

SUBJECT

LAND SABBATH

DATE ISSUED

Nov. 14, 1973

NO.

702

CHURCH ADMINISTRATION DEPARTMENT

THE LAND SABBATH
And Its Application
In the Twentieth Century

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong and
Mr. Garner Ted Armstrong have
reviewed and approved the follow-
ing instructions and policy.

POLICY

AC 678

WORLDWIDE
CHURCH OF GOD

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I. BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF TOPIC

As a Church we have been zealous to seek God's will for us from the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. We have been zealous to keep God's Commandments and have endeavored to apply and keep all of God's laws.

However, in the Old Testament there are many laws which were specifically concerning boundaries, temple washings, etc. Many of these laws are good principles, but Christians should not be expected to apply them in the letter in our modern society. For years we have taught that all the temple laws given in the Old Testament should not be applied today. They were given specifically for a temple, and since no temple exists today it is impossible for us to keep them.

In like manner are boundary laws and laws surrounding the jubilee plan.

We are no different today than the New Testament Church was during the time of the apostles. They were also zealous to keep all of God's Commandments and laws. They had to study and struggle to determine what laws were applicable to New Testament Christians scattered in various countries--living under the domination of worldly governments and paganized customs.

Of course, we know that circumcision was one of the major problems the early New Testament Church had to face. If we consider the magnitude of the problem it may help shed some light on some current situations causing some difficulty.

Circumcision was certainly upheld by all the Scriptures of the Old Testament. Circumcision could not be considered one of the laws of Moses because it was instituted at the time of Abraham. There were many other reasons why those who argued for enforcement of circumcision on New Testament Christians seem to stand on fairly solid ground.

It took a boldness and courage by the original apostles who saw the evidence of God's Spirit in the Gentiles to finally determine "that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

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but that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood" (Acts 15:19-20).

Here we find that the New Testament Church used its authority in determining which laws of the Old Testament were binding on the New Testament Christians and how those laws should be applied.

Obviously, the apostles preached and taught the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath and Holy Days plus the spiritual principles behind many Old Testament judgments and statutes. But they obviously recognized the difference between God's spiritual laws and physical laws of land, property, temple, etc.

Today God's Church has the authority to determine which physical laws from the Old Testament are binding on New Testament Christians and how those laws are to be applied.

II. EXAMINATION OF BIBLICAL CONTENT

The land sabbath law is given to us in Leviticus 25:2-4 and in Exodus 23:10-11.

First of all, we must understand that we are not keeping this land sabbath in the way God had intended for ancient Israel. Indeed, we cannot keep it literally.

The reason for this is obvious. We are not the nation of Israel. We have not inherited the land. Rather, we are strangers and pilgrims looking for a country (Hebrews 11:13-16). We cannot rest all the land in our whole nation. Not even in our Church do we have all Church members rest their land in the same year. What we have done is to adapt this national principle of the land sabbath and try to apply it to the New Testament Church.

Thus we must face the fact that whichever way we use the principle of the national land sabbath, it must be an adapted application.

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There were a number of factors in the giving of the land sabbath to the nation of Israel. First of all, the national land sabbath was tied up intimately with the Jubilee cycle. It fell also on the year of release. The farmer had to release others of all debts, and he, too, was released from all debts. This factor is not applicable today. Though the farmer may rest his land and derive no income from its produce, he must continue paying on debts that he has incurred to mortgage companies, insurance companies, utilities, taxes, etc.

In Leviticus 25:2, God stated that He gave the land to the Israelites. There were no taxes on the land. There were no mortgages on the land. God gave them the land to use as a gift--at no charge. It was not to be considered their own land. And it could not be sold. Thus the main condition for temporary use of this land was that they had to rest it in the seventh year as well as to tithe on the increase.

Today, however, Church members have to purchase their own land. The taxes have to be paid on that land as well as on the produce derived from it. And tithes are paid over and above both of those.

Was the land sabbath a test of faith for the Israelites? The answer, in a way, is no. This test of faith did not occur in their seventh year, for God promised them that in the sixth year they would obtain the produce of two years or a double portion. This was enough to carry them through their seventh year. Thus in the sixth year the farmer had in his hand--in his bins, silos, storage houses--the food that would carry him through the seventh year. It was no test of faith in the seventh year. It shouldn't have been difficult for him to decide to keep the seventh year land rest when he already had enough food in his possession to survive.

But do God's people get a double portion in their sixth year? The answer in the majority of cases is no. In fact, our farmers would increase their cost and taxes if they received double.

Most of our farmers do not farm to provide food for themselves. This is another big difference between the farmer in the Bible and today's modern businessman farmer. Today's modern farmer farms for the country. He farms for a living--but the living is not obtained from the food as he consumes it. He sells the food to be able to

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that God's people, after working the land for six years, allow it to rest in the seventh year. This rest may be done in part--a little at a time over a period of years--or may be done all at one time, if desired.

However, this principle is not a binding law for which the transgression is sin--and the penalty is death. This is merely an ecological principle which is intended to take care of the land.

This principle comes under the same category as other ecological laws, such as the law referring to capturing birds. The Bible tells us not to take the mother bird--for she will die in captivity--but we may capture the baby birds. This allows the mother to lay more eggs and breed other baby birds.

This principle is something the ministry should not enforce in any way. It becomes a member's personal responsibility.

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obtain money. He does not want to store the food over for the next year. He wants to sell the food and be able to put the money away.

God never asked the people to rest the land with their bins empty. He promised that they would have sufficient in storage to carry them through that year. If God does not provide a farmer with double portions today, we might ask, "Should he keep the land sabbath?"

We believe that God gave His Law for the benefit of mankind. God's Law is both logical and for the good of those who obey it and for the good of others around them. It was never given to inflict harm or cause unnecessary burdens.

In any scripturally unclear matter it became the right of the apostles in the New Testament to make judgmental decisions to clarify an issue for the good of all concerned. It is also true today that God's Church has the authority to bind judgments for the good of the people. God's Church has exercised it in many areas of applying principles of God's Laws in the Old Testament for the benefit of New Testament Christians or, in some cases, unbinding those principles.

Circumcision was a national law or custom the same as the land sabbath. Both were national customs for Israel to be observed by the whole nation.

With the passage of time since the original statement of land sabbath application in our society, we have grown as an institution in understanding how to apply the principle more effectively.

This paper is the end product representing a lengthy study into the entire land sabbath situation. The following policy has been prepared in conjunction with all Headquarters Evangelists, as well as those individuals representing the farm program at Big Sandy.

IV. POLICY

The land sabbath is to be taught as an ecological principle. The principle is that God wants us to take care of the soil. It is advisable