

2016 New Year Camp Meeting

Sabbath School

(Booklets Supplied)

The Sabbath, God's Eternal Sign of Rest

By

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Introduction

Welcome into His rest!

Rest is woven into the tempo of life and into the pages of Scripture—at the beginning, centre and ending.

The biblical story of creation begins on a sombre note: “*And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep*”. Then we begin to see divine power in action bringing into being a world of beauty. Then the process ends in rest. All within a space of seven days.

Distortions have since followed, and so have tragedies, sickness, pain and death. It all points up sin as a great disruptive, destructive force; a great evil!

But yonder the horizon God's rest ever beckons. There won't always be suffering, disease, death and calamities. Those who hope in Him, the Mighty One, will rest from them all in *His tabernacle of rest* (Rev. 21:3-4). It's an intrinsic gift of His creative love and the clarion call of His salvation: “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). A rest which He commands us to live and commemorate *now* by ceasing from our own works on the seventh day of every week, *as He did from His on the seventh day*, keeping it holy in His honour (v. 10).

Your own biological clock sides with the Creator that you need to rest every seventh-day of the week! The seventh-day Sabbath is a constant pointer to God's promise of eternal rest.

Only that the Sabbath faces much ideological opposition and has few admirers (as is equally true of the narrow way of life). The Sabbath has suffered from suppression, the deliberate distortion of the truth, falsehood and plain misunderstanding and prejudice. Yet it stands as God's unassailable truth!

The booklet you hold in your hands has come to enrich your understanding of God's Sabbath truth, strip away the false theories that have been invented around the Sabbath—laying it bare before your own eyes that Yahweh's Sabbath is still relevant today and is at the core of His call to salvation.

The publication is a treasure trove of heavenly truth and rich historical data.

Enjoy! And may “the Lord of the Sabbath” keep you in His rest forever.

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Human Life and the God Factor

It's rush hour! The world moves at breakneck speed – because man is born to toil and labour (Job 14:1; 7:1-7; Ps. 104:23). Life is a whirl of monotonous activities. We race against time in an effort to make ends meet. We struggle and sweat to put food on the table, clothe ourselves and get a roof over our heads.

But man is a complex being. We are not just stirred by our survival instinct or sense of self-preservation or contentment. We also have psychological needs and wants. Call it vanity, but our egos sometimes set us racing even faster so we might get ahead in the rat race and feel good about ourselves!

And we never seem to get to quit this race of life! It is an endless cycle day after day, week after week. All our life!

Life itself has come to be defined by our daily struggles for survival and – needful or ego-driven – self-improvement. Therein lies, as it were, the meaning of life.

Yet there is a Being who is elevated above life and all creation and is Life itself and the source thereof. He lives outside time and yet is able to enter the finite world of mankind and make His impact felt. That is to say, He is involved in life but grander than life. He's *immanent* and *transcendent*. Much as man would try, this *Self-existent One* can't be wished away.

“It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; He maketh the judges of the earth as vanity” (Isa. 40:22-23).

In His presence all fall silent (Hab. 2:20); all human pride and effort must be shoved aside. He embodies all meaning! To Him we owe our life and all we have, for He is the reason for all things. He demands and deserves due recognition and adoration.

He is the Creator God, and He has unquestionable claim on our time, our life and indeed everything we possess. For “who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom. 11:35-36). “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formeth the earth and the world,” Moses the prophet says of Him, “even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God” (Ps. 90:2).

Before time was, the earth was a wasteland flooded over and steeped in chaos. But He spoke and set in motion a flurry of activity over a six-day period which saw light, sky, land, sea, vegetation, animal species and man appear filling space with life and abundance. Every one of them created for His own pleasure and glory!

“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

“And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made” (Gen. 2:2-3).

The greatest factor in the wellbeing of man is not the human factor but the God factor. The Creator God Yahweh is the only One able to guarantee man durable peace and happiness. And He rested on the seventh day and sanctified it after He had created man and all things in six days!

The Sabbath, a Memorial of Creation

For God, the seventh day was the day to sit back and admire His creation, the work of His hands, and to receive honour and adoration from men. That was the reason why the fact of God resting on the seventh day and blessing it and sanctifying it was recorded for us! It interposes sacred worship time on the Sabbath into the Genesis narrative.

The Sabbath triumphantly celebrates the God who used an amazing six days to create “heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” and rested on the seventh day. It’s a feat for which He’s worthy of recognition and praise; it is something to call to mind everyday but especially on His seventh day of rest as enshrined in the Ten Commandments:

“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:

“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:8-11).

The Sabbath has special significance. Don’t let this escape you. Remember the day’s specialness and observe it as a sanctified or set-apart time. There are seven days in a week but only one to “remember” or celebrate as sacred time week after week. The seventh-day Sabbath has inherent sacredness, for so it was made. He who speaks and it’s done (Ps. 33:9) and blesses to establish it (1 Chron. 17:27) has spoken to sanctify the Sabbath forever! And men are called upon to regard it as such in deference and honour of the One who so blessed and consecrated it!

The Sabbath as a memorial of creation will never lose its relevance as long as the fact remains that God is the Creator who made the world in six literal days and rested on the seventh day. It’s only when this fact is disproved that the Sabbath loses its relevance – its reason for being!

In other words, to reject the Sabbath is to repudiate the fact that God is the Creator, since He Himself instituted the Sabbath to cause this very fact to be institutionalized and acknowledged.

The Sabbath law as revealed in scripture is inextricably bound up with the creation account. In fact, we may look upon the Sabbath as God’s final act of creation in the sense of *causing it to come into being*; an enactment. The Sabbath exists because God who made the world in six days instituted it to serve as a perpetual reminder of His handiwork. And it’s instituted and blessed forever!

By God’s act of rest (ceasing work) on the seventh day of the week, He put His holy Presence into that day; He declared it a holy time consecrated for His adoration forever. God needed not to have rested after six days of creation, for He does not get tired (Isa. 40:28; Ps. 121:4). But He did so to infuse the seventh day with His holy Presence and honour due Him as the Lord of creation from whom all blessings flow (see 1 Chron. 29:11-12; Acts 17:28; 1 Tim. 6:17).

We need to bear in mind that the Sabbath is “the only act of creation that was sanctified and hallowed by God (Gen. 2:3)”. For this reason, it is “a unique institution, fundamentally different from all other days of the week. It is the epitome of the sanctified living. It is, as Heschel described it, ‘an island in time’” (Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, *What You Should Know About Jews and Judaism*, pp. 82-83).

Simply put, the seventh-day Sabbath is God’s special act of creation made for His own pleasure and that of His children, and it continues to this day.

Come to think of it, if God has not undone any of the works of creation He did on each of the six days of creation, do you suppose that He will ever renounce and reverse the blessings of holiness and rest He pronounced on the seventh day?

The Sabbath remains ‘the icing on the cake’ of God’s creation – its memorial (similar to how nations institute Independence Days to commemorate their statehood) – and nothing will change that fact! It’s only to those prepared to reject God as the Creator that the Sabbath doesn’t count!

The Sabbath is the day on which God rejoices in His creation with His children. The heavens declare His glory and the skies His handiwork (Ps. 91:1). And how appropriate it’s to memorialize and appreciate the blessings of creation by dedicating one whole day to the honour of its awesome Author?

The seventh-day Sabbath is God’s special Holy Day of rest meant to be shared and enjoyed with man, created in His own image and likeness (Heb. 4:9-10, 16; Jer. 17:24-25; Ps. 118:24; 139:14). It’s a day most dear to His heart, a day sanctified for His honour. And He does not hide His emotional attachment to it:

*“If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:
“Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa. 58:13-14).*

The Sabbath is God’s perpetual delight and those who delight in it delight in Him. The Sabbath rest remains for the people of God across all time wherever they may be and have been (Heb. 4:9 *NASB*). In all their generations they are to keep it holy!

But how is the seventh day to be kept holy?

All Days are not Equal

The 4th commandment calls on us to acknowledge, first, the *fundamental functional difference* between the Sabbath and all the other days of the week. The sun rises and sets on the seventh day as on the other days of the week. Likewise, the wind blows on all days and birds fly and sing. But in terms of spiritual significance, the seventh day stands out from the rest. It has been blessed and set apart in honour of God!

Not so the preceding six days of the week. All of them are meant for work; man’s work for his living as a farmer, trader, fisherman, teacher and all the other professions and vocations of life.

We are to labour on these consecutive six days, engaged in whatever it is we do to make a living, and make sure we do “all” our work within the six-day period. But not in the absolute sense of completing all our life’s work within a particular six-day period but in the sense of having brought our work to a purposeful and blessed end on the sixth day without any lingering thoughts of labour and anxiety on our minds. Instead, our minds should be filled with gratitude for God; it should stay on God (Isa. 26:3). As Rabbi Eckstein explains in his commentary on the fourth commandment, the command to do all our work in six days is intended to make us “feel as if all our work has been completed. We are to greet the Sabbath queen in a Spirit of openness, anticipation, and tranquility, without thoughts of what has yet to be done burdening us” (*What You Should Know About Jews*, p. 84).

The scriptural background is in Isaiah 58:13. The LORD says that on the Sabbath day we should “honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.” It’s on the Sabbath that we especially cast all our “care upon Him, for He careth” for us (1 Pet. 5:8) as He sits on His throne of grace to receive our praises (Heb. 4:16; Ps. 99:9).

No work is to be done on the seventh day. All work is closed at the end of the sixth day – the same time period God brought His work to an end.

We see then that the command to “remember the Sabbath day” carries a divine positive endorsement of work but only within the six days. These are days Yahweh has approved for work and labour and therefore work on the seventh day will not have His blessing.

The seventh day of the week is not our time. It is the rest day (Shabbat) of YHWH our Elohim and therefore not to be devoted to our normal earthly pursuits of work and labour. The seventh day requires complete cessation of strenuous and/or commercial work, we and our household, including our farm animals.

YHWH made the seventh day His special day of rest not by arbitrary divine fiat, although as Sovereign God it would be within His full rights to do so. But God made the seventh-day Sabbath – in fact, created it a Shabbat – to memorialize creation which He brought into being in six days. The act was the rest He took on that day, the cessation from all creative work, because all He had done on the six days was “good” and “very good”, whereupon He blessed and sanctified it.

By instructing us to keep the seventh day holy, Yahweh is inviting us to share in the rest, joy and blessedness of His special day. We are His redeemed children, the work of His hands, and we are to imitate Him as “dear children” (Eph. 5:1).

Moreover, He’s our rest, even “our dwelling place in all generations” (Ps. 90:1).

Satan turns Man against God’s Rest

Now, here’s a real clash of wills:

As against God’s commandment to rest on the seventh day, many question the wisdom of resting on one full day out of the seven-day week. Throughout history, the Sabbath has been vilified and denigrated but above the din of protest and contempt, the Creator’s firm voice calls out to men: “If thou... call the Sabbath... My holy day... a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him.”

The Creator calls upon men to do the very opposite of how they would treat His Sabbath. Instead of a delight, they call it ‘a yoke’ and trivial instead of honourable because men have chosen to obey Satan:

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16).

No wonder the seventh-day Sabbath has been subjected to much opprobrium and contempt as no other divine commandment has been. Yet the Sabbath is the only divine commandment promulgated in Eden before man’s fall, before sin was, by God’s declaratory act of blessing and sanctification. It relates directly to man’s obligation to acknowledge, worship and appreciate His Creator who gave him life and all things for his enjoyment.

But nay, Satan will not have it. He has turned man against God and His Sabbath rest – and he rails against God’s Sabbath using men’s voices of all kinds down through history.

Often, God likes to use allegories to teach us deep spiritual truths. Israel was in the land of Egypt for a long time, but it was only after they were redeemed from the house of bondage that they were told to “remember the Sabbath day” dating back to Eden, although the Hebrew patriarchs like Abraham in all probability kept the Sabbath along with the other laws of God (Gen. 26:5).

It’s inconceivable that Pharaoh would have allowed Israel to rest on the Sabbath. When Moses appeared before him with word from the LORD, “Let My people go,” he took immediate offence and with

indignation answered: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” (Ex. 5:1-2).

When Moses with his brother Aaron impressed on him the absolute need to sacrifice to Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews, “the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens” (vv. 4-5).

Pharaoh’s overall concern was Israel resting from their burdens. The prospect of Israel getting rest was abhorrent to him. Accordingly, he laid more burdens on the people, ordering that they be made to make bricks without straw lest they be distracted from their work by Moses’ “vain words” (vv. 6-9).

The Pharaoh of Egypt epitomizes all that is evil, cruel and mean in Satan. He would have people labour all day all the time! His rage against God’s Rest Day refuses to abate: “why teach people to rest on the seventh day?” He would have people think that the divine call to rest are “vain words”!

Satan, “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4; cp. Gal. 1:4), has turned God’s Sabbath rest into an ugly thing in the minds of people. The Sabbath is seen as a sheer waste of precious time and out of step in a modern world where productivity cannot be sacrificed under any circumstances!

But, in reality, rest is beneficial to life. Rest is vital to the total wellbeing of man. The body needs rest and so too the soul and the spirit. God made the Sabbath to fulfill man’s physical and spiritual need for rest. Actually, He infused His Sabbath-rest into all His earthly creation.

And I am not making a mere conjecture!

Your Biological Clock Knows God’s Sabbath Rest

There’s scientific evidence to suggest that life on earth, in particular man, has been biologically programmed to operate within a seven-day weekly cycle without which we will be out of sync with our biological rhythms, nature and God.

The scientific discipline that has helped shed light on this innate pattern of a 7-day weekly cycle of activity is known as *Chronobiology*. It is defined as “the study of temporal (time) cycles on biological organisms through biochemical, physiological, or behavioral processes. There are patterns and rhythms that are built into plants, animals, and mankind. This can focus on a short period of time such as occurs daily, weekly, or with tidal fluctuations. There are also longer rhythms with seasonal or annual patterns. Perhaps the best known of these is the circadian rhythm which is a 24-hour cycle, which is based heavily on sunlight, that signals the body when it is time to wake, sleep, or eat.

“In regards to a weekly rhythm, we are commanded in scripture to rest on the seventh day of each week. We are learning that this is important and even necessary on a biological basis. Mental performance is found to decrease during the course of the week and lack of rest leads to increased stress on the body and tearing down of tissue. This was exemplified during the French Revolution starting in 1792. As an effort to undermine the Christian calendar, a new decimal calendar with ten day work weeks and three week months was instituted and continued for 13 years. One of the major consequences was an increase in illness for people and the death of the work horses” (Todd Elder, *Observing His Rest series* Art. “Physical Aspects of the Sabbath” www.exploringcreation.info/covenant/sabphysical.htm).

The French Revolution-era calendar of ten-day weeks operated for just 13 years and it was thrown out and the seven-day week calendar reinstated because it proved to be disruptive of the biological rhythms of both man and beast and therefore was counter-productive and destructive!

Man cannot disobey God and live a happy life. The seven-day weekly cycle of six days of work followed by rest on the seventh day has been embedded into the fabric of nature by the Creator. To go against it is to violate your biological clock designed by the Creator to keep your body and soul in shape for optimal performance.

An online article titled “Rhythm of Life” explains more:

“Life on this earth seems to be calibrated in some mysterious way to the number seven. We as humans operate under the cadence of a seven-day week – a cycle of human activity that doesn’t follow the cosmic timing of the stars, the sun, or the moon.” It is something innate, directly related to the Sabbath of the Creator God who made us and the Sabbath of rest on the seventh day. Accordingly, (the article continues), “we humans don’t just experience circadian rhythms of approximately 24 hours, we also operate under circaseptan or weekly rhythms as well” (<http://www.vibrantlife.com/?p=229>).

And it’s not just true of human beings but even among the lower creatures. The article cites the work of author Jeremy Campbell as reporting that “circaseptan rhythms are of very ancient origin, appearing in primitive one-celled organisms, and are thought to be present even in bacteria, the simplest form of life now existing”.

Little wonder, God said even our animals should rest on the Sabbath day. Their bodies are programmed to rest every seventh day of the week. (See Prov. 12:10).

What a caring God!

Sadly, this is a world that largely owes allegiance to the devil whose way is labour and suffering and no rest. The result is that the Sabbath, the keeping of which is in tune with our very biological rhythms, has been given a bad name. The good has been called bad in a world which is in rebellion against God (Isa. 5:20).

But, as true believers, we are no longer under Satan’s bondage of sin but redeemed to enjoy the life God created us to live. Therefore, we are entitled to rest.

This was the additional basis for Sabbath-keeping that Yah brought to the attention of the children of Israel as He reiterated the Ten Commandments to them by the mouth of His servant Moses:

“Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.

“Six days thou shalt 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, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

“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” (Deut. 5:12-15).

“Remember...”! Egypt represents bondage; redemption represents and leads to rest. “Therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day”.

The seventh-day Sabbath is first and foremost a memorial of creation, but here it also represents something much more. It represents *REST as a fruit of redemption*. It serves to illustrate that ultimately our rest is in God.

This was the same point Jesus, the Redeemer and Lord of the Sabbath, sought to put across when He extended an open invitation to all:

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

Our rest is in God, and God has made that abundantly clear by His Sabbath rest.

So then, the Sabbath serves to remind us that the purpose of creation (and redemption) is worship and rest (dependence, joy and relaxation) in the Creator!

The depiction of the Sabbath as a yoke or burden is a gross misnomer. It’s a satanic caricature and misrepresentation of what the seventh-day Sabbath really stands for, which is that, the Sabbath commemorates the salvational truth that in God and in Him alone has His people found rest!

What could be bad about this?

Only the devil will take issue!

The Test of Obedience

God’s high regard for the Sabbath is not only seen in the special blessings He has pronounced on it as the day of rest but also expressed in the way He insists on His people’s wholehearted observance of it. As a matter of fact, the Lord regards faithful Sabbath-keeping as the test of obedience to Him – and the entirety of His commandments.

The LORD made that clear early on in His relationship with the redeemed people of Israel, when He rebuked the nation for not keeping His commandments when some went out to gather manna on the Sabbath day against His express command.

We read in Exodus 16:27-29:

“And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the Sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day”.

Notice the charge the LORD laid against Israel in respect of Sabbath violation: “How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws?”

Why did Sabbath desecration carry such a serious charge of absolute lawlessness? What does Sabbath-breaking imply in the context of our relationship with God?

It implies a rejection of His status as Creator – the Creator God who created the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things therein in six days and therefore commands us to observe the Sabbath in commemoration of His work. The Sabbath is the sign that He’s the Creator God and that we acknowledge this truth by keeping it holy as He plainly states in Ezekiel 20:20 “And hallow My sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that ye may know that I am the LORD your God”. Thus, if you have rejected Him as the Creator by rejecting His Sabbath, why still find it worthwhile keeping any of His other commands? What further authority does He have over you?

It is a rejection of His right to demand obedience from you. The Sabbath commandment is that crucial. It’s at the heart of man’s acknowledgement and reverence for the true God of creation!

As the LORD informed Moses of His intention to rain down manna for the children of Israel, He had said to him:

“Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no.

“And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily” (Ex. 16:4-5).

Right there, is another Sabbath fact to note: The first law God gave to Israel after He redeemed them from slavery in Egypt was the Sabbath commandment. It came ahead of the rest of the nine commandments given together with the Sabbath at Sinai (Ex. 20). Of course, its beginnings go back to pre-Fall Eden when God rested after six days of creation. The Sabbath, no doubt, occupies a pride of place among God’s commandments.

In fact, the Bible makes no secret of the fact that one of the easiest ways to provoke God’s anger is to desecrate His Sabbath. Under the Old Covenant the penalty for Sabbath-breaking was death by stoning as befell a man caught gathering firewood on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-36; also Ex. 35:2).

Under the New Covenant, the penalty is still death – spiritual death – since the transgression of God’s law of which the Sabbath is part is sin, the wages of which is death (1 John 3:4; Rom. 6:23).

Knowing the grave consequences of Sabbath violation, the Prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned the kings and people of Judah against desecrating the Sabbath but all his warnings fell on deaf ears (see Jer. 17:19-27). It wasn’t until the king of Babylon destroyed and enslaved the nation, in fulfilment of Jeremiah’s words, that the people learnt the tragic consequences of Sabbath-breaking the hard way. For seventy years, the land enjoyed a Sabbath-rest while the people of Judah languished in exile in Babylon (2 Chron. 36:17-21).

The people had rejected rest by rejecting the Sabbath and so only one option remained: hard labour.

Nevertheless, the LORD would not be denied His Sabbath honour; He would exact Sabbath-rest from His holy land by giving the land a 70-year rest. During this period, no strenuous work or activities would be done on it – just as would have been the case every weekly Sabbath were the land peopled with faithful Sabbath keepers (Lev. 26:33-35).

God’s Sabbath can’t be trifled with. He does not take kindly to people trampling on His Sabbath law. Indeed, He has sworn in His wrath that those who disobey Him will not enter His rest, just as happened to the disobedient Israelites of old.

Otherwise, God’s promised rest remains on offer to every generation of believers, although there is an ever present danger of missing it.

This is the thrust of the message of Hebrews chapter four. So how do we make sure we don’t fail to enter God’s Sabbath rest?

“There Remains a Sabbath-keeping for the People of God”

The key to entering God’s Sabbath-rest lies in having a proper attitude towards Him—the attitude of godly fear being an element of true faith. Otherwise, we will come short of it:

“Therefore, while the promise of entering His rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it” (Heb. 4:1 RSV).

And we have the example of the ancient Israelites to learn from:

“For good news came to us just as to them; but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers” (v. 2).

That is to say, the SAME MESSAGE preached to us was also preached to the Israelites, but the message (which certainly includes the Sabbath) did not “profit them” because it was not “mixed with faith” (KJV) in their hearts.

On the one hand, we are to “fear” lest we fall short of His promised rest, but on the other hand, they did not have “faith”. What is it about fear and faith? What is the interplay between them?

The fear under discussion is, firstly, not satanic fear whereby he keeps people in bondage (Rom. 8:15; Heb. 2:14-15). The fear in question is godly fear or reverence for God. It is characterized by great unwillingness to disobey or offend God in any shape or form. It is the heart that “trembles” to obey God’s Word (Isa. 66:2) such that the very thought of sinning against God is repulsive and deeply hurtful. (See Gen. 39:9). It is the heart abounding with love for God; the heart that has surrendered itself to God and whose sole desire is to please Him and not allow other objects of desire to come between them. Such was the heart David prayed for:

“Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy name” (Ps. 86:11 KJV).

This unwavering heart of godly fear is a product of saving faith:

“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

“And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:37-38, 41-43).

In short, godly fear is the keeping of God’s commandments (Eccl. 12:13; 1 John 3:22) as an expression of faith, for, as *Ya’coov* puts it, “faith without works is dead” (Jam. 2:17, 26).

This was what the Israelites lacked – faith producing godly fear (that is, the keeping of God’s commandments as one’s heart’s singular purpose). Instead, it was disobedience galore! (Heb. 3:8-11, 15-19). The result was that the message they heard did not profit them, that is to say, they did not enter into rest.

And the reason is simply this: Rest is *only* reserved for those who believe (with all its connotations of godly fear and obedience):

“For we who have believed enter that rest, as He has said, ‘As I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall never enter My rest’, although His works were finished from the foundation of the world” (v. 3 RSV).

Those who fail to believe are not entitled to His rest; they are disqualified from it, and His vow, sworn in His anger to this effect (in Ps 95:11), makes it definite and irrevocable. “They shall *never* enter My rest!”

Yet God is more than ready to give people rest if only they would believe! His works leading to His rest were finished from the foundation of the world!

When?

“For He has somewhere [in scripture] spoken of the seventh day in this way, ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’” (v. 4).

The seventh-day Sabbath instituted at creation is the pivotal, enduring symbol and reference point for God’s rest. God rested on the seventh day not for its own sake but to teach us that He’s the giver of rest and that all His acts culminate in a seventh-day of rest. The seventh-day of rest is indelibly identified with Him.

Yet because His rest is reserved for only true believers who fear Him, He had to exclude some people despite His primordial Sabbath-rest:

“And again in this place [in Ps. 95:11] He said, ‘They shall never enter My rest’” (v. 5).

Historically, the works He finished from the foundation of the world are the works of creation He took six days to complete after which He rested on the seventh day. In context, however, they refer more to His works of salvation. (See 1 Pet. 1:18-20; Rev. 13:8). But redemption is also a creative act of God whereby He creates fallen man anew in His image of “righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24; 2 Cor. 4:6).

Like the works of creation, His works of salvation lead to rest, and the Sabbath which was “made for man” (Mark 2:27) is the logical and practical way to both illustrate and appropriate this rest!

God’s Sabbath-rest cannot possibly go out of date! Regardless of some people’s negative attitude towards it, the fact remains that it remains for some to enter His rest:

“Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience” (v. 6).

The offer is still on. Only disobedience is the stumbling block – it was the reason why “those who formerly received the gospel” failed to enter God’s rest.

But God has not resigned Himself to it that people will never enter His rest because they will never be obedient. Some failed, but it remains for others to enter! Halleluiah!

So He makes a fresh call to obedience through David after a long while:

“Again He sets a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.

“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later of another day” (vv. 7-8).

The call not to harden our hearts at His voice is a call to godly fear. And He made this call after so long a time – some five hundred years after the Israelites entered Canaan – all because the people failed to have rest under Joshua (presumably due to disobedience). Which necessitated Him speaking on another occasion of still a further need for rest – the “another day [of rest]” in reference. (See Ps. 95:7-11).

All of this – God’s insistent call to rest right up to our time – points to one conclusion: “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (v. 9). The more literal *Rotherham Emphasized Bible* (1902) renders it, “there is, left over, a Sabbath-keeping, for the people of God.” And so the *Bible in Basic English*: “So that there is still a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God”.

The Sabbath is far from falling into spiritual irrelevance or obsolescence. It is evergreen. It remains for the people of God. It’s a sign of God’s covenant with His people:

“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

“It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed” (Ex. 31:16-17 KJV).

The perpetuity of the Sabbath jumps out at us! "... keep the Sabbath to observe it throughout your generations, for a perpetual covenant; it's a sign between Me and you forever"!

But objectors would say, the Sabbath is a sign between God and the children of Israel only; all Gentiles are excluded! But my Biblical objection is that all believers in Christ have become spiritual Israelites with whom God has renewed His covenant laws, including the Sabbath, in their hearts and minds (Gal. 3:29; Eph. 2:11-13; Heb. 8:10-12).

Thus under the New Covenant, the Sabbath belong to all believers of all nationalities – Jew and Gentile alike – and indeed no Gentile believer has any reason to excuse themselves from God's Sabbath observance on the basis of ethnicity in this New Testament era. The Lord makes a universal call to Sabbath observance in this Gospel Age through the Prophet Isaiah:

¹*"Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.*

²*"Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.*

³*"Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.*

⁴*"For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant;*

⁵*"Even unto them will I give in Mine house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.*

⁶*"Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant;*

⁷*"Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.*

⁸*"The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him" (Isa. 56:1-8).*

Yahweh has made Himself clear: Because His salvation, which will reveal His righteousness, is about to come, He calls on all manner of men to do what is right and just, and especially to observe His Sabbath.

The Lord's salvation is certain. It is sure to come. It is to be revealed at the second coming.

This is not to be confused with the Messiah's first coming when He shed His blood for the redemption of mankind (Matt. 1:21) and inaugurated the gospel age with a charge to the church to preach the gospel to all nations.

The first coming opens the Biblical period known as "the last days" (which roughly spans the New Testament era, Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:1-2); the second coming closes this age.

However, the message is the same in the beginning as in the ending – "Repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" as the Apostle Paul would put it (Acts 20:21), which is but a rephrasing of Christ's classic call to repentance and faith made at the start of His earthly ministry:

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

The preparatory mission of John the Baptist, leading up to Christ's, was the same:

“And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins;

“As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight” (Luke 3:3-4).

In Isaiah’s prophecy, the divine call to repentance is summed up in the words: do righteousness and justice – and that coming at the tail end of the gospel age when His salvation will be “revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5).

The word “judgment” from the Hebrew “mishpat [mish-pawt]” (Strong’s # 4941) is properly speaking “a verdict” or “divine law” but in usage is often synonymous with the Hebrew word “tsedaq [tsaw-dak]” (Strong’s # 6664) meaning “ordinance” or “righteousness”. But actually “judgment” and “justice” may be looked upon as close cousins in Biblical Hebrew. A feminine noun, “tsedaq” means “righteousness, blameless conduct, and integrity...The word describes the attitude and actions God had and expected His people to maintain” (*Strong’s Complete Word Study Concordance* AMG [Expanded Edition] p. 1953).

And that’s how the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) translates Isaiah 56:1:

“Thus says the LORD: “Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon My salvation will come, and My deliverance be revealed”

This is the spiritual preparation God expects of all those who hope in His salvation “ready to be revealed in the last time”. His promise of salvation is for those who do what is right in His sight – the very thing His law teaches us to do. King David sung:

“My tongue shall speak of Thy word: for all Thy commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172 also Rom. 7:12).

In 1st Corinthians chapter 6, the Apostle Paul wrote:

“Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

The washing produces “white robes” – the righteousness of the saints:

“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

“And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?

“And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9, 13-14).

“And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev. 19:8).

The net effect of the washing in the Lamb’s blood is a cleansing from all unrighteousness so that one is no longer a fornicator, or an idolater or a homosexual or a thief.

To such ones will the Redeemer come the second time with His salvation:

“And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD” (Isa. 59:20).

Again, obedience to God’s law – righteousness – reigns supreme in the lives of the redeemed (Tit. 2:14).

Yet in the passage before us, Isaiah does not define righteousness for us in broad terms. The Lord has narrowed down His call to righteousness to a specific commandment – the keeping of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath!

And He begins with the word “blessed”, namely, “Blessed is the man that doeth this” (v. 2). It is not a curse but a blessing, not a yoke but rest and joy to keep the Sabbath. And it’s meant to be kept by all manner of men, even by the humblest of men, as denoted by the use of the Hebrew word “*enosh*”, “a man in humble life” as opposed to “*ish*”, “a man of high rank”.

Even so, the LORD does not propose to introduce the Sabbath to a people who have no prior knowledge of it. Instead, the knowledge of the Sabbath is assumed; its validity taken for granted. And Yahweh is only telling people to be careful not to “pollute” or desecrate the Sabbath, not to disregard or treat it with flippancy but to take firm hold of it, grasp it in both hands and lay hold on it. It’s far from the indifferent attitude most people adopt toward the Sabbath – from totally dismissing it to adopting a non-committal attitude towards it.

Yet the LORD says keep the Sabbath from polluting it and “keep your hand from doing any evil”. Although the Sabbath has been singled out for special emphasis, the Lord is not asking us to observe only one righteous act. Instead, He insists on us keeping the Sabbath as part of *a general lifestyle of righteousness* or we fall short of His standard of righteousness.

But who are the humblest of men God is so keen to reach out to?

The answer is inferable from the next verse.

The Lord tells the Gentiles and eunuchs that have joined themselves to Him not to view themselves as second-class believers in relation to natural-born Israelites! That is to say, “The LORD hath utterly separated me from His people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree” (v. 3).

No, the Lord says, that is an erroneous view of their spiritual status under the new dispensation of the Gospel Age. Instead, they should see themselves as “fellowcitizens with the [Jewish] saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:19-20).

Their separation from Israel belonged to the old dispensation which operated under the Old Covenant when they were “without Christ [Messiah], being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off [Gentiles], and to them that were nigh [Hebrews]. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2:11-18).

Gentile believers and eunuchs are now full-fledged members of the community of God (variously known as Zion, Israel, Israel of God, the Church) because of (1) the redeeming blood of the Messiah shed for all – both the Jew and the Gentile, and (2) the resultant abolition of the enmity-fostering ceremonial law of

ordinances which called for separation between Israelites, on one hand, and Gentiles and eunuchs, on the other hand:

“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” (Ex. 12:43-45).

Of eunuchs (sterilized men), the ordinance laid down:

“He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD” (Deut. 23:1).

In the Jerusalem temple, the ritual separation between Jew and Gentile was vividly concretized in stone with a stern warning to Gentiles not to trespass on pain of death! The Jewish historian Josephus writes:

*“Thus was the first enclosure [outer court]. In the midst of which, and not far from it, was the second, to be gone up to by a few steps: this was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death” (*The New Complete Works of Josephus* 15.11.15 (417) p. 524 Grand Rapids, MI 49501, 1999. Emphasis mine). (See Acts 21:28-29; Rev. 11:1-2).*

This was the sort of regulation – even “the middle wall of partition” – that Paul had in mind when the Holy Spirit led him to write: “Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances”. He never meant the Ten Commandment law of which the Sabbath is part.

Now thanks to the great sacrifice of Calvary, Gentiles and eunuchs are welcomed as fellow-citizens of the household of God! That’s how God sees them and they themselves ought to see themselves – and not as second-class citizens to Israelites. For as the Apostle Peter famously declared in his address to the household of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to the church, “Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.” (Acts 10:34-35).

Clearly then, the opinion of some commentators that Isaiah 56 is set in the pre-Christian era and therefore is directed at proselytes (Gentile converts to the Old Testament system of worship/Judaism) – all in an obvious attempt to disprove that the Sabbath is binding on Gentile believers – falls flat on its face! The testimony of scripture is clear that it was not until this ‘Christian era’ of the New Testament that God made an open invitation to all mankind to turn to Him. Prophecies given in Old Testament times like Isaiah 56 as well as Isaiah chapter 2 only anticipated this time (not that they were fulfilled at the time they were given).

Accordingly, this is exactly the same time – the New Testament era – that Philip was led of the Lord to meet and convert the Ethiopian eunuch returning from worship in Jerusalem (Acts 8:26-39).

Everything only falls into place in the last days of the New Testament era.

The Gentile who believes and the eunuch who believes are now full members of the congregation of the LORD. They have joined themselves to the Lord by His Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; 12:13), and the Sabbath is equally for them as it’s for the Jewish believers. The Lord, who foreknew the lame excuse many Gentile believers will make to avoid His Sabbath, asks them not to excuse themselves from Sabbath-keeping on the basis that it was given to Israel and therefore not for them – a common refrain of Gentile Christians to this day: “The Sabbath is for Israel, not for Gentiles (or Christians)”.

Despite this pro-Sabbath heavenly word that has come through Isaiah, the ‘evangelistic prophet’, they still repeat the mantra, “the Sabbath is for the Jews”.

Nevertheless, the unalterable word of God has gone forth and with it a promise of blessing and salvation to the obedient eunuch and Gentile: The faithful Sabbath-keeping eunuch and Gentile are assured of a place in the Presence of God!

#It is a promise prefaced with a citation of the obedient life of the Sabbath-observing eunuch which immensely pleases God. It goes: “Thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant” (v. 4).

The keeping of the Sabbath means a whole lot to the Lord. It means you have chosen to do one of the things that please Him and taken hold of His covenant – even the Sabbath covenant by which He has sanctified (or set apart) His people Israel from all others for all time:

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

“Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. (See Ez. 20:12).

“Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant” (Ex. 31:12-13, 16).

The obvious truth is that the Sabbath brings one into a covenant relationship with God. Such is the case of the Sabbath-keeping eunuchs, and their reward is ready!

Even such eunuchs who keep the Sabbath, and by so doing please the Lord and take hold of His covenant, will He grant them a place in His house and within His walls “and a name better than of sons of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (v. 5).

It is a complete reversal of the previous order banning them from the congregation of the LORD. They are no longer outside the walls of God’s household but within His walls, and the evidence is their keeping of the Sabbath which remains for the people of God.

What is more, He has since addressed their cry of hopelessness – “Behold, I am a dry tree”! Christ is “the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27), for He will crown them with eternal life, described as “an everlasting name”, which is far better than the family name their children would have perpetuated if they had any!

#The promise to the Sabbath-keeping Gentile believer is similarly prefaced with a citation, revealing the heart of God towards those who love Him enough to embrace His Sabbath:

“Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant” (v. 6).

The message is that the Gentile who joins himself to the Lord not just in name but means to serve Him and to love His name, to be His servant, keeps the Sabbath as a matter of course. He proves his sincerity by keeping the Sabbath which is at the heart of God’s covenant with His people. In God’s eyes, a desire to serve and love Him should naturally lead to the observance of His 7th day of rest on which He also rested. It is as simple as that. No arguments, no excuses. It’s love in action!

And Yahweh towards whom the love is directed requites that love. Even such Sabbath-keeping Gentiles, He promises, “will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar; for Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (v. 7).

The holy mountain of God represents, in prophetic symbolic language, the throne of the Lord's Kingdom which will be set up in Jerusalem during His millennial rule (Jer. 3:17; Ps. 68:29; Matt. 5:35; cp. Ez. 28:14).

Yet it's prefigured even now by the true church described as "the mountain of the LORD's house... established in the top of the mountains" [in the last days, and] "exalted above the hills" to which all nations flow to be instructed out of God's law (Isa. 2:2-3).

But ultimately it's the millennial mountain of Christ's universal rule (Dan. 2:35, 45; cp. Rev. 21:10) that the Lord refers to. God makes a luxuriant promise to Sabbath-keeping Gentile believers!

But how will He make His Sabbath-keeping Gentile followers joyful in His house of prayer?

His answer: "their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon Mine altar.

This is not a reference to the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament system but the offering of their lives of dedication and service to God as "a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1), the offering of their "sacrifice of praise" (Heb. 13:15) and prayer upon His golden altar of incense in heaven (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3-4; cp. Luke 1:10-11; Ex. 30:1-3; 39:38; 1 Kings 6:22; Heb. 8:5).

These sacrifices constitute, in the main, the "spiritual sacrifices" of the New Testament priesthood of believers (1 Pet. 2:5).

The house of the living God, Yahweh, shall be called in the last days of the New Testament era "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17). This house is properly called "the house of Israel" (with whom God has made a new covenant) or "the house of the God of Jacob" (Isa. 2:3). It's a Sabbath-keeping house, the very house with whom God has made an everlasting covenant with the Sabbath as its eternal sign!

This is the Sabbath-keeping house – "the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) – into which Gentile believers have been welcomed. And they must keep *the Sabbath covenant sign* to identify them as full members of the household.

"For the Lord God, who re-gathers the outcasts of Israel will gather others – eunuchs and Gentiles – to Israel, beside those that are gathered unto him" (v. 8). (See Rom. 9:25-26).

If so, Gentiles will not have a separate spiritual identity from natural-born Israelites in Christ (or as most now prefer to call themselves "Messianic Jews"). Instead, they will share in Israel's spiritual identity as God's chosen people (Ex. 19:4-6; 1 Pet. 2:9-10; Matt. 8:11). The Sabbath is for them as it's for their fellow spiritual citizens – the Jewish saints!

This explains why in Hebrews 4:9 God was careful to use the words the Sabbath remains for "the people of God" and not simply Israel. In accordance with Isaiah's prophecy, the nation of Israel has been enlarged with its borders extended "far unto all the ends of the earth" through the proclamation of the true gospel "among all nations", even "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Isa. 26:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8), and His people who espouse faith and obedience in Him are found all over the face of the earth.

And because the Sabbath, in God's original intent to date, was made for man not just for the Jews, He has specially called on all men in this last hour of the closing age to take hold of it.

But what does it mean to enter God's Sabbath-rest which remains for His people?

We enter God's rest by ceasing from our "own works, as God did from His" (on the seventh day) (v. 10). In other words, we are to emulate God and rest on the Sabbath from all our works just as He did. For this reason, it's inappropriate, even misleading, to say we enter God's rest by only taking a spiritual rest as

some would interpret Hebrews 4:9. The question is, how did God rest? He rested on a *specific day*, and His rest was from work He did in producing the visible world we now live in. He took a rest from the activity of creation which consisted in works physical in nature – even the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things therein – because He had finished making them! By no stretch of imagination can we say the rest God took was spiritual rest which He does not need anyway in the sense that it applies to us. (God is a perfect Spirit, complete in Himself and only takes joy in His creation). Instead, over a six-day period, there was action and then rest (stoppage) on the seventh day of the week; WORK and REST (cessation from work) in the physical realm!

This was the pattern of Sabbath-keeping God Himself set for man: Work for six days; rest on the seventh-day Sabbath as I did!

Adam and Eve, even in their innocence, kept the Sabbath and would have kept it right up to the present had not sin truncated their lives, in so far as God gave them WORK to do as farmers, tending the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15, 18).

And when Eden is restored, when Satan will have been incarcerated – and with him sin – for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1-2, 6) and the rule of Christ and the knowledge of God extended over all the earth “as the waters cover the sea”, the Sabbath will be physically observed universally:

“For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.

“And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the LORD” (Isa. 66:22-23).

The Sabbath will outlive this present age. And at no time does a spiritual Sabbath-rest take precedence over the physical rest of the Sabbath or, indeed, take its place.

While spiritual rest is Biblical, the scriptures in no way suggest that it supplants physical Sabbath keeping. If anything, it's the Sabbath that illustrates in practical terms what this rest means and entails!

Yeshua, the Lord of the Sabbath, sets people free from the burdens of sin and the bondage of Satan but not to live for ourselves. He makes us “servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18). That is why His yoke is light (Matt. 11:29-30). His yoke is a reciprocal gesture of love, an obligation of love, even as the Epistle of John testifies:

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

These commandments which are not burdensome to those who truly love God (John 14:15) include the Sabbath. To wit: “the Gentiles that join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants, every one that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of My covenant.”

That is spiritual rest:

“Great peace have they which love Thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (Ps. 119:165).

“O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea” (Isa. 48:18).

Spiritual rest derives from obedience to God through faith in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:31; 5:1). Otherwise the disobedient Israelites would have entered His rest.

Nay, His rest is for those who come to Him by way of faith and repentance, and He seals it all by His Spirit of “refreshing”! The Apostle Peter addressed the crowd mesmerized by the miraculous healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Jerusalem temple:

*“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;
“And He shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you” (Acts 3:19-20).*

It’s the refreshing Spirit of Jesus sent from the presence of the Father that sets the seal on the rest of the obedient (see Isa. 28:12), and this in no way obviates the observance of the Sabbath, for the Holy Ghost is given to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).

In this connection, the Sabbath illustrates spiritual rest, and spiritual rest points to the perpetual need for the Sabbath. Namely, “There is, left over, a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God.” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* explains the Greek term ‘*sabbatismos*’ translated as “Sabbath rest”:

“The words ‘Sabbath rest’ translate the [Greek] noun ‘*sabbatismos*’, a unique word in the New Testament [distinct from ‘*katapausis*’ ‘rest’ in vv. 1, 2,3, etc.]. This term appears also in Plutarch ... for Sabbath observance, and in four post-canonical Christian writings which are not dependent on Hebrews 4:9, for seventh day ‘Sabbath celebration’.

“The author of Hebrews affirms in Hebrews 4:3-11 through the joining of quotations from Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:7 that the promised ‘Sabbath rest’ still anticipates a complete realization ‘for the people of God’ in the endtime which had been inaugurated with the appearance of Jesus [Hebrews 1:1-3]... The experience of ‘Sabbath rest’ points to present ‘rest’ (*katapausis*) reality in which those ‘who have believed are entering’ (4:3) and it points to a future ‘rest’ reality (4:11). Physical Sabbath-keeping on the part of the New Covenant believer as affirmed by ‘Sabbath rest’ epitomizes cessation from ‘works’ (4:10) in commemoration of God’s rest at creation (4:4 = Genesis 2:2) and manifests faith in the salvation provided by Christ.

“Hebrews 4:3-11 affirms that physical ‘Sabbath rest’ (*sabbatismos*) is the weekly outward manifestation of the inner experience of spiritual rest (*katapausis*) in which the final rest is ... experienced already ‘today’ (4:7). Thus ‘Sabbath rest’ combines in itself creation-commemoration, salvation-experience, and *eschaton* [end-time]-anticipation as the community of faith moves forward toward the final consummation of total restoration and rest”.

The Sabbath institution speaks to the boundless depth of divine foreknowledge! (Rom. 11:33). The Sabbath straddles the past, the present and the future embodying in itself the ongoing eternal plan of God to give His people rest. The Sabbath rest of yesterday is the rest of today and of the age to come. We realize then that, while Hebrews 4:9 emphasizes the need to continue keeping the Sabbath in a New Covenant context, the day retains all the significance it had from the time God established it and then commanded it by law for His people. The *Sabbath thread of rest* is not about to taper off but is steadily moving forward towards final consummation in Christ Jesus!

So then, the keeping of the Sabbath is imperative for a life of faith and obedience in Christ – and Paul would not for once skip Sabbath-keeping even in a place where no meeting place could be found (Acts 16:13).

The example of God is clear; His command is clearer still: ‘keep the Sabbath by ceasing from all your work so you may take delight in Me – be refreshed in Me on My holy day as I experienced on the first Sabbath’:

“... for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed” (Ex. 31:17^b).

“Refreshed” from the Hebrew verb “naphash, [*naw-fash*]” (Strong’s #5314) literally means “to breathe or to be breathed upon, refreshed (as if by a current of air)”.

Again, the term doesn’t suggest the regaining of lost or spent strength by God, the untiring One. Instead, “naphash, [*naw-fash*]” captures the radiant mood of God on the first Sabbath, His exhilaration at His completed work of creation, giving Him a sense of rejuvenation and inner pleasure.

The example of God shows that the Sabbath simultaneously benefits those who observe it physically and spiritually, in that He took ‘physical’ rest and was ‘spiritually’ refreshed.

The keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is one way to become God-like, the Sabbath being the only law of God He personally keeps! All the other commandments are expressions of His nature. For example, God will not have to abstain from adultery or covetousness in a literal sense, except that they reflect His faithfulness and goodwill respectively. But the Sabbath is unique as a divine law. God personally kept it as its first keeper (together with Adam and his wife) as an example to us.

Accordingly, at no time are our spirits more refreshed in the Lord than on the Sabbath of His special joy – the seventh day. “This is the day which the LORD hath made” by not only numbering it (7th day) but also naming it (Sabbath). “We will rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps. 118:24).

Thus the Apostle John writes:

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet” (Rev. 1:10).

If we allow the Bible to speak, “the Lord’s day” can be no other day than the seventh day Sabbath—the day God calls “My holy day” (Isa. 58:13), “the Sabbath of the LORD” (Ex. 20:10), although some suggest it probably refers to the prophetic “day of the LORD” which will manifest His majestic power in judgment (Joel 2:1, 31; Amos 5:18).

The Lord’s day is never Sunday, the first day of the week. John was no Bible illiterate. His equally inspired writings should agree with other scriptures about which day of the week is the Lord’s day or the holy day of the Lord. He can’t go out on a limb and be referring to a different day of the week (the first day) as the Lord’s day, instead of the Sabbath of the Lord, the seventh day, while describing the remnant church as those that “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony [and/or faith] of Jesus” (Rev. 12:17; 14:12).

But truly, he was “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day”, “the Lord” being the Lord Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), by whom the Father created all things (Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16), and His spirit was in tune with God’s Spirit on His holy day. He was refreshed in the Lord.

For those of us who observe the Sabbath in loving obedience to God’s word and example, the Sabbath is a restorative spiritual tonic, a revivifying experience in the Lord.

And that is the more reason why, in addition to demonstrating obedience towards God, we must strive to enter God’s Sabbath rest:

“Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience” (v. 11 RSV).

“Labour or strive to enter” is not a call to physical labour in order to enter the Sabbath rest, as it sounds, but an attitude of the mind towards the Sabbath, a non-negotiable stance of faith, so that you and I might

not fall into the same sort of disobedience some of the Israelites fell into! It calls for a firm purpose in faith – that the Lord’s Sabbath-rest belongs to the people of God perpetually, and we will not fall short of it through sheer disobedience and unbelief.

It’s a faith-attitude to uphold in all our walk of obedience before the Lord:

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of heaven suffereth violence [is under siege or attack], and the violent take it by force” (Matt. 11:12).

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13).

“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able” (Luke 13:24).

So strive to enter. Be the exception among the many who will vainly seek to enter. So then, don’t be deterred from the keeping of the Sabbath by anything. Don’t let any competing interests, such as sporting events or TV entertainment programmes, come between you and the Sabbath of the LORD as to rob you of the joy and blessing of it. Don’t be talked or harassed or lampooned out of it. By all means, strive to enter it. Although there will be many people and/or things to discourage you, don’t adopt a disobedient attitude towards God’s Sabbath. Stand firm in the Sabbath truth. You owe it as a duty of love to obey God’s Sabbath commandment.

More so when the Word of God, of which the Sabbath is part, is not a matter to be trifled with. It is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before Him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (vv. 12-13 RSV).

We either reverence Him in truth or our hypocrisy is on full display before His eyes. We may put on all the airs of religion, but the contents and actual desires of our hearts are an open book before Him. We can’t pay lip-service to His truth laying claim to a spiritual Sabbath-rest, while ignoring His plain commandment to observe His seventh-day “Sabbath of rest” every week.

His call to Sabbath observance as well as to all His other commandments of love cannot be treated with contempt without consequences! His word is “living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword!”

Moreover, the Master came and gave us a deeper insight into the will of God concerning the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath in the Gospels: The Sabbath comes into its own in Christ

The expression ‘Jesus and the Sabbath’ evokes in some people a Christ--Sabbath dichotomy – a notion that Christ and the Sabbath are diametrically opposed to each other – because of the untruth they have been taught that Jesus was against the Sabbath. Yet Christ Himself made it clear by both personal example and teaching as to which side of the ‘Sabbath debate’ He belonged.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He declared unambiguously:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18).

True to His word, Jesus was a habitual Sabbath-keeper:

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16; also 31).

By “custom” it’s meant in the original Greek sense, “manner”, “wont”, (or habit) (Grk ‘*etho*’).

So that’s settled. If Jesus was opposed to the Sabbath, He would not have observed it by attending services and teaching on it on a routine basis. His personal weekly Sabbath observance validates the 7th day Sabbath in no uncertain terms. It should put to rest any question that Jesus was against the Sabbath.

Be that as it may, the New Testament records several incidents of Jesus arguing with the Pharisees, some of whom were stridently opposed to Him, over the Sabbath. And that is the source of the mistaken belief that He was against the Sabbath (and ultimately nailed it to the cross!).

But what awful misrepresentation! The Sabbath controversies which swirled around Christ, far from doing irreparable damage to the Sabbath of God, have rather served to clarify the meaning of the Sabbath.

Yes, ironic as it is, most of Christ’s declarative Sabbath statements were born of controversy. But then, that was exactly the kind of situation that would give Him the opportunity to bring clarity to the divine purpose behind the Sabbath.

In so doing, He expounded on the Sabbath as no one ever did – in His own deep, inimitable, penetrating style.

The Lord Yeshua HaMashiach didn’t reinvent the Sabbath. After all, it was He who instituted it after He created the world in six days. What He did was to bring out its meaning of rest and holiness by emphasizing that the Sabbath ought to be celebrated to bring rest to man and glory to God. And that is the heaven-sanctioned, scripturally correct view of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath has a two-fold purpose: it serves as a day of rest and simultaneously as sacred time devoted to the worship of God. Hence the divine command in Lev. 23:3:

“Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.”

We see further evidence and validation of this – Sabbath as rest and sacred worship time – in Jesus’ regular Sabbath attendance at the synagogue service as well as in the practice of the apostles:

“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down.

“And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

“Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience” (Acts 13:14-16).

Rest and worship. This was what informed Jesus’ Sabbath worldview. He expounded on the Sabbath to mean relieving people of their burdens on the Sabbath day and honouring God on His holy day, not on our own terms though, but on His terms.

And He practised what He preached. He demonstrated that the Sabbath stands for rest by healing the sick and performing other supernatural works of relief. He made people to experience the Sabbath (of rest in honour of God) on a personal level.

And it was all on a platform of controversy – but to the great endorsement of the Sabbath not to its diminishing or abolition!

The Sabbath is in its element in the hands of its Creator, Christ.

“The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day”

This is a statement from the Lord’s own mouth in answer to an accusation from His critics that He had looked on while His disciples desecrated the Sabbath by plucking ears of corn. The point they sought to make was that He was just as guilty as His disciples, if not more, by His connivance in their sin.

But that set the stage for Christ to crystallize what the Sabbath really stands for and how the proper appreciation and use of the Sabbath fit into His mission on earth.

It all unfolded one Sabbath when some Pharisees went nosing around Yeshua and His disciples as they walked in the fields:

¹“*At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and His disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.*

²“*But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto Him, Behold, Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day.*

³“*But He said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;*

⁴“*How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?*

⁵“*Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?*

⁶“*But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple.*

⁷“*But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*

⁸“*For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.*

⁹“*And when He was departed thence, He went into their synagogue:*

¹⁰“*And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse Him.*

¹¹“*And He said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?*

¹²“*How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days.*

¹³“*Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other” (Matt. 12:1-13).*

Jesus’ response to the Pharisees’ false charge of Sabbath-breaking summarizes for us what activities might *lawfully* be done on the Sabbath in honour of God and in fulfilment of the purpose for which He instituted the Sabbath. These permissible Sabbath activities fall into two categories:

- i) Good deeds of humanitarian nature that help to preserve or save life.
- ii) Work or duty commanded by God to be done on the Sabbath in His honour and service.

“It is Lawful to do Good on the Sabbath”

Picking “ears of corn” (or heads of wheat) to meet an exigency clearly belonged here. The disciples were starving and therefore their plucking of the grains, NOT for the commercial purpose harvesting for sale or for monetary reward, was an act of self-preservation lawful on the Sabbath. Indeed, the act itself derived from a divine social welfare provision whereby farmers were obliged to leave the corners of their fields un-harvested for the poor and the stranger to help themselves to them (Lev. 19:9-10).

Thus the disciples couldn't have gone harvesting on a large-scale or in a physically taxing manner. The social welfare law didn't even allow that on an ordinary day. All they could do was to pluck with their hands and not any more:

“When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn” (Deut. 23:25; cp. 24).

So the disciples did. They simply plucked ears of corn to quench their hunger – an urgent need without which the consequences could be dire! On this score, Matthew's account supplies a critical piece of information not found in the parallel passages of Mark and Luke – “the disciples were hungry” from the Greek ‘peinao’, [*pi-nah'-o*] (Strong's #3983), meaning “to famish (absolutely or comparatively); figuratively, to crave: - be an hungered.” Not so in either Mark or Luke:

“And it came to pass, that He went through the corn fields on the Sabbath day; and His disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.

“And the Pharisees said unto Him, Behold, why do they on the Sabbath day that which is not lawful?” (Mark 2:23-24).

“And it came to pass on the second Sabbath after the first, that He went through the corn fields; and His disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands.

“And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath days?” (Luke 6:1-2).

The common fact all three accounts were agreed on was that they merely “plucked” with their “hands”, not with a sickle, and therefore no hard work was involved.

Even if they ought to have prepared their meals beforehand on the 6th day of the week and they didn't for whatever legitimate reason we do not know, the element of emergency nullifies any idea of Sabbath-breaking (as the critics would make it out to be).

And the Master cited the example of David where he and his companions ate the shewbread at a time of extreme danger to buttress His point. The bread of the Presence (shewbread) placed before Yahweh every Sabbath was meant for the priests only, to be eaten by them (Lev. 24:5-9), but the desperate situation of David and his men on the run from King Saul, justified their eating of the holy bread meant for only the priests (1 Sam. 21:1-6).

On the surface, it does seem a palpable violation of the law forbidding ordinary men from eating the showbread – and on the Sabbath too on which the priests were supposed to eat it, but the high priest Ahimelech (in 1 Sam. 21) or Abiathar (his son who shortly afterward succeeded his father because Saul slew him, Mark 2:26) had no scruples about giving the holy bread to David, if at least the young men had kept themselves holy! If the high priest was not wrong, so too were the disciples in plucking ears of corn to quench their hunger on the Sabbath. Their situation justified their action and therefore they were not guilty of Sabbath-breaking but “guiltless”!

It was on this occasion that Christ made His famous statement: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath: therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath day” (Mark 2:27-28).

That is to say, the Sabbath was made for the benefit, joy and wellbeing of “man” (Greek “*anthropos*”, not just the Jew) and therefore not to be observed in an inflexible, legalistic way without due consideration for the plight of people in suffering or in some other discomfort. By this, Christ didn't mean acts of mercy shove the Sabbath aside but that they are to be seen as a concomitant part of the Sabbath observance. The Sabbath was made to serve man – to give him rest and joy in God, not to add to or serve as an excuse to

ignore his suffering. Therefore, man must not unnecessarily suffer for the sake of the Sabbath but that the Sabbath must accommodate the needs of man, especially in emergency situations of a life-threatening sort.

Those exigencies do not overshadow or abolish the Sabbath – for it must continue to exist to serve (or be made for) man. Instead, they are to be seen as a natural part of the Sabbath, an expression of its spirit and essence.

It's for exactly this reason – taking care of man's needs – that Yahweh commands His people to prepare for the Sabbath on the sixth day of the week so they will not lack or starve or suffer one way or another on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is for man's benefit, and if it becomes necessary to attend to a fellow man's need on the Sabbath, do so. It's a lawful deed on the Sabbath, says "the Lord of the Sabbath", the "Lord" meaning 'one with authority over'.

That title in itself is further evidence of the continuing validity of the Sabbath. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath because the Sabbath is! If not, how could He be the Lord of the Sabbath in the sense of interpreting it or regulating its observance and yet end up abolishing it? How can the author of a book who revises it be said to have withdrawn it?

Yeshua is the Lord of the Sabbath day because He has the authority to teach us the proper way to observe it. And that authority derives from His own divine Person – as the Creator of all things, including the Sabbath!

He didn't come to abolish the law or the prophets; He came to magnify the Sabbath and make it more meaningful and thus "honourable". (See Isa. 42:21).

This explains why He never shirked from healing the sick on the Sabbath day to the ire of the Pharisees. Healing is an act of mercy lawful on the Sabbath:

"And He entered again into their synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand.

"And they watched Him, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse Him.

"And He saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth.

"And He saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

"And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other" (Mark 3:1-5).

In Matthew's account, the Redeemer's conclusion was that, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath days" (Matt. 12:12).

The Sabbath controversy has led to a splendid declaration on the noble goals of the Sabbath from the Master. The Sabbath is not averse to good deeds which help save life – even the lower creatures, animals, which are also to enjoy the rest of the Sabbath (Ex. 20:10), routinely benefit from this (Matt. 12:11). If so, how much more man for whom the Sabbath was made?

What is especially abominable on the Sabbath is to do evil such as to kill! It goes against the grain; it violates the Sabbath spirit. But to heal or to do other humanitarian deed is in accord with the Sabbath; it is to do what you ought to do on the Sabbath if it becomes necessary.

This was exactly what the Master did one Sabbath when He saw a woman bent over in pain and sickness in the synagogue. He let her loose from her infirmity. When the president of the synagogue angrily

protested, Christ pointed out to them their double standard in loosing their animals and leading them to drink on the Sabbath day but would not countenance a woman, “a daughter of Abraham whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years”, being loosed from her bondage on the Sabbath day (Luke 13:10-16). None of His adversaries when He had made His point could refute or challenge His word, for He spoke evident truth! Plus the object of His good work, the healed woman, stood in front of their very eyes (v. 17)! She was the vindication of His statement that if it was good and proper to “loose” an animal on the Sabbath day, then it was even better, nay an absolute necessity, to “loose” a human being – letting him or her have freedom and joy and relief physically and spiritually – on the Sabbath. An animal cannot be allowed this right, while man, created in the image of God, is denied it.

This was the same argument Christ made when on yet another Sabbath occasion He sought to heal a sick man and actually went ahead and healed him. It’s lawful to heal on the Sabbath, He argued, in so far as it is lawful to save an animal in distress on the Sabbath, say, pull it out of a pit into which it had fallen (Luke 14:1-6).

Suffering and pain is at variance with the Sabbath, and that was what drove Christ to make healing a special feature of His Sabbath ministry. The Sabbath would hardly be meaningful without bodily and spiritual rest. Thus it was on the Sabbath that He healed a man who had been sick for 38 years and lay by the pool of Bethesda hoping for a miracle at the stirring of the water by an angel (John 5). His simple order to the man leading to the healing was: “Rise, take up thy bed and walk” (v. 8). The result was immediate – “the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath” (v. 9).

Instead of rejoicing with the man over his miraculous healing, the Jews raised a storm of objection telling the man not to carry his bed. But he answered them, “He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk” (vv. 10-11).

With his disease-burden of thirty-eight years lifted by Christ on the Sabbath day, surely, taking up his bed was comparatively no burden at all. If anything, it was a significant symbolic act of the new freedom and rest he had attained. Of the two situations consider what constituted a real burden – his being burdened with paralysis for 38 years or simply taking up his bed?

For 38 years, the man had not known any meaningful, joyful Sabbath-keeping until the Sabbath day Jesus bade him, “Rise take up thy bed and walk!” It’s interesting to note that it was only after he was healed that the man went to the temple to keep the Sabbath for the first time in 38 years and apparently to thank God on His holy Sabbath day. It was while there that he met Jesus and He charged him, “Behold, thou art whole sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee” (vv. 5-9, 14).

Yeshua Messiah did not mean sin no more by not carrying your bed but the Jews meant the very act of carrying his bed on the Sabbath was a sin to cease forthwith! This disagreement proved a source of tension between Yeshua and the Jews (*Yehudi*) with the latter even wanting to slay Him! (vv. 15-16).

But let’s take an honest look at the issue: Did the man really break the Sabbath by carrying his bed?

The prohibition against carrying a “burden” on the Sabbath day is found in Jer. 17:21-22 and Neh. 13:15, 19-20. The Hebrew word translated “burden” means “load”, “lifting”, “bearing”, etc. and is connected with loads related to business and commerce – the buying and selling forbidden on the Sabbath! (Neh. 10:31). It wasn’t about carrying just anything but loads of commercial value for sale on the Sabbath.

The word translated “bed” in the KJV is known as ‘*Krabbatos*’ in Greek, and it means “a pallet”, “camp bed”, “a small couch made of a padded quilt or thin mattress”. This means the ‘bed’ wasn’t a heavy item which would require much physical effort to carry.

And the joy was that the paralyzed man who could hardly stir himself was now strong enough not only to walk but also to hold his bedding!

That Sabbath was one kind of a Sabbath for him – one on which he rested from the burden of his sickness and rejoiced in His Creator.

That day Yeshua performed a good work in the life of the man. He turned his life around and put him on a path of wellness and freedom.

The Lord didn't shy away from the fact that He had worked on the Sabbath, but then He had worked a good work in restoring a man to health and giving him a new lease on life. So He answered them in defence: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (v. 17).

What did the Master mean by this? That because He and the Father work till today (the Sabbath), the rest of the Sabbath has been invalidated by them? If so, what was the point in consecrating the seventh day only to invalidate it by working on one particular Sabbath?

Mind, you, Christ didn't say, 'My Father breaks the Sabbath, and I break it too.' To interpret it this way is to put words in the mouth of Christ; it is to twist His words. Instead, what He did say was that "My Father worketh and I work", for not all work on the Sabbath constitutes a violation of the Sabbath.

So how come God works on the Sabbath, and yet does not break the Sabbath?

God works on the Sabbath in the sense that on the Sabbath He does not cease to be God with all that His being God entails, such as "the word of His power" sustaining life and all things (Heb. 1:3), for "in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:17).

Moreover, on the Sabbath day He does good deeds which are not unlawful to be done, whether it is the regular activity of His supernatural power in keeping the world functioning in an orderly manner or it's the performance of a special miracle such as the healing of the sick.

On the Sabbath, God doesn't go back to create in a literal sense, but He does good works!

The *Life Application Bible* notes:

"If God stopped every kind of work on the Sabbath, nature would fall into chaos and sin would overrun the world. Genesis 2:2 says that God rested on the seventh day, but this can't mean He stopped doing good. Jesus wanted to teach that when the opportunity to do good presents itself, it should not be ignored, even on the Sabbath" (p. 2057, Large Print edition).

This was what distinguished His Sabbath-keeping – doing good whenever the opportunity presented itself!

No one knew this better than His disciples. Thus one fine Sabbath morning as He took a stroll past a sick man, His disciples asked Him, "Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:1-3).

He then proceeded to make clay with His spittle, anointed the eyes of the blind man with it and instructed him to "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing" (vv. 6-7).

The rest of the story is that Jesus' miraculous healing of the man born blind led to exchanges between the Pharisees, on one hand, and the healed man, on the other hand, over Jesus' spiritual integrity – all because "it was the Sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes" (v. 14).

While some of the Pharisees denounced Jesus as a false teacher (i.e. “not from God”) because He did not keep the Sabbath, others insisted that a sinner could not possibly do such miracles as just attributed to Him. The Pharisees were themselves divided in their opinion of Him (vv. 15-17).

But the man had no doubt whatsoever in his mind that Jesus was a prophet (v. 176).

When the Pharisees verified from his parents that the man was indeed born blind but was now able to see (although they would neither affirm nor deny that Jesus had healed their son) (vv. 18-23), they counseled the man to give glory to God (the miracle was beyond belief!) but ignore Jesus as He was a sinner (vv. 24-29).

Still, the healed man remained unconvinced by their assertions – insisting that “God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, He could do nothing” (vv. 31-33).

The healed man was right and the Pharisees wrong. Yeshua’s healing of his congenital blindness was a good work lawful on the Sabbath day. He therefore found the Jews’ association of sin with the miraculous work Christ had wrought on His body difficult to accept.

How sad many people, like the Pharisees of old, still delight in branding Jesus a Sabbath-breaker simply because He healed the sick on the Sabbath!

Not only is doing good on the Sabbath in accordance with the will of God but it’s also the very work of God. It’s in acknowledgement of the distortions that have come to characterize life on earth (as a result of sin) and which require acts of mercy to correct or ease to make the Sabbath-rest even more meaningful. It is an admission of reality. There can’t truly be a proper Sabbath-rest while people are left in pain and suffering.

However, we will do well to note that the good works (humanitarian deeds) done on the Sabbath don’t supersede the Sabbath or suspend it. They are only permissible on the Sabbath. They are acts that can *lawfully* be done on the Sabbath without desecrating it.

Whatever good deeds are done, the Sabbath stands. The observance of the Sabbath is sacrosanct, but while observing it, acts of mercy can be done (as and when necessary) without violating it. Therefore, one has to be a Sabbath-keeper before one can be said to have done good deeds lawfully on the Sabbath.

And it was a principle the Jews knew well enough to practice it on their animals but conveniently overlooked it to find fault with Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ never broke the Sabbath (only His envious detractors said so) but rather claimed authority over it as to both exemplify and teach us how to observe it to bring its blessing of rest to bear on the lives of people.

It is Lawful to Perform a Divinely assigned Spiritual Duty on the Sabbath

Apart from acts of mercy, the only other way in which, according to Christ, work can lawfully be done on the Sabbath blamelessly is to perform a work commanded by God to be done on His holy day in His service or honour.

This accounts for His statement: “Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? But I say unto you, That in this place is One greater than the temple” (Matt. 12:5-6).

Here, the Messiah alludes to two priestly duties performed on the Sabbath that may ordinarily be classified as ‘servile (laborious) work’. These are the double offerings required on the Sabbath – morning and evening – as a *natural continuation* of the daily sacrifices (Num. 28:1-8, 9-10; see also Ex. 29:38-42; Dan. 8:11-12) and the baking of the consecrated bread (shewbread) on the Sabbath (Lev. 24:5-9).

Those priestly duties involved a fair amount of hard work (1 Chron. 9:32), but “the priests in the temple” who labored on the Sabbath to offer the sacrifices and bake the showbread, as though they were working on an ordinary day, were not guilty of Sabbath-breaking.

So too the priests who performed circumcision on the Sabbath when the child’s eighth day happened to fall on a Sabbath (John 7:22-24). Both instituted by God, circumcising a child on the Sabbath could not amount to a violation of the Sabbath. They were a coincidence of divine duties that did not cancel each other out but could harmoniously be done on the Sabbath simultaneously.

The One who calls the seventh day His holy day and appropriates it for His own glory is the One who authorized that those laborious priestly be done on His special day within the temple precincts! Any other priestly work outside His temple, which is not sanctioned by Him to be done on the Sabbath, will be a desecration of the Sabbath!

And now in this place or era is *One greater than the temple!* If the earthly temple of the Aaronic priesthood sanctified any laborious priestly duty imposed by God to be done on the Sabbath, then He, the Messiah, the true Temple (John 2:18-21) who *tabernacled* among us (John 1:14) could do much more. He could authorize what could be done on the Sabbath, and it will be holy work which does not violate the sanctity of the Sabbath.

The building only became a temple because of His presence in the Holy of Holies (Ex. 25:17-22; Lev. 16:2), but now He whose presence sanctified the temple, was now here in Person and subsequently in His ministers by His Spirit (1 Cor. 3:17; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 John 4:13).

Surely, whatever He does and/or authorizes to be done on the Sabbath, which obviously include teaching and healing, does not make anyone guilty of Sabbath-breaking for doing so! He is the Lord of the Sabbath, and He has decreed that He prefers acts of mercy being done on the Sabbath to mere ritualism (“sacrifice”).

Ritualism! That was the domain of the Pharisees and the reason for the many controversies they had with Jesus. They piled so much unbiblical rules on the Sabbath that it became no longer a joy and a delight but a burden!

Rabbinical law, for instance, outlawed picking heads of grain on the Sabbath which was one of **thirty-nine** kinds of work forbidden on the Sabbath.

“According to the Pharisees plucking wheat from its stem is reaping, rubbing wheat heads between one’s palms is threshing, and blowing away the chaff is winnowing” (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 45).

Where came this extreme, rigorous interpretation of the divine law forbidding exacting farm work on the Sabbath?

Exodus 34:21 simply states:

“*Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing time and in harvest thou shalt rest.*”

The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath simply calls for rest from such normal farm work as ploughing or reaping, not from rubbing wheat between one’s palms!

Yeshua was right in His assessment of the religious philosophy and practice of the Pharisees:

“But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9).
“For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers” (Matt. 23:4).

“Pray that your Flight be not on the Sabbath”

Although Christ did not see eye to eye with the Pharisees over their cold, unscriptural, petty Sabbath regulations, He would never sanction that His followers break the Biblical no-work on-the-Sabbath rule at will on any flimsy excuse! The call to do good on the Sabbath is not a call to treat the Sabbath with disrespect or reduce it to a day of personal interests and pleasures. The day is solely Yahweh's – a day to rejoice and reflect on Him without the stress of our everyday activities intruding on that ‘quality time’ with Him. So it's important that we take care not to ‘encroach’ on His rights to the day.

For this reason, it's best to avoid situations where we would be forced to use the Sabbath for ends other than for rest and worship and in which the activity involved is not a humanitarian deed being performed to save life or relieve suffering.

Such is having to flee on the Sabbath out of sheer necessity and/or self-preservation. Much as it might be considered a life-saving action lawful on the Sabbath, it's not ideal to take to flight on the Sabbath, what with having to trek over long hours in unfamiliar territory carrying along personal belongings! It is an exhausting undertaking with hardly any time for worship or rest.

Hence Christ admonished His disciples in His Mount Olivet discourse:

“But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day” (Matt. 24:20).

It's a call to prayer in the prophetic context of the outbreak of persecution in which Jewish believers, in particular, and believers elsewhere might have to run away to seek refuge. (See Matt. 10:23). This prophetic persecution, though, is not a one-time event. It straddles two prophetic time periods – one set in 70 AD and limited to Jerusalem/Judea and yet foreshadows a more universal, severer persecution to come in the very end, called the “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21 and Rev. 7:14).

In the parallel passage in Luke chapter 21, Christ calls the more immediate post-resurrection persecution, set off by the Roman invasion and subsequent destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, “the days of vengeance”, in which the Jews endure “great distress” and “wrath” (Luke 21:22-23).

In the throes of this persecution, the Jewish disciples, according to the instruction of the Master, are to “pray that your flight be not on the Sabbath day”. That is to say, don't downplay the sanctity of the Sabbath in this most difficult time. Instead, give it prominence in your spiritual life. Pray to the Father so that He might influence circumstances in such a way as to make you flee on a day other than the Sabbath. It's a call to consider the sanctity of the Sabbath so important a spiritual matter as to pray about it of all the prayer requests one could make at such a crucial time!

Likewise pray for the merciful Father to miraculously ‘schedule’ your possible flight away from the cold biting winter season in which travelling on foot is most difficult.

In both cases, the validity and continuance of the Sabbath and winter respectively is taken for granted. If winter has not ceased but occurs every year in its seasonal cycle so has the weekly Sabbath and vice versa. And this situation Christ foresaw as prevailing in 70 AD – some 40 years after His death, resurrection and ascension!

The Lord still expected His disciples to uphold the Sabbath – so much so that He urged them to pray for divine intervention in an unusual time of persecution so as not to be compelled to observe the Sabbath under the most unpleasant circumstances!

Church history has it that the disciples, in obedience to Christ, fled to Pella, a city of the Jordan River, in 66 AD, on seeing “Jerusalem compassed with [Roman] armies” under the command of General Titus (Luke 21:20-21) that year. Their prayers were answered, and they did not, in all probability, have to flee on the holy Sabbath.

Now, what was true of Yeshua’s Judean disciples in 70 AD is also true of His disciples in the period of “the end” (Matt. 24:14) as the final continuum of the prophecy comes to pass! They – the saints who would endure the last great tribulation – should equally pray so that wherever they may be they might not have to flee on the Sabbath under the pressure of persecution!

This time round, the sign is not the surrounding of Jerusalem by a Gentile invading army which was specific to the events of 70 AD; the sign to watch out for is “the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place” (Matt. 24:15). Although prior to this prophetic utterance of Christ the prophecy of “the abomination of desolation” by Daniel had had an initial partial fulfilment in 168 BC when Antiochus VII (Epiphanes), the Seleucid Greek ruler, offered a pig to Zeus on the altar of the temple in Jerusalem (Dan. 8:8-14; 11:30-31) followed by a second partial fulfilment in 70 AD when Titus set up an idol on the site of the burnt temple, the final consummate fulfilment is yet future. It is tied to the conclusion of the gospel age – and literally the end of the age – when the gospel of the Kingdom will have been preached in all the world for a witness to all nations!

How will this final fulfilment of the abomination of desolation prophecy unfold?

The final fulfilment of the prophecy will see the Antichrist install himself in the rebuilt temple of God in Jerusalem making himself out to be god (2 Thess. 2:2-4). But in addition to this, the ‘king-maker’ of the Antichrist, the ‘second beast’ of Rev. 13, identified with “the false prophet” who embodies its universal religio-politico-economic power (Rev. 19:20), will make statues or replicas of the Antichrist (possibly using artificial intelligence or some supernatural satanic power or a combination of both to give them an illusion of life) and install them in designated temples or “chambers” around the globe for all nations to worship “the image of the beast” equipped with the power of speech (Rev. 13:8, 11-15; Matt. 24:23-26).

This then – the Antichrist’s installing of his person as god in the Jerusalem temple and the erection of his replicas in designated centres around the world – is the universal *signal of danger* to true believers everywhere (not just in Jerusalem) to flee into the mountains and other places of refuge. (A worldwide enforcement of image worship is soon to come into effect at this point in time). And we are to pray that our flight be not on the Sabbath or in the cold season of winter (if it applies)!

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (v. 21).

This is the time the prophet Jeremiah calls “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7) and the prophet Daniel “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time” (Dan. 12:1). Even so, deliverance is promised to the end-time saints by both prophets: “but he shall be saved out of it”, says Jeremiah, corroborating Daniel’s assurance that “and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book”!

The heavenly Father will not withdraw His grace from His people during the last great tribulation. The Lord’s exhortation to His disciples to pray against the possibility of fleeing on the Sabbath or in the winter is premised on this. Things will not be that bad. God will still answer the prayers of His people (see 1 Cor.

10:13); He will still be a prayer-answering God (Ps. 65:2). His firm assurance is that those days of tribulation will be “shortened” to just 3½ years or 42 months (v. 22; Rev. 13:5).

During those short years of persecution, if only we pray about it, God will ensure that when the time comes for us to flee, it will not happen on a Sabbath. He will ‘re-schedule’ it for another day!

Obviously then, the Sabbath is of utmost importance to God, and He expects us to keep it holy in both normal and unusual times. The Sabbath cannot be sacrificed under any circumstances, except that we ought to see it as accommodating lawful humanitarian deeds like saving life. Even if the situation demands it, it is not the will of God that we exert our bodies on the Sabbath in going on an emergency marathon! That’s why He calls on us to pray against it.

But emergencies don’t only happen in the time of persecution. And so the principle is that we ought to pray against the outbreak of emergency situations on the Sabbath so that we might not be forced to do what we wouldn’t normally do on God’s holy day!

The Sabbath-rest remains for the people of God, and these are the people He recognizes as His own in 70 AD and beyond, even at the tail-end of the age! Christ could not be addressing a group of believers who were not seventh-day Sabbath-keepers and then tell them “pray that your flight be not on the Sabbath”!

The early Christian Church established in Jerusalem and headquartered there was a Sabbath-keeping, commandment-keeping church (Acts 15:19-21; Heb. 8:10-12), and so is the end-of-age remnant church (Rev. 12:17; Jude 1:3), which will bear the brunt of the last Antichrist’s great persecution for keeping the 7th day Sabbath among other divine commandments in a Babylonian world of universalized Sunday worship!

If you ever wanted the clearest proof that the Sabbath was not nailed to the cross, here is it – Matt. 24:20. For if Christ foreknew that He would do this very thing, He would not have instructed His followers to keep the Sabbath *After* the cross, at least in 70 AD!

Nonetheless, as some would have us believe, did His death and resurrection change the seventh-day Sabbath from its original function and character?

Sunday, not the Resurrection Day of the Lord of the Sabbath

(How long did the Messiah say He would be in the tomb?)

The traditional teaching of Christ’s crucifixion on Friday and resurrection on Sunday have been accepted as fact by churchgoers for hundreds of years.

But what did Jesus Christ Himself say about His death and resurrection? How long did He say He would be in the grave?

The Messiah’s death as the atonement for our sin is all-important – the very linchpin of our salvation. He died that we might live; He sacrificed His life as a ransom for us (Matt. 20:28). In the prophetic words of Isaiah, “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:5-6).

The good news is that having “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev. 1:5), the Messiah triumphantly rose from the dead in demonstration of the pardon granted us by the Father “for His name’s sake” (1 John 2:12) – to the end that we should no longer live for ourselves but for Him who died and rose again (Rom. 4:25; Col. 2:12-13; 2 Cor. 5:14-15).

But are the details of time relating to His agonizing death and glorious resurrection of any significance to our faith in Him? Does it matter whether we know the actual day of the week on which He died and the day on which He resurrected?

We might not readily see their significance. But they do matter to Him!

“The Jews Require a Sign”

In one of His encounters with the scribes and Pharisees, they said to Him, “Master, we would see a sign from Thee” (Matt. 12:38). Apparently, they had long sought a definitive sign from Him.

In answer to their request, Christ referred to Jonah’s three days and three nights in the belly of the fish as a sign of His Messianship:

“But He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

“For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (vv. 39-40).

As Christ put it, “the sign of the prophet Jonah” was a sign to “an evil and adulterous generation” who nevertheless wished to be assured of His Messianic credentials. (See Matt. 16:4).

The evil and adulterous generation was in no doubt in reference to the questioners, the scribes and Pharisees. That was how Yeshua viewed them along with the larger Jewish community of the time (Mark 8:38).

These people were not interested in the teachings of Christ, the truth He taught, but looked for a supernatural sign to confirm for them that Yeshua was indeed the Messiah.

It was a search that commenced with the ministry of John the Baptists when the Jewish leadership sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him if he was the Messiah, or the Elijah to come, or that Prophet (of whom Moses spoke) (John 1:19-27).

The search continued when Jesus Himself began His ministry. During this period, the Jews made many attempts to find out from Him His real identity and actually ambushed Him one day “and said to Him, How long dost Thou make us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly” (John 10:24).

The sign of confirmation was of overriding importance to the Jews; it was something visceral, something deeply ingrained in them, “For the Jews require a sign” (1 Cor. 1:22; see also Luke 11:16; John 2:18; 4:48; cp. Ex. 4:8-9, 17, 30-31).

“The Sign of the Prophet Jonah”

Finally, Christ gave them the sign they had long sought after – “the sign of the prophet Yonah”!

But it was not a sign they would witness in the here and now.

The sign of the prophet Jonah related to the duration of Christ’s stay in the grave upon His death – the length of time He would spend in “the heart of the earth” as He phrased it.

This time length would match exactly the amount of time Jonah remained in the belly of the fish.

And Jonah was in the whale’s belly for three days and three nights.

Jonah’s phenomenal entomb-ment in the belly of the fish is a story we are all familiar with: Yahveh sends Yonah to warn the city of Nineveh of His impending judgment against them for their wickedness. But Jonah decides to flee into Tarshish. On the way, Yahveh sends a great storm against the ship in which

Jonah is travelling leaving the crew and passengers panic-stricken! Each man begins to call upon his god for help, but Jonah is found to be fast asleep in a corner of the ship. As a last resort, lots are cast, and Jonah is discovered to be the cause of the LORD's anger manifested in the unfolding calamity at sea. As the remedy for the raging storm, Jonah asks that he be thrown into the sea. The men do so, "and the sea ceased from her raging".

Now, where does Jonah end up?

"Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17).

As already mentioned, the only detail of the story applicable to Yeshua as a sign of His Messianism was the length of time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish. Accordingly, Christ would be in "the heart of the earth" "three days and three nights", being the only sign He personally gave of His Messianism!

All other signs and prophetic proofs of His Messianism were foretold by the prophets of old before His human birth in the Hebrew Scriptures. But the sign of the prophet Jonah is unique, in that Christ personally gave it upon persistent request in, what we may call, self-authentication!

What do Three Days and Three Nights Mean?

The sign of the prophet Jonah is now an accepted part of the body of supernatural divine signs identifying Jesus as the true Messiah. But the question is, how was this sign actually fulfilled in Christ's death and resurrection in terms of the length of time that spanned between the two events?

In other words, what did Christ mean by "three days and three nights"? And how might we arrive at it?

We begin by acknowledging first that a day is made up of 12 hours (and hence night is also a 12-hour period, see Gen. 1:5). We read in John 11:9: "Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? ..."

But some point to the Jewish practice of "inclusive reckoning" where part of a day might be counted as one full day as a basis that Christ could not be referring to three literal days and nights!

The truth is, inclusive reckoning does not apply in the case in question. *Dake's Annotated Bible Reference* observes in its footnote on Jonah 1:17: "The Hebrew idiom three days can be used for any part of 3 days, but when the word nights is used with it the term can only mean 3 literal days and nights (v. 17; Mt. 12:40)" (p. 900).

The Companion Bible published and sold by the Oxford University Press similarly comments:

"Now, while it is quite correct to speak according to Hebrew idiom of 'three days' or 'three years', while they are only parts of three days or three years, yet that idiom does not apply in a case like this, where 'three nights' are mentioned in addition to 'three days'. It will be noted that the Lord not only definitely states this, but repeats the full phraseology, so that we may not mistake it" (Appendix 156).

Obviously then, Christ meant He would be in the tomb for three full days and three full nights, totaling 72 hours.

Friday Crucifixion to early Sunday morning Resurrection Falls Short

The traditional Friday crucifixion and early Sunday morning resurrection fall short of the given duration of 3 days and 3 nights by at least one full day and a full night – and that is by using "inclusive reckoning"!

Here is how this period is calculated: the few minutes of Friday before sunset are counted as the *first day*, all Friday night from sunset till daybreak as the *first night*, all daytime Saturday as the *second day*,

Saturday night as the *second night*, covering approximately 36 hours or less. But the Biblical record is that Jesus wasn't in the tomb any of the daylight portion of Sunday, so none of that can be counted as a day. According to John 20:1, "on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb" (NKJV). The Master had already resurrected well before the break of day.

Thus we have just two days and two nights. Without inclusive reckoning (which was what Jesus meant), we are left with *just one full day (Saturday) and two nights* – short of two full days and one night!

The Messianic sign of the prophet Jonah fails by the traditional Friday crucifixion to early Sunday morning resurrection, as it is impossible to get 3 days and 3 nights between Friday late afternoon and early Sunday morning before sunrise!

But who is right? Christ or tradition?

Of course, Yeshua, the Christ, is to be believed absolutely. He is the TRUTH!

What then is the correct time-frame within which the events of His burial and resurrection took place?

Wednesday before Sunset to Saturday before Sunset

We start with the internal evidence of Christ's resurrection day as recorded in the scriptures. The day of the crucifixion can simply be arrived at by counting three days and three nights backward from the day of the resurrection.

All the Gospels are agreed on the fact that Christ resurrected from the dead "in the end of the Sabbath" before the first day of the week:

Matt. 28:1: "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre."

Mark 16:2-4: "And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they [the women] came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun."

"And they said among themselves, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?"

"And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great".

Luke 24:1-2: "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them."

"And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre".

John 20:1: "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre".

All four accounts concur that the women went to the tomb after the Sabbath, at its *ending*, as the first day of the week (Sunday) approached, "very early in the morning," "while it was yet dark," and found the stone slab which covered the mouth of the tomb rolled away! Christ had already resurrected!

Put together, the 'aggregate' truth we arrive at is that the resurrection occurred somewhere between the ending of the Sabbath and the beginning of the first day of the week. The women did not witness the resurrection take place early Sunday morning, even "while it was still dark." They found instead an empty tomb!

And Matthew is emphatic that all this took place, not on Sunday, but "in the end of the Sabbath", a phrase the *American Standard Version (ASV)* renders as "late on the Sabbath day" (and so the *Darby Bible* and

the *Bible in Basic English*) “as it began to dawn TOWARD the first day of the week”. “Toward” but not yet the first day!

What was this time?

Since in the Bible a new day begins at sunset (of the previous/out-going day, Gen. 1:5; Lev. 23:32), the time described is clearly ‘twilight’ or ‘dusk’ on Saturday, with perhaps a few hours or minutes for the following day, Sunday, to begin at sunset. This is exactly how the *Darby Bible* translates Matt. 28:1:

“Now late on Sabbath, as it was the dusk of the next day after Sabbath, came Mary of Magdala and the other Mary to look at the sepulchre.”

The text doesn’t mean “dusk” on Sunday (toward evening) but the dusk (what we will now call Saturday evening) preceding the first day, the dusk which would soon usher in the first day of the week at the setting of the sun. That was when the women went to the tomb, and Christ was already risen!

“And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

“His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:

“And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.

“And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.

“He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

“And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you” (Matt. 28:2-7 KJV).

According to Matthew’s account, all the things – the visit of the woman and the encounter with the angel – took place “late on the Sabbath”, at dusk. This was the *first* visit the women made to the tomb prior to the one they made on Sunday morning as reported in Mark, Luke and John.

But what about the word “dawn” as in “dawn toward the first day?” Does it not denote the shining forth of light, implying daybreak or sunrise?

The very irrefutable fact that the Bible day begins at sunset negates the idea of the *dawning toward* representing the early rays of Sunday morning sunlight!

What the Greek word “*epihosko*” translated “dawn” means is “to begin”, “to shine”, “to grow light”, “dawn”, “appear”.

Thayer’s *Greek-English Lexicon* of the New Testament defines the word *epihosko* as this:

“it denotes entrance into a period which is penetrated, as it were, i.e. duration through a time... *te epiphoskouse eis mian sabbaton*, dawning into (ASV toward) the first day of the week, Matthew 28:1. Hence of the time in which a thing is done.”

In Robinson’s *Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, it is “to grow light upon, to dawn upon, intrans. of the day, Matthew 28:1 *te epiphoskouse sc. Emera Trop.* Of the Jewish day, beginning at sunset, to begin, Luke, 23:54.’!

Parkhurst’s *Greek and English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines the Greek work *epiphosko* as follows:

“To draw on, as the Jewish Sabbath, which began in the evening, (see Leviticus 23:32, Nehemiah 13:19). Thus the verb is plainly used, Luke 23:54 (comp. John 19:31 with Deut. 21:22, 23) and in the same view it may be understood wherein it occurs, namely Matthew 28:1... In the evening of the Sabbath, when the (Jewish) day was dawning on towards the

first day of the week” (Quoted in *The Resurrection of Christ... on Saturday NOT on Sunday* pp. 6 by E.E. Franke. Emphasis mine).

So “epihosko” as used in the context of the Hebrew Greek of the New Testament (not classic Greek) simply means to begin, to enter into, to dawn into. And it was dusk on the Sabbath while it was approaching or dawning into the first day of the week that the women, on visiting the tomb, were told by the angel that Jesus had resurrected!

Counting back 3 days and 3 nights from this time (“late on the Sabbath”), we arrive at the day of His burial on the 14th of Nisan (31 AD), which would be the 4th day of the week (our Wednesday), before sunset. Just hours before, Christ had died on the cross just in time to coincide with the slaying of the paschal lambs, slain year after year on 14th Nisan to prefigure His perfect sacrifice for sin!

The three days and three nights in which Jesus said He would be in the grave are thus as follows:

- Our Wednesday sunset to Thursday sunset = **FIRST NIGHT AND FIRST DAY IN THE TOMB**
- Our Thursday sunset to Friday sunset = **SECOND NIGHT AND SECOND DAY IN THE TOMB**
- Our Friday sunset to Saturday sunset = **THE THIRD NIGHT AND DAY THIRD DAY IN THE TOMB**

Alternatively, we may reckon the three days and three nights this way: the *nights* as: Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights; and the *days* as Thursday, Friday and Saturday (daytime).

The day following the crucifixion was an annual Sabbath, not the weekly Sabbath, and therefore the Gospel of John makes it plain that, the day of the crucifixion was a preparation day towards that annual Sabbath (or feast day).

What was the sequence of events?

Having eaten the ‘last supper’ on the night (or evening) of 13th Nisan which would be the beginning of the 14th (at sunset) (John 13:1-2, 27-30; cp. Matt. 26:20-21; Mark 14:17-18; Luke 22:14), Jesus was arrested later that night by “a band of men and officers from the chief priest and Pharisees” holding “lanterns and torches and weapons” (John 18:1-3; Luke 22:52).

From the Garden of Gethsemene where He had gone with the disciples (Matt. 26:36-47; Mark 14:30-36; Luke 22:40-44), the Lord was bound by the soldiers and escorted first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year (John 18:12-13), then from there to the palace of the high priest (Caiaphas) himself (vv. 15-27), then from Caiaphas to Governor Pilate’s “hall of judgment,” but the Jewish throng would not enter the hall, “lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover” [on the 14th at sunset. See Ex. 12:6-8] (John 18:28-29).

It is worth noting that it was still night-time, at the beginning (or “early” stages) of 14th Nisan, when Yeshua was ushered before Pilate who unsuccessfully tried to convince the Jews to let Him go because he found no fault in Him (vv. 30-40).

But when the Jews would have none of it and vehemently insisted that Jesus be put to death (John 19:1-12), Pilate “brought Jesus forth and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!” (John 19:13-14).

“The sixth hour” was about 12:00 midnight, being part of the dark portion of 14th Nisan before daybreak ushered in its daylight portion. It was later this same day, when it was daytime, that Jesus was led away to be crucified (John 19:16-17; Matt. 27:31-34; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-31) along with two criminals (Luke 23:32-33; John 19:18).

Next, Pilate affixed an accusation inscription to the cross “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS” despite protests from the chief priests (John 19:19-22; Matt. 27:37; Mark 15:26). The soldiers then divided His garments among themselves (John 19:23-24; Matt. 27:35-37; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34).

The time of these events was “the third hour” (9am in our time on 14th Nisan), “and they crucified Him” (Mark 15:25).

While He hanged on the tree in utter humiliation, the rulers, the spectators and one of the robbers reviled Him (Matt. 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-38; cp. 1 Pet. 2:22-24). But only for a space of three hours!

For at the sixth hour, 12 noon, a supernatural phenomenon engulfed the land. There was darkness all over the land from the sixth hour unto the ninth hour (12 noon – 3pm), at which point in time Christ cried with a loud voice and gave up the ghost (Matt. 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46).

Now John tells us that “The Jews... because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs [those of Jesus and the two male-factors crucified along with Him] be broken, and that they might be taken away” (John 19:31).

By now, it was apparently past 3pm (at which time the darkness had lifted) and sunset was approaching. Hence the Jewish leaders wanted the bodies removed for burial before sunset. (See Deut. 21:22-23; cp. Gal. 3:13).

Joseph of Arimathaea, a secret disciple of Jesus, eventually secured permission from Pilate to take away the body of his Master. With Nicodemus, another secret disciple, assisting with the burial, the Lord was laid in a “new sepulchre, wherein was never a man yet laid” in a garden adjacent to where He was crucified “because of the Jews’ preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand” (John 19:38-42; see also Matt. 27:57-60; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:50-54).

Two Sabbaths that week

That pivotal “*preparation day*” on which Christ was crucified and later buried before sunset was not Friday (the 6th day of the week), being the preparation day of the weekly Sabbath, as many assume. John pointed out back in verse 14 that it was “the preparation of the Passover” later to be eaten (observed) in the evening at sunset (Deut. 16:6).

The following day Nisan 15 (beginning, of course, at sunset Nisan 14) was the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, a holy day in which no servile work was to be done:

“These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.

“In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover.

“And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread.

“In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein” (Lev. 23:4-7).

The fifteenth day of Nisan was the “high day” of John 19:31, an annual “Sabbath” (see Lev. 23:24, 39; cp. Col. 2:16). In the year of Yeshua’s crucifixion, 31 AD, that “high day” yearly “sabbath” was a Thursday, meaning there were two sabbaths that week (one yearly, one weekly). (Note: the United States Naval Observatory, Washington D.C. has since confirmed as far back as 1919 that “the Astronomical Full Moon occurred Tuesday, March 27, AD 31, 1h P.M., Jerusalem time, Julian Calendar” making the next day, a Wednesday, the day of the Passover that year. *The Resurrection of Christ... on Saturday NOT Sunday*, p.

15, reproduces a letter from the Navy Dept. of the U.S. Naval Observatory Washington D.C. dated January 16th, 1919 and signed by W.S. Eichelberger, Commander (Math.) U.S.N. Director, Nautical Almanac testifying to this).

The following scriptural facts make it abundantly clear that there were two sabbaths during the Passion week:

Because of the haste in which the Lord's body was prepared and wrapped up in view of the coming Sabbath, there was the need for the two women disciples, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, to get back to the tomb sometime after the Sabbath to complete the work.

This Mark and Luke show the women did by buying spices and ointments after the Sabbath and finished preparing the spices before the Sabbath began that they might rest on the Sabbath "according to the commandment."

But take notice! They bought the spices when the Sabbath WAS PAST and yet prepared them BEFORE the Sabbath!

We read in Mark 16:1:

"And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him."

In Luke 23:55-56, we read about the same business of spices meant for Jesus' body:

"And the women also, which came with Him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how His body was laid.

"And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment."

Put together, Mark and Luke are in essence saying that the spices were *prepared before* the Sabbath after they were *bought after* the Sabbath!

Unless two different Sabbaths are involved, with a working day between them, we have a great contradiction between two gospel accounts staring us in the face!

And sure, there were two different Sabbaths during the week of Christ's death and resurrection.

The "Sabbath" Mark meant, at the end of which the women bought the spices, was the Thursday annual Sabbath (or "high day", John 19:31; Luke 23:54). The "Sabbath" referred to in Luke 23:56, the Sabbath on which the women rested according to God's commandment, was the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. This leaves one working day between the two Sabbaths, which is Friday, the 6th day of the week. This was the day on which the women prepared the spices after which they rested on the seventh day (beginning Friday evening at sunset).

That the "Sabbath" following the day of the crucifixion was not a 7th day Sabbath but a feast day is made plain in Matt. 27:62, where the term "Sabbath" is not used but "the next day that followed the day of the preparation" is used instead:

⁶² "Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate,

⁶³ "Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

⁶⁴ "Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night, and steal Him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.

⁶⁵“*Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.*”

⁶⁶“*So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch*” (Matt. 27:62-66).

As E.E. Franke notes in his book *The Resurrection of Christ... on Saturday NOT on Sunday*, “What the Jewish High Priests did on the day following the crucifixion of Christ is proof positive that it was not the seventh day Sabbath. They were great sticklers for the strictest kind of Sabbath keeping. Their law forbade travelling more than three quarters of a mile, and no secular work of any kind was permitted on the Sabbath day, yet it is recorded that on the day following the crucifixion these priests went to Pilate and begged for a guard to be sent to watch the sepulchre. This was permissible on their Passover Sabbath, but not on the Lord’s (seventh day) Sabbath.

“This fact alone proves that the day following the crucifixion was the Passover Sabbath and not the regular weekly rest day.

“Besides all this, Matthew calls that day the “NEXT DAY that followed the day of the preparation” (Matthew 27:62), a term that would in no wise have applied to the Sabbath of the Lord. All of these things should be understood and they bear mightily on the facts before stated.

“We have proven beyond doubt, and without fear of successful contradiction, that the Sabbath following the crucifixion, on which Christ was in the tomb, was not the Seventh Day Sabbath, but an entirely different day, viz. Thursday, which that year was the Jewish high day Sabbath or Day of Unleavened Bread, following the Passover feast day and the slaying of the Paschal lamb. Christ was in the tomb on the High Day Sabbath (Thursday), also the next day (Friday), and on Saturday, the Seventh Day Sabbath, on which day He arose (Matthew 28:1-8)” (pp. 17-18).

Christ fulfilled “the sign of the prophet Jonah” without fail – a sign that has been “spoken against” by the Friday crucifixion to Sunday morning resurrection tradition.

At baby Yeshua’s presentation in the temple, an old prophet named Simeon said of Him:

“And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary His mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against” (Luke 2:34).

Don’t be one to argue against the one Messianic sign Christ Himself gave about Himself – the sign of the prophet Jonah: 3 (twelve hour) nights and 3 (twelve hour) days in the heart of the earth!

“Third Day” means the Third Day after the Third Night

The argument that the phrase “on the third day” (Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22; Luke 18:32; 1 Cor. 15:4, etc.) used in reference to the time of Jesus’ resurrection is conclusive evidence that “inclusive reckoning” is to be used in calculating the duration of Jesus’ stay in the tomb is untenable. This is because the Messiah made it clear that this period would cover 3 days and 3 nights. Accordingly, we are not at liberty to surmise or assume that His rising on the third day suggests His being in the tomb for less than 3 days and 3 nights, made up of 12 hours each, night and day (Gen. 1:5). We are to interpret His resurrection “on the third day” in accordance with His own definition of what He means by that! And He means having spent three days and three nights in the grave! So then, the phrase is merely an identical term referring to the same time period just as “after three days” (Mark 8:31), which is also used in reference to the time of His resurrection, would also mean. The Greek word translated “after” is ‘*meta*’ meaning “after”, “upon”. Hence “after three days” simply means *when three days are accomplished, upon that occasion, at that very moment, I will rise again!*

The three days and three nights is the key determinant specifying how long the period is.

We find an example in the Book of Esther where the phrase “on the third day” is used to designate the ‘terminus’ or ending of a period covering three days and three nights:

“Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer,

“Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day; I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (Esth. 4:15-16).

“Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house” (5:1).

Now, did Esther’s appearance before the King “on the third day” mean they did not complete the fast spanning 3 days and 3 nights? That they only fasted some few hours of the first day, somewhere before sunset, and then ended the fast early on the third day and that would be 3 days and 3 nights – by inclusive reckoning? Whoever fasts this way?

If you were facing certain annihilation as Esther, Mordecai and the rest of the Jewish community in Persia faced, you wouldn’t fast this partially, this sloppily, and call it a fast of three days and three nights!

The simple truth is that the phrase “on the third day” refers back to Esther 4:16 as comprising 3 nights and 3 days with Esther making her appearance before the King on day 3 of the period (after the third night) and not day 1 or day 2.

And the time of her entry into the “inner court” must have been late in the afternoon or close to dusk on the third day (after the third night), as the story indicates that after King Ahasuerus had held out his golden sceptre to Queen Esther and accepted her, she went on to invite both the king and Haman to the banquet which she had prepared (v. 2 ff.). Because it was apparently close to nightfall, we learn in chapter 6 that “On that night could not the King sleep” (v. 1) – obviously the effect of the answered prayer offered during the fast.

So although the fasting period set was 3 nights and 3 days, it was proper to say Esther appeared before the king “on the third day” or day no. 3 of the period. This in no way truncates the 3-day fast, night and day.

In 1 Samuel 30:12-13, we read of an Egyptian slave who had not eaten or drunk for “three days and three nights” because his Amalekite master abandoned him when he fell sick “three days ago”. Clearly the “three days” are seen here as embodying their night portions or they would not be three days in the true sense of the word biblically. (See also Job 2:13 and Rev. 9:7, 11).

Perhaps we should also count the Sabbath period “inclusively” and consider any portion of daytime Saturday (say 9 am) as making up the whole Sabbath period? But we all know God never meant the Sabbath to be kept this way but from sunset (Friday) to (sunset) Saturday, a 24-hour period made up of one full night and one full day. It’s common knowledge that the Jews never observed the Sabbath using ‘inclusive reckoning’ but from sunset to sunset (Neh. 13:19; Mark 1:21, 32; see Lev. 23:32). Inclusive reckoning did not apply in any sense (when *night* was understood to be included!).

Neither did it apply in Jesus’ resurrection on the third day, that is, ordinal day three of the period defined in Matt. 12:40 as consisting of three days and *three nights*. The ‘third day’ was the day immediately preceded by the third night, which in the Lord’s case was a Saturday Sabbath late in the day!

The Significance of Jesus being actually Dead for Three Days and Three Nights

Arguments may be made back and forth, but what does it really mean for Jesus to be actually dead for three days and three nights?

The problem which arises from truncating Jesus' time in the tomb to a mere 36 hours or less, as Friday crucifixionists insist happened, is that it leaves room for doubts to be made about the authenticity of Jesus' death.

Dake's Annotated Reference Bible in its commentary on Luke 9:22 states inter alia:

“The Jews did not accept evidence as to the identification of a dead body after three days, for corruption took place quickly in the East. Hence, this period of three full days and three full nights was wanted by God, so as to preclude all doubt that death had actually taken place, and shut out all suggestion that Christ might have been in a trance. Jews would legally have to conclude His death, should He remain dead the full three days and three nights” (p. 69).

This the chief priests tacitly acknowledged when “the next day that followed the day of the preparation” they went to Pilate and requested that the tomb be placed under guard until at least “the third day” since in their words, “that deceiver said, while He was yet alive, ‘After three days I will arise again’” (Matt. 27:62-66).

Thus to limit Christ's stay in the tomb to 36 hours, which is less than two days (and two nights) or 48 hours, is to strike at the authenticity of Jesus' death and resurrection. It may well give credence to some theories that Jesus was merely in a coma while He lay in the tomb and not actually dead!

But the Lord Jesus truly died on the cross – and His side was speared – and He was entombed for three nights and three days, AND HIS BODY DIDN'T SEE CORRUPTION all those three days and three nights (Acts 2:27, 31-32; 13:34-37; cp. John 11:39), and He rose again on the third day (after the third night) late on the Sabbath as the Lord of all! (See Daniel 9:26-27, which has a two-fold meaning, for a prophetic hint of the Messiah being “cut off” for “the sacrifice and the oblation to cease” in the “midst of the week” [which is Wednesday]. The tearing of the veil of the temple from the top to the bottom signalled that animal sacrifices were no longer acceptable in heaven, Matt. 27:50:51; Heb. 9:11-12; 10:11-12).

Easter Sunday Predates the Resurrection

Since our Lord arose late on the Sabbath, as has been conclusively proven, it stands to reason that Easter Sunday sun-rise worship has nothing to do with Him. On the contrary, it has everything to do with Tammuz, the false Messiah (see Ezekiel 8:13-18). Indeed, it has been documented that “the idolatrous nations... in honour of their god, the sun, began their day at his rising” (G.L. Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath*, Nashville, Tennessee, 1904. Scanned and Edited by Paul Nethercott p. 40).

So then, the use of Christ's supposed resurrection on Sunday as the basis of Sunday worship in Christianity is clearly an afterthought.

The early disciples assembled in the evening of the first day of the week following Christ's resurrection, not for worship, but for an entirely different reason stated in the text – “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). With the arrest and cruel execution of their Master still fresh in their minds, they feared for their own lives and therefore huddled behind barred doors to keep away prying eyes. And it was in the evening, probably just before sunset.

Moreover, the disciples had not yet come to the conviction that the Lord had indeed risen – until the moment of His unexpected appearance in their midst – much less institute the first day of the week (Sunday) as a day of worship in honour of His resurrection!

And while He met them again “after eight days” (John 20:26) after the previous meeting, which would be a Monday (not another Sunday) counting from the twilight hours of the previous Sunday meeting (cp. 1

Chron. 9:25 with 2 Kings 11:5), He met them for a total of “forty days” after His resurrection (Acts 1:3), and all of those forty days could not have been Sundays, the first day the week.

What we know for certain is that the observance of the weekly seventh-day Sabbath was not only a routine for the Master but also for His disciples. Indeed, Luke, writing some thirty years after the resurrection, acknowledges the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath when he reports that the women who prepared the spices for the Lord’s body “rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56).

In *The Acts of the Apostles*, this same writer refers to the Sabbath not less than nine times and most of them in connection with apostolic Sabbath-keeping!

The Apostles on the Move along with their Sabbath-keeping Custom

The words of the risen Lord have had effect: The gospel has literally exploded out of Jerusalem in the power of Pentecost and is on an evangelizing tour of the nations, beyond Judea and Samaria! (Acts 1:8). Halleluiah!

Antioch: Paul Preaches Christ on the Sabbath

The first missionaries to the outside world are Paul and Barnabas. They arrive at Antioch in Pisidia after preaching in several cities along the route, “and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down” (Acts 13:14).

It appears worshipping on the Sabbath comes naturally to these evangelists. This particular Sabbath in Antioch, all eyes are on them in the synagogue.

Invited to address the congregation made up of native Hebrews (“men of Israel”) and Gentile God-fearers (vv. 15-16), Paul takes the opportunity to expound on the scriptures which clearly show Yeshua to be the long-promised Messiah of Israel.

His words make a profound impact on his hearers, and “the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them on the next Sabbath” (v. 42).

But oh, what a clanger!

Aren’t Paul and Barnabas supposed to observe Sunday, the next day, as their day of worship?

Anyway, Paul and Barnabas keep their Sabbath appointment: “And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God” (v. 44).

It’s no missed opportunity to instruct the Gentiles to come to church on Sunday. Paul and Barnabas never kept Sunday! Instead, they duly acknowledged the Sabbath as the divinely appointed day of rest and worship in their day. (Please read Acts 13:27).

Gentile Christians Observe the Sabbath in every City

After chapter 13, the next reference to the Sabbath in the Book of Acts occurs in chapter 15 where Gentile believers are portrayed as regular Sabbath-keepers who attend services “every Sabbath day” to hear instructions from the scriptures.

The whole chapter discusses how the early church resolved the issue of whether or not it was needful for Gentile believers to undergo circumcision.

Some Jewish believers from Judea had gone teaching that unless the Gentile believers submitted themselves to circumcision, they could not be saved. Paul and Barnabas, taking the opposite stand, had

trenchantly argued with them. But at the end of the day, it was agreed that the dispute be referred to “the apostles and elders” in Jerusalem for resolution.

A conference was subsequently convened in Jerusalem at which the disagreement caught fresh fire. The Jewish believers of Pharisaic background insisted that it was obligatory for the Gentiles to be circumcised “and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (v. 5).

After much talk, for and against, in which Peter called circumcision an oppressive “yoke” (vv. 5-11), the final decision of the council came by the mouth of James (*Ya’coov*), the elder who presided (and who was the Lord’s brother in the flesh):

“Wherefore my sentence [or ruling] is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

“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).

No endorsement of circumcision for Gentile believers and thus Christians in general. (See Ex. 12:49; Col. 3:10-11).

The rite of circumcision is properly situated among the ceremonial “law of Moses” which is quite distinct from the commandments of God, to wit: “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19).

If so, what was upheld by the apostles and elders as necessary for Gentile believers – abstinence from pollutions of idols, and from fornication and from unclean meats and blood – are all part of the commandments of God, and not part of the law of Moses.

Yet this was only foundational teaching. James said they would learn more of the will of God as they attended Sabbath services week after week:

“For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day” (v. 21).

The apostles and elders could not disallow “the law of Moses” and at the same time encourage readings from Moses if they didn’t mean two different things to them. The term “the law of Moses” in the context of the Book of Acts patently refers to the ceremonial law of animal sacrifices which could not take away sin or ‘justify’ sinners (Acts 13:38-39; Heb. 10:1-4; cp. Rom. 2:13). But Moses was also the one to whom God entrusted His commandments called “lively oracles” to “give unto us” (Acts 7:38). And so, while the ceremonial law of Moses was no longer binding, the believers were to give heed to scriptural readings and expositions on the writings of Moses (and the other prophets) every Sabbath day.

The distinction between the ceremonial law and God’s commandments have been clear from the outset:

1. The former was *written by Moses* in “a book” and put “in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD” (Deut. 31:24-26; see also Deut. 4:13-14; 2 Kings 2:18).
2. In contrast, the latter was spoken “out of the midst of the fire” (Deut. 4:12-13, 33, 36), *written with the very finger of God* on the tables of stone (Ex. 31:18; 32:16; Deut. 10:1-4) and “put INTO the ark” of the covenant under the mercy seat, above which YHWH appeared and communed with His people (Ex. 25:16; 25:20-22; 40:20; cp. Jer. 7:21-23).

The commandments, notably the Decalogue, are, as Stephen affirmed in Acts 7:38, “living oracles” as of now – not abolished or superseded.

They are living documents, being the terms of the New Covenant, guiding and influencing the thoughts and actions of God’s New Covenant people to align with His holy will, with the result that “all shall know

Me from the least to the greatest” (Heb. 8:10-11). The writing is again divine – by the Spirit of God writing on the fleshly tablets of the human heart (2 Cor. 3:3-6; Ezek. 36:26-27).

This is “the royal law” of the Kingdom (Jam. 2:8) preserved in heaven in the ark of the covenant sitting in the holy of holies in the temple of God in heaven (Rev. 11:19; 15:5; cp. Heb. 8:5; Ex. 25:9, 40; Heb. 9:11, 24).

Christ “did not come to destroy the law or the prophets” (of whom Moses is the leading light, Num. 12:8; Deut. 34:10) but to MAKE FULL as in “fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 5:17; 3:17). He did not inaugurate a “lawless” dispensation but instituted a New Covenant, whereby He put His laws in the hearts and minds of His people; a covenant He sealed with His own blood (Luke 22:20; Jer. 31:31-34).

To this extent, it is necessary to believe in Moses for one to truly believe in Christ, “for he wrote of Me” says Christ. “But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?” (John 5:46-47).

Thus the Gentile believers were instructed to learn more from the writings of Moses containing not only prophecies concerning the Messiah’s coming as the greater Prophet and Deliverer (Gen. 3:15; Deut. 18:18; John 1:25, 45; Acts 3:22-24) but also the record of the words of His covenant (Mal. 4:4) which He spoke with His own mouth, as Angel YHWH (cp. Ex. 34:28-35 with 2 Cor. 3:13, 17; 1 Cor. 10:4), “out of the midst of the fire” (Deut. 4:13; 5:22), which He then wrote with His own finger on tablets of stone – the same hand that writes the covenant in the hearts of true believers today!

And on what day were the Gentile believers especially to learn the scriptures to know more perfectly the will of God and thereby “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Saviour Jesus Christ”? (Note: The Apostolic Writings, what is commonly called the New Testament, had not yet been compiled. So the scriptures meant referred more to the ‘Old Testament’, 2 Tim. 3:15-16).

The day mentioned was the Sabbath, the seventh day, which is part of the divine words spoken out of the midst of the fire and subsequently written in the hearts of the New Covenant people of God by the fiery Spirit of Christ, the consuming Fire!

The words just fell from the lips of James as he concluded the verdict of the council. And there was no objection, no walkout, no shuffling of feet, not even a muted protest! Not from Paul, not from Peter, neither Andrew nor Barnabas. They let it stand, for James had said nothing untoward. On the contrary, “it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church...” (v. 22).

The observance of the 7th Day Sabbath by Gentile believers “in every city” (see Titus 1:5) was taken for granted; *Sabbath-keeping was considered a normal habit of the converted, Jew and Gentile alike.*

Against this background, it’s needless stressing that “the apostles and elders,” together with the entire church body based in the city of Jerusalem in Judea, were themselves habitual Sabbath-keepers and expected same of their Gentile brethren (1 Thess. 2:14). They indeed were! And “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost” too, for the Jerusalem Church to instruct the Gentile believers in the way of righteousness and holiness and to further exhort them to learn more from the writings of Moses in their various cities of residence every Sabbath (Acts 15:28-29).

How sad the modern church has rejected nearly all those things which “seemed good to the Holy Ghost” for believers to observe—right down to fornication (not to mention the meat of strangled animals) with the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle by ever growing segments of the world church!

What could they be missing?

Undeniably, it's the observance of the Sabbath at which they will be instructed more perfectly in the things of God! The Sabbath focus is to sit at HIS feet, rejoice in His love and come away more and more like Him!

Sabbath by the Riverside!

The next Sabbath stop in Acts sees Paul and Silas and their travelling companion, Luke, in the city of Philippi. "And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:13-14).

Apparently there was no meeting place in the city where Paul and his companions could observe the Sabbath. Yet they wouldn't miss the Sabbath. They went out to a quiet place by a riverside "where prayer was wont to be made," and their devotions led to the conversion of Lydia, a woman from Thyatira (v. 15).

Paul and his friends couldn't simply stop themselves from observing God's Sabbath, synagogue or no synagogue. It was out of force of habit.

For so "his manner was," as we go on to read in Acts 17.

Habitual Sabbath-keeping Witnessed in Thessalonica

"Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

"And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures" (Acts 17:1-2).

"Manner" is akin to "custom" which was used in describing the Lord's habitual Sabbath-keeping: "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read" (Luke 4:16).

Paul had certainly learnt from his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Cor. 11:1; 1 John 2:6). This was the man who wrote, "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4:19).

The life of the Apostle Paul testifies that faithful Sabbath-keeping is a Christ-like virtue; a mark of a person who has had the Messiah's values formed in him, thus becoming part of his essence.

Little wonder, the Sabbath remains for the people of God!

However, Bro. Paul doesn't spend all his time in Thessalonica. He travels on to Corinth.

Christ is Preached "every Sabbath" in a 1½-year Stretch!

Luke reports of Paul's Sabbath routine upon arriving in Corinth:

"And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

It turns out Paul "continued there [in Corinth] a year and half" (v. 11). That amounts to 78 Sabbaths in a row! And on each one of them, he kept the Sabbath even when he withdrew from the Jewish synagogue and began to meet separately with the Gentile converts and the few Jews who heeded his message, like Crispus, "the chief ruler of the synagogue," in the house of Justus "whose house joined hard to the synagogue"(v. 6-8).

How do I know?

It's because all the preceding six days of the week he was engaged in another occupation – the work of tent-making! And it's stated right there in the text:

*“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;
“And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.
“And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought [worked]: for by their occupation they were tentmakers” (vv. 1-3).*

This was what Paul was occupied in – along with the Jewish Christian couple, Aquila and Priscilla – all “the six working days” (Ez. 46:1), from Sunday to Friday. But went to church and preached *every Sabbath*. The text does not indicate anywhere that Paul organized the believers for services on Sunday (the first day of the week) but that he taught the scriptures and preached Christ every Sabbath (v. 5). The text is silent on his Sunday routine because he did nothing special, nothing spiritual in nature, on Sunday except the mundane work of tent-making.

The Apostle Paul was simply being obedient to God: “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....it is a Sabbath of rest; an holy convocation” (Ex. 20:8-10; Lev. 23:3). So Paul was only practising what he himself knew to be true and which was reaffirmed by the Jerusalem council: “Let the Gentile hear from the Law every Sabbath.”

The life of the Apostle Paul is as much a vindication of his faith as a vindication of his obedience which included the faithful observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Sunday Night Meeting followed by Sunday Morning Trek!

Up until this point, there has been no mention of the first day of the week in the missionary reports of Luke until we reach chapter 20, and all of a sudden there's a buzz! “Eureka! We have found it!” The solitary mention of Sunday in the whole of the Book of Acts is eagerly seized upon by churchmen desperate to find scriptural support for Sunday sacredness!

But what have they found? What do we find?

The text reads:

⁶ *“And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.*

⁷ *“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*

⁸ *“And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.*

⁹ *“And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.*

¹⁰ *“And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him” (Acts 20:6-10).*

Is this the scene of a Sunday morning service?

You only have to look away from the inside of “the upper chamber” to peer into darkness! But the room is lit up because there are “many lights” in it. It needs no telling that it's nighttime, but it's not the first day

of the week at its ending but at its beginning. Remember, “the evening and the morning were the first day” (Gen. 1:5).

Simply put, the time of the meeting was Saturday night, as we will now term it. But in Bible time, it was the beginning (or dark part) of the first day of the week ushered in after the Sabbath ended at sunset. Incidentally, this Sabbath which had just passed marked the last day of their seven-day stay in Troas (v. 6). It was the evening following this seventh day, being the first day of the week, that the disciples came together to break bread in the upper chamber lit up by lights.

The rendering of *Today’s English Version* brings out this fact more clearly:

“On Saturday evening we gathered for the fellowship meal. Paul spoke to the people, and kept on speaking until midnight, since he was going to leave the next day.” (Also *New English Bible; The Jewish New Testament*).

For the record, Sunday services, at least by current convention, don’t begin in the morning and stretch all the way through midnight till daybreak of the following day!

But Paul began his speech at sunset and talked till daybreak in the course of which Eutychus fell into a deep sleep and fell to his death! But Paul went down to him and raised him up by the power of God. As we see further in the chapter, Paul’s nightlong talk was, to all interests and purposes, a *farewell sermon* as this was the last time the brethren at Troas (as he indicated to the Ephesians) would be seeing him in person (vv. 25-29).

The meeting was not a Sunday morning service or evening for that matter. The stated purpose was to “break bread or have a “fellowship meal”.

Neither was it to have the “Lord’s Supper”, as some infer from the breaking of bread, which they claim was held every first day of the week! “Breaking bread” was simply a biblical expression commonly used to designate a meal. (See Matt. 14:19; Luke 24:20; Acts 27:33-36, and especially Acts 2:46 where the disciples used to do this “daily” “from house to house”). “It means to partake of food and is used of eating as in a meal... The readers [of the original N.T. manuscripts] could have had no other idea or meaning in their minds” (E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*, pp. 839-840).

This sense is all the more proven when we realize that after Paul had come up again after raising Eutychus, he “had broken bread [again] and eaten” (v. 11).

Meanwhile, Paul’s travelling companions had gone ahead of him (“went before,” v. 13) and were engaged in the labour of rowing and sailing a boat while he talked that Saturday night. Apparently, they had set sail after the Sabbath had ended. But Paul stayed behind for one more sermon for the last time. At daybreak Sunday morning, Paul himself set out on foot and walked a distance of 19½ miles from Troas to Assos where he joined his colleagues in the boat (vv. 13-14).

He rested the Sabbath, spoke at length to the church the night following it and went on an arduous journey covering 19½ miles on Sunday morning, a common working day.

But why was the first-day night meeting ever recorded since it wasn’t a formal worship service?

George L. Butler, among other cogent points, provides the answer in his book *The change of the Sabbath: Was it by Divine or Human Authority?*:

“Sunday observers cite Paul’s night meeting in Acts 20, and dwell upon it with much satisfaction. Yet he and his companions used the light part of that day for ordinary secular business. One night meeting they consider strong evidence for first day sacredness. Yet that very instance really counts more for the Sabbath than for the first day; for the disciples remained there over the Sabbath, and

as soon as the light the first day dawned, they started on their long journey toward Jerusalem. They did not start on the Sabbath, but they did on Sunday. Doubtless the reason why that night meeting was mentioned, was the remarkable occurrence of raising the dead man Eutychus. This was one of the greatest miracles that Paul ever wrought” (Nashville, Tennessee 1904 Scanned and Edited by Paul Nethercot 2002, p. 29).

If the truth be told, one meeting during the night of the first day of the week does not sanctify Sunday worship for the early church or even make it conventional – in contrast to the 84 different Sabbaths Paul and his co-workers observed in the cities of the Gentiles during their missionary journeys: two in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:42, 44), one in Philippi (Acts 16:13-14); three in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2), and 78 (over a one and half-year period) in Corinth (Acts 18:4, 11). One mention of a ‘dinner’ meeting held during the dark part of the first day of the week cannot supersede all those formal ‘customary’ observances of the 7th Day Sabbath by Paul and the Gentile believers in the Book of Acts. Certainly not! The passage talks nothing about it being ‘customary’ for religious meeting to be on Sunday. There was no such custom! It only relates to the events of one particular first day of the week during which Paul, midway through his nightlong talk, performed a phenomenal miracle. He restored a dead man to life!

Remember, it’s 84 Sabbaths versus one Sunday meeting at night (Saturday night) so far!

Romans 14: Man-made Special Days, a Matter of Personal Choice

We have followed the Apostle’s Paul Sabbath culture with interest all through the Book of Acts. But did he repudiate the Sabbath in Romans chapter 14 by his statement that each man should be convinced in his own mind which day to keep? Did he vitiate the Sabbath command by this?

The opening sentence of the chapter utterly discounts such an interpretation. The topic under discussion and the points raised do not relate to the Sabbath at all. It discusses an altogether different matter:

“Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

“For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs.

“Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him” (Rom. 14:1-3).

The *RSV* renders the *KJV*’s “doubtful disputations” “disputes over opinions”, while the *NIV* calls it “disputable matters”.

The Sabbath is not a matter of “doubtful disputation” or opinion like whether to eat vegetables only or eat meat in addition. It rests firmly on a clear command of God stated in the 4th commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.”

So then, Paul’s statement that “one man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike” in no way has anything to do with the Sabbath. He wrote:

“One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

“He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks” (vv. 5-6).

Since there’s no connection between Sabbath observance and vegetarianism, the context speaks to some other special days other than the Sabbath.

“The close contextual association with eating suggests that Paul has in mind a special day set apart for observance as a time for feasting or as a time for fasting” (Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, p. 146).

The observance of the Sabbath is not a matter of man’s opinion or preference but the Creator choosing the seventh day and blessing it and consecrating it as “Sabbath” (rest day). It’s a matter of obeying God.

In contrast, the competing days of fasting (Luke 18:12) or feasting were born of mere human decision. They had no inherent sanctity. But the seventh-day Sabbath has – made so by YHWH!

1 Cor. 16:1-2: Sunday is for Business: Take stock and Store up!

1st Cor. 16:2 is a text often quoted in support of Sunday observance in which Paul is *made to say* that we should attend church on Sundays and give an offering. But in reality Paul just said the opposite. He reaffirmed that Sunday was the first working day of the week and should be used for just that – work; something the Corinthians saw Paul do for the one and half years he stayed with them in Corinth. For the avoidance of speculation, there’s no mention of church, meeting or assembly but an instruction to engage in work.

It reads:

¹“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

²“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

³“And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem” (1 Cor. 16:1-3).

It’s a pretty straightforward matter. The “collection for the saints” is to follow the procedure earlier given to the churches in Galatia:

1. Do it on the first day of the week.
2. On this day, everyone is to “lay by him in store, as God has prospered him” over the course of the week.
3. Why this arrangement? So that people will not be rushing in with their contributions or “gatherings” when I come.”
4. Where is the collection destined for? Jerusalem; that’s where the aforementioned recipients of the collection, “the saints” (v. 1a), are based.
5. How will it get to them? You’ll have to send it by brethren from your assembly, ‘accredited’ by your letters.

We know from Romans chapter 15 that “it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Rom. 15:26; also 25). The Gentile believers considered it a form of debt payment to their Jewish brethren for the spiritual illumination they had received from them (v. 27; cp. 1 Cor. 9:11). And Paul was all too happy to send to them “this fruit” (v. 28).

The word “fruit” is a significant word for the purposes of our study. “It was not money, but FRUIT that was being sealed for shipment to the poor saints at Jerusalem! (The Greek word can also refer to grain, wine, and other produce which can be stored a long time without spoiling)” (Herbert W. Armstrong, *Which Day is the Christian Sabbath?* 1970, p. 91).

But why FRUIT (Grk. *karpos*, [*kar-pos*'], Strong's # 2590 fruit [as plucked], literally or figuratively) but not money?

“The poor saints at Jerusalem were suffering from drought and famine. They [therefore] needed, not money, but FOOD” (ibid. p. 91).

A prophecy had earlier gone forth predicting these very hard times:

²⁷ “*And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.*”

²⁸ “*And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.*”

²⁹ “*Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:*”

³⁰ “*Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul*”
(Acts 11:27-30)

Does the truth now unfold before your eyes? The “collection” for “the poor saints at Jerusalem”, the “relief”, consisted in food supplies, most probably grain. In a time of famine, money will have little practical use. What will be urgently needed is food.

This the Apostle Paul competently communicated first to the Assemblies in Galatia and later to the Corinthians, when he told them to ‘put something aside and store it up’ (RSV) *individually* on the first day of the week “that there be no gatherings” when he came around to visit.

The “gatherings” relate to food. Men gather fruit from the tree and vegetables out of the ground to be stored up! Putting coins in a collection bowl, or an offering in an envelope, hardly qualifies to be called “gatherings” – gatherings of food which would take time and labour to collect from the fields and store and therefore must be done before his arrival to avoid a stampede.

The language of the scripture does not suggest that public collections were to be taken up on the first day of the week. “The whole question turns upon the expression, ‘lay by him in store’. Would the act of taking money from the purse or pocket and placing it in a box or plate, be laying by him, i.e. by himself? Most certainly it would be just the opposite; it would be putting the money away from himself. The money would be gone. This is evidently an act to be done, not in a public gathering, but at home. This is most certainly the meaning of the original Greek. Various translations collected by J.W. Morton, late Presbyterian missionary to Hayti, read as follows:-

‘Greenfield in the lexicon, translates the Greek term, ‘by one’s self, i.e, at home’. Two Latin versions, the Vulgate and that of Castellio, render it ‘with one’s self, at home’. Three French translations, those of Martin, Osterwald, and De Sacy, ‘at his own house, at home’. The German of Luther, ‘by himself, at home’. The Dutch the same as the German. The Italian of Diodati, ‘in his own presence, at home.’... Dr Bloomfield renders it ‘by him, Fr. Chez Soi, at home ... Dr Justin Edwards, in his *Family Testament of the American Tract Society*, p. 286, thus gives it, ‘Lay by himself in store; at home; that there be no gatherings; that their gifts might be ready when the apostle should come.’” (George L. Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath: Was it by Divine or Human Authority?* p. 27).

For something to be put aside and stored in one’s own home in readiness for the apostle’s coming would necessitate bookkeeping or stocktaking of the previous week’s earnings or produce.

While such an act would not be consistent with God’s command to keep the seventh day holy, it would be perfectly all right to do so on the first day of the week.

And when finally the apostle comes?

The brethren the church would select and approve by letters would carry the gift to Jerusalem. That should tell you the gift is not a bag of money which one or two people could carry but a package (or collection) of food items which would require a number of people to carry (see 2 Cor. 8:19-23).

It's one of such groups of gift-bearers from the Gentile churches that we encounter in the company of the Apostle Paul in Acts 20:4ff. who, on their way to Jerusalem, remained in Troas over the Sabbath but sailed a boat around the 60-mile rim of the Asia Minor peninsula from Troas to Assos all during the night-time portion of the first day. Sometime in the day, Paul caught up with them, after leaving Troas for Assos at daybreak Sunday for the 19½-mile journey overland!

In Acts 24:17, Paul testifies that the "alms" of the Gentile believers (consisting mainly of food) were duly delivered to their intended recipients in Jerusalem. And all organized on the first day of the week as he instructed the churches in Galatia, Achaia (in which Corinth was located) and presumably Macedonia.

Thus rather than establishing Sunday as the 'Christian Sabbath' or day of worship, 1 Cor. 16:2 clearly establishes it as a common working day among the original early Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike!

Colossians 2:16-17: Yearly Sabbaths meant, not THE SABBATH!

Call it a misrepresentation born of prejudice, and you will not be wrong! Yet this is one 'proof text' often quoted by first-day preachers and churchgoers alike to justify their observance of Sunday. To them, it supposedly teaches that the Sabbath is obsolete and done away with.

But what "sabbath" is being discussed in Col. 2:16-17?

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

"Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

As you can see, the "sabbath" there is not one which stands alone but is part of a connected whole. This is a clear reference to the yearly feasts of the Hebrew calendar also called "sabbaths" (Lev. 23:24, 39) in which "a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings" were performed as an integral part of their ceremonies (Lev. 23:37).

The distinction with the weekly Sabbath of the moral law is clear. We read in the *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*:

"the sabbath – Omit 'THE' which is not in the Greek. 'SABBATHS' (not 'the sabbaths') of the day of atonement and feasts of tabernacles have come to an end with the Jewish services to which they belonged (Lev. 23:37-39). The weekly Sabbath rests on a more permanent foundation, having been instituted in Paradise to commemorate the completion of Creation in six days. Lev. 23:38 expressly distinguished 'the sabbath of the Lord' from the other [yearly] sabbaths" (p. 1322).

Nevertheless, some commentators see in the neutral tone of the Apostle Paul – "Let no one judge (or criticize) you" – an indication that the feasts were being kept or at least it was a matter of one's personal decision whether or not to keep them.

Whatever way one looks at it, the fact remains that the 7th Day Sabbath is a valid part of God's immutable moral law which remains in force as long as heaven and earth exist (Luke 16:17-18; Rom. 7:1-3) and that we are required to keep it as a whole or we are guilty of all if we "offend in one point" (Jam. 2:10-11). To the extent that the moral law inculcates in us the character of God which is "holy, righteous, and good" (Rom. 7:12), it will never lose its validity (Ps. 119:172, 100; cp. 1 Sam. 2:2; Isa. 6:3; Deut. 32:4; Nah. 1:7; Ps. 25:8).

But the ceremonial laws served a different purpose. “Added because of transgressions” (of the moral law since “where there is no law there is no transgression”, Rom. 4:15), they only functioned as a “school master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith [in His blood]. But after faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal. 3:19, 24-25).

The old “schoolmaster” is on retirement, bringing to our understanding the truth that the ceremonial laws were designed, in the foreknowledge of God, to teach us about the work and Person of the Messiah and the plan of salvation. They were “shadows” of the “good things” Christ would accomplish in our lives by His death, resurrection and ascension. These “shadows” or types included the animal sacrifices which could not take away sins (Heb. 10:1-4, 10); the earthly tabernacle which were “a shadow of heavenly things” (where Christ now serves as High Priest) (Heb. 8:5; 9:11, 23-24); and, of course, the yearly feasts (1 Cor. 5:7-8). Indeed, every piece of furniture, every offering, every feast day, the clothing of the priest, were all designed to teach us about Christ.

The seventh-day Sabbath, however, predates all these “shadows” and is a *covenant sign* (or mark or evidence) identifying God’s elect – a badge of their divine identity as the people of the Creator who made heaven and earth in six days, rested on the seventh day (Ex. 31:13, 17; Ez. 20:12, 20) and has promised them rest (Ex. 33:14).

Thus the Sabbath not only celebrates God’s creative power week after week but also finds continuing relevance, in its meaning of rest, in the finished salvation work of Christ (Heb. 4:3-4, 9-11) who both claimed it as His “Lord” and kept it as an example of obedience to us, an example followed by the apostles and early Christians who observed the seventh-day Sabbath but regarded Sunday as an ordinary working day!

Col. 2:16 is no positive endorsement of Sunday worship which rests on no divine authority but solely on human tradition, an act roundly condemned in the epistle. Rather than following philosophy and vain deceit, [which is] after the TRADITION of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ”, we are taught in Colossians to “walk in Him” (or “walk as He walked”, 1 John 2:6), which, of course, includes the observance of the seventh day Sabbath (Col. 2:6-8, also v. 22).

With regard to Col. 2:14, often cited as ‘proof’ that the Ten Commandments have been abolished and nailed to the cross, it should be plain to all that the “handwriting of ordinances” which Christ “blotted out” or crossed out, because it was “against us” or “contrary to us” and which He “took out of the way”, nailing it to His cross, were not the Ten Commandments.

There’s no way the Ten Commandments described as “holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12) and which defines for us good and evil (Rom. 7:7), can be said to be annulled. The result will be societal breakdown and anarchy with people going on a stealing spree, killing spree, and practising open and unrestrained idolatry and sexual immorality, including husband and wife snatching, with impunity!

What then was nailed to the cross?

They were the penalties of transgression (dating all the way back to “Adam’s transgression”, Rom. 5:12-14) which dangled over the head of every sinner like the sword of Damocles! These Christ “canceled out” (NIV) and took it out of the way when He offered Himself as a ransom for us. The Greek word translated as “handwriting” is *cheirographon* and it means “something hand-written” “a bond” or “record of debt” denoting “a record of sin”.

This was what was nailed to the cross. (See Rom. 8:1-2). It was a record which called for the death sentence to be passed against us as just punishment for sin (Rom. 6:23) and therefore was “against us”, was “contrary to us”. (See Gen. 2:17; Deut. 27:14-16). But Christ Jesus took all this record of our sins out

of the way when He forgave us all our trespasses! *The New Testament in Modern English* by J.B. Phillips makes this plainer in its translation. It translates verses 13 and 14 as follows:

“He has forgiven us all our sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing it over His own head on the cross.”

He wiped the slate clean, “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity [lawlessness] and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14), “Who His own self bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). He gives us an opportunity for a fresh start with God in righteousness.

The Sabbath is surely in there, for “all His commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172).

The Law of God itself was never against us but the penalty of death arising from transgressing it. Thanks be unto God, that no longer stands in our way. What remains for us is His life of righteousness. Halleluiah!

The Origin of Sunday Worship in Christianity

It Began on the Quiet

Throughout this booklet, we have proven for ourselves that the seventh-day Sabbath originated at creation, that it was blessed and sanctified then by the Creator, that God instituted it by law for “a perpetual covenant,” that He enjoins Gentiles who love His name to take hold of it, that Christ upheld it by word and example while He was on earth, that Christ didn’t resurrect on Sunday making it the new day of worship, that the apostles and Gentile believers continued to keep the Sabbath, and that at all times there remains “a Sabbath-rest for the people of God”.

So how did Sunday worship come to be accepted by most of Christianity?

Sunday worship encroached on the sanctity of the seventh-day Sabbath subtly by degrees until it came to overshadow the Sabbath in terms of popular observance.

It was a trend driven by primarily two factors: Apostasy and the use of civil power in favour of Sunday.

Accordingly, “The Christian church made no formal but a gradual and almost unconscious transfer of the one [Sabbath] to the other [Sunday]” (*The Voice from Sinai*, by Archdeacon F.W. Farrar, page 167, quoted in *The Home Bible Instructor* by A. N. Dugger, p. 153).

So how and when was the purported transfer made?

A Sabbath-keeping Christian World

The testimony of history is that for a long time after the death of the original Apostles and the writing of the New Testament, faithful believers continued to observe the Sabbath until much later. “In fact, its observance has never wholly ceased in the Christian church” to this day (ibid. p. 153).

The history is solid:

“The first Christian church established at Jerusalem by apostolic authority became in its doctrine and practice a model for the greater part of those founded in the first century... These Judaizing Christians were first known by the outside world as ‘Nazarenes’ [see Acts 24:5]... All Christians agreed in celebrating the seventh day of the week in conformity to the Jewish converts” (Hugh Smith, *History of the Christian Church*, pp. 50, 51, 69).

“The primitive Christians had a great veneration for the Sabbath, and spent the day in devotion and sermons. And it is not to be doubted that they derived this practice from the apostles themselves” (T.M. Morer, *Dialogue on the Lord’s day*, page 189, 1701).

“The Sabbath was religiously observed in the Eastern church three hundred years and more after our Saviour’s passion” (Prof. E. Brerwood of Gresham College, London, *Learned Treatise of the Sabbath*, p. 77).

The historian Socrates, who wrote about the middle of the fifth century, gives an eyewitness account (of near universal Sabbath-keeping in his day):

“Almost all the churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christian of Alexandria and at Rome on account of some ancient tradition, refused to do this” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 5, Chapter 22. Emphasis mine).

The Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge by Schaff and Herzog states on page 2166:

“It [the 7th Day Sabbath] had no rival day in the church until about the middle of the second century, when Sunday began to be observed as a festival day... along with Wednesday, Friday and numerous festival days of the LATIN CHURCH then beginning to drift upon the FIRST GREAT WAVE OF ITS APOSTASY”!

A rising Tide of Apostasy Sweeps aside the Sabbath

The engulfing apostasy, which had its epicentre in Rome, rode on the back of the influx of half-converted heathens into the church and then began to make deadly inroads into the truth of the gospel, to the extent that “Before the second century was half gone, before the last of the apostles had been had been dead forty years, this apostate, this working of the ‘Mystery of Iniquity’, had so largely spread over the east and the west, that it is literally true, that a large part of the Christian observances and institutions, even in this century, had the aspect of the pagan mysteries” (Mosheim, in *Ecclesiastical History*, Century 2, Part 2, Chapter 4, Paragraph 1, cited in *A History of the Sabbath and Sunday* by John Kiesz, p. 16).

The result was, as one church historian put it, “baptized paganism”.

Thus the ground was already prepared when the Roman Emperor, Constantine, arrived on the scene in the fourth century and began to ‘cosy up’ to the church as its benefactor. In 313 A.D., he issued the Edict of Milan which effectively granted Christians freedom of worship. In 321 A.D. Constantine, who remained a life-long devotee of the sun-god, made Sunday the official day of rest and worship throughout the Roman Empire.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, seventh edition, 1842, testifies:

“It was Constantine who first made a law of proper observance of Sunday; and who, according to Eusebius, appointed that it should be regularly celebrated throughout the Roman Empire.”

Constantine’s Sunday Law read:

“Let all the judges and town people, and the occupation of all trades, rest on the venerable day of the sun; but let those who are situated in the country, freely and at full liberty, attend to the business of agriculture because it often happens that no other day is fit for sowing corn and planting vines lest the critical moment being let slip, men should lose the commodities granted them by heaven” (*Corpus Juris Civilis* Cod Liv. 3, Tit. 12:30 cited in *A History of the Sabbath & Sunday*, p. 49).

Constantine's Sunday edict had a huge negative impact on Sabbath observance while Sunday worship rose to prominence:

"Very shortly after the period when Constantine issued his edict enjoining the general observance of Sunday throughout the Roman empire, the party that had contended for the observance of the seventh day, dwindled into insignificance. The observance of Sunday as a public festival, during which all business, with the exception of rural employment, was intermitted, came to be more and more generally established ever after this time, throughout both the Greek and Latin churches. There is no evidence, however, that either in this, or at a period much later, the observance was viewed as deriving any obligation from the fourth commandment. It seems to have been regarded as an institution corresponding in nature with Christmas, Good Friday, and other festivals of the church; and as resting with them on the ground of ecclesiastical authority and tradition!" - *Sabbath Laws Examined*, pp. 280, 281 (G.L. Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath*, p. 36).

But when the observance of the seventh day by Christians wouldn't be utterly extirpated, canon law (church decrees) stepped into the breach and quite outlawed the Sabbath:

"When the practice of keeping Saturday Sabbaths, which had become so general at the close of this century, was evidently gaining ground in the Eastern church, a decree was passed in the council held in Laodicea [A. D. 364]. That members of the church should not rest from work on the Sabbath day, like Jews, but should labor on that day, and preferring in honor the Lord's day. Then, if it be in their power, should rest from work as Christians." - *Sermons on the Sacraments and Sabbath*, pp. 122, 123 (ibid. p. 37).

In his *Dissertation on the Lord's Day* p. 163 Prynne testifies:

"The seventh day Sabbath was solemnized by Christians till the Laodicean Council did, in a manner quite abolish it. The Council of Laodicea first settled the observance of the Lord's Day [i.e. Sunday]".

The Council of Laodicea decreed in 364 A.D:

"Christians must not Judaize [be like Jews] by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be Judaizing, let him be anathema [i.e. accursed] from Christ" (as quoted in *A History of the Church Councils* by Charles J. Hefele, Vol. 11, p. 316, cited in *A History of the Sabbath and Sunday*, p. 50).

Now the fact has been established beyond dispute. It was not by divine authority or commandment that Sunday was made to take the place of the seventh day as the day of worship but by human authority and tradition.

It is a simple fact all knowledgeable students of the Bible and history acknowledge.

Candid Confessions of Sunday-keepers

BAPTIST

- "There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but the Sabbath day was not a Sunday.....it will be said however and with some show of triumph that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh day to the first day of the week..... Where can the record of such transaction be found? There is no scriptural evidence of the change of the Sabbath institution from the seventh to the first day of the week.

“To me it seems unaccountable that Jesus during his three year intercourse with his disciples, after conversing with them upon the Sabbath question... never alluded any transference of the day, also, that during the forty days of his resurrection, no such thing was intimated.

“Of course, I quiet well know that Sunday came into use in the early Christian history as a religious day, as we learn from the Christian fathers and other sources. But what a pity that it comes branded with the mark of paganism and christened with the name of the sun god, when adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism” (Dr. Edward T Hiscox, author of the *Baptist Manual*, in a paper read by before a New York ministers conference held November 13, 1893 quoted in *Rome’s Arraignment of Sabbath-breakers* pp. 15-16).

- “The first four commandments set forth men’s obligation directly toward God ... but when we keep the first four commandments, we are likely to keep the other six... The fourth commandments set forth God’s claim on man’s time and thought... The six days of labour and the rest on the Sabbath day are to be maintained as a witness to God’s toil and rest in the creation... No one of the ten words is of merely racial significance ... the Sabbath was established originally (long before Moses) in no special connection with the Hebrews, but as an institution for all mankind, in commemoration of God’s rest after the six days of creation. It was designed for all the descendants of Adam” (*Adult Quarterly*, Southern Baptist Convention Series, August 15, 1937) (ibid p. 16).

CATHOLIC

- “Question: Which is the Sabbath day? “Answer: Saturday is the Sabbath day.
“Question: Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday
- “Answer: We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic church, in the Council of Laodicea (AD 336), transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday” (Peter Gerthermann, *The Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* Second Edition, 1910 p 50) (ibid 18).
- “Question: Have you any other way of proving that the Church has power to institute festivals of precept?
- “Answer: Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her; -- she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no scriptural authority” (Stephen Keenan, *A Doctrinal Catechism*, p 174) (ibid. 18).
- “Question: How prove you that the church hath power to command feasts and holy days?
“Answer: By the very act of changing the Sabbath into *Sunday*, which Protestants allow of; and therefore they fondly contradict themselves, by keeping Sunday strictly and breaking most other feasts commanded by the same church.”
- “Question: How prove you that?
- “Answer: Because by keeping *Sunday*, they acknowledge the church’s power to ordain feasts, and to command them under sin: and by not keeping the rest (of the feasts) by her command, they again deny, in fact, the same power” (Henry Tubersville D.D, *AN Abridgement of the Christian Doctrine* (R.C), p 58) (ibid p.19).
- “Nowhere in the Bible do we find that Christ or the apostles ordered that the Sabbath be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We have the commandment of God given to Moses to keep holy the Sabbath day, that is the seventh day of the week, Saturday. Today most churches keep Sunday because it has been revealed to us by the church [of Rome] outside the Bible” (*Catholic Virginian* October 3, 1947) (ibid 19).

CHRISTIAN

- “There is no direct scriptural authority for designating the first day “the Lord’s day” (Dr. D.H Lucas, *Christian Oracle*, January 23, 1890) (ibid 20).
- “I do not believe that the Lord’s day came in the room of the Jewish Sabbath, or that the Sabbath was changed from the seventh day to the first day, for this plain reason, where there is no testimony, there can be no faith. Now there is no testimony in all the oracles of Heaven that the Sabbath was changed or the Lord’s day came in the room of it” (Alexander Campbell, *Washington Reporter*, October 8, 1821). (ibid. 20).

CONGREGATIONALIST

- "It must be confessed that there is no law in the New Testament concerning the first day" (*Buck's Theological Dictionary*, page 403) (ibid. 20).
- “The current notion that Christ and His apostles authoritatively substituted the first day for the seventh, is absolutely without any authority in the New Testament" (Dr. Lyman Abbott, *Christian Union*, Jan. 19, 1882).
- “The Christian Sabbath (Sunday) is not in the Scripture, and was not by the primitive church called the Sabbath" (*Dwight's Theology*, Vol. 4, p. 401) (ibid. 20).

EPISCOPAL

- “Where are we told in Scripture that we are to keep the first day at all? We are commanded to keep the seventh; but we are nowhere commanded to keep the first day... The reason why we keep the first day of the week holy instead of the seventh is for the same reason that we observe many other things, not because the Bible, but because the church has enjoined it” (Isaac Williams, D.D., *Plain Sermons on the Catechism*, Vol. 1, pp.334, 336. Emphasis mine.) (ibid. pp. 21-22).
- “But unless my reckoning is all wrong, the Sabbath day lasts twenty-fours from six o’clock on Friday evening. It gives over, therefore, before we come to Sunday. If you suggest to a Sabbatarian [strict observer of Sunday] that he ought to observe the Sabbath on the proper day, you arouse no enthusiasm. He at once replies that the day, not the principle, has been changed. But changed by whom? *There is no injunction in the whole of the New Testament to Christians to change the Sabbath into Sunday*” (D. Morse-Boycott, *Daily Herald*, London, Feb. 26, 1931) (ibid. p. 22).

METHODIST

- “The reason we observe the first instead of the seventh is based on no positive command. One will search the scriptures in vain for authority for changing from the seventh day to the first. ...” (Clovis G. Chappel, *Ten Rules for Living*, p. 61) (ibid. p. 24).

MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

- “The Sabbath was binding in Eden, and it has been in force ever since. This fourth commandment begins with the word ‘remember,’ showing that the Sabbath already existed when God wrote the law on the tables of stone at Sinai. How can men claim that this one commandment has been done away with when they will admit that the other nine are still binding?” (D.L. Moody, *Weighted and Wanting*, p. 47) (ibid. 24).
- “I honestly believe that this commandment [the fourth, or Sabbath commandment] is just as binding today as it ever was. I have talked with men who have said that it has been abrogated, but

they have never been able to point to any place in the Bible where God repealed it. When Christ was on earth, He did nothing to set it aside; He freed it from the traces under which the scribes and Pharisees had put it, and gave it its true place. ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath’! It is just as practicable and as necessary for men today as it ever was—in fact, more than ever, because we live in such an intense age!” (D.L. M. *Weighed and Wanting*, p.46).

- “Sabbath means *rest*, and the meaning of the word gives a hint as to the true way to observe the day. God rested after Creation, and ordained the Sabbath as a rest for man” (D.L. M. *Weighed and Wanting*, pp. 46-47) (ibid. pp. 24-25).

PRESBYTERIAN

- “The Sabbath is a part of the Decalogue—the Ten Commandments. This alone forever settles the question as to the perpetuity of the institution...Until, therefore, it can be shown that the whole moral law has been repealed, the Sabbath will stand...The teaching of Christ confirms the perpetuity of the Sabbath” (T.C. Blake, D.D., *Theology Condensed*, pp. 474, 475) (ibid. p. 26).

HISTORICAL

- “Eusebius, fourth-century bishop and friend of the wicked Emperor Constantine, whose Sunday law is the first on record, flatly says: ‘All things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these *we* have transferred to the Lord’s day (as they had begun to call Sunday)’” (*Commentary on the Psalms*) (ibid. p. 28).

INFIDEL

- “I challenge any priest or minister of the Christian religion to show me the slightest authority for the religious observance of Sunday. And, if such cannot be shown by them, why is it that they are constantly preaching about Sunday as a holy day? ... The claim that Sunday takes the place of Saturday, and that because the Jews were supposed to be commanded to keep the *seventh day* of the week holy, *therefore* the *first day* of the week should be so kept by Christians, is so utterly absurd as to be hardly worth considering... That Paul habitually observed and preached on the seventh day of the week, is shown in Acts 18:4 – ‘And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath (Saturday)’” (Henry M. Taber, *Faith or Fact*, pp. 114, 116) (ibid. p. 29).

The testimonies are clear. All of them – Scripture, history, learned theological discourse – concur that Sunday worship in Christianity is man-made and has no divine sanctity.

But why the choice of Sunday (of all the days of the week) when men chose to replace the seventh day of the week as the divinely ordained day of rest and worship?

A much loved Pagan Relic finds a Sanctuary in Christendom!

Sunday worship dates back to the earliest history of mankind, reaching back into the mists of time. “No one can tell where or when it did originate. It was of idolatrous origin, and was consecrated to the worship of the sun” (G.L. Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath*, p. 39).

As a matter of fact, "The worship of the sun...and its deification was the source of all idolatry in every part of the world" (William Tyler Olcott, *Sun Lore of All Ages*, Chapter VI - Sun Worship, p. 142, 1914).

Two figures in history who contributed greatly to popularize sun-worship among the nations were Nimrod, the post-flood celebrity “mighty hunter” whose birthday is still celebrated by the world every 25th December, and Semiramis, his wife (who was also his mother).

By the time of the Exodus when Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt by a mighty hand, sun-worship was well established in the pagan nations, and He warned Israel not to follow the heathen nations in venerating the host of heaven (Deut. 4:19).

Then came a time when it became fashionable in the Roman Empire to style oneself a Christian because Constantine himself now professed Christianity (which he ended up corrupting).

And they swarmed in, not to become members of Christ's church, but to curry favour with the emperor. Indeed, "In order to serve in the army or in the courts, or hold any official position, men had to profess to be Christians; and Gibbon declares that many did this, but continued to worship their idols in secret. Vast numbers joined the church. The bishops sought high positions, wealth, and place, dressing in gorgeous attire, and there was very little resemblance indeed between religion then and in the days of persecution" (G.L. Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath*, p. 37).

The Christian religion had undergone a complete transformation from its original purity. It had become substantially pagan by adulteration which, in effect, meant that the old pagan religion had merely undergone a make-over. A gloss of Christian belief here and there, but it was in all essential points truly "baptized paganism"!

By this time, the Sabbath was already being edged out. The cherished Sunday of the former pagans, celebrated for thousands of years, would not go; it would not be abandoned.

"During this indefinite time a considerable amount of a sort of theokrasia seems to have gone on between the Christian cult and the almost equally popular and widely diffused Mithraic cult, and the cult of Serapis-Isis-Horus. From the former it would seem the Christians adopted Sunday as their chief day of worship instead of the Jewish Sabbath" (H.G Wells, *The Outline of History* [New and Revised], p. 543, cited in *Rome's Arraignment of Sabbath-breakers*, pp. 27-28).

"The early Christians had at first adopted the Jewish seven-day week with its numbered week days, but by the close of the third century A.D. this began to give way to the planetary week; and in the fourth and fifth centuries the pagan designations became generally accepted in the western half of Christendom. The use of the planetary names by Christians attests to the growing influence of astrological speculations introduced by converts from paganism. ... During these same centuries the spread of Oriental solar worships, especially that of Mithra (Persian sun worship) in the Roman world, had already led to the substitution by pagans of *dies Solis* for *dies Saturni*, as the first day of the planetary week; ... Thus gradually a pagan institution was ingrafted on Christianity" (Hutton Webster, Ph.D., *Rest Days*, pp. 220, 221) (ibid., p. 28).

They began to chip away at the formal observance of the Sabbath by declaring it a fast day at the beginning of the third century. "The Roman Church regarded Saturday as a fast day in direct opposition to those who regarded it as a Sabbath. Sunday remained a joyful festival," -- *Ancient Church History*, part 1, div. 2, AD. 100-312, sec. 69 (quoted in G.L. Butler's *The Change of the Sabbath*, p. 38).

Thus Constantine's 321 A.D. edict only made Sunday worship legal and official. The Sabbath was effectively outlawed, as subsequent anti-Sabbath decrees of the Roman Church confirmed. And the pagans felt completely at home in the church.

At long last, Sunday had succeeded in getting its old rival out of the way!

The Witness of the Sabbath

As we can clearly see from the accounts of both Scripture and history, Sunday and the Sabbath have been long-time rivals as competing days of worship right from ancient times. The older of the two, however, is the Sabbath instituted at creation for man. And there's ample evidence that almost all cultures at one time knew and acknowledged the seventh-day Sabbath and therefore the Creator God who instituted it to commemorate His finished work of creation.

“Calmet gives the following:

‘Manasseh Ben Israel assures us that, according to the tradition of the ancients, Abraham and his posterity, having preserved the memory of creation, observed the Sabbath also, in consequence of natural law to that purpose. It is also believed that the religion of the seventh day is preserved among the pagans; and the observance of this day is as old as the world itself. Almost all the philosophers and poets acknowledge the seventh day holy!’

“This statement that Abraham observed the Sabbath is in perfect harmony with the statement in the book of Genesis, that Abraham ‘kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws,’ and with the fact that in that age they reckoned time by weeks. Genesis 26:5; 29:27. We know that the Sabbath was in existence before the law was given on Sinai, because the children of Israel kept it a month before the promulgation of that law; and God set it apart at the creation. Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 16. Abraham, who came from the Assyrian country, kept the Sabbath; and this writer intimates that it was known among all the ancient nations.

“The Arabs are also a very ancient nation. They existed in Abraham's time. William Jones, missionary to Palestine, says:

‘The seventh day is known throughout Arabia by *'Yorn-es-Sabt,'* or day of the Sabbath. Neither the word 'seven' nor any other name is given by the Arabs to the Sabbath day. It is always the Sabbath; and the reason for it, they say, is that this has been its name from the beginning.’

“This is valuable testimony. The Arabs were never united with the Jews. They have always inhabited the country in which they settled in Abraham's time, and have nearly always maintained an independent existence as a people.

“Gilfillan says:

‘It would also appear that the Chinese, who have now no Sabbath, at one time honored the seventh day of the week’ - *The Sabbath*, Page 360.

“The *Asiatic Journal* has this item:

‘The prime minister of the empire affirms that the Sabbath was anciently observed by the Chinese, in conformity to the directions of the king.’

“On page 359 he says:

‘The Phoenicians, according to Porphyry, 'consecrated the seventh day as holy.’

“Josephus bears this testimony:

‘There is not any city of the Grecians, nor any of the barbarians, nor any nation whatsoever, whither our custom of resting on the seventh day has not come.’ - *Against Apion*, Book 2, par. 40” (G.I. Butler, *The Change of the Sabbath*, p. 41).

This primeval knowledge of the Sabbath survives to this day in the languages and dialects of the nations. It not only recalls the heyday of the Sabbath in the dim and distant past, but also anticipates the coming universal Sabbath world of the millennium where from “one Sabbath to another” “all flesh” shall come to

worship before the Great King (Isa. 66:22-23), at a time “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9).

Here’s a partial list of words for *Shabbat* (Hebrew) in the different languages of the world. Not only are they etymologically related (having the same root meaning) but, you will notice that, they are also phonetically related (sound alike).

Language List

Language	Word for Saturday/7thDay	Meaning
Greek	Sabbaton	Sabbath
Latin (Italy)	Sabbatum	Sabbath
Spanish (Spain)	Sábado	Sabbath
Portuguese (Portugal)	Sabbado	Sabbath
Italian (Italy)	Sabbato	Sabbath
French (France)	Samedi	Sabbath day
High German (Germany)	Samstag	Sabbath
Prussian (Prussia)	Sabatico	Sabbath
Russian (Russia)	Subbota	Sabbath
Polish	Sobota	Sabbath
Hebrew	Shabbath	Sabbath
Afghan	Shamba	Sabbath
Hindustani	Shamba	Sabbath
Persian	Shambin	Sabbath
Arabic	Assabt	The Sabbath
Turkish	Yomessabt	Day Sabbath
Malay	Ari-Sabtu	Day Sabbath
Abyssinian	Sanbat	Sabbath
Lusatian (Saxony)	Sobota	Sabbath
Bohemian	Sobota	Sabbath
Bulgarian (Bulgaria)	Subbota	Sabbath
New Slovenian (Illyria, in Austria)	Sobota	Sabbath
Illyrian (Dalmatia, Servia)	Subota	Sabbath
Wallachian (Roumania or Wallachia)	Sambata	Sabbath
Roman (Sapin, Catalonia)	Dissapte	Day Sabbath
Ecclesiastical Roman (Italy)	Sabbatum	Sabbath

D'oc. French (ancient and modern)	Dissata	Day Sabbath
Norman French (10th -11th Centuries)	Sabbedi	Sabbath Day
Wolof (Senegambia, West Africa)	Alere-Asser	Last Day Sabbath
Congo (West Equatorial Africa)	Sabbado or Kiansbula	Sabbath
Orma (South of Abyssinia)	Zam-ba-da	Sabbath
Kazani - TARTAR (East Russia)	Subbota	Sabbath
Osmanlian (Turkey)	Yome-es-sabt	day of the Sabbath
Arabic (Very old names)	Shi-yar	Chief or rejoicing day
Ancient Syriac	Shab-ba-tho	Sabbath
Chaldee Syriac (Kurdistan,Urumia,Persia)	Shaptu	Sabbath
Babylonian Syriac (A Very Old Language)	Sa-Ba-tu	Sabbath
Maltese (Malta)	Is-sibt	the Sabbath
Ethiopic (Abyssinia)	San-bat	Sabbath
Coptic (Egypt)	Pi sabbaton	the Sabbath
Tamashek (Atlas mountains, Africa)	A-hal es-sabt	the Sabbath
Kabyle (North Africa, Ancient Numidan)	Ghas assebt	the Sabbath day
Hausa (Central Africa)	Assebatu	the Sabbath
Pasto (Afghanistan)	Shamba	Sabbath (pleasantest day of the week)
Pahlivi (ancient Persian)	Shambid	Sabbath
Persian (Persia)	Shambah	Sabbath
Armenian (Armenia)	Shapat	Sabbath
Kurdish (Kurdistan)	Shamba	Sabbath
Ndebele (Zimbabwe)	Sabatha	Sabbath
Shona (Zimbabwe)	Sabata	Sabbath
Miscellaneous Middle Ages Languages		
Georgian (Caucasus)	Shabati	Sabbath
Suanian (Caucasus)	Sammtyn	Sabbath
Ingoush (Caucasus)	Shatt	Sabbath
Malayan (Malaya, Sumatra)	Hari sabtu	day Sabbath
Javanese (Java)	Saptoe or saptu	Sabbath

Dayak (Borneo)	Sabtu	Sabbath
Makassar (s. Celebes & Salayer islands)	Sattu	Sabbath
Malagassy (Madagascar)	Alsabotsy	The Sabbath
Swahili (east equatorial Africa)	As-sabt	The Sabbath
Mandingo (west Africa, s. of Senegal)	Sibiti	Sabbath
Teda (central Africa)	Essebdu	The Sabbath
Bornu (central Africa)	Assebdu	The Sabbath
Logone (central Africa)	Se-sibde	The Sabbath
Bagrimma (central Africa)	Sibbedi	Sabbath
Maba (central Africa)	Sab	Sabbath
Permian (Russian)	Subota	Sabbath
Votyak (Russian)	Subbota	Sabbath

- Emily Thomsen <http://www.sabbathtruth.com/free-resources/article-library/id/912/which-day-of-the-week>

In regard to Africa, it needs not be belaboured that the concept of the rest of the seventh day is buried deep in the psyche and cultural consciousness of the people. As one writer put it, “The Sabbath has vital roots in Africa, an African connection, if you please, carried forward by a people who bear, in some mysterious way, visceral memories of the Sabbath, however faint” (Charles E. Bradford, *SABBATH ROOTS The African Connection*, p. 11, 1999).

Interestingly, while Christian Europe kowtowed to Sunday worship, Christian Ethiopia remained a bastion of Sabbath observance and would not be easily persuaded to give it up.

“The ambassador of the king of Ethiopia, at the court of Lisbon, gave the following reasons for keeping the Sabbath:

‘[We do celebrate the Sabbath] Because God, after he had finished the creation of the world, rested thereon. Which day, as God would have it called the holy of holies, so the not celebrating thereof with great honor and devotion seems to be plainly contrary to God's will and precept, who will suffer heaven and earth to pass away sooner than his word. And that, especially, since Christ came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. It is not, therefore, in imitation of the Jews, but in obedience to Christ and his holy apostles, that we observe that day.’”--

Church History of Ethiopia, pp. 87, 88 (cited in *The Change of the Sabbath* – G.I Butler, p.62).

That is the spirit. Keep the Sabbath in obedience to Christ, for the rest of the Sabbath is still available for you to enter through repentance and faith in Christ Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. He consecrated the seventh day for you at creation for your physical rest and spiritual renewal (Mark 2:27), enshrined it in the Ten Commandments for you to “remember” His loving care every week of your life, and made it a perpetual covenant sign to identify you as His own. While on earth, He kept it, along with His Apostles, as an example of obedience to us—and to point us to the eternal rest ahead of all those of us who trust and obey Him.

The future is a Sabbath world. Enter it now through faith in His name:

“Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish [RSV uphold] the law” (Rom. 3:31 KJV). Amen!

For more enlightenment on the Lord’s Sabbath truth and other vital topics of salvation, please contact:

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