

The Sabbath

Introduction

Society has undergone astonishing changes in recent decades.

Everyone, it seems, lives his or her life at a breakneck pace, constantly rushing here and there to get everything done. Technological advances that once promised more leisure time now seem only to push us further behind, making it ever more difficult to catch up.

So we frantically scramble. We feel out of touch---out of touch with our spouse, out of touch with our families, out of touch with the world around us and, perhaps most of all, out of touch with Yahweh.

The very Being who created this universe, and every one of us, gave us an inspired revelation, the instruction and truth of Yahweh (2 Timothy 3:15-17; John 17:17). That revelation, the Holy Scriptures, tells us what we need to know about life's purpose, why we are here and where we are headed. Most importantly, it tells us *how to live*.

It tells us that, thousands of years ago, Yahweh gave a people a set of laws, promising these people that they would be blessed if they kept them. "You shall walk in all the ways which Yahweh your Elohim has commanded you, so that you may live and *that good may be to you*" (Deuteronomy 5:33, emphasis added throughout).

The law Yahweh revealed is summed up in the Ten Commandments. They are our basic guide for living, showing us how to have a proper relationship with our Creator and our fellowman.

Among those Commandments, the one most universally misunderstood and misapplied is Yahweh's instruction to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Many people view the Sabbath as a quaint relic of history, perhaps a nice idea at some time in the past but altogether impractical in today's busy world. Some think the Sabbath is Sunday and that spending an hour or two at church on Sunday morning fulfills the intent of the Sabbath commandment.

Others think Messiah Yahshua did away with any specific day of rest, or the need to worship on a particular day, and that whatever time we choose to revere Yahweh is holy.

The questions and opinions about this commandment, it seems, are endless. Did Yahshua keep the Sabbath because He was Jewish, or did He break the Sabbath command, leading the religious leaders of His day to want to kill Him? Did the apostle Paul, in writing more books of the New Testament than any other writer, show that the Sabbath is no longer necessary for Christians, or did he uphold it?

Was the Sabbath condemned and changed in the early New Testament Church, or confirmed? Did Yahweh sanctify the Sabbath at the time He created Adam and Eve, or did He first set it apart as holy time at the Exodus more than 2000 years later? Was the Sabbath changed from the seventh day of the week to another day, and, if so, when?

Why did Yahweh command a day of rest to begin with? Did He have a purpose for it, and, if so, what is that purpose? Is the Sabbath relevant at all for humankind today? Does it make sense in today's world? The questions go on and on.

Why should there be such confusion about one of the 10 basic guiding principles and laws Yahweh gave mankind? Why is there such controversy and confusion over this one commandment when most people, including religious leaders and their churches, have little quarrel with the other nine?

You don't have to look far to discover the answers to these questions. They can be found in the pages of the Bible and history. In this booklet we will address these basic questions. Join us now for a journey through the Scriptures to discover *Yahweh's Sabbath Rest*.

The Sabbath: In the Beginning

"And on the seventh day Elohim completed His work...and He rested on the seventh day from all His work

which He had made. Then Elohim blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because He rested from all His work on it, which Elohim had created to make” (Genesis 2:2-3)

When we think of the Sabbath, we often think of the Ten Commandments, which Yahweh gave when Israel left Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The events of that period of Israel’s history---the Exodus---were extraordinary. The plagues on Egypt, the death of all Egypt’s firstborn, the parting of the Red Sea, manna coming from heaven and Yahweh giving Moses the Ten Commandments on stone tablets were all miraculous occurrences.

These events were dramatic testimony to the birth of a new nation. And, in the midst of these incredible beginnings, Yahweh told His new nation to remember something. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” He commanded His people (Exodus 20:8).

He pointed them back to creation, reminding them that “in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all which is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; on account of this Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it” (verse 11).

The Sabbath commandment had an important spiritual purpose. It pointed Yahweh’s people to Him as their Creator. It was a required weekly remembrance that there is a higher power and authority at work in our lives and the lives of all humanity. Yahweh intended that the Sabbath be observed as a reminder of that fact.

Sabbath revealed by miracles

The significance of the Sabbath was evident before Yahweh gave the Ten Commandments to the nation of Israel. For example, a few weeks earlier, after the crossing of the Red Sea, when the Israelites witnessed the destruction of Pharaoh’s armies, Israel entered the vast desert wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. Within a few days, the Israelite’s food supplies, brought with them from Egypt, were exhausted. “You have brought us out into this wilderness to kill all this assembly with hunger,” they cried to Moses (Exodus 16:3).

However, Yahweh was already a step ahead of them. He promised to send manna, a miraculous substance to nourish and sustain them as long as they were in the wilderness (verses 4, 15-18).

But Yahweh imposed a condition. He would provide the manna only six days out of every seven. On the sixth day there would be twice as much as usual, but none on the seventh day (verses 5, 22). Moses explained to the people what Yahweh had told him: “Tomorrow is a rest, a holy Sabbath to Yahweh... And lay up for yourselves all that is left over, to keep it until morning... You shall gather it six days, and on the seventh is a Sabbath, in it none shall be found” (verses 23, 26).

But some didn’t listen and “on the Sabbath day some of the people went out to gather, and did not find any (verse 27).

What was Yahweh’s reaction? “Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Until when do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See, because Yahweh has given the Sabbath to you, therefore He is giving to you two days of bread on the sixth day. Each one of you remain in his place. Do not let anyone go out from his place on the seventh day’” (verses 28-29).

Here, several weeks before giving Moses the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, Yahweh said the Israelites were refusing to keep His commandments and laws! He also said, “Yahweh has given you the Sabbath.” He didn’t say “is giving” or “will give”; He had already given them the Sabbath, to be observed every seventh day!

When Yahweh through Moses, commanded Israel, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 16:28), He pointed them back to the original creation week.

Sabbath Set apart

In the book of Genesis we read of Yahweh creating the earth, then filling it with plants and animals and forming it into a dazzlingly beautiful home for the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. Here we read of the real origin of the Sabbath: “And on the seventh day Elohim completed His work which He had made. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And Elohim *blessed* the seventh day and

sanctified it, because He rested from all His work on it, which Elohim had created to make” (Genesis 2:2-3).

This day was different from the other days of creation week. Yahweh blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. The word *sanctify* means to set apart as holy; Yahweh specifically set apart the seventh day as holy. We read three times in these two verses that Yahweh did not work on this day. The emphasis is that this was His day of rest. It was Yahweh’s Sabbath rest.

Some people dispute this interpretation, saying this was not the origin of the commanded day of rest, noting that the Sabbath isn’t mentioned here. However, the Hebrew word translated “rested” is *shabat*, which is the root word for “Sabbath.” *Shabat* means to cease, or rest, and it is from this that the Sabbath gets its meaning as “a day of rest.” To paraphrase the account in Genesis 2, “Elohim *sabbathed* on the seventh day from all His work.” The Hebrew language is clear and unambiguous in its intent.

When Is the Sabbath to Be Kept?

Our convention of starting a new day at midnight is an arbitrary, humanly devised practice. Yahweh, who created the heavenly bodies and set them in motion to mark the passage of time (Genesis 1:14), counts time differently---from evening to evening.

We see this indicated in the creation account in Genesis 1. After dividing day from night, Yahweh tells us that “there was evening and there was morning the first day” (verse 5). “Evening” is mentioned first, followed by “morning.” Yahweh describes each day’s creation in similar terms (verses 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

In the Bible, evening began when the sun went down (Joshua 8:29; 2 Chronicles 18:34; Nehemiah 13:19; Mark 1:32), and at that time a new day began. Regarding His Sabbaths, Yahweh commands that they be observed “from evening to evening” (Leviticus 23:32). This was the usual way at that time of calculating the beginning and ending of days (Exodus 12:18).

In New Testament times, days were calculated the same way. Mark 1:32 records that, after the sun had set, marking the end of one Sabbath, crowds brought many ailing people to Yahshua to be healed, having waited until after the Sabbath to come to Him. The Gospel accounts also record that Joseph of Arimathea entombed Yahshua’s body before evening to keep from working on a approaching annual Sabbath (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54).

Yahweh, Creator of the Sabbath, determines when it begins and ends, and it was observed from sunset to sunset throughout the Bible. His Sabbath begins Friday evening at sunset and ends Saturday evening at sunset.

Sabbath made for humankind

Remarkably, some will still argue that this doesn’t prove the Sabbath existed from creation week and wasn’t instituted until given to Israel at Mount Sinai and that it was then given only to the physical nation of Israel for a limited time.

However, Messiah Yahshua Himself dispelled this notion. “The Sabbath came into being for man’s sake, not man for the Sabbath’s sake,” He explained to some who completely misunderstood its intent and purpose (Mark 2:27). He clarified the great underlying principle of the Sabbath day that so many have missed through the centuries: The Sabbath, far from enforcing a tiresome bondage or sanctioning a list of forbidden activities, is something Yahweh made *for* man! It was sanctified---made holy---when mankind was made, with Yahweh creating Adam and Eve on the sixth day of creation week and creating the Sabbath on the following day (Genesis 1:26-31; 2:1-3).

To Messiah Yahshua the Sabbath was positive and beneficial, not the oppressive burden some religious leaders had made of it in His day. Notice Yahshua’s choice of words. The Sabbath wasn’t something just for the nation of Israel; He said it was made *for man*---for all humanity---and observing it wasn’t a meaningless practice forced on people to bring only hardship and difficulty.

The seventh day was made for man, created expressly for mankind’s benefit and well being! Several other translations bear this out: “The Sabbath was made for the good of man,” says Today’s English Version. “The Sabbath was made for the sake of man,” reads the New English Bible. The Williams New Testament says,

“The Sabbath was made to serve man.”

Yahshua understood the purpose of Yahweh’s law, including the Sabbath---that He intended it to be a blessing and benefit to mankind. Yahweh speaking through Moses, had earlier told Israel to “love Yahweh your Elohim, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments.”

Why? “That you may live and multiply; and Yahweh your Elohim shall bless you in the land where you are going in, to possess it.” (Deuteronomy 30:16).

Moses, after leading Israel for 40 years through the wilderness, summed up the Israelites’ experiences just before they entered the Promised Land. He understood how wonderful the law was that they had received from Yahweh, that it was unique. “Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as Yahweh my Elohim has commanded me...

And who is a great nation whose statutes and judgments are as righteous as all this law which I set before you today?” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

Yahweh clearly intended the Sabbath to be a blessing to those who would use it as He intended. The actual instructions Yahweh gave regarding the day were brief but give valuable insight into its intent. Let’s look at some of these instructions.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, and the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your Elohim; you shall not do any work, you, and your son, and your daughter, your male slave and your slave-girl, and your livestock, and your stranger who is in your gates. For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all which is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; on account of this Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it” (Exodus 20:8-11).

Rest for entire household

On the Sabbath, we see that all members of a household were to rest from labor---even servants, guests and animals. All were to rest every seventh day from their normal, routine work. All family and household members were specifically listed, including parents, sons, daughters, servants and guests. If none did normal work, presumably everyone would spend much of the Sabbath with other family members as a family or Household.

The command to observe the Sabbath in all households is reinforced in Leviticus 23:1-3, where Yahweh lists other required religious observances. He also makes it clear that the Sabbath is *His* holy time, not that of Moses or Israel: “Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, “The appointed seasons of *Yahweh* which you shall proclaim, holy gatherings, these are *My* appointed seasons: Work is to be done six days, and in the seventh day shall be a Sabbath of rest, a holy gathering; you shall do no work; it is a Sabbath to *Yahweh* in all your dwellings.”’”

The Sabbath was not just a religious ritual for the tabernacle; it was an observance *for every individual home* throughout the nation.

Deliverance from slavery

We can find more details of Yahweh’s intent where the Ten Commandments are reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:12-15: “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as Yahweh your Elohim has commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, and the seventh day shall be a Sabbath to Yahweh your Elohim. You shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor you male slave, nor your female slave, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your livestock, nor your stranger that is within you gates; so that your male slave and your female slave may rest like yourself. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your Elohim brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm. On account of this Yahweh your Elohim has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

In this listing of the commandments, another aspect of observing the Sabbath is added for Elohim’s people: remembering that they had been slaves in Egypt and that “Yahweh your Elohim brought you out from there by

a mighty hand.”

The Sabbath was a weekly reminder of Israel’s humble origins as slaves in Egypt and that Yahweh, by mighty miracles, had delivered His people into freedom and established them as a nation. Now that He had given them rest from their slavery, everyone throughout the nation was to rest and be refreshed on the Sabbath, and servants were specifically included in that command. As Yahweh had given the Israelites rest, they, too, were commanded to allow their servants to rest, an additional reminder of the blessing the Sabbath was to provide for everyone.

The Israelites were specifically told to remember those events in connection with the Sabbath. Yahweh through Moses frequently reminded the Israelites how far they had come and how He had miraculously intervened for them on many occasions.

In like manner, the Sabbath is an important reminder for Christians today of our deliverance. Through Yahweh’s mercy and Yahshua’s sacrifice, Christians are delivered from spiritual slavery of sin and death, set free now to serve Yahweh (Romans 6:16-23; 2 Peter 2:19).

He repeatedly warned them never to forget those events: “Only take heed to yourself... that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen; and that they do not depart from your heart all the days of your life. And you shall make them known to your sons and your sons’ sons (Deuteronomy 4:9). “You shall be on guard that you not forget Yahweh who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves” (Deuteronomy 6:12). “Then it rises up into your heart, and you forget Yahweh your Elohim who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves” (Deuteronomy 8:14).

Religious instruction, teaching and joy

Notice that Yahweh also told the Israelites to teach their children His laws and ways. Immediately after repeating the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5, Yahweh instructed the Israelites: “And these words that I am commanding you today shall be on your heart. And you shall point them out to your sons, and shall speak of them as you sit in your house, and as you walk in the way, and as you are lying down, and as you are rising up” (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

The Sabbath, then, was a time for religious instruction, for teaching and learning of Yahweh’s wondrous acts and laws. Customary work was prohibited and Yahweh’s great miracles were to be remembered on this day. “Thus the spirit of the Sabbath was joy, refreshment and mercy, arising from remembrance of Yahweh’s goodness as Creator and Deliverer from bondage... On this day the people were accustomed to... give to their children that instruction in the truths recalled to memory by the day which is so repeatedly enjoined by the duty of parents; it was ‘the Sabbath of Yahweh’ not only in the sanctuary, but ‘in all their dwellings’” (Online Bible, 1995, *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*, “Sabbath”).

Observed this way, the Sabbath truly was the blessing and delight Yahweh intended, a day of communion with the Creator, learning, contemplating, and practicing His laws and ways.

Which Day Is the Sabbath?

Which day is the Sabbath? Since most churches observe Sunday as their day of rest and worship, many people assume that Sunday is the Sabbath.

The Fourth Commandment states: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy; six days you shall labor and do all your work; and the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your Elohim; you shall not do any work...” (Exodus 20:8-10).

Yahweh commanded that the seventh day be observed as the Sabbath. A glance at almost any dictionary or encyclopedia will show you that Saturday is the seventh day of the week, while Sunday is the first day of the week. The seventh day according to Yahweh’s calendar is---and always has been---the Sabbath day. Although man has modified calendars through the centuries, the seven-day weekly cycle has remained intact

throughout history. The days of the week have always remained in their proper order, with Sunday as the first day of the week and Saturday as the seventh.

“The oracles of Yahweh”---His divine words and instructions---were entrusted to the Jewish people (Romans 3:1-2), and they have preserved the knowledge of the seventh-day Sabbath faithfully since well before Messiah’s time to this day.

No biblical authorization

How did Sunday become the primary day of rest and worship? Although the concept of rest has largely disappeared, most denominations hold their worship services on Sunday. You can search throughout the Bible, but you will find no authority to alter the day of worship.

James Cardinal Gibbons, Catholic educator and archbishop of Baltimore in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, was blunt about the change: “You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify. The Catholic Church correctly teaches that our Lord and His Apostles inculcated certain important duties of religion which are not recorded by the inspired writers... We must, therefore, conclude that the Scriptures alone cannot be a sufficient guide and rule of faith” (*The Faith of Our Fathers*, 1917, p. 89).

Did you grasp that? The writer admits that Sunday observance is nowhere authorized in the Bible and that the seventh day is the only day sanctified by the Scriptures. His justification for changing the day of rest and worship assumes that authority exists apart from the Bible to define the necessary truths and practices for salvation.

Change made after the New Testament was written

The change from Sabbath to Sunday was made long after the writing of the New Testament. No clear references to Sunday as a day of Christian worship are found until the writings of Barnabas and Justin, ca. A.D. 135 and 150, respectively. Observance of Sunday as the primary day of worship appears to have solidified during the reign of Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117-135), who harshly persecuted Jews throughout the Roman Empire. Hadrian specifically prohibited practices of Judaism, including observance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

These oppressive measures apparently influenced many early Christians in Rome to abandon the seventh day and turn to Sunday, historically observed by the Romans as a day of veneration of the sun. Within a few centuries Sabbath observance by Christians was virtually eliminated within the confines of the empire and replaced by Sunday.

Although the protestant reformation brought some doctrinal and administrative changes, observance of Sunday as a day of rest and worship continued from the Roman Catholic Church into subsequent Protestant denominations. Whereas the Catholic Church claimed authority to establish its own times of worship, Protestant churches generally justified Sunday observance on the grounds that seventh-day Sabbath was replaced in the New Testament by worship on Sunday in honor of Messiah’s resurrection.

However, as confirmed by Cardinal Gibbons above, there is no biblical authority for changing the day of rest and worship from the seventh day to Sunday. As shown throughout this booklet, Messiah Yahshua, the apostles and Jewish and gentile members of the early Church alike continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath. This is the only day authorized in the Bible.

Yahshua the Messiah and the Sabbath

“And He [Messiah Yahshua] said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27-28).

How did Messiah Yahshua view the Sabbath? Many people see only what they want to see regarding Messiah's approach to the seventh day. Some believe, based on misunderstandings, that Yahshua ignored or deliberately broke the Sabbath commandment.

Actually, the Sabbath is mentioned almost 50 times in the four Gospels (more than in the entire first five books of the Bible!), so we have ample historical record of His attitude toward the Sabbath. To understand the Gospel accounts, however, we must consider how Sabbath observance had changed---or, more properly, had been changed---since it had been created and later included in the Ten Commandments.

The Sabbath in history

Sabbath observance underwent a massive transformation in the centuries leading up to the time of Messiah. Earlier in this booklet we reviewed how Yahweh warned Israel not to forget His mighty works and laws.

The ancient Israelites' sad record shows they didn't listen. Eventually Israel did forget Yahweh and disintegrated as a nation, dividing into the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah before being taken away into captivity by Assyrian and Babylonian invaders, respectively, in the eighth and sixth centuries B.C.

One of the Israelites' most flagrant sins leading up to their national captivity was the violation of Yahweh's Sabbath. Even as the kingdom of Judah was self-destructing from its citizen's sinful behavior, Yahweh continued to warn it through the prophet Jeremiah not to "Carry a burden on the Sabbath day...nor do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers...But if you will not listen to Me to keep the Sabbath day holy...then I will kindle a fire...And it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem; yea, it shall not be put out" (Jeremiah 17:21-22,27).

The prophet Ezekiel, speaking for Yahweh from Babylon after he and much of the kingdom of Judah had been taken into captivity, wrote: "And I also gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am Yahweh, who sets them apart...And they greatly profaned My Sabbaths...they despised My judgments, and they did not walk in My statutes; and they profaned My Sabbaths" (Ezekiel 20:12-13,16).

Yahweh also told the nation of Judah, "Her [the nation's] priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not divided between the holy and the common; and between the unclean and clean they have not taught; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths; and I am profaned among them: (Ezekiel 22:26).

Later, many of the Jewish captives returned from Babylon and were restored to their former lands several centuries before Messiah's time. They knew from the messages of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that their nation had been destroyed for breaking Yahweh's law, and violating the Sabbath was one of their chief sins.

Once restored as a nation, they determined never to make the same mistake again. Consequently, over several centuries Jewish religious authorities crafted meticulous regulations that detailed exactly what they considered was and wasn't permissible on the Sabbath. They veered from one ditch to the other---from ignoring and abusing the Sabbath to demanding an oppressive, legalistic observance of the day.

Added Sabbath regulations

The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary describes how extreme these measures had become by Yahshua's day. The religious code regarding the Sabbath listed "39 principal classes of prohibited actions: sowing, plowing, reaping, gathering into sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking... Each of these chief enactments was further discussed and elaborated, so that actually there were several hundred things a conscientious, law-abiding Jew could not do on the Sabbath. For example, the prohibition about tying a knot was much too general, and so it became necessary to state what kinds of knots were prohibited and what kind not. It was accordingly laid down that allowable knots were those that could be untied with one hand...

"The prohibition regarding writing on the Sabbath was further defined as follows: 'He who writes two letters with his right or his left hand, whether of one kind [of letter] or of two kinds...is guilty. He even who should

from forgetfulness write two letters is guilty...also he who writes on two walls which form an angle, or on the tablets of his account-book, so that they can be read together, is guilty..." (1967, "Sabbath," p. 736).

Definition of work

The religious authorities' definition of "work" that could violate the Sabbath command was vastly different from any ordinary definition of work. For example, plowing was a prohibited-work category, and few would dispute that plowing is difficult work. However, according to first-century rabbinic opinion, the prohibition against plowing could be violated by simply spitting on the ground. The spit could disturb the soil, which in the rabbis' view was a type of plowing! Women were forbidden to look into a mirror on the Sabbath, because they might see a gray hair and pull it out, and that would constitute work.

Wearing nailed shoes on the Sabbath was prohibited, because in the authorities' view the addition of the nails meant they were carrying an unnecessary burden. Even walking through grass was not allowed, because some of the grass might be bent and broken, which constituted threshing, one of the forbidden categories of work.

The religious leaders taught that, if a house caught on fire on the Sabbath, its inhabitants couldn't carry their clothes out of the house to spare them from the flames, because that would be bearing a burden. However, they were allowed to put on all the layers of clothing they could wear and thus remove the clothes by wearing them, which was acceptable.

It was into this charged, hypercritical religious atmosphere that Messiah Yahshua came teaching and preaching. Today, without this historical background, many people draw wrong conclusions about how Yahshua viewed the Sabbath.

The writers of the Gospel accounts record numerous confrontations between Yahshua and the religious leaders of His day concerning the Sabbath. His healings on the Sabbath and teachings about Sabbath observance stirred frequent controversy. A brief view of the biblical record of His actions and teachings will help us understand how Messiah viewed the Sabbath.

As we review these accounts of Messiah's life, keep in mind their chronology. Scholars generally agree that the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were written in the first century, from the 50's through the 70's, some 20 to 40 years after the events recorded in them occurred. If Messiah Yahshua intended to change, abolish or annul the Sabbath, that intent should be apparent in the Gospel writers' historical records of His life. As we will see, there is simply no evidence to support that view.

Yahshua preaches on the Sabbath: Luke 4:16-30

The first mention of the Sabbath in the life of Messiah Yahshua is Luke 4:16: "And He [Yahshua] came to Nazareth, where He was brought up. And He went in as was His custom, on the day of the Sabbath, into the synagogue, and stood up to read."

In this, the Gospels' first mention of the Sabbath, at the very beginning of Messiah's ministry, we find that Yahshua's custom---His normal activity---was to go "into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." This was not an isolated incident; He would later continue to teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath as we see in (Mark 6:2; Luke 13:10).

Continuing in Luke's account: "And the roll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. And unrolling the book, He found the place where it was written; 'The Spirit of Yahweh is upon Me; therefore He anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to captives, and new sight to the blind; to send away crushed ones in deliverance; to preach the acceptable year of Yahweh.' And rolling up the roll...And He began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears'" (Luke 4:17-21).

Yahshua quoted Isaiah 61:1 and 2, which those in the synagogue recognized as a prophecy of the Messianic age. By saying, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears," Yahshua claimed to be fulfilling this prophecy---He proclaimed Himself to be the expected Messiah! Yahshua went on to compare His ministry to that of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. His listeners, clearly understanding His meaning, promptly tried to kill

Yahshua for this claim, but He escaped from them (verses 23-30).

This is the first mention of the Sabbath during His ministry. On that day Yahshua first proclaimed that He was the prophesied Messiah ---introducing His mission as Savior of all humanity. This was a significant event. Nazareth was where He grew up. The people of Nazareth were the first to hear, on that Sabbath, that He was the Messiah. He pointed to the hope of His future reign---the gospel, or good news, in both its present and future fulfillment.

Yahshua heals and casts out demons on the Sabbath: Luke 4:31-39

Immediately, Yahshua began to use the Sabbath to proclaim the coming Kingdom of Yahweh and to manifest His miraculous power as the Messiah. “And He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were astonished at His teaching, because His word was with authority” (Luke 4:31-32).

Next, Yahshua ordered a demon out of a man, and those in the synagogue “astonishment came on all. And they spoke with one another saying, ‘What word is this, that He commands the unclean spirits with authority and power, and they come out’” (verses 33-36).

Yahshua then went to Peter’s house, where He healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever. Finally, as the Sabbath day drew to a close, “all, as many as had sick ones with various diseases, brought them to Him. And laying hands on each one of them, He healed them. And also demons came out from many, crying out and saying, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of Elohim!’ And rebuking them, He did not allow them to speak; for they knew Him to be the Messiah” (verses 38-41).

As the Savior, Yahshua understood the purpose of the Sabbath, that it was a perfectly appropriate time to bring His message of healing, hope and redemption to humanity and to live that message through His actions. Even the demons recognized that He was the prophesied Messiah. Yahshua used the Sabbath to point people to Him as the Healer and Savior of mankind.

Just What is Legalism?

Throughout this chapter, references are made to the legalistic approach of religious authorities who accused Messiah Yahshua of breaking the Sabbath. But what does the term “legalism” mean? A dictionary definition of legalism is “a strict, literal or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code.”

A popular meaning attached to the word today is that any form of biblical law-keeping is legalism and therefore to be avoided. The word is used pejoratively, especially against such practices as keeping the Sabbath or adhering to other laws given in the Old Testament.

However, this use of the word is incorrect. It is not legalistic to obey Yahweh’s laws correctly. To be legalistic is to misuse His laws in a way never intended.

Pharisees’ interpretations undermined Yahweh’s law

The Pharisees, an excessively strict branch of Judaism whose religious interpretations dominated popular thinking at the time of Messiah, were examples of this. They added many of their humanly devised rules and regulations to Yahweh’s laws, which had the effect of misrepresenting and misapplying them. Their added interpretations of Yahweh’s laws so distorted the original purpose that they rendered them ineffective (Matthew 15:6), nullifying them. By following the Pharisees’ interpretations and edicts, the people were no longer following Yahweh’s law (John 7:19).

This mistaken view of Yahweh’s law lead many to reject Yahshua as the promised Messiah, even though that very law had prophesied of Him (John 5:39-40; Luke 24:44).

This is why Messiah so strongly condemned the lack of understanding and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of His time. He taught a return to the correct teaching and practice of Yahweh’s laws according to their original intent and purpose, and also that He was the promised Messiah.

Paul condemned perversion of law

The apostle Paul also wrote extensively against those who would pervert the proper use of Yahweh's law. This is particularly apparent in the book of Galatians. What Paul addressed was not the correct keeping of Yahweh's law, which he himself elsewhere upheld (Romans 3: 31; 7:12, 14, 22, 25), but a claim that justification (the forgiveness and restoration of a sinner to a state of righteousness) could be achieved by circumcision and strict observance of the law.

Some false teachers (Galatians 2:4; 5:10, 12; 6:12-13) subverted the Galatian churches by wrongly insisting that circumcision and the keeping of the law were sufficient requirements for justification and salvation, apart from faith in Messiah Yahshua.

Paul condemned this erroneous teaching, noting that obedience to the law had never made eternal life possible (Galatians 3:21). He made it clear that justification---being made righteous in Yahweh's eyes and thus gaining access to eternal life---is only available through Messiah Yahshua (Galatians 2:16; 3:1-3, 10-11, 22; 5:1-4).

Paul made it clear that forgiveness of sin requires a sacrifice, and even the strictest observance of the law cannot remove the need for that sacrifice.

However, the law of Yahweh remains the righteous standard by which all mankind will be judged (James 2:8, 12). The law is not annulled or abolished by faith in Messiah (Romans 3:31), as many falsely believe. Instead, said Paul, the law's proper use is established by faith.

When Solomon concluded that the whole duty of man is to "fear Yahweh and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13), he expressed the enduring purpose of Yahweh for all mankind. The apostle John agreed when he concluded that, if we love Yahweh, we will keep His commandments (1 John 5:3).

The woman taken in adultery was told by Yahshua to "sin no more" (John 8:11)---in other words, to uphold Yahweh's law! Yahshua told the rich young man, who came to Him asking what he could do to have eternal life, "If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17).

Biblical examples of legalism

So what does the Bible tell us about legalism?

To substitute humanly devised laws for Yahweh's laws, as the Pharisees did, is legalism.

To rely upon the keeping of any law to make one righteous in Yahweh's eyes, instead of faith in Messiah, is legalism.

If all one focuses on is obedience to law apart from the motivation of pleasing Yahweh, loving Yahweh and loving their neighbor, this distorts the purpose of the law (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:10) and is legalism.

If we believe that any keeping of Yahweh's law can earn our salvation as our reward, we are guilty of legalism.

Technical obedience or strict obedience to the exact letter of the law while searching ways to get around the underlying purpose and intent of the law, is legalism.

Proper obedience is not legalism

But Messiah Yahshua and the remainder of the Bible make one thing perfectly clear: Proper obedience to the law of Yahweh *is not* legalism.

After conversion, a Christian is given a much fuller understanding of the purpose and intent of Yahweh's law. He understands the importance of faith in the person and sacrifice of Messiah Yahshua. He is given a more complete understanding of why he is to be obedient. But it remains for him to obey. That is not legalism.

To obey Yahweh's biblical commands in a proper attitude, such as His command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, is not legalism. Don't allow anyone to beguile you with such a false notion, which is itself a contradiction of Messiah Yahshua's own command (Matthew 5:19).

Yahshua confronts Pharisees over disciples' actions on the Sabbath: Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5

Passages in Matthew 12, Mark 2 and Luke 6 are misconstrued to imply that Yahshua broke the Sabbath commandment. But let's see what really happened. From Mark's account, "And it happened He went along through the grain fields in the Sabbath. And His disciples began to make way, plucking the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, 'Behold, why do they do that which is not lawful on the Sabbath?'" (Mark 2:23-24).

The Pharisees were an excessively strict branch of Judaism holding considerable religious authority during Yahshua's time, and they were extreme in their interpretation of what was allowed on the Sabbath. Their question would make it appear the disciples were hard at work gathering grain on the Sabbath and were confronted by the Pharisees for violating it. Luke's account clarifies the disciples' actions: As they "went along through the grain fields" they "plucked the heads and were eating, rubbing with the hands" (Luke 6:1). They did this because they were hungry (Matthew 12:1), not because they were harvesting the field.

No violation of Sabbath commandment

Their acts were perfectly acceptable according to the laws Yahweh had given the nation of Israel. As a matter of fact, Elohim made specific allowance for picking handfuls of grain from another person's field (Deuteronomy 23:25). Yahweh even told His people to leave portions of their fields unharvested so the poor and travelers would be able to eat what is left (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22).

The disciples were walking through the field, and as they walked they picked heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands to remove the chaff, then ate the kernels. The Pharisees, who were among the most strict in their rules concerning the Sabbath, viewed the disciples' actions as "reaping" and "threshing," which were among the 39 categories of work forbidden on that day. Although these actions did not violate Yahweh's Sabbath commandment, they did violate the Pharisees' man-made regulations. The Pharisees viewed the disciples' conduct as "not lawful on the Sabbath" and criticized them for it.

Law allowed for mercy

Yahshua pointed out that King David and his hungry followers, when they were fleeing King Saul's armies, were given bread that was normally to be eaten only by priests, yet they were guiltless in Yahweh's sight (Mark 2:25-26). He also pointed out that even the priests serving in the temple of Elohim labored on the Sabbath by conducting worship services and performing sacrifices, but Yahweh held them blameless (Matthew 12:5).

In both examples, the spirit and intent of the law were not broken, and Yahweh specifically allowed both instances for the greater good, Yahshua said. He emphasized that Yahweh's law allowed for mercy, and the Pharisees were completely wrong in elevating their harsh, humanly devised regulations above everything else, including mercy.

He said that, because of the Pharisees' distorted view, they had actually turned matters upside down. "*The Sabbath was made for man*, and not man for the Sabbath," He asserted. Because of their narrow, legalistic view of the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week had become a hardship, weighted down with hundreds of rules and regulations about what was and wasn't permissible on that day.

Yahshua, however, pointed out the true purpose of the day intended from its inception: Yahweh created the day *to be a blessing*, a time for *genuine rest* from normal labors rather than an unmanageable burden. It was a time to be enjoyed, not endured. Further, He said the Sabbath was created for all mankind, not just for the nation of Israel.

Yahshua's teaching in these verses is summarized in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*: "At times Jesus is interpreted to have abrogated or suspended the Sabbath commandment on the basis of the controversies brought about by Sabbath healings and other acts. Careful analysis of the respective passages does not seem to give credence to this interpretation. The action of plucking ears of grain on the Sabbath by the disciples is

particularly important in this matter. Jesus makes a foundational pronouncement...: ‘The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath’ (Mark 2:27). The disciple’s act of plucking grain infringed against the rabbinic *halakhah* of minute casuistry in which it was forbidden to reap, thresh, winnow, and grind on the Sabbath...”

“Jesus reforms the Sabbath and restores it to its rightful place as designed in creation, where the Sabbath is made for all mankind and not specifically for Israel, as claimed by normative Judaism...It was God’s will at creation that the Sabbath have the purpose of serving mankind for rest and [to] bring blessing” (1992, Vol. 5, “Sabbath,” p. 855).

In this example, we see that Messiah Yahshua understood and explained the Sabbath’s true intent: that it was created to be a day of rest from normal labors, a blessing and benefit to all humanity.

Another Sabbath healing: Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3”1-6; Luke 6:6-11

Immediately after the dispute with the Pharisees over the disciples’ plucking grain on the Sabbath, the Gospel accounts record that Yahshua found Himself in another confrontation over what could and could not be lawfully done on the Sabbath. The Pharisees’ regulations went so far as to forbid giving aid to someone who was ill on the Sabbath unless the person’s life was threatened!

In the synagogue on the Sabbath, Yahshua met a man with a withered, shriveled hand: a severe handicap, but not life-threatening. “Stand up in front of everyone,” Yahshua told the man (Mark 3:3, New International Version). Angered and grieved that their callous, hardened minds were incapable of grasping the most fundamental intent of Yahweh’s law, Yahshua asked those watching: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”

Unable or unwilling to answer, they remained silent. In front of the entire synagogue, Yahshua healed the man’s hand, making it “completely restored.” Far from rejoicing at the blessing given the man, the Pharisees “went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Yahshua” (verses 4-6, NIV).

Rather than learning a vital spiritual lesson about the intent and purpose of both the Sabbath and Messiah Yahshua’s ministry, the Pharisees were infuriated that Yahshua ignored their strict directives. Rather than understanding a message of mercy and compassion, they conspired to kill the Messenger.

Far from annulling the Sabbath, Yahshua demonstrated that the Sabbath is an appropriate time to give aid and comfort to those in need. The Sabbath command didn’t instruct people on what they were to do on that day, just what they were not to do. Yahshua clarified what was acceptable to Yahweh: “It is lawful [within Yahweh’s law] to do good on the Sabbath,” He declared (Matthew 12:12).

Pharisaic legalism had gone far beyond Yahweh’s stated commandment not to work and created a myriad of rules restricting even the very basics of human activity---something He never intended. Yet, even the Pharisees’ regulations gave way to emergencies like getting a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath (verse 11). Yahshua declared that the Sabbath was a day on which good could and should be done.

Some who oppose Sabbath observance view Messiah’s statement that “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath” as ending any distinction of days for rest or other religious purposes. However, to conclude that Yahshua annulled the Sabbath’s unique nature by teaching that it is lawful to do good on that day, one must assume that it was originally *unlawful* to do good on that day. That is clearly not the case. As He frequently chided those who criticized Him, doing good was specifically allowed on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:12; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9). The Sabbath is a day given by Yahweh for rest and religious observance, but this does not preclude doing good.

Yahshua’s healing acts on the Sabbath also foreshadowed something much larger: the miraculous healings still to come in the Messianic age. Isaiah prophesied of the time: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Isaiah 35:5-6).

The Savior’s actions on the Sabbath are a reminder of that coming time of peace, restoration, and healing for all mankind.

Yahshua heals a crippled woman on the Sabbath: Luke 13:10-17

Luke records another incident of Yahshua's healing of a chronically ill person on the Sabbath in the synagogue, in this case "a woman having a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent together, and was not able to completely erect" (Luke 13:11). Calling her to Him, He laid His hands on her, "And instantly she was made erect, and glorified Yahweh" (verses 12-13).

The crowd, knowing that Yahshua had just violated the narrow, restrictive prohibition against giving aid to an ill person unless the situation were life-threatening, waited to see what would happen next. The people didn't have to wait long. "But answering, the synagogue ruler, being angry that Yahshua healed on the Sabbath, said to the crowd, 'There are six days in which it is right to work. Therefore, coming in these, be healed, and not on the Sabbath day'" (verse 14).

Messiah Yahshua would have none of this attitude. "Hypocrites!" He responded. "Each one of you on the Sabbath, does he not untie his ox or ass from the manger, and leading it away give it drink? And this one being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound, lo, eighteen years, was it not right to free her from this bond on the Sabbath day?" His answer sank in on the crowd. "And on His saying these things, all who opposed Him were put to shame. And all the crowd rejoiced over all the glorious things taking place by Him" (verses 15-17).

Yahshua stressed here that the Sabbath represents a time of liberation, of loosing from bondage, and so helps us further understand Yahweh's intent for Sabbath observance. Even the Pharisees' strict regulations allowed for the feeding and watering of animals on the Sabbath. If caring for the basic life's needs of animals doesn't break the Fourth Commandment, then how much more is "loosing" by healing appropriate on the Sabbath!

Yahshua's example reminds us that the Sabbath is an appropriate time to visit the sick and elderly, helping them celebrate the day as a time of freedom. As He proclaimed earlier, He came to "preach deliverance to captives [and] to send away crushed ones in deliverance" (Luke 4:18)---referring to the glorious freedom and liberty from spiritual bondage that will be a hallmark of His coming rule as Messiah.

Yahshua heals a man on the Sabbath: Luke 14:1-6

The next mention of the Sabbath during Messiah's ministry follows in Luke 14. Rather than in the synagogue, this incident took place in the home of a prominent Pharisee where Yahshua had gone to share a meal on the Sabbath.

A man with a chronic health problem came before Him. Yahshua pointedly asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? None answered. Yahshua healed the man, who promptly left the uneasy atmosphere of the gathering (verses 2-4).

"Whose ox or ass of yours shall fall into a pit, and he will not at once pull it up on the Sabbath day?" Yahshua asked. They wouldn't answer Him (verses 5-6). Questions such as these had been debated among the Jewish religious teachers for years, and even they recognized that the command to rest didn't include emergency situations in which life and limb were at stake.

Yahshua's approach was that, whenever an opportunity to relieve suffering presents itself, that opportunity should be taken. Yahweh's Sabbath command was never intended to prohibit doing good on that day. Yahshua well knew the heart and core of Yahweh's law: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: (Leviticus 19:18). Both James and Paul understood that love was the intent and fulfillment Yahweh's law (James 2:8; Galatians 5:14).

Yahshua's example showed that every day is to be lived in the spirit and purpose of Yahweh's law, which is love.

Yahshua heals an invalid on the Sabbath: John 5:1-18

John 5 records a Sabbath healing not mentioned in the other Gospels, thereby adding another dimension to Messiah's activities on the Sabbath. In this instance, Yahshua healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk," Yahshua told the man (verse 8, NIV).

The man was instantly healed, took up the mat on which he had lain and walked away, only to be confronted by other Jews for carrying his mat. “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat,” they warned him (verse 10, NIV). “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk,’” he replied.

After determining that it was Yahshua who had performed the healing and told the man to carry his mat, they “persecuted Yahshua, and lusted to kill Him, because He did these things on a Sabbath” (verse 16). Their view of the Sabbath was so distorted that they focused more on their own petty rules about what could not be carried on the Sabbath than on the wonderful healing of a man’s 38 –year affliction!

Yahshua’s response to their accusation of breaking the Sabbath angered His accusers even more. “My Father works until now, and I work,” He said. “Because of this, therefore, the Jews lusted the more to kill Him, for not only did He break the Sabbath, but also called Yahweh His own Father, making Himself equal to Elohim.” (verses 17-18).

What He broke was not Elohim’s Sabbath command, but the Pharisees’ restrictive regulations regarding what they thought was allowable on the Sabbath. Messiah Yahshua could not have broken the Sabbath, because He had earlier pronounced a curse on anyone who “breaks one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach men so” (Matthew 5:19).

But what did Messiah mean when He said, “My Father works until now, and I work”? The Life Application Bible, commenting on this verse, says: “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 that 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.”

Yahweh made the Sabbath as a day of rest *for mankind*, not for Himself. He rested from His work of forming the world on the seventh day to show us that we should also rest from our normal work. But Yahweh continues some work without ceasing. Night and day, seven days a week, He works to bring mankind into His Kingdom. He works to help people grow spiritually on the Sabbath. He works constantly to build a close, personal relationship with His people. According to the Gospel accounts, Yahshua healed more people on the Sabbath than on any other day. He taught and preached on the Sabbath.

Was He sinning? No. His activities were part of Yahweh’s work of helping people understand and ultimately enter the Kingdom of Yahweh and were therefore perfectly acceptable to Him.

Circumcision and the Sabbath: John 7:21-24

In John 7:24 Yahshua summed up what should have been obvious to those who criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath: “Do not judge according to sight, but judge righteous judgment.” The Pharisees’ narrow, intolerant view focused more on outward appearance than anything else. Yahshua upbraided them for their emphasis on physical things while neglecting more important matters such as justice, mercy and faith (Matthew 23:23).

To illustrate the extremes to which the Pharisees took their views, Yahshua used the example of circumcision. He pointed out that circumcision, a sign of the covenant between Yahweh and the nation of Israel could be performed on the Sabbath without breaking it. And if this alteration of one of the 248 parts (by Jewish calculation) of the body could be done on the Sabbath, He argued, “why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?” (John 7:22-23, NIV).

The inconsistency of allowing the ritual of circumcision while outlawing mercy to those who needed healing was to callously disregard the intent of Yahweh’s law. “Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment,” He warned His detractors (verse 24, NIV).

Rather than *upholding* Yahweh’s law by their added rules and regulations, their distorted view of Elohim’s commands led them to actually *break the law*, according to Yahshua (Matthew 23:3, 28; Mark 7:6-9). “Not one of you keeps the law,” He told them (John 7:19, NIV), reproving them for their twisted interpretation of Yahweh’s law. They were not keeping the law correctly, and Yahshua restored its proper understanding and practice.

Yahshua heals a blind man on the Sabbath: John 9:1-34

Yahshua used the incident of healing a blind man on the Sabbath to twice proclaim His Messiahship. Speaking to His disciples, He said, “It is necessary for Me to work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day... While I am in the world, I am the light of the world “ (John 9:4-5). He then healed the man of his blindness.

The Pharisees caught up with the recently healed man, then interrogated and intimidated him. “This Man (Yahshua) is not from Elohim, because He does not keep the Sabbath,” they argued (verse 16). The man countered, “For there is a marvel in this... He opened my eyes!... If this One was not from Elohim, He could not do anything” (verses 30,33).

Angered at having their authority questioned and their opinions challenged, “they threw him outside,” excommunicating the man from the synagogue (verse 34). He was condemned as a heretic, cut off from family and friends.

Yahshua sought out the man. “Do you believe in the Son of Elohim?” Yahshua asked.

“Who is He, Master, that I may believe in Him?” the man replied.

“Even you have seen Him, and He speaking with you is that One,” Messiah answered.

The man then accepted Yahshua as the Son of Elohim. At this Yahshua said, “I came into this world for judgment, that the ones who do not see may see, and they who see may become blind” (verses 35-39).

Messiah Yahshua again made it clear that He was the Messiah, the very Son of Elohim. In this incident He continued to teach, as He did so many times on the Sabbath, of His redemptive work for mankind.

Did Yahshua change the law?

These accounts summarize the specific activities of Messiah on the Sabbath recorded in the four Gospels. As stated earlier, some see only what they want to see in these verses—supposed proof that Messiah Yahshua broke the Fourth Commandment. However, as the Scriptures actually show, Yahshua did no such thing. He did ignore the religious leaders’ misguided, restricted regulations of the Sabbath, but He never broke Yahweh’s commandments. Had He done so, He would have sinned. He lived a sinless life so He could be our perfect sacrifice, the Savior of all mankind (1 Peter 2:22; Ephesians 5:2; 1 John 4:14).

It would have been unthinkable for Yahshua to disobey Yahweh’s commandments. He said of Himself, “The Son is not able to do anything from Himself, except what He may see the Father doing; for whatever that One does, these things also the Son does the same way” (John 5:19).

What did Yahshua do? In His own words, He did exactly what the Father did. Yet some mistakenly think He came to overturn Yahweh’s holy law and remove it as a standard of guidance and behavior for mankind.

“Nothing I am able to do from Myself; just as I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, for I do not seek My will, but the will of the One sending Me, the Father,” He said (John 5:30). Messiah Yahshua’s motivation was to please the Father. What the Father wanted was most important to Him.

“My food is that I should do the will of Him who sent Me, and that I may finish His work,” He told the disciples (John 4:34). That was His motivation, His reason for living; to do the will of Yahweh the Father. Through Messiah’s teaching on the Sabbaths during His earthly ministry, He revealed Yahweh’s will and determined to carry out His work, in spite of the opposition and persecution that ultimately brought about His cruel torture and death.

Messiah Yahshua’s clear statement

Yahshua Himself clearly denied that He intended to change or abolish the Sabbath or any part of Yahweh’s law. “Do not think that I came to annul the Law or the Prophets,” He said. “I did not come to annul but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17).

The Greek word *pleroo*, translated “fulfill” means “to make full,” “to fill up, i.e. to fill to the full” or “to render full” (Online Bible, 1995, *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, “Fulfill”).

In other words, Yahshua said He came to complete the law and make it perfect. How? By showing the spiritual intent and application of Yahweh's law. His meaning is clear from the remainder of the chapter, where He showed the spiritual intent of specific commandments.

Some distort the meaning of "fulfill" to have Yahshua saying, "I did not come to destroy the law, but to end it by fulfilling it." This is entirely inconsistent with His own words. Through the remainder of the chapter, He showed that the spiritual application of the law made it even more difficult to keep, not that it was annulled or no longer necessary.

Yahshua made it clear that He wasn't abolishing any of Yahweh's law: "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled: (verse 18). Here a different Greek word is used for "fulfilled": *ginomai*, meaning, "to become," "to come into existence" or "to come to pass" (Thayer's). Only after everything necessary would come to pass would any of Elohim's law pass from existence, said Messiah.

To prevent any possible misunderstanding, He warned those who would try to abolish Yahweh's law: "Whoever then shall break one of these commandments, the least, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches them, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (verse 19).

Yahshua, by explaining, expanding and exemplifying Yahweh's law, fulfilled a prophecy of the Messiah found in Isaiah 42:21: "Yahweh is well pleased for his righteousness' sake; he will magnify the law, and make it honorable" (King James Version). The Hebrew word *gadal*, translated "magnify," literally means "to be or become great" (William Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*, "Magnify"). Messiah Yahshua did exactly that, showing the true purpose and scope of Yahweh's Sabbath rest.

Following Yahshua's example

When asked, "Which is the first commandment of all?" Messiah Yahshua answered, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, Israel, Yahweh, our Elohim is one Yahweh, and you shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:28-30).

Here Yahshua restated the greatest commandment of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Those who observe the biblical Sabbath strive to obey that commandment, putting Yahweh first in their lives and keeping His command to observe the Sabbath. They will also follow Yahshua's instruction: "He that has my commandments and keeps them, it is that one who loves Me" (John 14:21).

Messiah Yahshua is our Lord and Master (Philippians 2:9-11). He also proclaimed that He is "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28), so we should follow His example in observing the Sabbath---and all Yahweh's commandments---in the way that He taught and lived.

Was the Sabbath Changed in the New Testament?

"So indeed the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12)

We have seen that Messiah Yahshua did not change Yahweh's Sabbath day. On the contrary, throughout His ministry He showed the true purpose and intent of the Sabbath. Yahshua often showed that the Sabbath, and particularly His teachings and actions on it, prefigured the coming Messianic age---the Kingdom of Yahweh---as a time of healing, freedom and restoration for all humanity.

Yahshua was a Sabbath-keeper. At the time of His death, His closest followers clearly observed the Sabbath, waiting until it was past to prepare His body for burial (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 23:56; 24:1). Fifty days after Messiah's resurrection, many gathered for the Day of Pentecost, one of Yahweh's seven annual Sabbaths or feasts (Leviticus 23:1-44) observed along with the weekly Sabbath, and it was on that day that the New Testament Church was founded by the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). We see no evidence of any

change at Messiah's death and resurrection; we observe a continuation of His followers observing the Sabbaths just as Yahshua had done.

If the Sabbath, or any part of Yahweh's law, were abolished or changed in the early New Testament Church, there should be clear evidence of such an alteration in New Testament writings. After all, the books of the New Testament were written in the first century over a period of decades ending in the 90s, more than 60 years after Yahshua's death and resurrection.

Did Paul abolish the Sabbath?

Many who argue that the Sabbath was abolished in the New Testament point to the apostle Paul's writings to justify their opinion. But is this correct? Three passages are commonly cited to support that claim---Romans 14:5-6, Colossians 2:16-17 and Galatians 4:9-10.

To properly understand the Bible we must look at each verse in context, both in the immediate context of what is being discussed and in the larger social and historical context influencing the author and his audience at the time. We must be careful not to read our preconceived notions into the text. Let's examine each of these verses in context and see if Paul indeed annulled or abolished Sabbath observance.

First, let's consider Paul's own statements about Yahweh's law. More than 25 years after the death of Messiah Yahshua, He wrote in Romans 7:12, "So indeed the law is holy, and the commandment holy, just and good." In Romans 2:13 he stated, "For not the hearers of the law are just with Yahweh, but the doers of the law will be justified." In Romans 7:22 he said, "For I delight in the law of Yahweh according to the inward man."

Many assume that, once we have faith in Messiah Yahshua, there is no more need to keep the law. Paul himself addressed this concept in Romans 3:31: "Then do we make the law of no effect [Greek *katargeo*, meaning 'destroy' or 'abolish'] through faith? Let it not be! But we establish [Greek *histemi*, meaning 'erect' or 'make to stand'] the law." Faith does not *abolish* the law, said Paul; it *establishes* and *upholds* it.

In Acts 24 he defended himself before the Roman governor Felix against charges of dissension and sedition brought by Jewish religious leaders. Replying to the accusations against him, he said, "I worship the ancestral Elohim, *believing all things according to that having been written in the law and the prophets*" (verse 14).

Two years later he again defended himself against such accusations, this time before another Roman governor, Festus. "*Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I sinned in anything,*" he responded to the charges against him (Acts 25:8).

Here, some 25-30 years after Messiah Yahshua's death and resurrection, Paul plainly said he believed "all things according to that having been written in the law and the prophets" (terms used for the books of the Old Testament) and had done nothing against the law!

In light of these clear statements, we should expect to find equally clear instructions regarding abolition of the Sabbath, if that were Paul's understanding and intent. But do we?

Are all days of worship alike? Romans 14:5-6

In Romans 14:5-6, Paul wrote: "One indeed judges a day above another day; another judges every day alike. Let each one be fully assured in his own mind. The one minding the day, He minds it to Yahweh. And the one not minding the day, he does not mind it to Yahweh. The one eating, he eats to Yahweh; for he gives thanks to Him. And the one not eating, he does not eat to Yahweh, and gives thanks to Him."

From this statement, it could appear to some that Paul is saying that whatever day one chooses to rest and worship is irrelevant so long as one is "fully assured in his own mind" and "minds it to Yahweh." Does this mean that the Sabbath is no different from any other day or that we are free to choose whatever day we wish to observe?

To come to that conclusion, one must read it into the verse, because Sabbath is nowhere mentioned here. In fact, the word *Sabbath* or references to Sabbath-keeping are not found anywhere in this epistle. The reference here is simply to "days," not the Sabbath or any other days of rest and worship commanded by Yahweh.

Keep in mind that Paul, earlier in this same epistle, had said: "The law is holy, and the commandment holy

and just and good” (Romans 7:12); “For no the hearers of the law are just with Elohim, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Romans 2:13), and “I delight in the law of Yahweh” (Romans 7:22). If he were saying here that Sabbath observance is irrelevant, such an assertion would be completely inconsistent with his other clear statements in this same letter.

What days did Paul discuss?

What are the days Paul mentions here? We must look at the context to find out.

Paul was writing to a mixed church of Jewish and gentile believers in Rome. In verses 2 and 3 Paul discussed vegetarianism (“he who is weak eats only vegetables”) and continued this theme in verse 6 (“he who eats...and he who does not eat”).

The passage in question about days is in verses 5 and 6, immediately between references to eating meat and vegetarianism in verses 2,3, and 6. There is no biblical connection between Sabbath observance and vegetarianism, so these verses have to be taken out of context to assume that Paul was referring to 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 Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1976, Vol. 10, p. 146). It is apparent that Paul wasn’t discussing the Sabbath, but rather Roman or other special days during which feasting, fasting or abstaining from certain foods was practiced.

The context shows us that some members of the congregation there were eating meat, and others were abstaining from eating meat. The vegetarians were likely members who “feared lest they should (without knowing it) eat meat which had been offered to idols or was otherwise ceremonially unclean (which might easily happen in such a place as Rome), that they abstained from meat altogether” (W.J. Conybeare and J.S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, 1974, p. 530).

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul addressed the issue of eating meat that may have been sacrificed to idols and consequently could have been viewed by some members as improper to eat. Paul’s point in that chapter was that any association of food with idolatrous activity had no bearing on whether that food was otherwise suitable for eating.

It appears likely that Paul was addressing the same issue in both groups, namely whether members should avoid meats that may have been associated with idolatrous worship. This may be indicated by Paul’s reference to “unclean” meat in Romans 14:14. Rather than using the Greek word used to describe unclean, or prohibited, foods listed in the Old Testament, he used a word meaning common or defiled, which would appropriate in describing meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Paul’s advice in 1 Corinthians 8 was the same as his conclusion in Romans 14:15: Be especially careful not to offend a fellow member, causing him to stumble or lose faith over the issue of meats. What is clear is that the Roman members’ reason for avoiding meat was directly related to the days they were observing.

In no way was this related to Sabbath observance because Yahweh’s Sabbath is a “feast” day (Leviticus 23:1-3), not a day when one must abstain from eating meat. The Sabbath is nowhere mentioned in Paul’s letter to the Romans; it simply wasn’t the issue. The days mentioned here are obviously connected with avoidance of meat, indicating that they are Roman or other observances and not any days of worship commanded by Yahweh.

Is the Sabbath bondage? Galatians 4:9-10

Galatians 4:9-10 is another passage from Paul’s epistles that some see as condemning Sabbath observance. In these verses Paul wrote: “But now, knowing Yahweh, but rather being known by Yahweh, how do you turn again to the weak and poor elements, to which you again desire to slave anew? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years.”

Those who would argue against Sabbath observance see Paul’s reference to “days and months and seasons and years” as pointing to the Sabbath, festivals and sabbatical and jubilee years given in the Old Testament (Leviticus 23,25). They see these Elohim- given observances as the “weak and miserable principles (NIV) to which the Galatians were turn[ing] again” and becoming “slaves anew” (verse 9).

Is this Paul's meaning? There is an obvious problem with viewing these verses as being critical of the Sabbath. As in Romans 14, the Sabbath is not even mentioned here. The term "Sabbath," "Sabbaths" and any related words do not appear anywhere in this epistle.

To argue against keeping the Sabbath, some assume that the "years" referred to in Galatians 4:10 are the sabbatical and jubilee years described in Leviticus 25. However, the jubilee year was not being observed anywhere in Paul's day, and the sabbatical year was not being observed in areas outside Palestine (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 14, p.582, and *Jewish Encyclopedia*, p.666, "Sabbatical Year and Jubilee"). The fact that Galatia was in Asia Minor, far outside the land of Israel, makes it illogical to conclude Paul could have been referring here to the sabbatical and jubilee years.

The Greek words Paul used for "days and months and seasons and years" are used throughout the New Testament in describing normal, civil periods of time. They are totally different from the precise terms Paul used in Colossians 2:16 specifying the Sabbaths, festivals and new-moon celebrations given in the Bible. He used exact terminology for biblical observances in Colossians, but used very different Greek words in Galatians---a clear indication that he was discussing altogether different subjects.

To understand what Paul meant, we must examine both the historic and immediate contexts of these verses. The Galatian churches were composed mostly of members from a gentile, rather than Jewish, background. Paul made it clear that they were physically uncircumcised (Galatians 5:2; 6:12-13), so they could not have been Jewish.

Was Sunday the New Testament Day of Worship?

Three scriptures lead some people to believe that Sunday was the day of rest and worship for the New Testament Church. Let's briefly examine each of them to see if this is true.

One scripture commonly cited to justify Sunday worship is Revelation 1:10, where John said, "I came to be in the spirit on the Lord's Day..." Some believe this means John was worshiping on Sunday and had the vision on that day. But nowhere does the Bible define "Lord's day" as the first day of the week. As a matter of fact, this is the only place this term is used in the Bible, which would hardly be the case if the Church had been observing Sunday for years, as some contend. If this were referring to a day of the week, we would have to conclude that John meant the seventh day, since Messiah Yahshua said He was the "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28), not some other day of the week.

However, the context of John's vision wasn't referring to a day of the week at all. Instead, he wrote that the vision transported him into the future time the Bible elsewhere calls the "day of Yahweh," "day of the Lord Messiah Yahshua" or "day of Messiah" (Jeremiah 46:10; Acts 2:20; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10).

These items are not speaking of a specific single day. Instead, they refer to the end-time events surrounding the return of Messiah Yahshua, when He will personally and directly intervene in human affairs. Thus, these terms indicated the end of the age of man's rule and the beginning of the age of Messiah Yahshua. This is the theme of the book of Revelation and "Yahweh's Day" John saw in a vision.

Breaking bread on Sunday?

Another scripture some believe shows the New Testament Church observed Sunday is Acts 20:7: "And of the first of the week, the disciples having been assembled to break bread, being about to depart on the morrow, Paul reasoned to them. And he continued his speech until midnight."

Some think that "break[ing] bread" is a reference to the bread and the wine of the New Testament Passover and therefore this is a religious service on the first day of the week. However, breaking bread does not refer to a religious service, but to dividing flat loaves of bread for a meal. "It means to partake of food and is used of eating as in a meal...The readers [of the original New Testament letters and manuscripts] could have no other idea or meaning in their minds" (E.W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech used in the Bible*, 1991, pp.839-840). This is proven by the fact that, after Paul finished speaking, they again broke bread and ate (verse 11). Breaking

bread to eat a meal is mentioned in Luke 24:30, 35 and Acts 27:35.

The timing of these events helps us to understand more clearly. Acts 20:7-11 describes several events of one night. Since the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, counts days as beginning when the sun goes down, these events began with a meal on Saturday evening after the Sabbath, which would have been the only evening on “the first day of the week.” Several translations, including the New English Bible, Today’s English Version, The New Testament in Modern English, and The Jewish New Testament, state unequivocally that this occurred on Saturday night.

Paul planned to leave the next day for another city, so he stayed and spoke long into the night. At midnight one young man in the congregation fell asleep, tumbled from the window where he sat and was killed in the fall. Paul rushed to the young man, who miraculously came back to life. After that, the group broke bread and ate again, talking almost until dawn. Paul departed at daybreak.

After speaking and talking all night, Paul the next morning walked almost 20 miles to Assos to meet the rest of the people in his group who had sailed there (verses 11, 13-14). Rather than describing a religious service on Sunday, this passage actually documents Paul walking 20 miles on foot on the first day of the week...hardly making it a day of rest and worship for him!

Collection during Sunday service?

Some people assume that 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 refers to taking up a collection during a Sunday religious service. However, a closer look shows that this is not what Paul means. Although the Bible says the collection took place on the first day of the week, nowhere does it say that a church service was involved.

This was a special collection “for the saints,” members of the church in Jerusalem (verses 1,3). It was part of a wider relief effort involving other members in Galatia (verse 1), Macedonia and Achaia (Romans 15:25-26), as well as those in Corinth to whom Paul wrote. This outpouring of support may have been what was described in Acts 11, when a famine prompted members to send “relief to the brothers dwelling in Judea...by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:28-30).

Paul does not indicate that this collection was to be taken up at a religious service. On the contrary, he tells the Corinthians “let each of you put by himself, storing up whatever he is prospered, that there not be then collections when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:2). These contributions were to be “put by himself” and “stored up” not brought to a church service and collected there. To say this is an account of a collection taken up during a Sunday worship service is to read into the Bible an unwarranted personal interpretation.

There are no other scriptures that mention anything remotely resembling religious services on the first day of the week. The New Testament was written over a time of more than 60 years after Yahshua’s death and resurrection, and nowhere does it show the day of rest being changed to Sunday.

Couldn’t turn back what they hadn’t observed

This background is important in understanding this controversial scripture. In Galatians 4:9-10, Paul said that the Galatians were “turn[ing] again to weak and miserable elements,” which included “days and months and seasons and years.” Since Paul’s readers were from a gentile background, it is difficult to see how the “days and months and seasons and years” they were turning back to could be the Sabbath and other biblical festivals, since they could not turn back to something they had not previously observed.

This is made even more clear by the immediate context. In verse 8, Paul said, “Indeed not knowing Yahweh, you served as slaves to the ones not by nature being gods.” By this Paul referred “clearly to the idols of paganism, which, in typical Jewish idiom, Paul termed ‘not gods’” (James Montgomery Boice, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1976, Vol. 10, p. 475).

Not referring to biblical practices

Is it possible that these “weak and beggarly elements” they were returning to (verse 9) could be Yahweh’s

laws, Sabbaths and festivals? The word translated “elements” here is the Greek word *stoicheia*, the same word translated “elements” earlier in verse 3. There Paul described his readers as having been “in bondage under the elements of the world.” For this to refer to Yahweh’s law in verse 9, it would also have to refer to His law in verse 3, since the same word is used.

To say that verse 3 refers to biblical law is insupportable, because “in this case there are two further difficulties: (1) It does not seem to apply to the gentiles, for the difficulty of the gentiles, is not that they were under the law in the past...and (2) it does not explain why or how Paul could add the phrase ‘of the world’ to the term *stoicheia*. All Jewish thought would emphasize the other-worldly character of the law resulting from its divine origin” (Boice, p. 472).

“It would seem that in Paul’s time this exceedingly early and primitive view had been expanded to the point at which the *stoicheia* also referred to the sun, moon, stars, and planets---all of them associated with gods or goddesses and, because they regulated the progression of the calendar, also associated with the great pagan festivals honoring the gods. In Paul’s view these gods were demons. Hence, he would be thinking of a demonic bondage in which the Galatians had indeed been held prior to the proclamation of the gospel.

“...In the verses that follow, Paul goes on to speak of these three crucial subjects in quick succession: (1) ‘those who by nature are not gods,’ presumably false gods or demons; (2) ‘those weak and miserable principles,’ again *stoicheia*; and (3) ‘days and months and seasons and years’ (vv 9,10). No doubt Paul goes on to speak of these demons in ways entirely different from the former thinking of the Galatians... Thus, this whole issue takes on a cosmic and spiritual significance. The ultimate contrast to freedom in Messiah is bondage to Satan and the evil spirits” (Boice, p. 472).

Superstitious observance of days and times

It is in this context that the Galatians were observing special “days and months and seasons and years.” The word translated here as “observe” or “observing” is the Greek word *paratereo*, meaning “to watch closely, [or] observe narrowly” (W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Observation, Observe”).

This word “seems to have the sense of ‘anxious, scrupulous, well-informed observance in one’s interest,’ which...fit[s] regard for points or spans of time which are evaluated positively or negatively from the standpoint of the calendar or astrology” (Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1995, Vol. 8, p. 148).

Whatever “days and months and seasons and years” the Galatians were observing, they were apparently observing them in a superstitious manner, as they had observed days and times before their conversion.

From the context, we see it is simply not logical to conclude that Paul was criticizing the observance of the biblical Sabbath and festivals, since they were not even mentioned. Instead, he was attacking misguided efforts to attain salvation through unnecessary superstitious observances.

Is the Sabbath obsolete? Colossians 2:16-17

A third passage from Paul’s writings, Colossians 2:16-17, is also used to support the claim that observance of the Sabbath is no longer necessary. “Then do not let anyone judge you in eating or in drinking, or in respect of a feast, or the new moon or of Sabbaths, which are a shadow of coming things; but the body is of Messiah,” he wrote.

Again, let’s examine these verses’ context and historic setting to see if they support that view.

Did Paul intend to say that Sabbath-keeping is abolished? If so, we encounter some immediate problems with this interpretation. To accept this position, it is difficult to explain how Paul could leave the issue so muddled by not stating that these practices were unnecessary, when these verses indicate that the Colossians were, in fact, observing them. After all, the Colossian church was primarily gentile (Colossians 1:27; 2:13), so Paul could have used this epistle to make it plain that these practices were not binding on gentile or other Christians.

However, Paul nowhere said that. Regarding the practices of festivals, new moons and Sabbaths, he said only

to “let no one judge you,” which is quite different from saying these practices are unnecessary or obsolete.

Not discussing biblical practices

A more basic question to ask is whether Old Testament practices were even at the core of what Paul was addressing here. Was Paul even discussing whether Christians should keep the laws regarding clean and unclean meats, the biblical festivals, the weekly Sabbath or any other Old Testament laws?

Many people assume that the “handwriting of the ordinances...nailing...to the cross” (verse 14) was Yahweh’s law and the requirements He gave in the Old Testament. But this is not what Paul meant. The Greek word translated “handwriting” is *cheirographon*, and this is the only place the term is used in the Bible. It meant a handwritten record of debt, or what we would today call an IOU. In contemporary apocalyptic literature, this word was used to designate a “record book of sin,” meaning a written account of our sins.

Paul was not saying that Yahweh’s law was nailed to the cross. What was nailed there, he said, was *all record of our sins*. Because Yahweh’s law required the death penalty for sin (Romans 6:23), this record is what “was against us, which was contrary to us” (Colossians 2:14), not the law itself. The New Testament in Modern English, by J.B. Phillips, makes this plain, translating verses 13 and 14 as: “He has forgiven you all your sins: Messiah 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.” It is the *evidence against us*, not the law itself, that was nailed to the cross, enabling us to be forgiven.

This becomes clear when we read the rest of this chapter. It is apparent that other issues were involved that had nothing to do with Yahweh’s laws given in the Old Testament. Among these were “principalities and powers” (verse 15), “false humility and worship of angels” (verse 18), forbidding to touch, taste and handle (verse 21) and “neglect of the body” (verse 23).

Further, Paul referred to the false teachings in Colosse as rooted in “persuasive words” (verse 4), “philosophy and empty deceit” and “the tradition of men” (verse 8). He also referred to submitting to “regulations” of this world (verse 20) and “the commandments and doctrines of men” (verse 22).

Could Paul, who in Romans 7:12 said the law is “holy and just and good,” possibly be referring to the same law here, or is he addressing an entirely different issue?

Infiltration from Gnosticism

Taking into account the historical context, the answer becomes clear. As the Church grew and developed in the first century, it had to deal with the progressive infiltration of Gnosticism. The influence of this thought and practice is particularly noticeable in the New Testament writings of Paul, Peter and John.

Gnosticism “was essentially a religio-philosophical attitude, not a well-defined system” (Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 1978, Vol. 11, p. 166). As such, it wasn’t a competing religion, but rather an approach to one’s existing beliefs. The central theme of Gnosticism was that secret knowledge (*gnosis* is the Greek word for “knowledge,” hence the term *Gnosticism*) could enhance or improve one’s religion.

“Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good, and matter is entirely evil. From this unbiblical dualism flowed...important errors” (The New International Version Study Bible, introduction to 1 John). Among these errors were beliefs that “man’s body, which is matter, is therefore evil. It is to be contrasted with God, who is wholly spirit and therefore good”; salvation “is escape from the body, achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge”; and, “since the body was considered evil, it was to be treated harshly. This ascetic form of Gnosticism is the background of part of the letter to the Colossians.”

In addition to these beliefs, “Gnosticism, in all its forms, was characterized by belief...in mediating beings.” Further, “The knowledge of which the Gnostics spoke...was knowledge acquired through mystical experience, not by intellectual apprehension. It was an occult knowledge, pervaded by the superstitions of astrology and magic. Moreover it was an esoteric knowledge, open only to those who had been initiated into the mysteries of the Gnostic system” (Vaughan, p. 167).

References to Gnostic teachings

All of these elements are seen to have been influencing the Colossian congregation. It is clear that Paul was combating the supposedly special knowledge claimed by the Gnostics by claiming that he was making known to the Colossians the higher, saving knowledge of Yahweh the Father and Messiah Yahshua (Colossians 1:9; 25-29; 2:2-3).

Paul wrote to them “that no one may beguile you with persuasive words” (verse 4). He called this secret knowledge nothing more than “philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world; and not according to Messiah” (verse 8). The more important knowledge, wrote Paul, was that of Yahweh and Messiah, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (verse 3).

Adherents to the heresy included people who advocated obeisance to angels and other spiritual powers. Paul warned the Colossians of those who delight in “worship of angels” (verse 18). In the light of Messiah’s atoning sacrifice, these supposed spirit “principalities and powers” were useless as a means of access to Yahweh, he said (verses 10, 15).

Strict ascetic approach

Based on their belief that spirit was good and the flesh was evil, these teachings taught strict asceticism, denying the self any physical pleasure. Through “not in any honor of satisfaction of the flesh” (verse 23), they hoped to attain increased spirituality. Paul described their rules as “Do not handle; do not taste, do not touch” (verse 21). These regulations concerned only “which things are all to rot away in the using,” he wrote, because they are based on “injunctions and teachings of men” (verse 22), rather than teachings from Yahweh.

This early Gnostic asceticism probably integrated gentile concepts with elements of Judaism such as circumcision (verse 11). “It is likely, therefore, that the Colossian heresy was a mixture of an extreme form of Judaism and an early stage of Gnosticism” (The New International Study Bible, introduction to Colossians).

From the specific teachings Paul addressed, it appears that one or more branches of Judaism were influenced by Gnosticism and infiltrated the Colossian congregation, teaching an extreme form of ascetic Judaism blended with Gnostic beliefs. The ascetic approach advocated by these false teachers led them to condemn those whose religious observances were not up to their ascetic spiritual standards. Thus Paul cautioned the Colossians “not [to] let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink...” (verse 16, NIV).

Was Yahweh’s Law Abolished in the New Testament?

If the Sabbath were indeed abolished in the New Testament, we should find numerous passages throughout the New Testament making that clear. The negating of one of Yahweh’s Ten Commandments would certainly require nothing less.

Messiah Yahshua said that “in no way shall one iota or one tittle pass away from the law” until all “comes to pass” or has completely filled its purpose (Matthew 5:18). Various passages, including entire chapters of the New Testament, make clear the spiritual purpose behind such practices as animal sacrifices and temple services (Hebrews 7:11-19; 8:1-6; 9:1-15; 10:1-18).

But Yahweh’s commandments remain. The last books written in the New Testament were, in A.D. 85-95, John’s epistles and, about A.D. 95, the book of Revelation. Were the Ten Commandments abolished by that time? Notice John’s words: “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that one” (1 John 2:3-4).

John defined sin as the violation of Yahweh’s laws. “Everyone practicing sin also practices lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness,” he wrote (1 John 3:4). He knew that Yahweh’s law was a law of love, defining both our love for others and our love for Yahweh: “By this we know if we love the children of Yahweh, when we love Yahweh and keep His commandments. For this is the love of Yahweh that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not heavy” (1 John 5:2-3).

The intent of Yahweh’s law from the beginning was love, as Messiah Yahshua taught: “And this is love, that

we should walk according to His commandments. And this is the commandment even as you heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it” (2 John 6).

The book of Revelation, divinely inspired by Messiah Yahshua Himself (Revelation 1:1), also upholds keeping Yahweh’s commandments. In Revelation 12:17, shortly before Messiah Yahshua’s return, Satan attempts to destroy members of Yahweh’s church, “who keep the commandments of Yahweh and have the testimony of Messiah Yahshua.”

In Revelation 14:12, the saints are described as “those keeping the commands of Yahweh and have the faith of Yahshua.” Faith and keeping Yahweh’s commandments go hand in hand, as Paul stated earlier (Romans 3:31).

In the last chapter of the Bible, Messiah Yahshua gave a final message to the church: “Behold, I am coming quickly and My reward is with Me, to give to each as His work is...’ Blessed are the ones doing His commands, that their authority will be over the tree of life and by the gates they may enter into the city” (Revelation 22:12,14).

Clearly Yahweh’s law is not abolished in the New Testament.

Judged for how---not whether---they observed the Sabbath

The Colossians were being judged not for observing festivals, new moons and Sabbaths as such; rather they were being judged for *how* they observed those times, apparently in a joyous and festive manner. These days were, after all, given by Yahweh as festivals and celebrations. This approach was entirely contrary to the Gnostic approach of stolid self-denial that was so evident in this chapter.

Gnosticism was so concerned with the stars and planets, referred to by Paul as “the basic principles of this world” (verse 8, NIV). Their perspective would likely have influenced the Gnostics’ observance of the festivals, new moons and Sabbaths, since the calendar governing those days was determined by movements of the heavenly bodies.

By cautioning the Colossian members not to let others judge them for how they observed the festivals, new-moon celebrations and Sabbaths, Paul didn’t question whether they should by kept. The obvious implication of these verses is that these gentile Christians *were* in fact observing these days, and in no way did Paul tell them to desist.

Instead, the issue he addressed is that Christians should not be criticized for observing in a festive manner. Paul cautioned that members should not let others judge them by those misguided ascetic standards in what they ate or drank or how they observed the Sabbaths or festivals (verse 16).

The larger context of Colossians 2:16 is asceticism growing out of early Gnosticism, not a discussion of which laws are binding for Christians.

Shadow of things to come

What about Paul’s statement in Colossians 2:17 that the Sabbath and biblical festivals “which are a shadow of coming things, but the body is of Messiah”? Did Paul mean that they were irrelevant and obsolete because Messiah Yahshua was the “body “ of what these days foreshadowed?

Actually, Paul said they “are shadows of *coming* things,” indicating they have a future fulfillment. The Greek word translated “to come” is *mello*, meaning “to be about to do or suffer something, to be at the point of, to be impending” (Spiros Zodhiateds, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, 1992m p. 956).

Mello means “to be about (to do something), often implying the necessity and therefore the certainty of what is to take place” (Vine, “Come, Came,” p.109).

Paul uses the same word construction in Ephesians 1:21, stating that Messiah Yahshua is “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (NIV). He contrasts the present age with “one to come,” showing there is clearly a future fulfillment.

This future fulfillment is also made clear from the phrasing in Colossians 2:17 that these things “*are* shadows.” The Greek word *esti*, translated here as “are,” is in the present-active tense and means “to be” or “is”

(Zodhiates, p. 660). For Paul to have meant that the Sabbath and festivals were fulfilled and became obsolete in Messiah Yahshua, it would have been necessary for him to say they “were shadows” and to have used entirely different wording.

Paul’s choice of wording makes it clear that the Sabbath and festivals “are shadows” of things still to come and not “were shadows” of things fulfilled and made obsolete in Messiah Yahshua.

Physical acts teach spiritual lessons

Some assume that certain physical acts relating to worship---because they are representations or symbols of greater spiritual truths---have been “fulfilled in Messiah” in the New Testament and are therefore obsolete and unnecessary. These people include the Sabbath and other biblical festivals in this category based on Paul’s comment that they “are shadows of coming things.”

But this reasoning is flawed. Just because something is a shadow, a representation or a symbol doesn’t mean its importance is diminished. The Old and New Testament alike are filled with symbols and symbolic actions commanded by Yahweh to teach us important spiritual lessons.

Baptism is a symbolic act representing a greater spiritual truth, the burial of the old self and living a new life (Romans 6:3,4), yet we are commanded to be baptized (Acts 2:38). The bread and wine of the Passover service symbols of the vital spiritual relationship we have with Messiah Yahshua, yet we are clearly commanded to partake of them (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Laying on of hands (Hebrews 6:2), anointing with oil (James 5:14), foot-washing (John 13:14), partaking of unleavened bread (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) and other physical actions are commanded to be observed in the New Testament, not because they are greater than the things they symbolize, but to strengthen and enhance our spiritual understanding as we do them. After all, we are physical human beings who are in search of spiritual understanding. Yahweh gave us spiritual acts and symbols to help us better understand spiritual lessons.

These examples show that symbols and symbolic actions aren’t strictly limited to physical worship in the Old Testament, but are clearly commanded in the New Testament as important elements of our worship. They are vital reminders of important spiritual truths, as Paul recognized (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). The same is true of the Sabbath. Messiah Yahshua, through His actions and teachings on the Sabbath rest is a type---a foretaste---of the great coming Messianic age of peace, rest, freedom and healing.

In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul isn’t discussing the permanence or transience of the Sabbath at all. As a matter of fact, Paul nowhere quotes the Old Testament in Colossians. He uses the Greek word for “law.” *nomos*, dozens of times in his other epistles, but not once in Colossians. Why? The Old Testament and Yahweh’s law simply were not the issue.

Far from negating Sabbath observance, Paul’s instructions to the Colossians, written about A.D. 62, actually affirm that gentile Christians were indeed observing the Sabbath more than 30 years after Messiah’s death and that the Sabbath is an important reminder of vital spiritual truths for us today.

Why is the Sabbath Commandment Not repeated in the New Testament?

Some people believe that, since the Sabbath commandment isn’t explicitly repeated in the New Testament, it is no longer binding.

The Sabbath commandment did not have to be repeated in the New Testament simply because the people to whom Messiah Yahshua and the apostles preached would never have imagined that it *needed* to be repeated.

The scriptures that later would be called the Old Testament were their Bible, their guide for living (Romans 15:4). Paul described them as being “given by inspiration of Yahweh and...profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of Elohim may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The holy Scriptures clearly commanded them to keep the Sabbath, and the common people accepted that as Yahweh’s inspired instruction.

Messiah Yahshua and the apostles lived and taught in a Sabbath-keeping society. Yahshua's confrontations with the Pharisees were over *how* to observe the Sabbath, never over *whether* to observe it.

When the apostles took their message beyond the confines of Judea, Sabbath observance was well known in other parts of the Roman Empire. The Jewish historian Josephus, during the time of the New Testament Church, wrote, "...The multitude of mankind itself have had a great inclination for a long time to follow our religious observances; for 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 hath not come...As God himself pervades all the world, so hath our law passed through all the world also" (*Against Apion*, 2,40).

The examples of Yahshua and the apostles confirm that they believed in and obeyed all of the Ten Commandments. Throughout the book of Acts---written by Luke, a gentile---the Sabbath and the annual Sabbaths described in Leviticus 23 are mentioned quite routinely (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 21; 20:6, 16; 27:9). Whether to observe them simply wasn't a question.

Historical record in Acts

Out of all Paul's writings, the three passages discussed earlier in this chapter are the ones commonly used in attempting to prove he did away with Sabbath observance. However, as we have seen, two of those passages do not even mention the Sabbath, and the third confirms that gentile believers were actually keeping the Sabbath, since Paul told them not to let themselves be judged for *how* they kept it.

But, in addition to Paul's word, his actions showed that he never intended to abolish or change the Sabbath and that he observed it himself.

Acts 13 records that, 10 to 15 years after Paul was miraculously converted, he and his companions traveled to Antioch in Asia Minor, where they were "going into the synagogue on the day of the Sabbath" (verse 14). After being invited to speak to the congregation, he addressed both Jew and gentile proselytes (verse 16), describing how the coming of Messiah Yahshua had been foretold throughout the Old Testament Scriptures.

His message was received so enthusiastically that, "the Jews having gone out of the synagogue, the gentiles begged that these words be spoken to them on the next Sabbath" (verse 42). Notice that the gentiles in attendance wanted Paul to teach them more about Messiah *on the next Sabbath*. Why? Because these Gentiles were clearly already keeping the Sabbath with the Jews in the synagogue!

What was Paul's response to the gentiles' request? "And in the coming Sabbath, almost all the city gathered to hear the word of Yahweh" (verse 44). Had Paul not believed in the Sabbath, he could have easily told them to come the next day or any other day and he would teach them. Instead, he waited until the following Sabbath, when "almost all the city," Jew and gentile alike, came out to hear his message!

The gentiles of the city, hearing that Paul had been commissioned to preach the gospel to the gentiles, "rejoiced and glorified the word of Yahweh. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed" (verses 45-48). The Sabbath commanded by Yahweh, was the normal day for rest, assembly and instruction in Yahweh's way of life.

About five years later, in what is today Greece, Paul "came through Thessalonica, where a synagogue of the Jews was. And *according to Paul's custom*, he went into them and reasoned with them from the Scriptures on three Sabbaths, opening and setting forth that the Messiah must have suffered, and to have risen from the dead; and that this is the Messiah, Yahshua whom I announce to you" (Acts 17:1-3). Here, some 20 years after Yahshua's death and resurrection, Paul's custom was still to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath, there to discuss the Scriptures and teach about Messiah Yahshua!

He continued to teach both Jews and gentiles: "And some of them were persuaded; and joined themselves to Paul and Silas, both a great multitude of the worshipping Greeks, and not a few of the leading women (verse 4). Paul, specifically commissioned to preach the gospel to the gentiles (Acts 9:15; 13:47), taught the gentiles in the synagogues on the Sabbath!

Several years later he went to the Grecian city of Corinth, where "he reasoned in the synagogue *on every Sabbath persuading both Jews and Greeks*" (Acts 18:4). Later still he went to Ephesus in Asia Minor, where "going into the synagogue, he spoke boldly over three months, having reasoned with them, and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of Yahweh" (Acts 19:8).

The book of Acts was written about A.D. 63, shortly before Paul's execution in Rome, and covers the history of more than 30 years of the New Testament Church. It shows that, over a period of many years, Paul repeatedly taught Jews and gentiles on the Sabbath. Even though he was the apostle to the gentiles, he never hinted to them that the Sabbath was obsolete or unnecessary.

To say that the apostle Paul advocated abolishing or annulling the Sabbath, one must not only twist Paul's words out of context to directly contradict his other statements, but one must also ignore or distort Luke's written eyewitness record of the Church from that time. The book of Acts contains no evidence that the Sabbath was abolished or changed during that time.

In legal proceedings against him, Paul assured all who heard him that he believed in and had done nothing against the law (Acts 24:14; 25:8). He said that the law of Yahweh is not annulled or abolished by faith, but, "Let it not be, we establish the law" (Romans 3:31).

He concluded, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but the keeping of Yahweh's commands" (1 Corinthians 7:19). That is his unequivocal statement: Obeying Yahweh's commandments matter. They are vitally important to our relationship with Yahweh.

Paul, in observing the Sabbath, was only doing what he told others to do: "Be imitators of me, as I also of Messiah" 1 Corinthians 11:1). He observed the Sabbath just as his Master had done.

Delighting in the law of Yahweh

Paul himself said, "I delight in the law of Yahweh" (Romans 7:22), not that he was abolishing it. "So indeed the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good," he affirmed (Romans 7:12).

He did not see the New Testament as replacing the Old. After all, there were no New Testament scriptures as such during his lifetime---they were not assembled until several decades after his death. Paul quoted from what we call the Old Testament dozens of times in his writings, fully accepting and using it as an authority and guide for living (Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:15).

The New Testament Church simply continued with Old Testament practices, including the Sabbath, but with greater insight and understanding of their spiritual significance.

'There remains a Sabbath Rest for the people of Yahweh'

The book of Hebrews uses creative comparisons to emphasize to its Jewish audience that the weekly Sabbath is a reminder of something more than Yahweh being just the Israelite's Creator and the One who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

The faithfulness of Moses and Messiah is spoken of in the first six verses of the third chapter of Hebrews. Beginning in verse 7, Psalm 95 is quoted to document the failure of the first generation of Israel as a lesson to Yahweh's people today. Unbelief was the main cause of their failure to enter the rest promised to them (verse 19).

The fourth chapter begins with an admonition to faith and obedience as a prerequisite for receiving the rest that is still available to Yahweh's people. No one has yet entered that rest, not because Yahweh hadn't readied it; in fact, it was finished from the foundation of the world (Hebrews 4:3). The Yahweh rested on the seventh day from all His works indicates as much (verse 4). David in (Psalm 95) spoke of a promise of rest long after Joshua led the second generation of Israel to rest in the Promised Land. This demonstrates that the rest fulfilled at the time of Joshua was only a type of a greater rest to come (Hebrews 4:6-8).

Rest for the people of Yahweh

Now we come to a controversial statement: "So then, there remains a rest for the people of Yahweh" (verse 9). The Greek word translated "rest" in every other verse throughout Hebrews 3 and 4 is *katapausis*. The word

for “rest” in Hebrews 4:9 is *sabbatismos*. This is the only New Testament occurrence of this word, and its meaning is fundamental to understanding this pivotal verse, which is the conclusion of everything previously said about “rest” beginning in Hebrews 3:7.

The Anchor Bible Dictionary states about the meaning of *sabbatismos*: “The words ‘sabbath rest’ translate the [Greek] noun *sabbatismos*, a unique word in the NT. 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’...”(p. 855).

The Anchor Bible Dictionary continues with an explanation of the context: “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 Yahweh’ in the ...end-time which had been inaugurated with the appearance of Jesus [Hebrews] 1:1-3...The experience of ‘sabbath rest’ points to a *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 Yahweh’s rest at creation (4:4 = [Genesis] 2:2) and manifests faith in the salvation provided by Messiah.

“[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” (pp. 855-856).

In summary, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* decisively and correctly concludes that *sabbatismos* means keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Therefore, Hebrews 4:9 stresses the need to continue to keep the Sabbath in a New Covenant context, even though the day also embodies all it meant under the Old Covenant.

Added meaning for the Sabbath

The book of Hebrews is addressed to converted Jews to explain the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. The Sabbath and circumcision have long been considered two of the cardinal tenets of Judaism, identifying the Jews as “the people of Yahweh.” However, by the time of Messiah, the meaning of the Sabbath had become buried under a mountain of dos and don’ts.

The Sabbath had become a heavy burden as Sabbath-keeping degenerated into the bondage of legalism, perpetuated by the narrow-minded scribes and Pharisees. Messiah Yahshua condemned these human traditions and set the example of how to keep the Sabbath as Yahweh’s gift to mankind (Mark 2:27-28).

Elevation of the Sabbath

What could be more appropriate to the book of Hebrews than the elevation of the Sabbath to its full meaning and intent in the plan of Yahweh?

So the Sabbath retains its Old Covenant meanings that identify Yahweh’s specially sanctified people (“the people of Yahweh”) and pointing them back to Yahweh as Creator. Added to that is the New Covenant meaning of entering into another rest through Messiah, fulfilled in type by the rest given to Israel during Joshua’s time (Hebrews 4:8).

This spiritual rest begins now in this life and reaches its consummation in the resurrection to eternal life at the return of Messiah (Revelation 20:6). His return also signals the beginning of the millennial rest prophesied in the Old Testament.

The book of Hebrews cleverly weaves together three themes of rest: the rest promised to Israel from enemies, the weekly Sabbath, and the spiritual rest through Messiah. The conclusion is that Sabbath-keeping is still necessary for the people of Yahweh, the New Testament Church.

As Hebrews 4:10 affirms, we must all labor to enter the spiritual rest and continue to keep the weekly Sabbath because of what it portrays in Yahweh’s great master plan.

Yahweh’s Sabbath in Today’s World

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and Yahweh’s holy day honorable, ... then you will find your joy in Yahweh...”
(Isaiah 58:13-14, NIV).

Is the Sabbath relevant? Is it really practical to keep the Sabbath in today’s world? How should it be observed today? To answer these questions, let’s consider what the Bible, Yahweh’s inspired Word, reveals.

Messiah Yahshua said that He was “Lord of the Sabbath” and that “The Sabbath came into being for man’s sake, not man for the Sabbath’s sake” (Mark 2:27-28). He did not limit the Sabbath by teaching that it was made for any particular group of people at any specific time in history. Instead, it was made for all mankind for all time. It was enshrined in the Ten Commandments, the heart and core of Yahweh’s divine law for mankind.

Right relationship with Yahweh

The Sabbath was made for mankind, but for what purpose?

The book of Isaiah, chapter 58 and 59, describes mankind’s separation from Yahweh because of our sins. “Behold the hand of Yahweh is not shortened from saving; nor is His ear heavy from hearing. But your iniquities are coming between you and your Elohim; and your sins have hidden His face from you, from hearing” (Isaiah 59:1-2).

These verses point out the hypocrisy of those who claim to seek Yahweh, yet are still filled with sin and evil intentions (Isaiah 58:1-4; 59:4-15).

But Yahweh shows that we can be reconciled to Him: “‘And the redeemer comes to Zion, and to those in Jacob *who turn from transgression,*’ declares Yahweh” (Isaiah 50:20). Messiah Yahshua is that prophesied Redeemer, the One who will redeem, or buy back, mankind for Yahweh through the sacrifice of His life (John 3:16; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 2:2; 4:9-10).

Yahweh also describes how to begin building a proper relationship with Him. Doing so involves humility and fasting that we might come to understand Him and His ways. “Then you shall call, and Yahweh will answer, you shall cry, and He shall say, ‘Here I am’ ... then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall be as the noonday. And Yahweh shall always guide you, and satisfy your soul in dry places, and support your bones. And you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail” (Isaiah 58:9-11).

Right understanding of the Sabbath

This section of scripture reveals another critical element to help us build that right relationship with Yahweh--right understanding and observance of the Sabbath.

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and Yahweh’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in Yahweh, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance [physical blessings] of your father Jacob.’ The mouth of Yahweh has spoken” (verses 13-14, NIV).

Here we see Yahweh’s true intent for the Sabbath: It is part of a proper, loving relationship with Him. It is a matter of honoring Yahweh. It is a matter of surrendering one of our most precious possessions---*our time*---to build a right relationship with our Creator.

Proper observance of the Sabbath, according to Yahweh’s instruction here, means turning away from “going your own way.” “doing as you please” and speaking idle words.” These actions trample His holy time underfoot, says Yahweh.

But the Sabbath is not to be a time for doing nothing. It is to be a time for building a relationship with Yahweh. It is to be a delight, a time to “find your joy in Yahweh,” He tells us. Rather than spending this time on our own interests and pursuits, it is a time set aside to concentrate on the things that are pleasing to Yahweh and nourish our relationship with Him.

What is True Worship?

A theme in this booklet is the concept of “worship.” In most people’s minds, worship involves some sort of public praise service with hymns of praise, prayers and a well-planned liturgy. Such services epitomize for many what is involved in worshipping Yahweh. Yet this provides only a partial picture.

A dictionary definition of worship is “reverence tendered to a divine being” and “an act expressing such reverence.” The word “worship” comes from an Old English word meaning “worth-ship” and refers to worthiness, respect and reverence directed toward Yahweh.

Appreciation for Yahweh’s worth

Our worship of Yahweh would therefore literally mean showing our appreciation of His worth. Certain forms of outward religious practice, with their rituals, ceremonies and prayers, can show worship for Yahweh. But we must pay careful attention to what He tells us in His Word, the Bible.

Yahweh makes it clear He seeks those who will worship Him “in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24). When Satan sought to tempt Messiah to worship him, Messiah Yahshua sharply rebuked him, saying, “You shall worship Yahweh your Elohim, and Him only shall you serve: (Matthew 4:10). The apostle Paul equated his worship of Yahweh with “believing all things according to that having been written in the Law and the Prophets” (Acts 24:14), referring to what we call the Old Testament.

Yahweh wants humanity to worship Him in truth. We do this by honoring Him, serving Him and giving heed to His instructions. Yahweh asks us to live “by every word going out of the mouth of Yahweh” (Matthew 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3). Our worship of Yahweh is shown in how we live our daily lives. Christianity is a way of life (Acts 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). It is a way of thinking, acting and living, it affects every aspect of our life.

What true worship involves

True worship of Yahweh involves nothing short of the inward transformation of the human heart by faith in Messiah Yahshua and His sacrifice. External worship practices alone are inadequate. Yahweh is looking for those who will worship Him in spirit, from a converted and transformed heart.

True worship, then is much more than praise of Yahweh in a public worship service. This broader meaning is indicated by the fact that five Greek verbs are translated “worship” in the New Testament. “The worship of Yahweh is nowhere defined in scripture...It is not confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgement to Yahweh, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgement” (Vine, *Worship, Worshiping*,” p. 686).

Messiah Yahshua sharply rebuked the religious leaders of His day because they misrepresented Yahweh’s commands and substituted their own humanly devised teachings (Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7). He said such worship was in vain. Yahshua reserved the harshest words of warning for those who would profess to worship Yahweh (who say “Lord, Lord,” Matthew 7:21), but refuse to do Yahweh’s will or obey His laws (verses 21-23). Such worship is empty and without merit, unacceptable to Yahweh and Messiah Yahshua.

We live at a time when many people are disillusioned with traditional worship services. They find them vacuous, without meaning and irrelevant to their lives. It is time to take a fresh look at what true worship is all about. When we come to understand its real significance, true worship becomes supremely relevant to our lives now and to our human destiny.

Sabbath full of meaning today

Many people, and professing Christians in particular, might be shocked to learn that the seventh-day Sabbath--Yahweh's commanded day of rest and communal worship---is not abrogated for the Christian today. It remains very much in force, as shown throughout this booklet. It is full of meaning and supremely relevant to the lives of all humanity. We are missing some of Yahweh's most wonderful blessings if we ignore the observance of His commanded day of rest.

True worship of Yahweh honors His commands concerning the Sabbath. In contrast, Sunday observance does not rest on Yahweh's authority or that of His Word, but on the authority of man. The hard question must be asked whether Yahweh accepts such worship when His clear commands regarding His Sabbath are ignored.

Building proper relationship

How do we build this right relationship with Yahweh? We build through contact and communication with Him. We talk to Him through prayer. He talks to us through His inspired Word, the Bible. These are vital keys to a right relationship with Him.

"Steadfastly continue in prayer," wrote Paul (Colossians 4:2). "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks for this is the will of Yahweh in Messiah Yahshua toward you," he added (1Thessalonians 5:16-18). "The prayer of the righteous one has great strength, having been made effective," wrote James (James 5:16).

Messiah Yahshua *expected* His followers to pray, telling them, "When you pray..." (Matthew 6:5-7; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:2). He gave them specific instruction about prayer and encouraged them that "it is always right to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

Yahweh's Sabbath is an ideal time for additional prayer and contact with Him. By refraining from our usual work and other activities on that day, we have additional time to spend with Him to build and strengthen our relationship with Him.

The Sabbath is also an ideal time for Yahweh to speak with us. He instructs us through His Word, the Bible. "Every scripture is Elohim-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of Elohim may be perfect, fully furnished for every good work," Paul told Timothy (2Timothy 3:16-17).

Not only does Sabbath observance help us understand Yahweh's ways; it helps us better understand our own thoughts and motivations, showing us where we can change to become more like Him. Hebrews 4:12 tells us "For the word of Yahweh is living, and powerfully working, and sharper than every two-edged sword, even piercing as far as the dividing apart of both soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge of the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

We should earnestly desire to study Yahweh's word and learn more about it. "As newborn babes desire the soul-nourishing milk, that you may grow by it," we are told (1Peter 2:2).

David, a man after Yahweh's own heart (Acts 13:22), understood that Elohim's Word shows us the right way to live: "By what shall a young man purify his way, to keep it according to your word...I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:9,11).

David used his time to think about Yahweh's ways and how he could live a life more pleasing to Him. "I will meditate in Your precepts and I will regard Your ways...Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all day," he wrote (Psalm 119:15,97).

Worship services on the Sabbath

Yahweh's Sabbath is a time for fellowship with others of like mind, a time for mutually encouraging one another. "And let us consider one another, to incitement of love and of good work, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as is the custom of some, but exhorting; and by so much more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Believers are expected to come together to worship (1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:23). As mentioned above, we should not forsake “the assembling of ourselves together.” In the Old Testament, the Sabbath was “a holy gathering,” also translated “a sacred assembly” (Leviticus 23:3, NIV), Yahweh commanded His people to gather to worship on that day.

Yahweh’s ministers are expected to teach His people about His way of life. Paul instructed the younger Timothy to “preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage---with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2, NIV).

As we read earlier, the regular practice of Messiah Yahshua and the apostle Paul was to attend a gathering in the synagogue on the Sabbath to teach and fellowship with those who wanted to learn Yahweh’s ways. Messiah Yahshua constantly showed by His actions---by explaining His Word and way of life and by performing works of mercy---the proper way to observe the day. Today Yahweh’s Sabbath is the appropriate day to rest from our normal work and employment, a day to set aside time to meet with other believers to worship Yahweh, be instructed in His way of life and likewise perform good works that exemplify His way of life.

Build relationship with Yahweh

Yahweh tells us, “And the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your Elohim; you shall not do any work, you...” (Exodus 20:10). He made it clear that our ordinary, routine work was unacceptable on that day. The Sabbath was to be different. Under the national administration of Yahweh’s laws in ancient Israel, the Sabbath was so important to Him that He specified that those who violated this command were to be put to death (Exodus 31:14-16; 35:2).

When Israel came out of Egypt, Yahweh enforced this commandment by providing a double portion of manna on the sixth day and none on the Sabbath every week for 40 years (Exodus 16:26, 35; Joshua 5:12)---a total of more than 2000 miracles! The Sabbath command is clearly important to Yahweh, and He expects us to obey it. Observing the Sabbath is vital to maintaining a proper relationship with Him.

The Life Application Bible, commenting on Exodus 20:8-11, explains why we as humans need the Sabbath: “The Sabbath was a day set aside for rest and worship. God commanded a Sabbath because human beings need to spend unhurried time in worship and rest each week. A God who is concerned enough to provide a day each week for us to rest is indeed wonderful. To observe a regular time of rest and worship in our fast-paced world demonstrates how important God is to us, and it gives us the extra benefit of refreshing our spirits. Don’t neglect God’s provision.”

Messiah Yahshua showed by His example the proper way to observe the Sabbath. It was never intended to be a rigid, joyless day constrained by endless restrictions detailing what could and could not be done. He used it as a time to delight in sharing with others the joy of Yahweh’s Word and way of life, showing it to be a time for strengthening our relationship with Him. He used it as a time for healing---physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. It was a time for encouraging and helping those who were less fortunate.

Messiah Yahshua made it clear there was nothing wrong with doing good on the Sabbath, pointing out that Yahweh’s Sabbath command had never forbidden it. He emphasized what the day is for, rather than listing all the things we can’t do. His actions on the Sabbath pointed to the coming age He referred to as “the Kingdom of Yahweh,” in which all humanity will share in His promised healing, joy and freedom (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:16-19; 9:11; 10:9).

Messiah’s example showed the Sabbath is to be a day of physical rest and spiritual rejuvenation. It is meant to be a welcome, refreshing rest from our weekly labors, a time during which we must no longer be absorbed in our ordinary daily cares and concerns.

The Sabbath in the Age to Come

Yahweh created the Sabbath for mankind (Mark 2:27), and there will yet come a time when all mankind will keep His Sabbath.

The Bible speaks of Yahweh’s Kingdom as being established on earth when Messiah Yahshua returns to rule

as “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 11:15; 19:11-16). In addition to ruling over sons of Elohim who will be changed to spirit beings and rule with Messiah in the Kingdom of Yahweh at the time of His second coming, Yahshua will rule as Head of a literal government over physical nations on earth (Psalm 22:27-28; 72:1-11; Daniel 2:34-35; Zechariah 14:8-9).

At that time, all nations will be ruled by Yahweh’s laws (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Micah 4:2; Isaiah 2:2-3; Hebrews 8:7-13).

All of humanity will learn and keep Yahweh’s Sabbath: “From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me’ says Yahweh” (Isaiah 66:23, NIV).

The Sabbath will be kept by gentiles and those who were never a part of the physical nation of Israel. “So says Yahweh: Keep justice and do righteousness for My salvation is near to come and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who lays hold on it; keeping Sabbath, from defiling it and keeping his hand from doing every evil...For so says Yahweh to the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths and chooses things I am pleased with, and take hold of My covenant: I even will give to them in My house and in My walls a hand and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, which shall not be cut off.”

“And the sons of an alien who join themselves on Yahweh to serve Him, and to love Yahweh’s name, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and takes hold of My covenant: even them I will bring to My holy mount and make them joyful in My house of prayer” (Isaiah 56:1-2; 4-7). Sabbath observance is specifically mentioned as a part of the covenant Yahweh will make with all peoples then, and their worship of Him.

Purpose of Yahweh’s commands

Yahweh’s Word tells us that His commandments are never burdensome (1 John 5:3). They are not meaningless or arbitrary. They were given to humanity in love for an Elohim of infinite wisdom and knowledge (Isaiah 55:8-9). They were given to be a benefit to mankind, bringing blessings when obeyed (Deuteronomy 4:40; 5:29; 33). These commandments include His Sabbath. It is a day of rest and refreshing, given to man by the One who designed and created mankind. It is a time for physical, emotional and spiritual renewal.

Yahweh knew that we would need this time to nurture and strengthen a right relationship with Him. Part of the Sabbath command reads, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work...” Yahweh tells us to take care of our ordinary work and concerns on the other six days, leaving our time and our minds free to properly worship and obey Him by observing the Sabbath. When we are free to focus our minds and thoughts on Yahweh’s way and purpose, the Sabbath truly becomes the blessing and delight He intends it to be (Isaiah 58:13-14).

On this seventh day of each week, we should cease from our own work and allow Yahweh to work in us, building and nourishing our relationship with our Creator. We will then discover and experience the blessings of Yahweh’s Sabbath rest.

Congregation of YHWH Jerusalem PO Box 832 Carteret NJ 07007
www.coyhwh.com