

LESSON #6



## THE DEFILING OF THE SABBATH REBUKED

**Scripture Texts:** *Exodus 31:13-14; Numbers 15:32-36*

Would it be kind to lower the character of the state which all people may reach in order to allow one to go unpunished for disobedience? That is, would it be fair to take from all people the possibility of being made holy in this life just so one man might be unholy with God's permission? God knows best. He is always right. He is both love and just, and to preserve His love and justice, it is necessary at times that He be severe. In today's lesson we consider one such incident.

**MEMORY VERSE:** *Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.* —Romans 11:22

### The Meaning of the Sabbath

**Exodus 31:13-14** The Sabbath is given great importance in the Bible. It was observed before the Law was given (Exodus 16:22-30). Sabbath means *rest*. God's fourth commandment concerned the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). He gave it frequent emphasis afterward. **Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep. Why? For it is a sign saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep. Why? For it is a sign—a symbol, a type—between me and you . . . A sign or type that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.**

The Sabbath day is a type then of the sanctified life—the life that is clean, holy, and Spirit filled. The Sabbath day is a type of the Sabbath life. The type was a day of physical rest from work. The antitype or fulfillment is a life of spiritual rest from sin. The Sabbath is not now a *day*. It is not Saturday or Sunday. The Sabbath stands for 1. the holiness of God, 2. the holiness of the church, and 3. the Gospel plan of salvation. It stands for the rest of God in the soul of man. This is what the man defiled when he gathered sticks on the Sabbath day.

### A Sabbath Breaker

**Numbers 15:32-34** A man **gathered sticks**. It was physical labor, but it was on **the sabbath day**, the seventh day of the week. Physical work on that day was forbidden by God's Law, the fourth commandment. The man was brought before **Moses** who was leader and judge, before **Aaron** who was high priest, and before **the congregation**, a legislative and judicial body of Israelite men.

While leading Israel through the wilderness, Moses met many problems. Some, seemingly small in scope, were of tremendous significance in their spiritual results. This incident can be considered one of these problems. **They put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.** God's Law had no detailed instructions which Moses felt would apply specifically to this case. He knew what the Law stated (Exodus 31:15), but Moses wanted to be sure. Taking a man's life is a serious matter. Did his act come under the meaning of the Law? Was he excusable for any reason? If not, how was the penalty to be carried out? From the next verse we learn that Moses asked the Lord about it. He did not depend upon his own judgment. There were errors he might have made. He waited on

the Lord. This was wise. He delayed disposing of the case because God's will was not clear to him.

We, in our day, often have decisions to make, some of them of great and far-reaching consequences. Sometimes instructions do not appear to include all of the details which we feel we need. We can find principles by which to guide our decisions. We can find advice so clear and definite as to make us sure in our action. Moses did. Many others have too. Read John 14:26; 16:13; James 1:5.

### The Sentence and Punishment

**Numbers 15:35-36** The Lord said . . . **The man shall be surely put to death.** How? **The congregation shall stone him with stones.** Where? **Without the camp**—the place of reproach, of uncleanness, of refuse, and of outcasts. Looking at the two verses just preceding our lesson, one might come to the conclusion that the man sinned presumptuously and so incurred the anger of the Lord and brought just and terrible punishment upon himself. It must be so, for the one sinning presumptuously knows the Word of the Lord and has **despised** it. He has sinned willfully, knowing what he was doing (Hebrews 10:26-28). One sinning ignorantly was given a way to gain forgiveness.

The sentence was carried out. The man died from the stoning. Why? What had he done? Who had he harmed? He had defiled the Sabbath and so despised God's Word. He held God's Word to no effect. It is good that each of us consider the danger of our day—that of committing sin repeatedly and thinking all we have to do is return again and again to God, and He will forgive. This is presumptuous sin without godly sorrow, and it was never in God's plan.

### Our Sabbath

The Sabbath day was given to a specific people for a specific time. It was for the old Israelite nation. Christ fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17). Jesus Christ brought a new Law, which redeemed from the curse of the old Mosaic Law (Galatians 3:13). The Law served out its time up to the coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfilled the Law (John 1:17). The old Law provided a Sabbath for one day each week. Jesus is our spiritual Sabbath seven days every week. We are not judged on keeping the Sabbath as a day above other days (Colossians 2:14-17). The Sabbath day was a type of the sanctified life of rest from sin every day. Gathering sticks on the Sabbath day is a type of bringing sin into the saved life. The stoning of the man is a type of the attitude God has toward sin. Christ established a new covenant (John 13:34). The old Law commanded "thou shalt." God's new Law commands "if you love me, you will." Thank God for a new Sabbath! Thank God for a better way!

### JUST A THOUGHT

**All the suffering we can do for our sins is a consequence  
of them, never an atonement for them.**