

Q. Exodus 12:49 says that there is one law for Israel and the stranger. Exodus 20:10 also says that the stranger is to keep the Sabbath. Doesn't this prove you wrong when you say that the law, including the Sabbath, was given only to Israel?

A. In Exodus 12:49, we read, "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you." As with any Scripture, to understand this verse, we must look at the context and know how its terms are defined. The terms that we should pay particular attention to here are "homeborn" and "stranger." Now, let's look at the context by reading Exodus 12:43 through 48:

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.

In these verses, God is giving instructions concerning the Passover to Moses and Aaron. In verse 43, God tells them, "there shall no stranger eat thereof." Yet, in verses 48 and 49, God talks about strangers keeping the Passover. When we see what appears to be a contradiction, we must do some digging to find out what is really going on.

First, we find that "stranger" in verse 43 and "stranger" in verses 48 and 49 are from different Hebrew words. "Stranger" in verse 43 means "son of a foreigner," which is merely a way of indicating a foreigner. We'll look at verses 48 and 49 when we come to them.

Verse 44 says that servants who are circumcised shall eat the Passover. This obviously means servants who are not native Israelites but who become as Israelites by becoming circumcised. But verse 45 says, "A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof." The word "foreigner" in this verse is from still another Hebrew word. It means "resident alien." It refers to someone of another nation living in Israel who is not circumcised as an Israelite. "Hired servant" is from a Hebrew word that means "hireling." It refers to someone—in this case, obviously a non-Israelite—who does not become part of a household but merely works certain hours for wages. The point is again that those who are not circumcised may not eat the Passover.

Verse 47 says that all the congregation of Israel shall keep the Passover. Then, in verse 48, we read, "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee...." The word "stranger" in this verse is the noun of the verb translated "sojourn." The beginning of this verse can be translated, "when a sojourner shall sojourn." It is significant that the Jewish translators of the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint translated this as, "And if any proselyte should come to you...." This is speaking of a foreigner living in Israel who desires to live as an observant Jew. If such a person wants to keep the Passover, all the males in his household (obviously including himself) must be circumcised. Then, "he shall be as one that is born in the land." The word "born" here means "native." It can be used also of plants and animals that are native to a region. So, someone who is not born as an Israelite but who is circumcised along with the males in his household is treated as a native born Israelite. Notice the warning that "no uncircumcised person" shall eat the Passover.

It is only after this explanation that God says, "One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you" (verse 49). "Homeborn" is the same word as "born" in verse 48. "Stranger that sojourneth" are the same noun and verb as "stranger shall sojourn" in verse 48. Thus, Exodus 12:49 refers only to strangers who are circumcised and thus become "as one that is born in the land" (verse 48). When a stranger was circumcised, he became an observant Jew. He was not like other foreigners. There was one law for native born Israelites and for circumcised proselytes. But the law for Israelites and proselytes was not the law for uncircumcised foreigners,

as is proved by the fact—as we just read—that uncircumcised foreigners were not allowed to eat the Passover.

With this information, let's read the Sabbath command in Exodus 20:8-10: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, 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." "Stranger" is the same word for "stranger" in Exodus 12:48-49. Clearly, the "stranger that is within thy gates" is referring to the circumcised proselyte/sojourner living in Israel. This person was under the same law as the native born Israelite and was therefore to keep the Sabbath.

By the way, the "manservant" and "maidservant" here are obviously servants bought for money as in Exodus 12:44 and not hired servants or hirelings as in 12:45. But why are cattle mentioned? I have heard people talk of how God cares so much for the cattle that He even wants the cattle to keep the Sabbath. But in 1 Corinthians 9:9-10, the apostle Paul gives a principle that God does not command such things for the sake of the cattle, but for the sake of the people. In the case of the Sabbath command, God wanted the Israelites to rest. Cows normally stand or lie around eating, chewing their cud, or sleeping. Under normal circumstances, they are always at rest. If they are going to work, man must put them to work pulling a plow, hitched to a grindstone, or whatever. In Exodus 20:10, God is merely saying that the Israelites must not put their cattle to work on the Sabbath day because this means that the people would also be working.

In Deuteronomy 5:2, we read that "God made a covenant" with the children of Israel "in Horeb" (Mount Sinai). From the verses that follow, we see that the Ten Commandments were that covenant (see also Deuteronomy 4:13). That covenant includes the Sabbath command (verses 12–15), which Exodus 31:13-17 says is a sign between God and the children of Israel. It is never said to be a sign between God and anyone else. Notice also in Deuteronomy 5:15, as a part of the Ten Commandments as stated in this chapter, God says, "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day." This can apply only to the Israelites.

We can also read, "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with

thee and with Israel. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments" (Exodus 34:27-28). This is speaking of the Ten Commandments, the words of the covenant. But notice that this is the covenant that God made with Moses and Israel. Also, The Bible says that the Sabbath is a unique sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 31:12-17; Ezekiel 20:10-12, 20). If it were given to anyone else, it could not be a unique sign. Romans 2:14 speaks of "the Gentiles, which have not the law," meaning the Old Testament law.

Clearly, the Old Covenant law, including the Ten Commandments and the Sabbath, was given only to native born Israelites and those who converted through circumcision. It was not given to anyone else. Today, the Old Testament law has ended. It has ended not only for believing Jews, but also for all of the Jews, even those who have not become Christians. God as much as told them this when He used the Romans to destroy the temple in A.D. 70. The temple was central to the Jewish system of law and, without it, the law cannot be followed. Jews who think they are still following the law are fooling themselves. Today, we are not to preach law, but the good news of release from law and its consequent sin for all who put their trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior—see, for example, the articles "Dead to the Law" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/deadtothelaw.htm>) and "Should We Preach the Law to Bring People to Christ?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/preachlawqa.htm>). More specific information about the Sabbath can be found in the articles "What Is the Christian Sabbath?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/christiansabbath.html>) and "Questions from Seventh Day Keepers" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/7thdayanswers.html>).

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