

CHAPTER 3

THE SABBATH COMMITTED TO THE HEBREWS

Object of this chapter - Total apostasy of the human family in the antediluvian age - Destruction of mankind - The family of Noah spared - Second apostasy of mankind in the patriarchal age - The apostate nations left to their own ways - The family of Abraham chosen - Separated from the rest of mankind - Their history - Their relation to God - The Sabbath in existence when they came forth from Egypt - Analysis of Ex.16 - The Sabbath committed to the Hebrews.

We are now to trace the history of divine truth for many ages in almost the exclusive connection with the family of Abraham. That we may vindicate the truth from the reproach of pertaining only to the Hebrews - a reproach often urged against the Sabbath - and justify the dealings of God with mankind in leaving to their own ways the apostate nations, let us carefully examine the Bible for the reasons which directed divine Providence in the choice of Abraham's family as the depositaries of divine truth.

The antediluvian world had been highly favored of God. The period of life extended to each generation was twelve-fold that of the present age of man. For almost one thousand years, Adam, who had conversed with God in paradise, had been with them. Before the death of Adam, Enoch began his holy walk of three hundred years, and then he was translated that he should not see death. This testimony to the piety of Enoch was a powerful testimony to the antediluvians in behalf of truth and righteousness. Moreover the Spirit of God strove with mankind; but the perversity of man triumphed over all the gracious restraints of the Holy Spirit. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Even the sons of God joined in the general apostasy. At last a single family was all that remained of the worshipers of the Most High.[1](#)

Then came the deluge, sweeping the world of its guilty inhabitants with the besom of destruction.[2](#) So terrible a display of divine justice might well be thought sufficient to restrain impiety for ages. Surely the family of Noah could not soon forget this awful lesson. But alas, revolt and apostasy speedily followed, and men turned from God to the worship of idols. Against the divine mandate separating the human family into nations,[3](#) mankind united in one great act of rebellion in the plain of Shinar. "And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Then God confounded them in their impiety and scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth.[4](#) Men did not like to retain God in their knowledge; wherefore God gave them over to a reprobate mind, and suffered them to change the truth of God into a lie, and to worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator. Such was the origin of idolatry and of the apostasy of the Gentiles.[5](#)

In the midst of this wide-spread apostasy on man was found whose heart was faithful with God. Abraham was chosen from an idolatrous family, as the depositary of divine truth, the father of the faithful, the heir of the world, and friend of God.[6](#) When the worshipers of God were found alone in the family of Noah, God gave up the rest of mankind to perish in the flood. Now that the worshipers of God are again reduced almost to a single family, God gives up the idolatrous nations to their own ways, and takes the family of Abraham as his peculiar heritage. "For I know him," said God, "that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep

the way of the Lord, to justice and judgment."⁷ That they might preserve in the earth the knowledge of divine truth and the memory and worship of the Most High, they were to be a people walled off from all mankind, and dwelling in a land of their own. That they might thus be separated from the heathen around, God gave to Abraham the rite of circumcision, and afterward to his posterity the whole ceremonial law.⁸ But they could not possess the land designed for them until the iniquity of the Amorites, its inhabitants, was full that they should be thrust out before them. The horror of great darkness, and the smoking seen by Abraham in vision, foreshadowed the iron furnace and the bitter servitude of Egypt.

The family of Abraham must go down thither. Brief prosperity and long and terrible oppression follow.⁹ At length the power of the oppressor is broken, and the people of God are delivered. The expiration of four hundred and thirty years from the promise to Abraham marks the hour of deliverance to his posterity.¹⁰ The nation of Israel is brought forth from Egypt as God's peculiar treasure, that he may give them his Sabbath, and his law, and himself. The psalmist testifies that God "brought forth his people with joy, and his chosen with gladness: and gave them the lands of the heathen: and they inherited the labor of the people: that they might observe his statutes and keep his laws. And the Most High says, "I am the Lord which hallow you, that brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God."¹¹ Not that the commandments of God, his Sabbath and himself, had no prior existence, nor that the people were ignorant of the true God and his law; for the Sabbath was appointed to a holy use before the fall of man; and the commandments of God, his statutes and his laws, were kept by Abraham; and the Israelites themselves, when some of them had violated the Sabbath, were reproved by the question, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?"¹² And as to the Most High, the psalmist exclaims, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."¹³ But there must be a formal public espousal of the people by God, and of his law and Sabbath and himself by the people.¹⁴ But neither the Sabbath, nor the law, nor the great Law-giver, by their connection with the Hebrews, became Jewish. The Law-giver indeed became the God of Israel,¹⁵ and what Gentile shall refuse him adoration for that reason? but the Sabbath still remained the Sabbath of the Lord,¹⁶ and the law continued to be the law of the Most High.

In the month following their passage through the Red Sea, the Hebrews came into the wilderness of Sin. It is at this point in his narrative that Moses for the second time mentions the sanctified rest-day of the Creator. The people murmured for bread:

"Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. . . . I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God. And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp; and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna; for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing left over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man

according to his eating. And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning and it bred worms, and stank; and Moses was wroth with them. And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating; and when the sun waxed hot, it melted. And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread,[17](#) two omers for one man; and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said,[18](#) To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake to-day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade; and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to-day; for to-day is a Sabbath unto the Lord:[19](#) to-day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the Lord said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day."[20](#)

This narrative shows, 1. That God had a law and commandments prior to the giving of the manna. 2. That God in giving his people bread from heaven designed to prove them respecting his law. 3. That in this law was the holy Sabbath; for the test relative to walking in the law pertained directly to the Sabbath; and when God said, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" it was the Sabbath which they had violated. 4. That in proving the people respecting this existing law, Moses gave no new precept respecting the Sabbath, but remained silent relative to the preparation for the Sabbath until after the people, of their own accord, had gathered a double portion on the sixth day. 5. That by this act the people proved not only that they were not ignorant of the Sabbath, but that they were disposed to observe it.[21](#) 6. That the reckoning of the week, traces of which appear through the patriarchal age,[22](#) had been rightly kept, for the people knew when the sixth day had arrived. 7. That had there been any doubt existing on that point, the fall of the manna on the six days, the withholding of it on the seventh, and the preservation of that needed for the Sabbath over that day, must have settled that point incontrovertibly.[23](#) 8. That there was no act of instituting the Sabbath in the wilderness of Sin; for God did not then make it his rest-day, nor did he then bless and sanctify the day. On the contrary, the record show that the seventh day was already the sanctified rest-day of the Lord.[24](#) 9. That the obligation to observe the Sabbath existed and was known before the fall of the manna. For the language used implies the existence of such an obligation, but does not contain a new enactment until after some of the people had violated the Sabbath. Thus God says to Moses, "On the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in," but he does not speak of the seventh. And on the sixth day Moses says, "To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord," but he does not command them to observe it. On the seventh day he says that it is the Sabbath, and that they should find no manna in the field. "Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none." But in all this there is no precept given, yet the existence of such a precept is plainly implied. 10. That when some of the people violated the Sabbath they were reprov'd in language which plainly implies a previous transgression of this precept. "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" 11. And that this rebuke of the Law-giver restrained for the time the transgression of the people.

"See, for that the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days;[25](#) abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."[26](#) As a special trust, God committed the Sabbath to the Hebrews. It was now given them, not now made for them. It was made for man at the close of the first week of time; but all other

nations having turned from the Creator to the worship of idols, it is given the Hebrew people. Nor does this prove that all the Hebrews had hitherto disregarded it. For Christ uses the same language respecting circumcision. Thus he says, Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers."[27](#) Yet God had enjoined that ordinance upon Abraham and his family four hundred years previous to this gift of it by Moses, and it had been retained by them.[28](#)

The language, "The Lord hath given you the Sabbath," implies a solemn act of committing a treasure to their trust. How was this done? No act of instituting the Sabbath here took place. No precept enjoining its observance was given until some of the people violated it, when it was given in the form of a reproof; which evinced a previous obligation, and that they were transgressing an existing law. And this view is certainly strengthened by the fact that no explanation of the institution was given to the people; a fact which indicates that some knowledge of the Sabbath was already in their possession.

But how then did God give them the Sabbath? He did this, first, by delivering them from the abject bondage of Egypt, where they were a nation of slaves. And second, by providing them food in such a manner as to impose the strongest obligation to keep the Sabbath. Forty years did he give them bread from heaven, sending it for six days, and withholding it on the seventh, and preserving food for them over the Sabbath. Thus was the Sabbath especially intrusted to them.

As a gift to the Hebrews, the Creator's great memorial became a sign between God and themselves. "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." As a sign, its object is stated to be, to make known the true God; and we are told why it was such a sign. "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."[29](#) The institution itself signified that God created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh. Its observance by the people signified that the Creator was their God. How full of meaning was this sign!

The Sabbath was a sign between God and children of Israel, because they alone were the worshipers of the Creator. All other nations had turned from him to "the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth."[30](#) For this reason the memorial of the great Creator was committed to the Hebrews, and it became a sign between the Most High and themselves. Thus was the Sabbath a golden link uniting the Creator and his worshipers.

1 Gen.2-6; Heb.11:4-7; 1Pet.3:20; 2Pet.2:5. <[Return](#)>

2 Gen.7; Matt.24:37-39; Luke 17:26,27; 2Pet.3:5,6. <[Return](#)>

3 Deut.32:7,8; Acts 17:26. <[Return](#)>

4 Gen.11:1-9; Josephus' Ant., b. i. chap. iv. This took place in the days of Peleg, who was born about one hundred years after the flood. Gen.10:25, compared with 11:10-16; Ant., b. i. chap. 6. sect. 4. <[Return](#)>

5 Rom.1:18-32; Acts 14:16,17; 17:29,30. <[Return](#)>

6 Gen.12:1-3; Josh.24:2,3,14; Neh.9:7,8; Rom.4:13-17; 2Chron.20:7; Isa.41:8; James 2:23. <[Return](#)>

7 Gen.18:19. <[Return](#)>

8 Gen.17:9-14; 34:14; Acts 10:28; 11:2,3; Eph.2:12-19; Num23:9; Deut.33:27,28. <[Return](#)>

9 Gen.15; Ex.1-5; Deut.4:20. <[Return](#)>

10 Ex.12:29-42; Gal.3:17. <[Return](#)>

11 Ps.105:43-45; Lev.22:32,33; Num.15:41. <[Return](#)>

12 Gen.2:2,3; 26:5; Ex.16:4,27,28; 18:16. <[Return](#)>

13 Ps.90:2. <[Return](#)>

14 Ex.19:3-8, 24:3-8; Jer.3:14, compared with last clause of Jer.31:32. <[Return](#)>

15 Ex.20:2; 24:10. <[Return](#)>

16 Ex.20:10; Deut.5:14; Neh.9:14. <[Return](#)>

17 On this verse Dr. A. Clarke thus comments:- "On the sixth day they gathered twice as much - This they did that they might have a provision for the Sabbath." <[Return](#)>

18 The Douay Bible reads: "To-morrow is the rest of the Sabbath sanctified unto the Lord." Dr. Clarke comments as follows upon this text: "To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath. There is nothing either in the text or context that seems to intimate that the Sabbath was now first given to the Israelites, as some have supposed; on the contrary, it is here spoken of as being perfectly well known, from its having been generally observed. The commandment, it is true, may be considered as being now renewed; because they might have supposed, that in their unsettled state in the wilderness, they might have been exempted from the observance of it. Thus we find, 1. That when God finished his creation he instituted the Sabbath; 2. When he brought the people out of Egypt, he insisted on the strict observance of it; 3. When he gave the LAW, he made it a tenth part of the whole: such importance has this institution in the eyes of the Supreme Being!" Richard Baxter, a famous divine of the seventeenth century, and a decided advocate of the abrogation of the fourth commandment, in his "Divine Appointment of the Lord's Day," thus clearly states the origin of the Sabbath: Why should God begin two thousand years after [the creation of the world] to give men a Sabbath upon the reason of his rest from the creation of it, if he had never called man to that commemoration before? And it is certain that the Sabbath was observed at the falling of the manna before the giving of the law; and let any considering Christian judge. . . . 1. Whether the not falling of the manna, or the rest of God after the creation, was like to be the original reason of the Sabbath. 2. And whether if it had been the first, it would not have been said, Remember to keep holy the Sabbath-day; for on six days the manna fell, and not on the seventh; rather than `for in six days God created heaven and earth, &c., and rested the seventh day.' And it is casually added, `Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it.' Nay, consider whether this annexed reason intimates not that the day on this ground being hallowed before, therefore it was that God sent not down the manna on that day, and that he prohibited the people from seeking it." - Practical Works, Vol. iii, p. 784. ed. 1707. <[Return](#)>

19 The Douay Bible reads: "Because it is the Sabbath of the Lord." <[Return](#)>

20 Ex.16. <[Return](#)>

21 It has indeed been asserted that God by a miracle equalized the portion of every one on five days, and

doubled the portion of each on the sixth, so that no act of the people has any bearing on the Sabbath. But the equal portion of each on the five days was not thus understood by Paul. He says: "But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want; that there may be equality; as it is written, He that gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had not lack." 2Cor.8:14,15. And that the double portion on the sixth day was the act of the people, is affirmed by Moses. He says that "on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread." Verse 22.

[Return](#)

22 Gen.7:4,10; 8:10,12,; 29:27,28; 50:10; Ex.7:25; Job 2:13. [Return](#)

23 By this three-fold miracle, occurring every week for forty years, the great Law-giver distinguished his hallowed day. The people were therefore admirably prepared to listen to the fourth commandment enjoining the observance of the very day on which he had rested. Ex.16:35; Josh.5:12; Ex.20:8-11. [Return](#)

24 The twelfth chapter of Exodus relates the origin of the passover. It is in striking contrast with Ex.16, which is supposed to give the origin of the Sabbath. If the reader will compare the two chapters he will see the difference between the origin of an institution as given in Ex.12, and a familiar reference to an existing institution as in Ex.16. If he will also compare Gen.2 with Ex.12, he will see that the one gives the origin of the Sabbath in the same manner that the other gives the origin of the passover. [Return](#)

25 This implies, first, the fall of a larger quantity on that day, and second, its preservation for the wants of the Sabbath. [Return](#)

26 This must refer to going out for manna, as the connection implies; for religious assemblies on the Sabbath were commanded and observed. Lev.23:3; Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16; Acts 1:12; 15:21. [Return](#)

27 John 7:22. [Return](#)

28 Gen. 17; 34; Ex.4. Moses is said to have given circumcision to the Hebrews; yet it is a singular fact that his first mention of that ordinance is purely incidental, and plainly implies an existing knowledge of it on their part. Thus it is written: "This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof; but every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof." Ex.12:43,44. And in like manner when the Sabbath was given to Israel, that people were not ignorant of the sacred institution.

[Return](#)

29 Eze.20:12; Ex.31:17. [Return](#)

30 Jer.10:10-12. [Return](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Table of Contents](#)