

## Pastors and the Sabbaths

**Exodus 20:8-10** (KJV) "*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

*9 Six days shalt thou labour [toil], and do all thy work [employment]:*

**10.** *But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work [employment], thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:"* [Emphasis added]

**INTRODUCTION** – It is a common belief that pastors ought to be given a day off during the week in lieu of their labour on the Lord's Day. This belief has spawned pastors who demand that they be given a day off from their churches and that no member is allowed to contact them. To contact them is to intrude into their rightful privacy. To compound the matter even further, these pastors are also granted, or they demand, a sabbatical year after a certain period of tenure in their churches. In some churches, it is a sabbatical year for every six years of service. In other churches, pastors are required to serve from ten to fifteen years before they are entitled to a sabbatical year of "rest." With this sabbatical year of rest, these "pastors" are allowed to travel anywhere in the world, supposedly to be "equipped" in a Bible College or seminary so that they can be "recharged" and return to their churches better preachers or teachers of God's Word. The question we need to ask is whether this "Sabbath phenomenon" is a biblical concept. If it is a biblical concept, then every pastor ought to ask for it in order not to be short-changed. However, if it is not a biblical concept, then the pastors who make the above demands must stop or they would be charged with being hirelings who have reduced the highest and most noble office that God has given to His people to just another "job."

**I. What is the meaning of the Sabbath?** – The word "Sabbath" means "rest." It is a day to cease all servile work. It does not mean to not do any work at all and just be somewhere quiet and do nothing! The people of God were told by the LORD not to do any employment including servile work (i.e. their regular week day slavish work that brings in money). On the Sabbath day, they were to do all other "work" that did not make any money, like acts of mercy and spiritual work such as offerings or observing other holy activities. The Bible teaches the keeping of the Sabbath Day as well as a Sabbath Year.

**II. To Whom were the Sabbaths given?** – The text that sheds clear light on this is **Leviticus 23:1-3** (KJV) "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **2** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, . . . **3** Six days shall work [employment] be done: but the seventh day *is* the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work [employment] *therein*: it *is* the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings." [Emphasis added] This command was for the "children of Israel". They were the occupiers of the Land of Promise. They were the landlords. They were to work the land for food. This was their employment (work). They were to do this for six days of the week. But the seventh day was a sabbath of rest (literally

it means "sabbath of sabbaths"). This day was to be a day of holy convocation. The word "convocation" means "assembly." The people of Israel were to assemble together for holy activities as a gathering of God's people. Israel was not to do any work (employment). The strength of the prohibition is the same as for the Ten Commandments, implying not an option but a strict command! The seventh day was called the "sabbath of the LORD." It was not called the "sabbath of the people of Israel." The people of Israel were to keep the seventh day as a day of rest but it was the LORD's Day and not the people's day. This means that the people of Israel had no power to decide whether to keep the Sabbath day holy or not. They were to stop all employment and keep the Sabbath Day holy. The LORD decided for them.

The reason is a spiritual one. It is one of faith. The LORD wanted Israel to know that without faith it is impossible to please Him. Israel could not afford to forget that she was a spiritual people who needed to trust the LORD to protect and provide for all her needs. This was how the LORD ensured that Israel learned gratitude and to sincerely praise the LORD from her heart. If Israel did not keep the Sabbath Day holy she would soon become worldly. Israel would lose her identity as the people of God. To become like the rest of the Gentile nations would be disastrous. Israel was the only spiritual light in a world perishing in sin and spiritual darkness. If Israel were to lose her witness, it would be like the only spiritual light had been switched off, thus plunging the world into spiritual darkness. Israel was to live a life that shines forth the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. To do that Israel must not forget who she is. Working the land without stopping would cause Israel to lose this spiritual focus. The LORD enforced the Sabbath Day for the spiritual benefit of both Israel and the world! Israel would then remember that her home is in heaven. If the LORD had given a choice to Israel, she would most probably keep on working and would not stop until she "dropped dead"! This truth has been evidenced by the fact Israel broke the Sabbath Day more often than she kept it after she entered the Land of Promise! For soon after Joshua died and after he brought the people of Israel into the Land of Promise and divided the Land for the twelve tribes, the people entered into a period of more than 350 years of doing what was right in their own eyes. Israel completely ignored the laws of God.

Then there is the Sabbath Year that the LORD commanded Israel to also observe. **Leviticus 25:1-4** (KJV), "And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, **2** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. **3** Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; **4** But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard."

If Israel was able to keep the Sabbath Day holy, it would be possible for them to also keep the Sabbath Year holy. The Sabbath year was given by the LORD to rest the land. Israel had

to trust the LORD to provide for all her needs annually as well as weekly and daily. The LORD understands that it is also a matter of faith and trust in Him to provide not just for one day but also for an entire year and more. In **Leviticus 25:19-22** (KJV), the LORD anticipated the Israelites' question, "And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. **20** And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: **21** Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. **22** And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat *yet* of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat *of* the old *store*." Israel as a spiritual nation could not turn her back on her spiritual responsibility to be a godly nation! Keeping the Sabbath Day and Sabbath Year ensured that Israel lived by faith daily, weekly and yearly! The ones chosen by the LORD to teach this truth to Israel were the priests and Levites.

From the above, we realize that the Sabbath Day and Year were given by the LORD for the people of Israel to rest from their employment. The recipients of the Land of Promise had to stop work (employment) to ensure that their spiritual duties and life of faith were not compromised!

**III. Do Priests and Levites Keep the Sabbaths?** – The priests and Levites did not own land. God did not give them any land for their inheritance because their inheritance was the LORD. **Numbers 18:20** (KJV) "And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I *am* thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel." They lived in forty eight Levitical cities assigned to them by the LORD to teach the Word of God to the people of Israel. These cities were spread throughout the length and breadth of both sides of the River Jordan. These were the only God appointed and, therefore, legitimate people on earth who could truly function as mediators between God and sinful man. They could not be encumbered by working the land. To be distracted by such "worldly" activities would be disastrous. They were the only guardians of the perfect Word of God on earth and not just in Israel. They were to copy and preserve the Word of God. They were to study and teach the Word of God to the people of Israel that generations of Israelites would benefit from their teaching. Then all Israel would have a close and godly relationship with the LORD. The Word of God was copied by hand very laboriously. The Israelites did not have the Bible so readily like we have today. The Bible was very costly and therefore the people did not carry or own a Bible. They depended entirely upon the Levites and priests to teach the Word of God accurately and diligently. There was no way they could "check" on the teaching of the Levites and priests the way we can check, like the Bereans, today. This means that the Levites and priests had to be very sincere and honest in discharging their spiritual responsibilities and duties. The Israelites trusted them to be taught the truth at all times. If the Levites and priests were sloppy or evil, they would lead the Israelites astray and betray their trust.

If the priests and Levites only do spiritual work, then how did they and their families have food to eat? They would eat and feed their families from the tithes and offerings brought by the people of Israel. These tithes and offerings were meant for the LORD but because the priests and Levites had the LORD as their inheritance, whatever was given to the LORD, the priests and Levites were the beneficiaries. These would become the daily sustenance of the priests, Levites and their families. **Numbers 18:24** (KJV) teaches, "But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer *as* an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance." Unto the priests, the LORD gave the firstfruit of the land among other things, like the Israelites' offerings brought to the LORD. **Deuteronomy 18:3-5** (KJV) "And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether *it be* ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder, and the two cheeks, and the maw. **4** The firstfruit *also* of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him. **5** For the LORD thy God hath chosen him out of all thy tribes, to stand to minister in the name of the LORD, him and his sons for ever." The priests and Levites looked after the spiritual aspects of Israel's life whereas the twelve tribes worked the Land and offered to the LORD their tithes, firstfruits and offerings which took care of the physical needs of the priests and Levites from generation to generation.

The LORD ruled as King since Israel was a theocratic nation. The Levites and priests functioned like the hands and legs of the LORD as they taught the Word of God and functioned as mediators between God and Israel. When Israel was taught the truth of God's Word and obeyed, they would bring their tithes, offerings and firstfruits regularly and the physical needs of the priests and Levites and their families would be taken care of. The priests and Levites were not to bargain or complain about what the people brought to the LORD. Whatever the people brought was determined by the LORD. The firstfruits and tithes of the people were also determined by the LORD as He is the Lord of the harvest. In other words, both the priests and Levites and the people of Israel lived by faith and trust in the LORD to provide as they fulfilled their respective duties in the Promised Land.

The priests and Levites were busy during the Sabbath Day. They had to take out the one week old shewbread from inside the Holy Place and replace them with fresh loaves. The priests would be busy every day of the week. They would also be busy serving the LORD during the Sabbath Year. There was no rest for the priests and Levites! The people of Israel rested from the physical labours so that they could focus on spiritual matters fulltime. This helped them to remember their spiritual responsibilities and to trust the LORD to provide all that they needed within the six days of the week. They were forbidden to work the land on the Sabbath Day and Sabbath Year. The priests and Levites were already doing spiritual work. For them to take a Sabbath would mean that they stop doing spiritual work. If that happens, then Israel would remain in sin because the priests were the only ones who could do the sin, burnt, peace and thank offerings for them. If the priests and Levites were to take

a year off, Israel would be plunged into total spiritual darkness. No one was allowed to rest from doing God's spiritual work!

**IV. Should Pastors be given "Sabbath Days and Years"?** – Pastors and all fulltime workers doing pastoral work are like the priests and Levites of old. They must not be involved in any secular work. They must not buy shares and involve themselves in making money or business ventures! This holds true for their wives as well! They must not hold a job and involve themselves in making money privately or publicly. There must be no involvement in multi level marketing or any form of business like being silent partners in any business as these involvements will compromise the position of the pastor. It is only a matter of time when his credibility and focus in his ministry as a pastor would be jeopardised. Paul worked as a tent maker only once and for a very brief time to support himself and others in the ministry in an exigency. Trusting the LORD to provide is a matter of faith. The pastor cannot afford to be side tracked by any form of materialistic endeavours! He should focus every moment of every day thinking and praying for the LORD's flock. He studies the Word of God every day. He conducts Bible Studies and holds seminars on God's Word. He conducts the church prayer meeting. He writes articles for the flock to read. He prepares sermons every LORD's day so that God's flock can be fed with fresh messages from the LORD every week when they come. The Word of God and prayer are his main spiritual diet every day, led by the Spirit of God.

Derelict pastors today preach once a month to their own flock. They invite outside speakers under the guise of "variety is the spice of life." These pastors have the audacity to sit in the congregation like an ordinary member while the invited speaker takes the pulpit. This is a very shameful thing to do. To make matters worse, they bring shame to the ministry and the office of the pastor by demanding a Sabbatical year off "to study God's Word!" Does the congregation think that the pastor will study God's Word during the Sabbatical year when he has not been studying God's Word throughout the weeks and years he has been with them? If the pastor has been studying the Word of God regularly during the years he has been with the congregation, then why does he need to take a sabbatical year to study God's Word overseas? The concept of a sabbatical year for the pastor is ludicrous! Such foolish notions spawn and breed lazy pastors. They take advantage of their members' love for them and those who dare to do so should be asked to go on a permanent sabbatical because they have brought shame to the office of pastor which the LORD esteems very highly. There is no biblical basis for pastors to take a "rest" from spiritual work! God the Father never stops working and neither does Christ! **John 5:17** (KJV), "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

**CONCLUSION** – Rev Timothy Tow was absolutely correct to teach us by example that the pastor is to be on call for the LORD and to the congregation 24/7 any time and any day. There is no Sabbath Day and definitely no Sabbath Year for the pastor. The concept of giving

pastors a Sabbath Day "rest" in lieu of the "work" they put in on Sunday is a farce! There is no biblical support for this. Likewise, the Sabbath Year is a waste of the LORD's money! Any church that gives her pastor a Sabbath Year with full pay as well as expenses for his so-called theological education is practising an unbiblical concept which has created a generation of spoilt, self centred and lazy pastors! If they want to take leave and spend time with their families and friends, then do it and call it a leave like everyone else.

The Sabbath rests (day or year) are for the people of God who serve the LORD as employees or employers. They need to rest in order to maintain their spiritual well being and to not lose sight of their eternal inheritance unlike the pastor who is already doing spiritual work every day as the LORD has called him to do. The pastor is like the priests and Levites of the Old Testament. He is not to have Sabbath Days and Years. He does not need them. He is to keep on serving as long as the LORD gives him strength! Amen.