

What is the origin of the Sabbath, and why was it observed only by the nation of Israel?

The first mention of the Sabbath by that name is in Exodus 16:23, although we read in Genesis 2:2,3 that because God finished the ordering of the earth for man in six days, He rested on the seventh, and hallowed that day. There is no instruction to observe it, and I do not know of any reference in the Bible which indicates that it was observed, until the incident recorded in Exodus 16. There in connection with the giving of the manna, Moses instructed Israel to observe the day (v 23). He said, in verse 29"... the Lord has given you the Sabbath." This seems to indicate that the Sabbath had not been observed prior to that.

In Exodus 20 this observance was incorporated in the Ten Commandments. Later Nehemiah, in recounting God's goodness in calling Israel to be His people, said in a prayer of confession to the Lord, " You came down also on Mount Sinai,..and made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, by the hand of Moses" (Nehemiah 9:13, 14).

While Moses was on Mount Sinai God said to Moses, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is sign between Me and you throughout your generations, ... to keep as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever" (Exodus 31:13, 16, 17) These words are self-explanatory, and they show that the keeping of the Sabbath was one of several marks given the children of Israel to show they were the covenant people of God.

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