

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## ART. III.—THE JEWISH SABBATH.

TWO institutions there are coeval with the creation of man—marriage and the Sabbath. If an objection should perchance be raised that the latter is recorded in a passage (Gen. ii. 1-3) forming part of a supposed Priestly Code so-called, made long centuries after Moses, by unscrupulous priests in Babylonia, we can but answer that it will be time enough to consider how far that affects our position, when the Wellhausen theory shall have passed from the realm of cloud-land to that of solid demonstrated fact. In the meantime, we will take our Bible as we find it.

Dr. Sayce has called our attention ("Higher Criticism and the Monuments," pp. 74-77) to the fact that, like many other points in the early history of mankind, the idea of the Hebrew Sabbath can be strangely paralleled, *and as strangely contrasted*, with that of the Babylonian Sabbath. The two, we are firmly persuaded, are alike sprung from a primal revelation, the former preserved in essential purity, the latter distorted and corrupted. It is important for our point now to notice that the references to the Sabbath in the cuneiform inscriptions as a thoroughly established institution are in themselves evidence, if any were wanted, of very great antiquity; and that while the name Sabbath is genuinely Shemitic (Assyrian and Hebrew alike), yet the institution is referred back to pre-Shemitic times, and to the Sumerian régime. In fact (*op. cit.*, p. 74), Shemitic as is the word, the Assyrian scribes actually referred it to a Sumerian etymology, a proof of the antiquity they attached to the name.

With regard to the contrast between the Babylonian and Hebrew Sabbath, it may be noted that the former is closely associated with the idea of the new moon, and was kept on each seventh day of each lunar month, besides an unexplained Sabbath on the nineteenth day of the month. It thus was essentially bound up with Babylonian astronomy and the polytheism connected with the planets. The Hebrew Sabbath, on the other hand, has no connection with the lunar month, and, so far as the original statement goes, rests upon the fact that God "rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made." It is true that the word "Sabbath" does not occur in this passage, but the Hebrew word translated "rest" is *Shabbath*, the root of the name.

Some surprise has occasionally been expressed at the strange paucity of allusions in the historical books of the Old Testament to so solemn and weighty an institution. It is, therefore, an important matter to be able to note that prominent as

is the Sabbath as a Babylonian institution, it seems that there is not one reference known to it in the historical inscriptions of Assyria (Sayce, p. 77). Moreover, anyone who will carefully notice the earliest allusion we possess, that in connection with the giving of the manna (Exod. xvi. 22 *sqq.*), will see that there is nothing in the narrative suggestive of a new departure invented by Moses. It is clear from verse 22 that the idea of the Sabbath was one thoroughly recognised by the people, even though, as was surely natural enough, some were found careless and neglectful of it (verse 27). This incident, it will be remembered, preceded the giving of the Law on Sinai, and there, in the Fourth Commandment, the law of the Sabbath is laid down, that each seventh day is to be a day of rest, following six days of work; based on the fact that God, after He had devoted six days to the creation of the heaven and the earth, rested upon the seventh day and hallowed it. Let it be noted that we are not dealing here with the ceremonial law; the recognition of the Sabbath meets us in the same category with the command to worship one God only, and to hallow His name. It is interesting to observe that in the later declaration of the Decalogue, set forth by Moses in the plains of Moab at the close of his life, we have the second ground put forward for the observance of the Sabbath: Israel was to remember that he had been "a servant in the land of Egypt," and that the Lord had brought him thence "through a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm."

Into the question of the Sabbath, viewed on its ceremonial side, we do not propose at all to enter, except to say that the institutions of the Sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee are in themselves evidence of weight as to the sacred position occupied by the Sabbath. Of historic allusions other than these, there is but one solitary instance in the Pentateuch, the case of the man put to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath-day (Numb. xv. 32 *sqq.*), where the punishment is recorded as due to a direct declaration of the will of Heaven. The case is paralleled by that of the man who was stoned for blasphemy (Lev. xxiv. 10 *sqq.*), in which case also the wrongdoer was put in ward till God's will was made known concerning him.

When we look at the course of the history, as set forth in the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings, we find no allusions to the Sabbath at all, save a few of an incidental kind in the Second Book of Kings. And yet this very incidental character of the allusions is itself clear evidence of the fully established nature of the usage. Paradoxical as it may seem, the very paucity of allusion is, in its way, a kind of positive evidence.

Note, for example, the instances in the Second Book of Kings. When the Shunamite mother, craving for the help of God's prophet on the death of her child, seeks to go to him, her husband, ignorant of what had happened, asks in surprise why she wants to go, as it was "neither new moon nor Sabbath" (iv. 23). A world of familiarity of use is in those words. Again, in the account of the revolution in which Athaliah was overthrown (2 Kings xi.; 2 Chron. xxiii.), we have references as to the arrangement of the guard at the palace, and at the temple, on the Sabbath-day, as a well-recognised and established thing, and that, too, even during the supremacy of one who did not worship Jehovah. The Sabbath is spoken of simply as a matter of course. The above and the passing allusion to the "covert" for the Sabbath in 2 Kings xvi. 18, are all that we meet with in these books.

We do not propose here to dwell on the references in the prophets to the recognition of the Sabbath in their time, but it is sufficient to say that in their incidental character they do but prove all the more decisively how completely the institution was rooted. One example may suffice us. When Amos, one of the earliest, perhaps the earliest, of the prophets whose writings we possess, is inveighing against the evils of a corrupt and luxurious plutocracy, he puts into the mouth of the evil-doers words (viii. 5) which show that the institution of the Sabbath is too firmly rooted even for the false Israelites to disregard: business must be suspended on the Sabbath, and not till it is over will they venture to resume their fraudulent and oppressive practices.

The latest historical books of the Bible—Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah—were written after the return from captivity, and were markedly influenced by the spirit of their age. It is needless to dwell here on what has so often been described: the tremendous zeal which, after the return from exile, animated the Jews with regard to the externals of their religion; there is no relapsing into idolatry now, the danger is not so much a disregard of God's law as of too servile a following of the mere letter of it, the tendency is to a sort of deification<sup>1</sup> of the code itself; the Sabbath is thrown into

<sup>1</sup> If this phrase be thought too strong, we would call attention to a curious story in the Talmud, where Rabbis disputing on the Law obtain various miraculous signs in proof of definitely conflicting views. In this *impasse*, they appeal for a direct ruling from heaven, and a voice from heaven (*bath kol*) comes, deciding that R. Eliezer is in the right. Undaunted even by this, the opposing Rabbi, R. Joshua, maintained, on the strength of a passage in the Law, that not even Heaven is competent to intervene on a point where the Law has already ruled. "And the Holy One . . . laughed, and said, 'My children have prevailed over me; my children have prevailed over me'" ("Tal. Bab., Baba Metsia," f. 59b).

increased prominence, and the duty of observing it more and more emphasized in a rigid way. In Jeremiah xvii. the duty of the observance of the Sabbath is very stringently insisted on, but the ruling is essentially a negative one; the essence of it is, "Ye shall not bear burdens on the Sabbath-day," the matter which so much distressed Nehemiah, and in which he took such summary and decisive action.

The tendency continued and became more and more intensified to lay stress on this merely negative side of the idea of the Sabbath, and perhaps the climax was reached in the book of "Jubilees," whose date we cannot stay here to discuss, but which may probably be referred to a period not very remote from the Christian era, on one side or another. Here it is taught<sup>1</sup> that the Sabbath was observed in heaven before the creation of man, and that Israel was chosen specially in order to keep it.

If we now try to realize the idea attached to the Sabbath-day by the religious Jews of our Lord's time, so far as it is brought before us in the Gospels, the result is what we might have supposed from what has gone before. The whole tenor of the Pharisaic teaching is, "You must not do so-and-so on the Sabbath-day"—just that and nothing more. Our Lord is found fault with for healing on the Sabbath-day—healing is work, and work is forbidden; for the idea of the work being justified as a work of mercy is viewed as quite irrelevant. The disciples are found fault with for plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath—not, of course, that this was viewed as stealing, but that the plucking and rubbing were work, and work, even in the extremity of necessity, is forbidden.

The Saviour's teaching on the Sabbath is as plain and unmistakable as on other topics. As with other Commandments, so with the Fourth, it is reasserted, but with a fuller and broader meaning. There is no abrogation of the Sabbath as of some obsolete detail of a mere ceremonial law; it was a part of the very kernel of the code, stored up in the sacred receptacle of the Ark. In a word, we have in our Lord's teaching in such a passage as Mark ii. 27, 28 (the parallel passages in St. Matthew and St. Luke are less detailed), the same kind of exposition of the true meaning of the Fourth Commandment as we have of such Commandments as the Sixth and Seventh in the Sermon on the Mount. Our Lord elevates and broadens the whole conception, and turns the old, bare, negative idea into distinct positive teaching.

At this point it will be well to attempt to give increased vividness to the idea of the ancient Pharisaic Sabbath by

<sup>1</sup> c. 2.

giving a few illustrations from the "Mishnah." We have already made some remarks about this work in an earlier number of this magazine.<sup>1</sup> It will suffice here to say that it is the earliest attempt at a codifying of the Jewish oral law, and that it was formed near the end of the second century by R. Judah, the *nasi* or head of the great college at Tiberias. It of course contains many of the rulings of great Rabbis, who lived long before the time of its final redaction; Hillel, for example, and the Gamaliel at whose feet St. Paul sat, being among the best known.

One treatise is, as might be guessed, on the law of the Sabbath-day, and one who has read this will understand how oppressive and cruel such a code of laws could become. There is the constant attempt to "make a hedge for the law," by a multiplying of details and an almost bewildering hair-splitting of precepts, though side by side with this the attempt is made in two ways to relieve pressure, first, by the concession that if a forbidden thing be done conjointly by two persons, so that neither singly can be charged with the complete act, no harm is done; and, secondly, that a person may legitimately take advantage of an existing fact, though it would not be lawful to bring about the required conditions merely for the present need.

We shall now give examples on each of these points. The "making of a hedge for the law" shows itself in a minute subdividing and specializing of precepts, and in the attempt to be, as it were, on the safe side by having a margin, as in the well-known case of inflicting thirty-nine stripes, lest the authorized forty should be exceeded. Rules of a most wearisome kind are laid down as to the carrying of burdens on the Sabbath; where, it must be remembered, that the word "burden" may imply something exceedingly small, not being a part of the actual dress. Thus a woman must not go out on the Sabbath with "a needle that has an eye, nor a ring that has a seal on it . . . nor with a smelling-bottle" ("Mishn. Shabbath," vi. 3); she must not go out with a "frontlet and pendant, *unless sewn to her cap*" (vi. 1). This rule may press awkwardly sometimes, for we read (vi. 8) that "a cripple must not go out with his wooden leg"—anyhow, so says R. Jose, though R. Meir allows it.

As illustrations of keeping on the safe side, it is ruled that a tailor must not go out with his needle when it grows near to the dusk preceding the Sabbath, for he may forget that he has it with him, and so actually carry it during the Sabbath (i. 3). There are various rules which insist that when the Sabbath

<sup>1</sup> March, 1891.

draws near no work must be started, such as bleaching, dyeing, tanning, and the like, which cannot be finished before the Sabbath begins. So R. Simeon ben Gamaliel tells us (i. 9): "They were accustomed at my father's house to give white garments to the heathen laundress (strictly, washerman) three days before the Sabbath."

We shall refer next to the two ways of relieving the pressure, where most people will think that the wearisomeness of remembering the concessions is as bad as the rule itself. As a specimen of the former kind, we are told: "If a gazelle get into a house, and one man fasten it in, he is guilty; if two men fasten it in, they are absolved. If one man was unable to fasten it in, and therefore two men fasten it in, they are guilty" (xiii. 6). Or again, what of a mother teaching her child to walk on the Sabbath? It is laid down by R. Judah that she may do this, "if the child can lift up one foot as it puts the other down, but if it drags them along behind, she may not do so" (xviii. 2). We will give one more instance of this kind to show how even charity must on the Sabbath-day be ordered by very strict rules (i. 1). A beggar stands outside a house and the goodman of the house within his own doorway. If the goodman stretches his hand across the dividing line and puts money or food into the hand of the beggar, he has conveyed a thing from what the "Mishnah" calls a *reshuth* [a recognised division of space, private or public property] to another *reshuth*. The goodman then is guilty, though the beggar is clear. By throwing the initial action on to the beggar, the guilt can be put upon him, while the goodman is clear. Yet, in two ways, the prohibited action can be halved between the two men, so that both would be cleared. Either the beggar may put his hand into the house and the goodman place his gift in it, or the goodman may put his hand outside and the beggar take what is therein.

A second line of relief is, as we have said, to be found in taking advantage of an existing fact, though it is not permissible to take action directly in the matter. For example, "If a heathen has lighted a lamp, an Israelite may make use of the light thereof; but if it has been lighted for the sake of the Israelite, he is forbidden to use it. If a heathen has drawn water to give drink to his cattle, an Israelite may give drink to his own cattle after him, but if it has been drawn for the sake of the Israelite, he is forbidden to use it" (xvi. 8). Or again: "If a man's hand or foot has been sprained, he must not bathe it with cold water; but he may wash it *as he usually does*, and if he is healed, he is healed" (xxii. 6).

In the whole treatise there is very little regard to the Sabbath viewed in the light of men's need—"man is made

for the Sabbath." For a woman in childbirth the Sabbath may be violated, and certain concessions are made in the case of circumcision on the Sabbath.

When now we come to view the teaching of our Lord on the subject, we find not merely that He protests both by His teaching and His actions against the false ideas circulating round the Sabbath, but that He lays down positive teaching on the point, insisting on and re-enacting the central truth of the Fourth Commandment. The first of these was necessary in the age and country in which He lived; the miracles of healing on the Sabbath and the declarations accompanying them went to open men's eyes, and to free them from the chain of the Pharisaic code of the Sabbath. What had been God's own rest given to man, had been made by man and for man a galling yoke. But here our Lord's words come in decisively: "Man was not made for the Sabbath."

It is not our business here to discuss how and when and by what authority the Sabbath became the Christian Sunday. All we are concerned to maintain is that our Saviour, while absolutely rejecting by precept and example the false teaching which Pharisaism had grafted on to the Divine code, does not confine Himself merely to the negative, "Man was not made for the Sabbath." He reasserts and gives His full authority to the idea of the Sabbath, maintaining its Divine character and beneficent intention, and therefore indicating its obligation—an obligation which requires, indeed, a careful defining in the light of Christ's words, but still is an obligation. "The Sabbath was made for man," here is the positive side. Good men may indeed differ in details as to the manner of best utilizing the Sabbath (for that Sunday is the Sabbath in nobler form and with a doubled glorifying, we cannot here pause to maintain), yet of the essential Divinity of the institution they may not doubt. Our Lord's words are unmistakable. "The Sabbath was made for man." It was made, therefore, by God, and made for man's use—a beneficent purpose in the Divine intention.

There is no danger in the nineteenth century of any disregard of the negative part of the teaching. There is no defilement of the Sabbath now, no maintaining that a thing which God has appointed for man's good is a higher and holier thing than he for whom it was appointed.

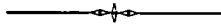
Yet it might seem as if, even in Christian England, there was in too many quarters an ignoring of the words which come to us on so paramount an authority, "The Sabbath was made for man." The essence of the Sabbath, as the word itself tells us, is rest—rest and refreshment and recuperation of body and soul. If this twofold end be attained, we may admit of



wide diversity of opinion as to many details. We may in some cases come to take a broader view of things than that of the good men of earlier generations; we may refuse to judge those to whom Sunday gives the only chance of a sight of green fields and flowers and trees, which God made so fair. The contemplation, with the fullest enjoyment, yet with reverence, of the beauties of nature is in itself a worship, and our worship in God's house is quickened, not checked, by such innocent enjoyments.

Yet the Sunday "recreation" (often how falsely so called, if the true meaning of the word be regarded) is too often becoming one which entails heavy work, and needless work, on others, is an amusement which is in no sense a true rest, an amusement in which it is impossible to see at all how God is glorified. The bad example set by too many in high places cannot be too urgently deplored; it is mere selfish disregard of a God-given privilege; it is a practical denial of any Divine intention of a day of rest at all.

ROBERT SINKER.



#### ART. IV.—EVOLUTION AND THE DIVINE FATHERHOOD.

(*Professor Drummond's "Ascent of Man."*)

"WHICH was the son of Adam, which was the son of God." With this impressive declaration St. Luke at once concludes and crowns his genealogy. If the statement be regarded as a revelation with respect to the origin of man as a spiritual being, it settles finally and incontrovertibly the great doctrine of the universal Fatherhood of God. No subsequent moral catastrophe, no doctrine of the "fall," however strongly conceived, can neutralize this fundamental fact, that every human being is descended from a Divine Parent, and that there is, therefore, a "vital spark of heavenly flame" in every human breast.

The attention called to this great fact has been one of the most remarkable theological features of the period, and there is no doubt that the general acceptance of the truth thus strongly witnessed to has borne fruit in a very widespread modification of view on other subjects. Particularly it has affected our eschatology. Thoughtful men of every school have learnt to feel sure that, whatever may be the true theory of future retribution, no theory can be true that ignores altogether this primary eternal relationship between God and man. Hence the doctrine of future punishment, whatever form it