



Minutes With Messiah

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Is Sunday the Sabbath?

When did God authorize a change in the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday? This is the usual phrasing of a question about the difference between Sabbatarians (Seventh Day Adventists, Seventh Day Baptists, Church of God—Sabbatarian, and smaller groups) and other Christian groups. It goes directly to the doctrine that most distinguishes them from other denominations. (I speak here primarily of “Seventh Day” Sabbatarians, not the few “First Day” Sabbatarians.)

Most Sabbatarians are at least consistent in that they also follow other aspects of the Law of Moses, most notably the dietary laws, in addition to keeping Sabbath. Some keep kosher by modern Orthodox Jewish practice, while others keep the letter of the Law without the rabbinic decrees of keeping kosher. Some however, do not keep God’s appointed feasts on the dates specified in Leviticus 23, or fail to follow other commands of the Law.

Those who ask that question that started the first paragraph, including many from these groups, reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of the Sabbath, and of the non-Jewish Christian’s responsibility toward the law.

How does this question reveal a misunderstanding of the Sabbath? Sunday is not, and never has been the equivalent of the Sabbath for Christians. Most Sabbatarians, keep Sabbath by refraining from normal workday activities, as would be proper. But to say what we do on Sunday is “keeping Sabbath” is far from accurate. Under the Law of Moses the Sabbath is a day of rest from creative work, but nowhere was it ever a set aside day for congregational assemblies or for worship. Throughout most of Jewish history it has been kept more in the home than in the synagogue. Christians assemble on Sunday as they have been doing since the early days of the church (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2) but they are not attempting to keep Sabbath.

Are non-Jewish Christians obligated to keep any part of the Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments)? If so, to what extent? This is the heart of the difference between Sabbatarians and other Christians.

While the book of Galatians may address this issue, the principal passage that deals with it is Acts 15. Certain Jewish Christians were saying that Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The question was referred to the elders and apostles in Jerusalem. Under the influence of the apostle Peter and the elder James, both Jews, a letter was published which included the following (Acts 15:28-29):

For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.

Circumcision was not required. Most of the laws of *kashrus* (kosher) were not required to be followed by Gentiles. No mention of the Ten Commandments is made. In particular for this discussion, Gentile Christians were not required to keep Sabbath or any other of the appointed holy days of the Jews. To hold that one must keep Sabbath in accordance with the Ten Commandments is in direct contradiction with the apostle Peter and other followers of Jesus in the first century.

I will contend that it would actually be good for most of us to keep Sabbath. In America in the twenty-first century we don’t often take a day of rest. Our days off are filled with all the chores we couldn’t do during our workweek. But to require it of my family or any other non-Jewish Christian would be to fly in the face of scripture.

Contents

Is Sunday the Sabbath?	1
God Is Not Ashamed	2
Ruth and the Law	4

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God Is Not Ashamed

It's hidden there, in the middle of Hebrews, chapter 11. In that great roll call of faith it is easy to miss. Just a little phrase, but one of amazing import. Imagine this being said of you. "God is not ashamed to be called their God." (Heb 11:16)

What kind of person did it take to receive this accolade? The phrase actually starts with the word "therefore." Someone once said, "any time you see the word "therefore," you should see what it is there for." We can look at the people whose names preceded this phrase to see what their attitudes were.

Abel

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous. (v. 4)" All my life I have heard debates about what it was that made Abel's sacrifice more acceptable than Cain's. Some have said that it was because Cain's was a fruit sacrifice, and Abel's was animals. We don't know that, because the scriptures don't say. What we do know is that he offered his sacrifice by faith, and that made it more excellent.

We don't know what kind of sacrifice God demanded. It is obvious that He had at least demanded some kind of offering. What we can be

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sure about is that, whatever the offering, God is not as concerned about what it is as with how it is offered. When King Saul disobeyed God in the matter of Agag the Amalekite, Samuel told him (1 Sam 15:22), "Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." It is the *attitude* of obedience that God wants, even more than mindless compliance. And so it was that Abel offered his sacrifice; in an attitude of faith.

Can a dead man speak? He is able, if he is Abel. And even now he speaks of faith. God is not ashamed to be called Abel's God, for Abel was a man of attitude—the right attitude.

Enoch

What do we know about Enoch? He was the father of Methuselah of 939-years-of-age fame. He did not die, because "God took him" (Gen 5:24). God took him because he walked with God. But what does it mean that he walked with God?

The writer of Hebrews adds (11:5) that he "pleased" God, and that faith is required to do so. He further defines that faith as believing both that God exists and that God rewards. This, then, is how he walked with God. He knew God existed, but more than this, he knew God would take him home to a heavenly country.

Jude further explains that Enoch was a prophet of God. His prophecy had to do with judgment, and "and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (Jude 15) Among the ungodly's of this verse is a condemnation of those who spoke against God. Enoch not only believed in God, he stood up to those who would deny Him. Enoch was not ashamed to call God his God, so God was not ashamed to be called Enoch's God.

Noah

Imagine God appearing to you and telling you to prepare for something, and you have no idea what he is talking about, because it has never happened before. There is no word for it, because it is something that doesn't exist. During the 150 years that you are preparing for it, you take a lot of ridicule, but barely know how to warn them of what is coming, because you can't describe it yourself.

That is exactly what happened to Noah. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house." (Heb 11:7) Noah prepared to

leave his home and live for a couple of years in a mobile home shared with a zoo. He didn't even know where he would end up. In fact, for all he knew his mobile home might never leave the driveway, if his source was wrong. But Noah didn't worry about that. He trusted the one who told him to build.

Not only did Noah build when told. He warned the people around him, even though they could not understand what was coming. The flood didn't matter, though. Noah may not even have been able to warn of the flood. He was able to preach what could prevent the flood. That is why Peter (2 Pet 2:5) calls him a "preacher of righteousness." It wasn't the threat of the flood that Noah presented to his contemporaries, it was obedience to God.

Abraham and Sara

He was a son of a man who had left the corporate world. His father had packed up the house and moved from the great city to a small town some time after Abraham marriage, and Abraham had to go with him. Then after a few years, Abraham got the call. "Leave your father in his new home. You are going somewhere else. Sorry, I can't tell you where right now, but pack your bags."

At least in the Navy I had the luxury of being able to give my preferences before I was transferred. Abraham not only didn't get to express a preference, he had to move on "sealed orders." And yet this man who barely knew God, who had been moved by his father from his original home, moved yet again. When we would get orders to isolated duty where we couldn't take our families, the phrase was that "the Navy didn't issue you a wife with your sea bag." Abram, as he was known at the time, faced the same situation, but he did not know if he would ever get back. His orders weren't for just two years. His father would live another sixty years, but he apparently would never see him again.

In addition to all of that, he bought a tent for the travel, and lived in it for the next hundred years. No more houses. No more closets and cabinets. Not even a garage in which to store his junk. Just a tent, a troublesome nephew, and his herds. (And some household employees, one of

whom would prove more troublesome than the nephew.)

Abram packed his tent, and left his father's house. He had his orders, and he followed them. He would continue to follow them for the rest of his life, even at the threat of losing his only son. He went where he was told, because he knew that he had a permanent home waiting for him when he retired from this world.

And what about Sara, his wife? She followed him when he received his orders. Twenty-five years later, still childless and ninety years old, she listened as her hundred-year-old husband was told that within a year they would have a child. Granted her husband had fathered a child just a few

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years before, but she had never conceived. But she believed God, when He said she would have a child. Because of this she "received strength" (Heb 11:11) to have a child at that advanced age.

You and Me

"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God" (Heb 11:16) Ultimately, the reason that God was not ashamed to be called their God was because they did not consider this world their home. They looked for their real home, and didn't look back.

There are situations, however, when God will be ashamed of us. "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." (Luke 9:26)

There are, then, a couple of attitudes we must have. We must remember that we have another city waiting for us; we are only here for a short time. Also, for God not to be ashamed to be called our God, we must not be ashamed to call him our God. Now, who wants God to be ashamed of them?

Ruth and the Law

On the day of *Shavuot* (Pentecost) the scroll of Ruth is read in every synagogue. There are various reasons proposed for this. I think one reason may be related to the Law, which tradition says was given on this date.

Ruth was from Moab. She was married to an Israelite for about ten years, until he died. Naomi, her mother-in-law determined to go home. Because Jewish law said that the nearest living male relative would have to raise an heir to the daughters-in-law, and apparently Moabitish law did not, she gave them both the opportunity to stay in their homeland. This became the occasion for the beautiful passage where Ruth says to Naomi:

Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. (Ruth 1:16-17)

Herein is a reason the scroll of Ruth is appropriate to be read on *Shavuot*. Ruth declares her intention to follow the nation of Israel, and their God. She does this willingly, and even in the face of her mother-in-law's repeated insistence that she remain in her native land. Ruth, then, typifies the entire nation to which she aspires.

Israel was enslaved in Egypt. The people of Moses' time had been born there. They knew no other land. Along comes Moses, and they began a journey of

the body and the spirit that would take them away from all they had ever known.

Fifty days later they were at the foot of Sinai. They were in a desert, with only two ways to go—back to Egypt or forward into the unknown. God gives them the choice of which way to go. "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." (Ex 19:5-6) Without even knowing the conditions of that covenant, "all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." (Ex 19:8) The people said to Moses, in essence, "thy God shall be my God."

Ruth had the advantage that she knew what she was getting into. But she typifies Israel in that she chose to leave the land of her birth to follow a God she had not previously known.

That she took her vow seriously can be seen in Ruth 3:10. Although she was obviously an attractive "older lady," she did not marry outside the family, but kept herself for the near kinsman who would raise up an heir for her dead husband. Not only had she promised to follow her mother-in-law, but she learned the Law and kept it.

As Israel chose to keep the Law given at Sinai on *Shavuot*, and merited to be called God's chosen people through whom the Messiah would come, so Ruth also chose to keep God's law, even in the small details. As a result, she merited to be the mother of David's line, and thus of the direct lineage of Messiah.

(*Shavuot*/Pentecost falls on May 28, 2001.)

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