

After returning with the second set of Tablets, לוחות, Moses assembled the people to transmit the commandments given to him by Gd. The first commandment he gave them was to keep the Sabbath. Why did Moses begin with the laws of the Sabbath? After all, he had already spoken of the Sabbath several times previously, even prior to Sinai. Gd concluded the instructions for building the Tabernacle with ושמרו בנו ישראל את השבת. Why did Moshe see fit to alter the presentation order and mention the Sabbath before the Tabernacle? Why was it necessary to precede the mission of building the Tabernacle with Sabbath?

As noted, the people were already acquainted to some of the rules and regulations of the Sabbath. The Sabbath challenged their self-survival instincts as they were commanded to collect a double portion of manna on Friday to hold them over for two days. Some of them ignored Moses' command to collect the double portion of Friday and refrain from going out to collect the manna on Saturday, when Gd promised there would be none. Gd grew angry with the people at their lack of faith and observance of His commands. He wanted to teach them the principle that was reiterated in the Ten Commandments with זכור את יום השבת לקדשו. The Torah uses the word Zachor sparingly. Where it is used, it connotes a fundamental and eternal idea of Judaism. The Sabbath is one of those fundamental principles of Judaism. It bears witness not only to the Exodus from Egypt but to the very creation of the world itself.

The people were already introduced to the Sabbath at Marah. They viewed the restrictions of the Sabbath as overly limiting because they did not fully understand the meaning behind the Sabbath. When Moses descended from Mount Sinai the second time with the second set of לוחות the people were excited and interested in hearing about the building of the Tabernacle. They looked forward to the Tabernacle firmly establishing their relationship with Gd. They thought building the Tabernacle was their ultimate mission and fulfillment of their Jewish identity and relationship with Gd.

However, the building of the Tabernacle, or the Temple for that matter, is not a fundamental principle in Judaism. While it is important, it does not compare with the importance of a fundamental commandment like keeping the Sabbath. From the order of the commands Moses used to instruct the people when he descended from Mount Sinai we can deduce that he wanted to regulate their enthusiasm so they would adopt the proper perspective on performing the commandments. He sought to ensure that they never lose perspective of the importance of the commandments, especially the fundamental commandments we are required to remember constantly, like the Sabbath. The Jewish people have survived millennia

without the Temple. The Jewish life they enjoyed during the long period of exile includes beautiful periods and great accomplishments, despite the absence of the Temple. Among the reasons for our survival without a Temple are our dedication to Torah and keeping the Sabbath. For more than the Jews kept and observed the Sabbath, the Sabbath kept and protected the Jews. Without the Sabbath, the Jewish People could not survive.

From their outset, the reform and conservative movements sought to downplay and ridicule the role of ritual sacrifice and the Temple in Judaism. However it is their assault on the Sabbath that has had the largest impact in distancing so many Jews from the Sabbath and Judaism. It is the return of the Jews to keep the Sabbath in the future that will usher in the final redemption. Moses recognized the fundamental importance of the Sabbath to Jews in the desert and his insight is no less keen in our time.

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