as a memorial of the deliverance out of Egypt. It was again included in the law at Mount Sinai, not as a moral command, but as a sign of God's rest at the beginning. In Ezek. 20:12, we find that the Sabbath was given as a sign, "I also gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am Jehovah that hallow them.” Thus we see that the Sabbath was a sign of God's covenant. It is very important for us to understand this. The Sabbath given to Israel was the sign of God's covenant with Israel.

In Heb. 8 we see this old covenant has passed away, and "place" has "been sought for the second," which is "a better covenant, which was established on better promises." It is most important for us to clearly understand that the covenant between God and the Jewish people is entirely set aside for us, and that the sign of this covenant, (resting on the seventh day), does not belong to us. If we clearly understand this important teaching of the Scriptures, it will deliver us from the snare of the teaching of Seventh Day Adventists, and all others who seek to put the Lord's people under the law.

But there is more. Our rest is not in this world. The Sabbath was the sign of rest in this world, and the Lord Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. The Spirit of God has been careful to show in the four Gospels how often He worked on the Sabbath. The Lord made no mention of the Sabbath in the Sermon on the Mount, (Matt. 5; 6; 7), where He gave such a precious summary of the fundamental principles suited to the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus passed the Sabbath in the grave, a sign of the position of the old covenant now.

Many people try to show that the Sabbath day is now the Lord's Day. But the Sabbath day was the Seventh Day a rest at the end of the week, after the labor was finished. The Lord's Day is called in Scripture the first day of the week, for us it is the day above all days. It is the resurrection day. It shows we find our rest in resurrection. We find our rest at the beginning of our spiritual life, instead of finding it at the end of our labors. "Come unto me," Christ said, "and I will give you rest." Our rest is in the new creation. Some Christians think that the Lord's Day is like other days, because they understand our rest is not down in this world. But they do not understand that the Scripture clearly makes a difference between this day and the following six days of the week. The Lord Himself has chosen even the name of this day. He calls it "the Lord's Day." (Rev. 1:10). Some people tell us this means "the day of the Lord," of which we read much in both the Old and the New Testaments. But the Greek says quite another thing, and is quite a different word. This word is only used twice in the New Testament "The Lord's Supper," and "the Lord's Day.”

So we should understand clearly the nature of the Sabbath. It was God's appointed sign of seeking rest as the result of labor under the law. The more we understand this, and understand that the Lord Jesus who is "Lord of the Sabbath," has disannulled the first covenant, the more clearly will we understand that any person who now seeks to maintain the authority of the Jewish Sabbath is in danger of denying the authority, the dignity, and the rights of the Lord Jesus Himself.

Let us take care on the other hand, because we are not under law, but under grace, not to forget the thought of man's rest and also of God's rest. As we have pointed out before, rest is the special mark of God's Own people. When we come to Christ, He gives us rest, and when we take His yoke upon us, we find rest to our souls. To the servant of the Lord who is wearied in the service of His Master, (not wearied of His service), we read of another rest, "Come ye yourselves apart and rest awhile," and there, alone in the presence of His Master, far from the rush and toil, he finds rest and refreshing, and comes forth freshly girded for His work. And to those saints who have left us and are "with Christ," "they rest from their labors," they are at Home with their Lord in Paradise. (See 2 Cor. 5:8; Luke 23:43).

The Millennium will be a further stage of this rest that God gives, when Christ will reign for a thousand years and Satan will be bound, then will be fulfilled the prophecy. "The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet; they break forth into singing." (Isa. 14:7). The noise of war is gone. The cry

of the oppressed will cease, and "the Sun of Righteousness" will bring peace and plenty to this weary earth. It will keep its Sabbath. But even this is not the final rest. The final rest is from spiritual labors in the midst of this evil, not only from sin. During the Millennium sin will remain in this world. Satan though bound, will be loosed again. Eternal rest this unending Sabbath of God we shall enjoy with the Lord Himself in a coming day, though now we have the privilege of working for Him who has said, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work."

Jesus answered them,

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

John 5:17

"And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."

Mark 6:31

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