

THIS MIGHTY HOUR

THE SEAL OF GOD

It is imperative, then, that one should understand what is meant by the seal of God. Those who desire to belong to His people, to witness for righteousness and champion His cause in the earth, will want to carry His ensign and wear His badge.

Now we have already found that God's remnant His people of the last days will always be recognizable by the fact that they "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." In other words, they have whole-hearted faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and, in consequence, keep all the commandments of God. This being so it would be reasonable to suppose that their distinguishing characteristic which, more than anything else, sets them forth as God's champions, is likely to be found connected with one or other of these indispensable qualifications.

The Apostle John himself gives us a most helpful suggestion. Describing those who are sealed when at last they appear before the Lamb of God, he says: "I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads." [Revelation 14:1]

Evidently the seal and "His Father's name" are synonymous, for both are found "in their foreheads." But in what practical way could God's people demonstrate that "Jehovah" is written there? Truly, they must have His name constantly in their minds and champion it against all the forces of evil; but surely such solemn words mean even more than that.

Can it be that there is some connection between the general description of the people as keeping "the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" and the statement describing their special characteristic as "His Father's name"?

For a moment think through the commandments and all that they embrace. The first. The second. The third. The fourth. What does this say again? "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall thou labor, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy 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]

IMPORTANCE OF THE SABBATH

Here is a commandment definitely affecting the name and the honor of God. It provides for the observance of a weekly Sabbath as an everlasting memorial of His creative power. Those who keep it proclaim to the world by their action that they believe in the living God who made heaven and earth. Their presence on earth is tangible evidence of God's existence in heaven. They say, in effect, every week that passes, "We are Jehovah's champions, we honor His name, we trust in His power, we will, by His grace,

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keep His commandments.”

Those who observe the seventh-day Sabbath under deep conviction that it is the will of God, have thus, in a special and very practical way, the Father’s name in their foreheads. For they cannot attempt to keep this one commandment without bringing their lives, by His help, into harmony with the other nine. There is something very public about the fourth. It is the one command that cannot be kept in secret. Those who stop their work at sunset on the sixth day of the week, and rest until sunset on the seventh day, become conspicuous, especially in a community that cares little for the things of God. And this very publicity demands consistency. True observance of the Sabbath and dishonesty in business, for instance, are incongruous. The best Sabbath-keepers must always be the best citizens.

People of the world may taunt Sabbath-keepers with being cranks and kill-joys, but they are usually willing to admit the godliness of their lives. They cannot help but see the signs of their heavenly allegiance, although resenting the constant rebuke that it brings against themselves. As a worldly business-woman said not long ago: “These strict Sabbath-keepers may be peculiar, but I prefer to do business with them because they always pay their bills!” The seal of God is not stamped in vain.

A PERPETUAL MEMORIAL

The suggestion that the distinguishing mark of God’s own people is the observance of the Sabbath is by no means new. Moses was commanded by the Lord to give this message to Israel: “Verily 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 that does sanctify you.” [Exodus 31:13]

Speaking also as God’s mouthpiece, the prophet Ezekiel—who described the marking of the remnant in Jerusalem—brought a similar message to the people of his day: “Thus said the Lord God. In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up Mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known unto them in the land of Egypt. I gave them My statutes, and showed them My judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.” [Ezekiel 20:5-12]

Later in this same chapter we read God’s express commandment concerning this matter: “Hallow My Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.” [Ezekiel 20:20]

Undoubtedly this command had a special application to the Jews so long as they occupied their honored position as God’s chosen people. But the observance of the weekly Sabbath is not Jewish. It was a sign of allegiance to God long before the first Jew was born. It dates back to creation, of which, as the fourth commandment states, it is the perpetual memorial.

One of the first acts of God in Eden was to inaugurate the Sabbath institution, which shares with marriage the honor of His primeval blessing. We read in the second chapter of Genesis: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 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 2:1-3]

THE SIGN PRESERVED

The knowledge of the Sabbath was kept alive by God’s champions through all the early years of the world’s history and, in the heart of Noah and his family, survived the Flood. That Abraham also was a Sabbath keeper there can be no doubt, for God says of him: “Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.” [Genesis 26:5]

Thus from generation to generation the tradition was handed down and the memorial preserved. Those who chose to walk in God’s ways courageously donned this emblem of their loyalty to Him. When Moses went into Egypt to deliver the people from bondage he sought to procure for them the privilege of Sabbath observance. One of the charges leveled against him by Pharaoh was that he made the people “rest [Hebrew “Sabbatize”] from their burdens.” And when at last they reached the wilderness, before the law was given from Sinai, he said to them: “Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord. Six days you shall gather it [the manna]; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none.” [Exodus 16:23-26]

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Clearly the Sabbath is not Jewish. It is an institution that belongs to all time and all people, an everlasting token of loyalty to God. Jesus Himself observed it, though He sought, by precept and example, to lift it out of the formalism into which it had been dragged by the Jews of His day and to restore to it all the beautiful meaning intended originally by its Maker. The apostles themselves kept the same day and, despite the subsequent wholesale apostasy of the church, there have been found, in every succeeding century, noble men and women who have kept the banner flying despite all attempts of the enemy to tear it from their hands. Today, when God's Word is doubted and His power to create so generally denied, the observance of the Sabbath is of special significance as marking those who champion His cause in the earth. That there is some deep spiritual value in God's sight in the keeping of the Sabbath is made evident by the fact that it is to be carried over from this world into His eternal kingdom. Isaiah, describing that time, says: "From one Sabbath to another ... shall all flesh come to worship before Me, said the Lord." [Isaiah 66:23]

A COUNTERFEIT TOKEN

Thus though God's people may never have possessed a flag of their own like other nations, they have carried an emblem of loyalty of far more durable quality. Moreover, scattered as they have ever been in all countries, a material flag would have been a constant menace, calculated* to give to the world an entirely erroneous impression of their spiritual mission. It would have been easily destroyed by God's enemies, and its use for ever prohibited; but nothing could utterly efface the priceless spiritual token provided by the unbroken observance of the weekly Sabbath. If the knowledge of it should be stamped out in one quarter by bitter persecution, there would always be someone somewhere to keep alive the remembrance of it until better times should come.

The only way such an emblem might be lost would be by the introduction of a counterfeit so similar in every respect that even those most anxious to do the will of God might be deceived. Provided that the outward appearance should bear a sufficiently close resemblance to the original, so many might be persuaded to accept it that ultimately the vital meaning of the true emblem would be lost.

And that is exactly what happened. After the passing of the apostles and the decline of the early church from its pristine purity, its lowered standards not only made the apparent conversion of the heathen easier, but also permitted the infiltration of many pagan customs and ideas. Among these was the use of the first day of the week, which had long been associated with the worship of the sun, for services in memory of the "Sun of righteousness." The transition from the seventh day to the first was for a long time hardly noticeable, but before many centuries had passed, what with the edicts of emperors and the blessing of misguided bishops, the first day had almost completely supplanted the true Sabbath.

NO AUTHORITY FOR CHANGE

It is not possible in our limited space to follow the fortunes of the two respective days through all the nineteen hundred years of the Christian era. Those who are specially interested will find much of great value in "The History of the Sabbath," by J. N. Andrews and J. R. Conradi.' The outstanding fact for us to notice here is that, though the true emblem was displaced, it was not destroyed. Certainly God did not change it because His arch-enemy had created a counterfeit. The confusion of the issue did not alter the facts. The true Sabbath still stands as the sign or seal of God's own people. No divine command has ever been given for its abrogation, nor does any Biblical evidence exist to authorize the change to which the greater part of the Christian church has consented.

This does not mean to say that all who have ever observed the first day as the Sabbath were thereby excluded from the ranks of God's people. Far from it. Some of the godly saints of history have followed this course. They knew no better. In all good conscience they lived in the full light that had been revealed to them and would have gladly accepted God's true emblem had they known of it. We may rest assured that a God of infinite mercy will accept the motive that inspired their lives of consecrated service.

But though, as the Apostle Paul said when addressing the Athenians on Mars' hill, "the times of this ignorance God winked at," He "now commands all men everywhere to repent: because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world." [Acts 17:30,31] Ignorance ceases to be an excuse when knowledge has displaced it.

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TRUE SABBATH-KEEPING

Those who today perceive God's will in this matter should not hesitate to carry it out. Indeed, it is the only course open to those who would be His chosen champions in this crisis hour. To realize the importance of some divine requirement and yet refuse to obey it would be to mark oneself as belonging, not to God, but to the world.

As we have seen, the call of the Lord to those in Babylon "Come out of her, My people" is also an earnest invitation to those whose hearts are towards Him to pledge themselves to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Yet it means even more than that. The special perils- of this mighty hour, the fierce efforts of a desperate enemy, demand that those who would enlist in God's army shall come out boldly for Him and wear His chosen emblem of loyalty.

Nevertheless this emblem must be no mere outward adornment. The most hardened hypocrite might observe the weekly rest-day all his life and never gain the seal of God. Sabbath-keeping is only of value when it is a token of loyalty to God in every aspect of life. The Father's name is reserved solely for His own sons and daughters; and only those who have fully consecrated themselves to Him may enjoy the high honor of receiving it.

On the other hand, the first and most ardent desire of those who have truly given their hearts to the Lord will be to do His will in everything. Realizing the value that He has set upon the Sabbath as a sign of His people's allegiance to Him, they will determine by His grace to keep it holy. As King Edward declined to dishonor the flag of Italy, so they will refuse to tread upon this more sacred emblem. They will refrain from doing their own ways, or finding their own pleasure, or speaking their own words, during its God-blessed hours. They will call this holy day of the Lord honorable and rejoice in all its ample provision for rest and communion with Him.

There is good reason why God desires that His people in these days shall keep His Sabbath holy. He knows the swift pace at which the stream of life is moving, and how easy it would be for them all to be engulfed in its surging tide. The weekly day of rest is both a protection and a refuge, like islands of peace amid a rushing torrent, where they can pause, with rhythmic regularity, to replenish their spiritual resources.

Undoubtedly, to keep God's holy Sabbath on His appointed day and with the deep spiritual significance that He intends, will seem to some a hard thing to do. But the true disciple will ever desire to be as his Master and to follow whither He leads. After all, there is nothing too difficult for those whose lives are knit with God's. Every fear is swallowed up in His never-failing promise: "My grace is sufficient for thee."