

Exegetical Notes, Exodus 31:12-18
“Keeping the Sabbaths”

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Exodus 31:12-18

Verse 12-13

Then YHWH said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am YHWH, who makes you holy.’”

- The conversation on the mountain between God and Moses ends with this admonition to the Israelites. They are to observe the Sabbaths.
- The word Sabbaths is plural. The Bible actually mentions three Sabbaths: the seven day Sabbath, the seven year Sabbath, and the year of Jubilee. Every seventh day was to be set aside as a special day of remembrance. Every seventh year was to be set aside as a special year of remembrance. Every fiftieth year was to be set aside as a year of remembrance. In its history, Israel ignored the seven year Sabbath and the year of Jubilee. These Sabbaths were never kept.
- It is important to note the purpose of the Sabbath. It was reserved as a remembrance, like the Lord’s Supper is for us. It was to be a time when people remembered their special covenant relationship with God.

Verse 14-16

“Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to YHWH. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.”

- The word Sabbath now appears in its singular form. The discussion changes focus from the three Sabbaths to the seventh day Sabbath. The seventh day is to be set aside as holy to Israel.

- This is such an important observance that those Israelites who fail to keep it are to be put to death.
- The day is to be made special by the absence of work. The Israelites will keep the day holy by not doing any work on the seventh day.

Verse 17

“It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days YHWH made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”

- The Sabbath is to be a sign of the covenant that exists between God and Israel.
- Because it is such a sign and the covenant was to last forever the sign was to last forever.
- Israel was to observe the Sabbath sign by following the example set by God. As he rested from work on the seventh day, so Israel was to rest from work on the Sabbath.

Verse 18

“When YHWH finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.”

- When the conversation ended God gave Moses two stone tablets upon which God had written the moral law. Often the tablets are pictured as containing the Ten Commandments, five commandments per stone. However, it was more likely two identical copies of the entire law, each stone having all of the commandments on it. One would have been God’s copy and the other, the copy that belonged to the people. Both copies were to be placed side by side within the Ark of the Testimony. This would indicate that the terms of the covenant were mutually agreed to by both God and Israel.
- The tablets were made by God to show that this offer came from God and not from the people.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Keeping the Sabbaths*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and *Cornerstone Fellowship*.)