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WHEN DID GOD COMMAND SABBATH OBSERVANCE?

All of us in God's Church are familiar with the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20. After all, all of us are Sabbath-keepers. If any adult today does not keep the Sabbath, then that person is certainly not a part of God's true Church.

But two questions arise regarding the Sabbath. The first question is: **when did God establish the weekly Sabbath?**

And the second question is: **did God give the commandment to observe the Sabbath at the same time as God established the Sabbath?** Or did God only institute the Sabbath commandment at a later time, well after God had in fact already established the Sabbath?

Typically we have tended to assume that the Sabbath commandment took effect at the time when God created the Sabbath. That may be the case, but if it is, then we should be able to prove that. Establishing something and making that something a commanded observance are not necessarily the same thing. In this matter I don't believe that we should assume what is the correct answer. Assumptions are typically based on bias and not necessarily on facts.

So let's examine these questions more closely.

We all know that the Sabbath commandment was given by God in Exodus 20, when God spoke all of the ten commandments to the people of Israel. So the Sabbath commandment has assuredly existed since the time of Exodus 20.

But we need to also consider that Abraham, who lived well before the time of the Exodus from Egypt, already kept God's commandments. As Genesis 26 tells us:

Because that Abraham **obeyed my voice**, and kept **my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws**. (Genesis 26:5)

Does this Scripture mean that Abraham was a Sabbath-keeper? After all, the Sabbath is one of the ten commandments. So what did Abraham do? Did Abraham really keep the Sabbath every week?

For that matter, if Abraham was in fact always keeping the weekly Sabbath Day, who did he get that information from? Did God reveal the Sabbath to Abraham in a personal private revelation? Or did Abraham get the knowledge of the Sabbath commandment from his forefathers? And from whom would his forefathers have gotten that knowledge ... from Noah?

Note! We are not talking about a knowledge of the Sabbath "existence". We are talking about a knowledge of the Sabbath **commandment**, the knowledge that God requires us human beings to observe the Sabbath, and not merely the knowledge that God had blessed and sanctified the seventh day.

If the knowledge of the Sabbath commandment was understood before the flood, then it would have been Noah who brought that knowledge of the Sabbath commandment through the flood. Had Noah kept the Sabbath? Did anybody else (e.g. perhaps Abel, Enoch, etc.) before the flood ever keep a weekly Sabbath? Is there any evidence for Sabbath-keeping before the flood?

If some people like Abraham and those before him had kept the Sabbath, it would surely have been different from the way we today keep the Sabbath.

Abraham and those before him didn't have any books. No part of the Bible was written down before the time of Moses. So Abraham, etc. could not have done any Bible study on the Sabbath. And neither could Abraham and those before him have gone to any church services or Bible Studies on the Sabbath, or even to seek fellowship with other God-fearing people.

And Abraham certainly didn't go shopping all the time. So not buying and selling on the Sabbath Days didn't affect Abraham at all.

Now we know very well how we keep the Sabbath. We don't do our regular job. We (hopefully) spend some extra time in personal prayer and Bible study. We may take some extra time to relax and rest. And we don't seek any form of entertainment ... no TV and no sports, etc. **And where possible, we attend church services or Bible studies**

with other members of God's Church. And we don't go shopping on the Sabbath. And neither do we work in our garden or our garage. And we don't go to parties on the Sabbath. All these things are likely to make our lives to some degree different from the way our lives would be if we did not keep the Sabbath.

Yes, we know how we keep the Sabbath.

But the major things **we do** on the Sabbath (attend services and study the Bible) were not a part of Abraham's life. Spending time in personal prayer on the Sabbath is the one thing Abraham would have had in common with us today.

And most of the major things **we don't do** on the Sabbath (shopping, entertainment, working on personal hobbies, TV, going to social activities, watching or participating in sport, etc.) Abraham would also not have done, because they were not a part of Abraham's world. The one thing Abraham would have had in common with us today regarding the Sabbath is not doing his regular work, i.e. if Abraham had to work at all at that stage of his life (i.e. he was already 75 years old when he is first introduced to us, and he was 99 years old when God made a covenant with him in Genesis 17). And Abraham could certainly have given all of his 500+ servants time off from work on the Sabbath.

[Comment: Abraham had at least 318 able-bodied men who were his servants, or slaves in our terminology. They were "born in his own house" (see Genesis 14:14). And with that many strong healthy men as servants, there would also have been a similar number of women servants, as well as many children. So Abraham easily had over 500 servants.]

So Abraham's Sabbath Days, if he was keeping the Sabbath, would have looked somewhat different from the way most of us today observe the Sabbath. Most of the things we need to consciously avoid on the Sabbath were not even a part of Abraham's world. It is interesting to think about the different circumstances that Sabbath-keepers in the days of Abraham would have faced.

Anyway, now let's consider a basic question.

THE REAL PURPOSE FOR SABBATH-KEEPING

Why did God give the Sabbath commandment? What is the real point of Sabbath-keeping? **What is Sabbath-keeping in its most basic state?**

Note: here we are not asking about the establishment of the Sabbath. Here we are asking about **the purpose** for this specific commandment.

When we look at the 10 commandments, we see that **eight** commandments are **negative** statements; they tell us what we are **not** to do. **One** of the 10 commandments is a **positive** statement, telling us one thing that we **must do**. We must honor our parents. And the last remaining commandment is a combination of **positive and negative statements**, and that is the Sabbath commandment. This commandment tells us both, what we are to do and also what we are not to do. We are to keep the Sabbath holy, and we are not to work.

So why did God give us the Sabbath commandment? Was God concerned that we would get proper rest every seven days, and therefore we are not to work? Or was God concerned that we would have regular opportunities to fellowship with like-minded people? Is that what it's all about? Or is the purpose for this command to mark the commemoration of something God had done on the very first Sabbath?

Here is the point:

The Sabbath is not about resting! The Sabbath is about submission to God's rule!

This is extremely important to understand: the Sabbath is first and foremost, above everything else, about **unconditional submission to God's authority** over our lives. The Sabbath is about the Creator's right to tell us how to live, irrespective of whether God's instructions make sense to the carnal human mind or not.

The other nine commandments, including those about worshipping God, the carnal human mind can after a fashion reason out as making sense, and as being important for ensuring that human society doesn't descend into total chaos and anarchy. But the Sabbath commandment doesn't make sense to the carnal mind. The carnal mind cannot find a logical justification for the Sabbath commandment. If from a health perspective people need to have a day off work once every seven days, then why couldn't that day off always be a Tuesday or a Sunday or a Friday? Why does it always have to be Saturday?

The answer here is: it must always be Saturday because **God does not have to justify** the reasons for any and all instructions that God chooses to give us human beings! It goes back to the principle Paul stated to the Romans.

Nay but, O man, who are you that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed *it*, **Why have You made me thus?** (Romans 9:20)

The Sabbath commandment is about: do we freely accept God's authority over our lives or not? Whether or not we agree with the reasons for why God instituted the weekly Sabbath is initially immaterial.

The Sabbath really has nothing at all to do with expending energy. It is first and foremost not about resting. It is really about us being willing to submit our minds to God, and to do so eagerly, and to obey God willingly.

In other words, as Mr. Armstrong used to point out to us many years ago, the Sabbath is a **test commandment**. This commandment is primarily a test of our minds, how our minds will respond to our Creator.

The real and primary purpose for the Sabbath commandment is **to test how our minds work** and think and reason.

This is important to understand. Once we understand that the Sabbath commandment was instituted by God **primarily** as a way of testing the human mind, then this opens the door for further understanding.

In round numbers, God created the first man and woman around 6,000 years ago. Since the time of Adam and Eve God has always focused on testing how the human mind will work in different circumstances. And over these past 6,000 years God has used **different tests with different people**.

The Sabbath commandment is only one of many different tests that God has employed at different times to bring out into the open how our human minds will think and reason in a variety of circumstances.

For Adam and Eve, Sabbath-keeping was not one of their tests. Their test was whether or not they would "obey God's voice" (see Genesis 26:5 again). For Abraham the test was whether or not he would put obedience to God ahead of the very real threat to the life of his son Isaac. For Abraham Sabbath-keeping was also not really a testing issue.

For King David the issue was not whether David would restrict himself to having only one wife, or whether he would have a whole bunch of wives and concubines. **God tested David's mind on far different issues.** (But David was most certainly also tested on observing the weekly Sabbath, amongst many tests.)

By contrast, for us today polygamy is totally unacceptable before God. If today any man who is a part of our western culture wants to be a polygamist, he cannot become a part of God's Church, because his mind does not think and reason the way God requires us human beings to think and reason. Jesus Christ's statement "from the beginning it was not so" (see Matthew 19:8) clearly reveals God's intentions in the area of marriage.

Right, now let's look at what God did in Genesis.

GENESIS 2:2-3

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He **rested** on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had **rested** from all His work which God created and made. (Genesis 2:2-3)

The word "rested" in these two verses is a very significant mistranslation. The Hebrew verb "shabath", here twice translated as "rested", actually has nothing at all to do with resting. This verb really means **"to cease doing something", "to stop certain activities"**. But stopping certain activities is not at all the same as resting. "Resting" really implies "stopping all activities". But the Hebrew verb "shabath" does not refer to "stopping all activities".

This mistranslation of the Hebrew verb "shabath" is discussed at length in my 40-page 2001 article "FURTHER UNDERSTANDING ABOUT THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT". See that article for more information on the correct meaning of "shabath".

So Genesis 2:2 tells us the following things:

1) On the seventh day God **ended** His work which He had made". Did God end "all work"? No. This statement only tells us that God ended **the specific work God had done during the preceding six days**. This point is repeated in the next statement.

2) Did God then "rest" on the seventh day?

Genesis 2:2 does not say that God "rested". In this verse "rested" is a mistranslation. So when we look strictly at Genesis 2, then the answer to this question is "no".

However, **over 2,500 years later** we come to the time of Exodus 20. And in the command in Exodus 20 God used a different Hebrew word. Instead of using the verb "shabath" in the commandment, in Exodus 20 God used the Hebrew verb "nuwach", and this Hebrew verb really does mean "to rest".

In Exodus 20 we are told that God did "rest" on the first Sabbath. So the commandment in **Exodus 20 provides us with additional information**, information that had not been presented anywhere in the Book of Genesis. And based on Exodus 20 the answer to the above question is "yes".

But back in Genesis 2:2-3 the verb "rested" is a mistranslation. The correct translation of the second part of verse 2 says: "and God (i.e. "He") **ceased** (i.e. stopped) on the seventh day **from all His work which He had made**". This statement again identifies exactly what God stopped doing on the seventh day. God stopped doing the things He had been doing during the preceding six days.

3) Genesis 2:2 has in fact followed a very common Hebrew language practice, and that is the practice of **saying the same thing twice** with only minor changes in the wording. That was the most common form of emphasizing something. There are very many examples throughout the Old Testament of this practice of saying the same thing twice in succession with only very minor changes.

4) So the two statements in Genesis 2:2 are:

A) On the seventh day God **ended** His work which He had made.

B) And God **ceased** on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

These two statements are basically identical, except for the different verbs that are used. The verbs are different, but their meanings overlap like synonyms. And neither one of these two Hebrew verbs means "to rest".

5) The meaning of these two statements in verse 2 is then repeated one more time in verse 3. Correcting the mistranslation in verse 3, it reads:

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it **He had ceased** from all his work which God created and made. (Genesis 2:3)

So we are told a third time that God had ceased from all His work which God had created and made.

6) **Because** this seventh day identified that God had ended, ceased, stopped all the work He had created and made during the preceding six days, **therefore** God very intentionally and deliberately (i.e. expressed by the use of the piel stem with the next two Hebrew verbs) decided to do two things. These two things were not inevitable foregone conclusions. No, these two things were very deliberate and calculated actions on God's part. These two things were:

A) God **"blessed"** the seventh day. "Bless" means "to endue with power for success, prosperity and longevity".

B) God **"sanctified"** the seventh day. "Sanctify" means "to consecrate, dedicate, set apart as holy, set apart for a holy use".

When God "sanctified" the seventh day, it means that **at that point God created the weekly cycle**. And God set the seventh day apart from the other six days, to be used for a holy purpose. If God had not "sanctified" the seventh day, then the weekly cycle would not have come into existence. This is important to understand.

So here we have the answer to one of our original questions, i.e. regarding the establishment of the weekly Sabbath. **God "established" the Sabbath Day in Genesis.**

The weekly cycle did not exist before God actually sanctified the Sabbath Day. It was the sanctification of the Sabbath Day that brought the weekly cycle into existence in Genesis 2:3. And from that original Sabbath Day onwards the weekly cycle has always been in existence. It has thus far never been broken or interrupted, and so it is still in existence today.

[Comment: The monthly cycle is established by the moon's circuit around the earth, and the yearly cycle is established by the earth's circuit around the sun. These two cycles are established by physical actions, by the movements of physical bodies through space. By contrast, the weekly cycle is not based in physics. There is no physical reason or justification for the weekly cycle. It is an arbitrary cycle, established totally at God's discretion, without any reference to any astronomical cycles. This cycle was established when God sanctified the Sabbath, and not before then.]

As a point of interest, we might also note that the Sabbath was established **one day after** God had established that **a man should only have one wife**. That's what Jesus Christ's statement regarding "from the beginning it was not so" refers to (see Matthew 19:8 again), that God's original intention was for a man to have only one wife.

You might never have thought of it this way, but **marriage on the human level is actually one day older than the 7-day weekly cycle**, because God created marriage the day before God established the weekly cycle. As Jesus Christ said:

And He said unto them, **The Sabbath was made for man**, and not man for the Sabbath: (Mark 2:27)

God made man on Day 6, and then God made the Sabbath **for man** on Day 7. God first created the human beings who would be tested for the opportunity to become immortal members of God's Family, and then on the next day God created the Sabbath, which would become one major test, but by no means the only one, in the process of salvation for mankind. And before the creation of man the 7-day weekly cycle had never existed.

So let's note: God "established" that marriage is between one man and one woman, and that divorce and polygamy are wrong, one day before God "established" the weekly Sabbath. But while monogamy was "established" by God on Day 6 of the first year of human existence, God didn't give the command for monogamy until about 4,000 years later, when Jesus Christ during His ministry spelled out (regarding both divorce and polygamy) that "from the beginning it was not so" (see again Matthew 19:3-9).

Whether Abraham would have concubines (see Genesis 25:6), and whether Jacob and King David and others would have several wives was not something these servants of God were tested on. This is in spite of God's original intention always having been that **a man would only have one wife**, and that there would be no divorce (except for very specific circumstances laid out by Jesus Christ). And in this matter God's original intention was established one day before God established the weekly Sabbath.

Yet millennia later God went so far as to tell David: **"I gave ... your master's wives into your bosom ..."** (see 2 Samuel 12:8), i.e. for you to have sex with them. Clearly God at that time did not require David to restrict himself to having only one wife. In that age God simply tested King David's character and integrity in other ways.

So the matter of **God's original intentions** for marriage, and **God's command** that marriage must always be restricted to a man having only one wife, are separated by about 4,000 years. With marriage we have a precedent that God expressed His original intentions for one aspect of human conduct several millennia before God enacted those original intentions in the form of a command.

In Old Testament times polygamy was not something that God made an issue of with any of His servants. In fact, right within the Old Covenant God gave laws **to regulate polygamy**. For example:

If he take him another *wife*; her **food**, her **raiment**, and her **duty of marriage**, shall he not diminish. (Exodus 21:10)

So if a man married a second wife (i.e. polygamy), then he was responsible for providing a fair share of food, clothing and sex for both wives. Each wife was entitled to have sex with him just as often as the other wife, in addition to receiving food and clothing from him.

But this law in Exodus 21:10 was actually contrary to God's original intentions for marriage. Yet this law was not repealed until the time of Jesus Christ's ministry. Before Christ's ministry adultery (i.e. sex with another man's wife) was already a very serious sin, yes. But having two or three or more wives simultaneously was not condemned by God, as demonstrated by Scriptures like Exodus 21:10, 2 Samuel 12:8, etc.

So let's get back to talking about the Sabbath.

A CHANGE IN FOCUS

For over 2,500 years after the creation of Adam and Eve the only information about the weekly Sabbath (in addition to sanctifying and blessing it) was that God had **"stopped certain activities"** on that original Sabbath. For those 2,500+ years there was no hint of any kind that the Sabbath is to include "resting". Even at the time of Abraham God had not yet revealed anything about "resting" on the Sabbath.

We need to get the devious mistranslation for the Hebrew verb "shabath" out of our minds. "Shabath" **never** means "to rest"! It follows that **the noun "shabbath" likewise does not mean "rest day"**. The noun "shabbath" means "the day of stopping certain activities". That's all it literally means.

God chose the name "Sabbath" precisely because it means "Day of stopping certain activities". God could easily have chosen a name that means "day of rest".

For example, God **could have** formed the name for the seventh day from the Hebrew verb "nuwach". Hebrew already has the noun "manowach", which has been formed from the verb "nuwach"; and "manowach" refers to **"the state or condition of rest"**. Thus God could easily have formed another noun from "nuwach" to be the name for the seventh day, along the lines of "manowach"; and that would then unambiguously call the seventh day "the rest day". **But God didn't do that.**

God instead chose to call the seventh day "the day of stopping certain activities". And the activities we are to "stop doing" on the Sabbath are identified for us by God in Isaiah 58:13.

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, *from* doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor Him, **not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words:** (Isaiah 58:13)

Isaiah 58:13-14 expresses God's real intentions for the Sabbath Day. God spells out three specific areas of actions/activities that God wants us to avoid on the Sabbath. Those are the things that amount to "trampling the Sabbath under foot". Those three areas are:

1) We are not to do our own ways. That includes our job and all our daily work.

2) We are not to find our own pleasure. That includes all sport and all entertainment and recreation.

3) We are not to speak our own words. That includes not speaking about all the things covered by the previous two points. In other words, we are to control our minds, to try to not even think about any of the things we are not to do on the Sabbath, and certainly not to speak about them.

These three areas are what we are "to cease from" on the Sabbath. It is a day of not engaging our minds and our bodies in these three areas. And when we do that, then the Sabbath will also for us be "a day of cessation".

We should also note that in this context of defining activities for the Sabbath Day here in Isaiah 58, **God actually said nothing at all about "resting"**. God's whole focus in these two verses is on "stopping certain activities". This doesn't mean that the Sabbath isn't a good time to get some extra rest. It is simply that resting is only a secondary focus for the Sabbath Day, and it is not even mentioned here.

Now let's take a close look at the Sabbath commandment.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God: *in it* you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:8-11)

Let's note that this commandment spells out **two things**.

First it **tells us what we are to do** (work for six days) and **what we are not to do** (not work or have our employees work for us on the seventh day). That's verses 9-10.

Secondly, it **tells us what God did** (create, rest, bless and hallow). That's verse 11. The point is that verse 11 is not an instruction for us. Our instructions from God are recorded in verses 9-10. So in these verses of the fourth commandment there is no instruction that **we** are to rest. What God did is not an instruction for us. Our instructions are recorded in verses 9-10. Can you see that?

Okay, let's look a little later in this account of the Old Covenant, when God again mentioned the weekly Sabbath. That's the concise statement found in Exodus 23:12.

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall **rest** (shabath): that your ox and your ass may **rest** (nuwach), and the son of your handmaid, and the stranger, may **be refreshed** (naphash). (Exodus 23:12)

In this verse we again have the verb "**shabath**" **mistranslated**. The other two Hebrew verbs in this verse (i.e. nuwach and naphash) are translated correctly. But "shabath" is mistranslated. So let's correct this mistranslation. Here's what we now have:

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall **stop your regular work activities**: that your ox and your ass may **rest**, and the son of your handmaid, and the stranger, may **be refreshed**. (Exodus 23:12)

Again, in this verse **we are not the ones who are told to rest**. To rest and to be refreshed is presented as a consequence for those under our authority, a result of us stopping certain activities. **We are to stop doing something**, and the result will be that our animals get to rest, and our employees are refreshed. **We stop ... and they are rested and refreshed**.

That's an interesting focus, isn't it? It doesn't tell us to rest. No, it tells us to stop doing something so that others may be able to rest. We need to blot out of our minds the devious mistranslation of the Hebrew verb "shabath", even if every single Hebrew dictionary that you can lay your hands on asserts that "shabath" does mean "to rest". It doesn't. That is proved by how the verb "shabath" is used throughout the Old Testament.

And that is also true for the New Testament.

In 2009 I wrote a 23-page article entitled "What is 'the rest' of Hebrews Chapter 4?" That article examines the Greek word "katapauo", translated as "to rest" in Hebrews 4, and the article proves that "rest" is also a mistranslation of the Greek words used in the New Testament for what happened in Genesis 2:2-3. This Greek verb also means "to cease".

So to summarize what we have seen thus far:

- 1) God established the Sabbath Day in Genesis 2:2-3. That is when God established the 7-day weekly cycle. And that was the day after God had established that marriage was to be between one man and one woman.
- 2) At that point nothing was said about God "resting". All that was said is that God "ceased" doing certain things.
- 3) The commandment for human beings to keep the Sabbath was given over 2,500 years later, in Exodus 20. That commandment states things that God did on the original Sabbath, and it also states things that we human beings are to do, and things we are not to do.
- 4) The commandment presents the new information that God also "rested" on the original Sabbath. This is a new focus for the Sabbath ... that God "rested" on that first Sabbath Day. But this commandment does not directly instruct us to rest, meaning that this commandment does not contain any specific instruction that we are to rest. It only instructs us to make it possible for others to rest.
- 5) Exodus 23:12 is in agreement with this information about the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20.
- 6) We have also seen an interesting parallel to the Sabbath with the establishment of marriage. God's very clear intention that marriage was always to be between a man and only one wife was established the day before God created the weekly cycle. But this clear intention was never made into a binding law until Jesus Christ, the Lawgiver, established this law during His ministry. So during Old Testament times God did not prevent His servants from engaging in polygamy, even though polygamy will always have some bad consequences for one or more people.
- 7) What the establishment of marriage illustrates is: the fact that something new is "established" does not necessarily make that something new a law or a commandment. If at its establishment something new is to also be an immediate commandment, then that needs to be stated in a clear way. It needs to be made known that a commandment has been established. But that did not happen in Genesis 2.
- 8) The Hebrew word for "Sabbath" is never mentioned in the Book of Genesis. Genesis 2:2-3 only mentions "the seventh day", but without giving that seventh day a specific name. So none of God's servants mentioned in the Book of Genesis would have known that the seventh day has the name "Sabbath". The actual name "Sabbath" was not given to the seventh day until after Israel had left Egypt. It was in Exodus 16 that God first gave the seventh day the name "Sabbath".

So now let's examine the place **where the word for "Sabbath" is used for the very first time in the Old Testament.**

THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT IS INTRODUCED

Israel had left Egypt. They had walked through the Red Sea. They had already traveled for 30 days, and they still did not know anything about the weekly Sabbath Day. So four or five Sabbath Days had come and gone without any Israelites, including Moses, knowing anything about observing the weekly Sabbath. This brings us to the 15th Day of the Second Month (see Exodus 16:1), **a full month after they had left Egypt.**

During that first 30-day period after the exodus none of the Israelites kept the weekly Sabbath. None of them.

This is extremely significant for the following reason:

If the command to observe the weekly Sabbath was already in force before the Israelites left Egypt, then there is no way that God would not have brought the weekly Sabbath observance to their attention, before God would have led them out of Egypt!

This is absolutely vital!

God had very clearly instructed the Israelites to observe the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. And God had already given the Israelites two of the seven annual Holy Days ... the 1st and the 7th Days of Unleavened Bread (see Exodus 12:16). So the Israelites kept the Passover, and then they kept the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

And then they, including Moses, totally ignored the next four weekly Sabbath Days!

And God didn't say anything about the Sabbath to them. There was no reprimand or correction for the people for not keeping those Sabbath Days. Nothing!

This was not a case of God not saying anything to the Israelites about a law that already existed, but about which the Israelites didn't know anything. That's not it!

The only possible conclusion here is:

While God had "established" the Sabbath in Genesis 2:2-3, God had up to that point in time (i.e. up to 30 days after the exodus from Egypt) never yet given human beings "a command to observe" the weekly Sabbath, with very specific do's and don't's regarding how to observe this day.

Obedience to **laws that are already in force** always comes ahead of future obedience to laws that will be given in the future. And it is not a matter of God somehow "winking at their ignorance" of an existing commandment. That line of reasoning would imply that God felt that the already existing Sabbath commandment was not something God should make an issue of until well after the Passover and after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. But that line of reasoning is utter foolishness.

The only reason God didn't mention the weekly Sabbath commandment to the Israelites before they left Egypt was **because God had never yet given human beings the commandment to observe the weekly Sabbath.**

So here is something we haven't fully understood before. As far as God's commanded observances are concerned:

1) **The very first law** God gave Israel in this regard was the command to observe **the Passover**. That was in Exodus 12. God's revised plan starts with the Passover.

2) **The second law** God gave Israel was the command to observe the 7-day **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. It must follow immediately on the heels of the Passover. That was also in Exodus 12.

Everything that follows is built on the foundation of these first two laws.

In plain language: people have to be repentant (Passover) and be willing to obey God (Feast of Unleavened Bread) **before** God gives them the Sabbath and all the other Feasts and Holy Days.

3) **The third law** God gave Israel was the **weekly Sabbath command**. That was in Exodus 16, which we will examine shortly. Like the previous two commands, this command had also never existed before. That is, the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread had never existed before Exodus 12, and the Sabbath had never existed as a commandment before the time of Exodus 16.

4) On the foundation of these three commands God **then** gave Israel **the Ten Commandments**. God then embedded the Sabbath Commandment right within the body of the Ten Commandments. That was in Exodus 20.

(Comment: We are here considering the Ten Commandments from the perspective of **commanded observances**. We're not looking at the laws that regulate all our daily conduct and behavior, like not killing, stealing, etc., which laws certainly existed before this time.)

5) **After that** God then told Israel about the Jubilee Year, the weekly Sabbath once again, and **the three annual Feasts**. That was in Exodus 23:10-17.

6) When Moses had to cut out two new tables of stone, because he had broken the original two tables, God then repeated the instructions for the three annual Feasts and the weekly Sabbath. That was in Exodus 34:18-23.

(Comment: This repetition in Exodus 34 is only presented because Moses had broken the original tables of stone. **If Moses had not broken those original tables**, then God very likely would not have repeated this information in Exodus 34. Moses is the reason for why this information was repeated.)

As an aside, you might notice that Exodus 34 mentions first the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That's in verse 18. Then it mentions the weekly Sabbath. That's in verse 21. And then it mentions the other two Feasts ... Pentecost and Tabernacles. That's in verse 22. Verse 23 then is a summary statement for all three annual Feasts.

But the sequence in Exodus 34 is: 1st = Feast of Unleavened Bread; 2nd = weekly Sabbath; 3rd = the remaining two Feasts. That sequence may seem a bit unusual, but it is **the exact same sequence** in which God had revealed these observances earlier in this Book of Exodus. This repetition was due to Moses having broken the original tables.

7) **After that** God then told Israel about **the Day of Atonement**. That is the account about the Azazel goat in Leviticus 16. See Leviticus 16:29 for the date for Atonement.

At that point the only observances that were **still missing** were two of the seven annual Holy Days. Those two missing Holy Days were the **Day of Trumpets** and the **Last Great Day**.

8) So these two missing Holy Days were then presented to Israel in Leviticus 23, in their proper time context within the whole body of all the commanded observances. And with the revelation of the dates for Trumpets and for the Last Great Day **the picture** for all of God's commanded observances **is complete**.

Now none of these observances (i.e. the Passover, the weekly Sabbath, the three annual Feasts, and the seven annual Holy Days) had ever been given by God to any people to observe. **All of them were new instructions from God.**

Right, so now let's take a look at Exodus 16.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT

A full month had passed since Israel had left Egypt on the 15th Day of the 1st Month. Whatever food supplies they had brought with them out of Egypt had been used up. So the people griped against Moses and Aaron, and they referred to **the abundance of meat and bread** that had been freely available to them when they were in Egypt. See Exodus 16:3.

At that point God intervened, and God then gave the people manna. Notice what God said in the next verse.

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. (Exodus 16:4)

The purpose God stated for giving the people manna was to test the people. Notice that God was going to use manna to test whether or not the people would obey God's law. Which law? Well, the next few verses will explain.

And it shall come to pass, that **on the sixth day** they shall prepare *that* which they bring in; and it shall be **twice as much** as they gather daily. (Exodus 16:5)

What was God doing?

God was going to reveal the Sabbath to Israel. And God was going to attach a command, a law, to the Sabbath Day. It was the law attached to the Sabbath Day with which God was going to "prove them".

Right here in Exodus 16 God tells us **the primary purpose** for the command, which command God was about to attach to the Sabbath Day, was **to act as a test** as to whether people would obey God's laws or not.

It is God Himself who tells us quite clearly that His purpose for enacting the Sabbath Commandment was to test the obedience of the people of Israel. Never mind resting and being refreshed, the main thing this commandment is intended to reveal is whether or not the people of Israel would obey God. And throughout the Old Testament God used the Sabbath as a test of obedience.

Now in response to the people's complaining attitude God gave them quails in the evening (i.e. meat to eat) and manna in the morning (i.e. bread to eat). Moses then told the people to gather manna "every man according to his eating" (Exodus 16:16). The result was that "he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack" (see Exodus 16:18). They could gather as much as they thought that they might want to eat for the rest of the day.

And in accordance with God's instructions in verse 5, on the sixth day they gathered a double portion, to last them for two days. Then on the morning of the seventh day the manna had not gone bad; it was still good for eating for the whole of the seventh day.

It was at that point that God through Moses revealed to the people that God had given the name "Sabbath" to the seventh day!

And Moses said, Eat that today; for **today is a Sabbath** unto the LORD: today you shall not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on **the seventh day, which is the Sabbath**, in it there shall be none. (Exodus 16:25-26)

The name "Sabbath" means "**Day of Cessation**", or "Day of stopping certain activities". So Moses told the people "... today is a Day of Cessation unto the Eternal"; and then Moses spelled out that "the seventh day is the Day of Cessation".

This name "Sabbath" told the people that they were to "cease doing certain things on this seventh day". The activity the people were to "cease" from doing in their specific circumstances at that point in time was going out and gathering manna.

Some people went out looking for manna anyway, and didn't find any (verse 27). In response to that God asked Moses:

And the LORD said unto Moses, **How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?** (Exodus 16:28)

The expression "My laws" here basically means "**My instructions**", rather than referring to a fixed set of codified laws. God had given the instruction for the people to not go out and look for manna. So when some people did go out, then they did not obey the instruction that had just been given.

That "instruction" was in fact "a commandment", which God would shortly present to the people in a codified form, as a part of the Ten Commandments. So with the expression "**My commandments and My laws**" God was referring specifically to **the instructions God had just given** regarding the Sabbath, which instructions God would shortly thereafter (i.e. in Exodus 20) elevate to the status of being the Fourth Commandment.

So then Moses explained the Sabbath to the people.

See, for that the LORD has given you the Day of Cessation (i.e. Sabbath), therefore He gives you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide you every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. **So the people ceased** (Hebrew "shabath") on the seventh day. (Exodus 16:29-30)

"So the people ceased ..." means that on the seventh day "**the people didn't go out and look for manna**". Whether or not the people also "rested" on the Sabbath is not addressed. There is no focus on "resting" in this context. The focus is on "stop looking for manna on the seventh day". But "stop looking for manna" is not the same as "resting". And "shabath" does not mean "to rest".

"Let no man go out of his place on the seventh day" is not an instruction to stay in their tents for the whole 24 hours. They might very well all want to go out and look for an "ADR" (i.e. A Desert Restroom) on the Sabbath. This instruction in verse 29 meant "don't go out to look for manna". It is **the reason for going out** of their tents that is the focus of this specific instruction.

So here in Exodus 16 the Sabbath Commandment is instituted. And then in Exodus 20 this command becomes the 4th of the 10 Commandments.

At this point we might consider **how spontaneously God confronted the Sabbath-breaking** of the people in Exodus 16:27-28. Yet God said nothing about the, at least, four Sabbath Days since the Israelites had left Egypt, as well as about the several more Sabbath Days in Egypt while the ten plagues were being poured out, when the Israelites had not kept any of those Sabbath Days.

God said nothing for those 4+ Sabbath Days before Exodus 16, because at that time God had not yet elevated the Sabbath Day to the level of a commanded observance, to be observed by all people. **Before Exodus 16 God had simply never given a command to any people to keep the Sabbath holy by not working.**

That should not strike us as strange or as unusual. God did not give the totality of His laws and commandments all at the same time. Some laws God gave earlier, and some laws God gave later. God has given all of His laws through **exactly two "law-givers"**.

In the Old Testament God gave all His laws through the man Moses. After the time of Moses God did not give any additional laws for the rest of the Old Testament period. This is important to understand.

It was Moses himself who pointed out that in time there would be another "Law-giver", meaning Jesus Christ. As Moses said:

The LORD your God will raise up unto you a Prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, **like unto me**; unto Him you shall hearken; (Deuteronomy 18:15)

With "like unto me" Moses was referring to the function that Moses had fulfilled. That was the function of giving Israel the laws of God. And that is the function Jesus Christ then fulfilled during His ministry.

It was in His capacity as a Law-giver that Jesus Christ said:

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. (Matthew 5:17)

Far from doing away with the law, Jesus Christ clarified and amplified the law of God. He did so by focusing on the actual intentions underlying all of God's laws. We sometimes refer to that as focusing on "the spirit of the law".

Christ also gave some new laws, like baptism and the changed format for observing the Passover. The primary passage **where Jesus Christ demonstrated His function as the second Law-giver is in Matthew chapters 5-7. A common format in that section is: "you have heard that it has been said ... but I say unto you ..."**. That was Jesus Christ, the Law-giver speaking, expanding or refining previously given laws and instructions.

So we have answered both of our original questions.

1) God "established" the Sabbath back in Genesis 2, but without commanding any specific restrictions for activities on the Sabbath. God simply didn't tell any human beings anything about "the Sabbath", and God gave no instructions for how to observe the Sabbath. And so the word "Sabbath" is never mentioned in Genesis.

The reason for "establishing" the Sabbath at that time was to create the 7-day weekly cycle. Without God "sanctifying" the seventh day, the weekly cycle would not have come into existence.

2) God then **much later**, in Exodus 16, **commanded the "observance" of the Sabbath**, by instructing us human beings "to cease" from certain activities on the Sabbath. And then in the commandment in Exodus 20 God finally revealed to man that God had already "blessed and hallowed" the Sabbath on the day after God had created Adam and Eve.

ANOTHER LOOK AT GENESIS 26:5

This understanding then raises a question about Abraham. If Sabbath observance had not yet been commanded in the days of Abraham, what does Genesis 26:5 actually mean? Let's look at this verse once more.

Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws. (Genesis 26:5)

This tells us that Abraham obeyed all of God's laws and instructions **that Abraham was aware of**. But obviously, Abraham did not observe any laws of God that were only brought into existence long after Abraham had died.

Abraham was completely faithful to God. Abraham obeyed God in everything that he was aware of.

But Abraham also had concubines, plural, and these concubines had children by Abraham (see Genesis 25:6 again). Yet from the beginning it was never God's intention that any man would have "concubines". At Abraham's time God had clearly established that adultery was a very serious sin, yes. But having concubines and having more than one wife was something God had never addressed in any of His dealings with human beings. So when Abraham had sex with a concubine, **he did so with a clear conscience** before God. Abraham simply didn't understand that a man should never have sex with any woman other than his own one wife.

While Abraham faithfully obeyed all of God's laws and instructions in force at his time, that didn't mean that God somehow could not give **more commandments and more laws and more statutes** after Abraham had died.

For example: while we can draw valid comparisons between God instructing Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, and the Passover representing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins, **Abraham obviously did not observe the Passover every year**. And likewise, Abraham did not observe the Days of Unleavened Bread every year. God had simply not yet given these laws and statutes while Abraham was still alive. Nobody ever observed a Passover before the night in which the death angel "passed over" the houses of the Israelites in Egypt.

Regarding tithing: there is no indication that Abraham ever tithed on his own personal income every year. **The only thing that Abraham ever tithed on was the loot** which Chedorlaomer and his allies had stolen from Sodom, and which loot Abraham then retrieved when Abraham defeated Chedorlaomer. In other words, Abraham tithed on **the spoils of war** ... see Genesis 14:20. But that's not the same as tithing on his own increase of wealth every year.

The point is: God did not give any tithing laws until the time of Moses. So Abraham could not possibly have obeyed laws that had not yet been established. Abraham's action of tithing on the spoils of war was not based on any law of God! **It was a freewill offering** from Abraham, one that Abraham probably felt obligated to give to God, because God had given Abraham such a resounding victory over the kings who had attacked Sodom.

Also, Abraham did not keep the Feast of Tabernacles every year, because during Abraham's lifetime God had not yet established this Feast. Never once in his life did Abraham ever go to "a feast site".

And the same is true for the observance of the weekly Sabbath Day. God never commanded the observance of the Sabbath until Exodus 16. **It is not right for us to assume** that God had supposedly given the Sabbath commandment to Adam or to Abel back in Genesis. Genesis simply does not state a command to observe the Sabbath, by human beings ceasing from certain activities. Something like that was never revealed to any human being in Genesis. And Abraham never in his life kept the Sabbath.

In Genesis 22:5 God told Isaac that his father Abraham had obeyed God in every way. Abraham's unconditional obedience was demonstrated in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. That act of obedience showed God that **Abraham would do whatever God might choose to tell Abraham to do**. Abraham's obedience was unconditional. And if God had chosen to reveal more laws and more commandments to Abraham, then Abraham would also have obeyed those without question. That's what God had come to see, when God said to Abraham: "... **now I know** that you fear God ..." (see Genesis 22:12).

That is also what Genesis 26:5 says ... it says "**I have come to know ... that Abraham would have kept any and every law and instruction I might ever have given him**".

Genesis 26:5 is a statement about Abraham's character and integrity. It is not a statement about exactly how many commandments and laws and statutes of God were actually in existence and in force at that point in time.

And it is not a statement that prevented God from establishing more laws and more commandments after the time of Abraham. It is simply a statement about Abraham's impeccable character before God. And it is a statement about God's trust in Abraham's character.

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