



October 22, 2021

Times of Assembly

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God, from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you all doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

This year on the Friday evening during the Feast of Tabernacles in Orange Beach, Alabama in the Friday Evening Bible Study we discussed "*God's Purpose for the Sabbath*". The discussion after and through the rest of the Feast was encouraging.

When we examine the Scriptures, there are clear and frequent instructions for the people of God to observe the seventh day Sabbath and to cease from doing one's normal labor on that day. (See Exodus 16:22-28; Exodus 20:8-11; Exodus 31:13-17; Isaiah 56:1-8; Isaiah 58:13-15 for just a few references.)

Let's look at the account in Exodus 16 where God revealed the weekly Sabbath through the giving of the manna.

Then he said to them, "*This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.'*" (Exodus 16:23) "*Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none.*" (v.23) "*See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.*" (v.29)

Is God saying, "We should stay in your home and rest on the Sabbath day and we are to not leave our dwelling place?" Is the Sabbath intended only as a day to cease from work and labor and simply rest and get extra sleep?

Let's notice the wording of the fourth commandment.

"*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Vs 9 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 . . .* (Exodus 20:8-10)

Notice the following instructions that describe keeping the Sabbath as a covenant celebration. Certainly ceasing from work is strongly emphasized and mandated.

"Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 'You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 'Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. (Exodus 31:13-15)

Further instruction reveals that the weekly Sabbath and the annual holy days are also described as *times of the assembly* of God's people when they are to leave their dwellings and assemble before God.

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. . . (Leviticus 23:2-3)

The Hebrew word translated "convocations" is *'miqra'* and the Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon defines the meaning as: "convocation, convoking, reading, a calling together, sacred assembly." These convocations on the Sabbath are a time for God's people to come before Him and worship Him in word, song and prayer and hear the Scriptures read to them. As I have so often mentioned, the first Feast (or appointed time) on the list is the *seventh day Sabbath*.

Notice the words of the following Sabbath Psalm.

<A Psalm. A Song for the Sabbath day.> It is good to give thanks to the LORD, And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, And Your faithfulness every night, On an instrument of ten strings, On the lute, And on the harp, With harmonious sound. (Psalm 92:1-3)

Other Psalms refer to coming before God with expressing thanksgiving and gladness and with singing! (Psalm 95:2; Psalm 100:2) One of the logical times to come before God would be on the Sabbath convocation.

There are several prophecies that link observing the Sabbath with the worship of God. We understand them to convey both the present and future intent for celebrating the Sabbath. Notice the specific mention of "to worship before me" on the Sabbath.

"And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me," says the LORD. (Isaiah 66:23)

Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the entrance to this gateway before the LORD on the Sabbaths and the New Moons. (Ezekiel 46:3) (We'll examine the subject of the New

Moon assemblies another time).

So, a good question to ask would be, what is the New Testament record regarding assembling to worship God on the Sabbath day?

There are numerous references to what Jesus practiced and what the Jewish community practiced regarding Sabbath observance. Jesus assembled with others at the synagogue and participated in reading and expounding the Scriptures on the Sabbath. Here's a well-known and significant one.

Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. (Luke 4:14-16)

Obviously Jesus was assembling with others at the synagogue at a Sabbath service. There are many other similar statements. (Mark 1:14, 16, 20-22; Mark 6:1-2; Luke 4:31; Luke 6:5-6; Luke 13:10)

Let's take a moment and examine the practice of the apostle Paul (and others in his company).

Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures. (Acts 17:2)

The same practice is recorded in Acts 13:14-15, 42 and Acts 18:4. It is clear that observing the Sabbath included assembling together to hear the Scripture read and expounded.

To most of us, this discussion is not new to us. But, in a world ever so rapidly ignoring God and His instruction, there's plenty to read and digest in God's Holy Word about His Sabbath...we'll look at more in the weeks ahead.

Arms up friends! Our prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Please do pray for us as well.

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