

**GOD'S PROGRAM FOR HIS PEOPLE PREDICTED IN ISRAEL'S FEASTS**  
**I. The Sabbath Feast: God's Grace As The Basis Of His Program For His People**  
**(Leviticus 23:1-3)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. The Leviticus 23:1-44 feasts for Israel typologically predict God's program for His people in history (Bible Know. Com., O. T., p. 208), what is valuable for us to study today in view of unsettling current events.
- B. The first "feast" is the Sabbath Day (Leviticus 23:1-3), and it occurs weekly, not annually like the other feasts.
- C. Yet, all the other feasts are either marked by or connected to a Sabbath rest, so knowing the reason for God's establishing the Sabbath Day is key to understanding the very basis of His program for His people in history.
- D. We thus view Scripture to understand this basis of God's program for His people in history (as follows):

**II. The Sabbath Feast: God's Grace As The Basis Of His Program For His People, Leviticus 23:1-3.**

- A. Leviticus 23:1-3 introduces the section on the Lord's feasts for Israel and simply asserts that the first "feast" is the Sabbath Day observance in which the people of Israel were to do no [servile] work.
- B. To understand the significance of this observance, we review the origin of the Sabbath Day (as follows):
  - 1. Genesis 2:1-3 clarifies that after God had finished creating the universe in six consecutive solar days in Genesis 1:1-31, He rested on the next day, the seventh day, from all His creative work, blessing and sanctifying that day as a day of cessation from His work.
  - 2. "No weariness is implied," for God majestically created the universe by simply speaking a few words each of the six days to bring the vast universe into existence! (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Gen. 2:2)
  - 3. Obviously, then, the establishment of the Sabbath Day rest was for man's needs, not for God's needs.
- C. However, pagan man's departure from God into spiritual darkness described in Romans 1:18-23 led to his distorting the Sabbath Day's meaning so that it became an oppressive distortion of what God instituted:
  - 1. In the pagan Mesopotamian world from which Israel's patriarch Abraham had come, "the seventh day was a day of bad luck. These pagans feared that their work would not prosper on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth day of the month connected with the four phases of the moon. Concerning these days [Umberto] Cassuto wrote: "These days, to which must be added the nineteenth of the month, which occurs seven weeks after the beginning of the preceding month, were regarded as unlucky days on which a man should afflict himself, eschew pleasures, and refrain from performing important work, for they would not prosper.'" (Bruce K. Waltke, Creation and Chaos, 1974, p. 65, citing U. Cassuto, A Com. on the Book of Genesis, trans. by Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), p. 66)
  - 2. Waltke added, "It is against this environment and background that one can appreciate his Bible and the God of grace who revealed His benevolent virtues to us," Ibid., Waltke. Indeed, in sharp contrast to this pagan view, God had Moses announce that the **original** Sabbath was *not* a day of bad luck or trouble for man, but a day when God provided refreshing rest for man, Exodus 31:17!
- D. The Sabbath Day is no longer to be kept by believers in the Church (Colossians 2:16-17), but Hebrews 4:4-10 claims it typifies our need as believers in Christ today to rest from our own meritorious efforts to please God as we enter into the spiritual rest God has provided for us through grace. The Sabbath Day rest that marks all of Israel's annual feasts then emphasizes the cessation from man's meritorious works in a futile effort to please God as the basis for how God relates to sinful man!
- E. For this reason, when Jesus was opposed by the legalists of His time about picking grain on the Sabbath, He claimed that man was not made for the Sabbath so as to have it become a burden to him, but that the Sabbath was made for man that he might be refreshed in it, Mark 2:23-27. The legalists were making the Sabbath into what pagan man in Mesopotamia had made it -- a burdensome day of self-help work, but Jesus sought to restore the Sabbath to God's original purpose for it -- a day of man's resting in God's grace.
- F. We can thus understand why violating the Sabbath Day observance became a capital offense in Israel that was punishable by death, cf. Exodus 31:15. It was God's testimony to the pagan world that Israel's God was the God of grace in sharp contrast to paganism, a tool for evangelizing pagans to believe in God.

***Lesson:*** *The Sabbath Day "feast," what was an integral part of all of God's other annual feasts for His people in Leviticus 23, typologically revealed God's grace in relating to His people. Thus, man relates to God in every way based on God's unmerited favor to him, that man rests from his own works by relying on God's work in his behalf.*

***Application:*** *May we relate to God in every way based on His unmerited favor to us in our Lord Jesus Christ.*