

The Sabbath in Egypt

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THE Sabbath was kept by the Israelites in Egypt; at least Pharaoh charged Moses and Aaron with causing them to keep it, and for that reason made their burdens heavier, and took away the straw. Pharaoh said to Moses and Aaron,

Exodus 5

⁵ Behold the people of the land now are many, and you make them rest from their burdens.

The word here translated “rest” is in Hebrew *shabath*, and in every other place where the word is translated rest it is in connection with the rest of the seventh-day Sabbath, except in *Leviticus* 26:34,35, where it refers to the land resting while it should be desolate.

But when we turn to *2 Chronicles*, to the fulfillment of the words in *Leviticus*, there we have the word translated plainly,

2 Chronicles 36

²¹ As long as she lay desolate, she kept sabbath.

Following are all of the places wherein the word *shabath* is translated “rest” or “rested”:

Genesis 2

² And He rested on the seventh day.

³ Because that in it He had rested.

Exodus 5

⁵ You make them rest from their burdens.

Exodus 16

³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

Exodus 23

¹² On the seventh day you shall rest.

Exodus 31

¹⁷ The seventh day He rested.

Exodus 34

²¹ ...on the seventh day you shall rest: in earing time and in harvest you shall rest.

Leviticus 26

³⁴ Then shall the land rest and enjoy her Sabbaths.

³⁵ ...it shall rest; because it did not rest...

And in *2 Chronicles*, the same word is translated as stated above, plainly, “sabbath,” in fulfillment of *Leviticus* 26:34,35:

2 Chronicles 36

²¹ As long as she lay desolate, she kept sabbath.

So, therefore, with the exception in *Leviticus*, in every place in the Bible where the word is translated “rest,” it refers to the rest of the seventh day, the Sabbath of the Lord, unless we make a further exception of these words of Pharaoh in *Exodus* 5:5.

But why should this be more an exception when there is nothing in the text nor context which demands it as an exception? and when besides we have all these instances of the use of the word to justify the use of it in that same sense in this place?

Further: the context appears to justify this meaning; for Pharaoh said also:

Exodus 5

⁸ For they be idle.

Now what good reason could he have for saying they were idle unless it be in view of what he had said to Moses and Aaron that they made them rest, and in view of that rest being the Sabbath in which they should “not do any work.”

Consequently, there was a conflict of authority. Moses and Aaron came to the people with the authority of God, teaching the people to rest. Pharaoh refused to recognize the authority, and made their burdens heavier and their tasks harder, and would not let them serve God.

Then,

Exodus 8

¹ The Lord spoke unto Moses, Go unto Pharaoh and say unto him, Thus says the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me.

And this is further confirmed by the fact that the very first service that the Lord demanded of them, after Pharaoh had finally let them go, was to keep the Sabbath,—to rest on the seventh day.

Another thing that strongly confirms this view of the text is:

Revelation 15

³ And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God.

Who sing this song?

² They who had gotten the victory over the beast and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name.

How did they get the victory?

Revelation 14

¹² [By keeping] the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

How did they get the victory “over his mark?” By being sealed with the seal (mark) of the living God (*Revelation* 7:3; 14:1), in opposition to the mark of the beast (*Revelation* 14:9-12).

We know that the last oppression that the people of God will suffer in this world, will be because they recognize their duty (and will do it) of keeping the Sabbath of the Lord, resting on the seventh day.

We know, likewise, by *Revelation* 13:15-17, that an attempt will be made to prevent our serving God, and therefore when the oppression of the modern Pharaohs becomes so cruel upon us, again the Lord will say unto them,

Exodus 8

²⁰ Let my people go, that they may serve me.

Revelation 22

³ ...His servants shall serve Him:

And when that shall have been said, and he shall have given us the victory over the beast and over his image and over his mark, etc., then indeed will it be that we shall “sing the song of Moses” the servant of God, as well as “the song of the Lamb.”

But how can we sing the song of Moses, unless we have a similar experience to that which gave rise to the song of Moses? Oppression alone does not give that experience; because if that were so, all of the martyrs could sing the same song.

But in this, none but those who have “gotten the victory over the beast and over his image and over his mark,” etc., —“the hundred and forty-four thousand,”—none but these sing this song (*Revelation* 15:3; 14:3).

Therefore it cannot be oppression alone, but oppression for the same cause which gives rise to that song of Moses. And this text (*Exodus* 5:5), and this view of the text, furnishes not only a parallel oppression, but a parallel cause for the oppression.

And if this view of the text be not allowed, there is no fitting parallel between the circumstances and events of that time of old and the one soon to be. Therefore, I firmly believe that *Exodus* 5:5 was emphatically one of the things which was written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come (*1 Corinthians* 10:11).

This view of the text furnishes additional light also upon other texts, *Deuteronomy* 5:14-15, for instance. There, Moses, after rehearsing the fourth commandment up to the place where the man-servant, the maid-servant, and the stranger

are mentioned, breaks off and adds,

Deuteronomy 5

¹⁴ ...that your man-servant and your maid-servant may rest as well as you.

¹⁵ And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt...

In this view, this was an appeal to the personal experience of every one, under the Sabbath commandment. And more, they were to remember how God had wrought for them with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and how he had punished their oppressors. They were to draw from that the lesson that they should not oppress the keepers of the Sabbath of the Lord, lest they be like Pharaoh and all his host. And the lesson was not for them alone, but for all people, and all time (*Revelation* 13:10-18; 14:9-12).

Further: this view of the text shows that the duty of keeping the Sabbath was the main cause of their deliverance, and decisively excludes it as the consequence. For if they had not been required to keep the Sabbath, their oppression would not have been so great; and if their oppression had not been so great, they would not yet have been delivered.

Once more, and with this I close: if this view of the text be allowed, and if it be shown that the keeping of the Sabbath was a point of conflict in Egypt, before the Exode, then we have a strong additional refutation of the claim that it originated in the wilderness. Other reasons might be given for this interpretation of the text, but I think these are amply sufficient to justify us in the belief that it is the correct one.