

# Adventures in Bible Study

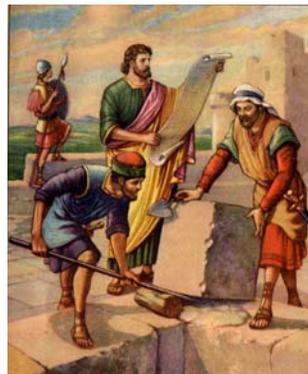
## Nehemiah's Challenge



Nehemiah lived in the capital city of Shuham in the Persian empire. He was the king's cupbearer. His office was a very high position in the kingdoms of those days for he served and protected the king (**Nehemiah 1:1 & 2:1**). Nehemiah held this position shortly after the end of the 70 year captivity of Israel in Babylon predicted by Jeremiah the prophet for the failure of Israel to obey the commandments of God (**Jeremiah 25:11**).

Some of Nehemiah's relatives who had already returned to Israel reported to him that the city of Jerusalem was in ruins, and in particular the walls were broken down (**Nehemiah 1:3-4**). It seems that God was moving upon Nehemiah to have particular interest in the walls that surrounded Jerusalem.

Nehemiah was a man of prayer so he took the matter directly to God. Shortly after that the Lord moved on the king of Persia, Artaxerxes to send Nehemiah back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls at the expense of the Persian empire. After arriving back in Jerusalem Nehemiah toured the city to discover what the damage was, and what his plan would be. Soon after Nehemiah and the people of Israel began to build the walls (**Nehemiah 2**).



But rebuilding the walls wasn't the only challenge Nehemiah faced. The people of Israel had grown apart from God over the years and were not following the counsel of God to avoid close associations with the idol worshippers around them, and they were not keeping the Sabbath holy (**Nehemiah 13**). Perhaps the greatest challenge of all was rebuilding the faith of the people to believe and obey the word of God.

In the heart of God's ten commandments we find a command of Jesus that is for our best good, and which, if followed, will bring a great deal of rest into our lives.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." **Exodus 20:8-11**. Jesus set aside a day—the seventh day of each week—and commands us to set it aside as well. He wants us to take at least one day out of seven to rest and remember our Creator. This is why Jesus said: "The Sabbath was made for man." **Mark 2:27**.

In **Genesis 1:1** the Bible says the earth was without form and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Then on the first day God spoke and said, "Let there be light." and there was light. On the second, third, and fourth days God gathered the seas into one place and let the dry land appear. He called the flowers, grasses, and trees into existence, and filled the earth with an abundance of food. He placed the sun, moon and stars in their places. On the fifth day God created the birds to fly through the skies. He also made the fish on the fifth day, and caused them to fill the waters of the seas with life. On the sixth day God created the animals of all descriptions. He also created Adam and Eve, our first parents, on the sixth day, and placed them in the Garden of Eden. "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."

**Genesis 2:1-3.**



To bless something means to add something to it. The Sabbath was blessed because God's presence was there—He was in it. Only He alone can bless a day in that way. Man cannot set aside a day and pronounce it holy, or make it blessed. To sanctify something means to make it holy, sacred, or special. God said, therefore, that the Sabbath was holy, which means man should not tamper

with it. It is special to Him, and it should be to us too. Just as the anniversary of a wedding is inseparably linked to the man and woman who share that day, and the event that made that day special. Likewise, the Sabbath was meant to ever keep fresh in man's mind the importance of creation and the Creator who loves us (Exodus 31:17).

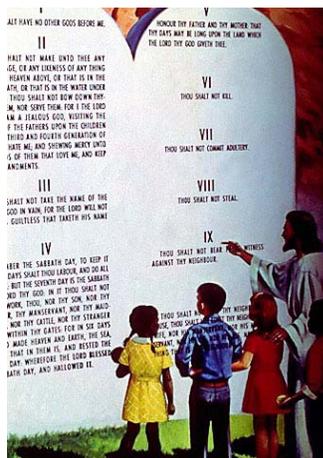
Many people thought the Sabbath was only a Jewish day, and applicable only to them. However, we have just seen, God gave the Sabbath at creation to Adam and Eve who were the first parents of all mankind. God gave the Sabbath to the world, not just to Jews. Even in the commandment itself, God had said that the stranger, or alien from some other nation was to keep the Sabbath as well.

Others have thought that the Sabbath was not given until Mt. Sinai and that it was part of the ceremonial laws. However, the Sabbath was given at creation, and the Jews were reminded to keep the Sabbath before they ever reached Mt. Sinai (Exodus 16:28). Later, when Moses was called up to the top of Mt. Sinai God met with Moses and gave him two tables of stone, on which God had written with His own finger the ten commandments. It is the only part of the Bible that God wrote with His own hand (Exodus 31:18). The fourth commandment is the one that deals specifically with the Sabbath. God refers to it as His day (Exodus 20:8-11).

The Sabbath was given from God as a present to the earth He had just made. It was to be a special time of rest, and enjoyment of fellowship with God (Exodus 31:13). If man had always kept the Sabbath there would always have been a constant reminder of God, the Creator, and mankind would have had one day out of seven each week to recuperate both mind and body.

Other people think that Jesus did away with the laws of God when He came to earth and ministered to men and women. The Bible makes that clear as well. "Do not

think that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17. Jesus said we would abide in His love if we kept the commandments (John 15:10). Jesus kept the commandments of God, including the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Jesus, as Creator (Colossians 1:15-17), was the Author of the ten commandments, and He kept them Himself, including the Sabbath. Now He invites us to do the same. "If you love me, keep my commandments."



Some have thought that Jesus did away with the Sabbath when He died on the cross. However, there is no question Jesus wanted His followers to keep the Sabbath even after He died. As Jesus looked down through the years of

time in prophecy He warned His disciples of a time when Jerusalem would be surrounded by armies and destroyed. Concerning that time He warned: "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath." Matthew 24:20. Jerusalem was surrounded by the Roman armies and destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70. Why would Jesus encourage His disciples to pray that their flight be not on the Sabbath if at that time they wouldn't be keeping it?

We can also learn from the example of the apostles. They weren't aware of any change in God's requirement to keep His Sabbath. Concerning the apostle Paul we read: "They. . . went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down." Acts 13:14. Even the non-Jewish converts, or Gentiles, were keeping the Sabbath (Acts 13:42-44). Paul speaks of going out on the Sabbath to speak to a group of women who had met there to pray (Acts 16:13). John certainly thought the commandments of God were important to keep. He saw in vision that at the end of time the people of God would be keeping the ten commandments of God. (Revelation 14:12).

Still other people wonder if it is possible to know for sure which day is the Sabbath. They wonder if the calendar has changed, or the order of the days of the week. There really is no question in the minds of most Christians when Jesus was crucified. That's Good Friday. There is also no question in the minds of Christians what day Jesus was resurrected on. That's Easter Sunday. If Jesus was crucified on Friday, and if He was resurrected on Sunday, then there should be no doubt about the day that comes between. That could only be Saturday (Luke 23:54-24:2). According to the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington D.C., there has been no change in the continuity of the weekly cycle.<sup>1</sup> From the time of creation to the present day there has been no change in the order of the days of the week. We can be certain that the seventh-day of the ten commandments is the same in our day.

Someone else may say, "But, doesn't the New Testament speak somewhere of the 'Lord's day'?" It certainly does in Revelation 1:10, but it doesn't identify what day of the week that is. Biblically speaking Saturday would have to be the Lord's day for Jesus said, "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath." Matthew 12:8. The Sabbath is the Lord's day.

The Sabbath was restored to the Israelites before they reached Mt. Sinai. The Sabbath was kept by Christ and the apostles, and it was also kept by the early Christian church. The Bible even says the Sabbath will be kept by God's people in the new earth (Isaiah 66:22-23). The Sabbath will give you a day of rest for your body and mind, and it will also bring you closer to Jesus as you worship Him.

<sup>1</sup> <http://aa.usno.navy.mil/data/docs/JulianDate.html>