

The Sabbath Watchman

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The Sabbath in *Judaism*

WORLD IN BRIEF

– United States

– Costa Rica

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Introduction

The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. Exodus 20:10.

When God created the earth and placed human beings upon it, He divided time into seven periods. Six He gave to us for our own use, to employ in secular business; one He reserved for Himself. Having rested on the seventh day, He blessed and sanctified it. Henceforth, the seventh day was to be regarded as the Lord's rest day and to be sacredly observed as the memorial of His creative work. It was not the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth day that was sanctified, or set apart to a holy use; neither was it a seventh part of time and no day in particular; but it was the seventh day, the day upon which God had rested....

When the law was given at Sinai, the Sabbath was placed in the midst of moral precepts, in the very bosom of the Decalogue. But the Sabbath institution was not then made known for the first time. The fourth commandment places its origin at Creation. The Creator's rest day was hallowed by Adam in holy Eden and by the people of God throughout the patriarchal ages. During Israel's long bondage in Egypt, under taskmasters that knew not God, they could not keep the Sabbath; therefore the Lord brought them out where they could remember His holy day....

A threefold miracle was wrought in honor of the Sabbath, even before the law was given on Sinai. A double quantity of manna fell on the sixth day, none upon the Sabbath, and the portion needed for the Sabbath was preserved sweet and pure, when if any were kept over at any other time, it became unfit for food. Here is conclusive evidence that the Sabbath was instituted at Creation, when the foundations of the earth were laid, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy. And its sacredness remains unchanged, and will so remain even to the close of time. From the Creation, every precept of the divine law has been obligatory on mankind and has been observed by those who fear the Lord. The doctrine that God's law has been abolished is one of Satan's devices to compass the ruin of the race....

The holy oracles were especially committed to the Jews; not to be an Israelite was not to belong to the favored people of God.... Now the prophet declares that the stranger who will love and obey God shall enjoy the privileges that have belonged exclusively to the chosen people.—*Signs of the Times*, February 28, 1884.

Ellen G. White.

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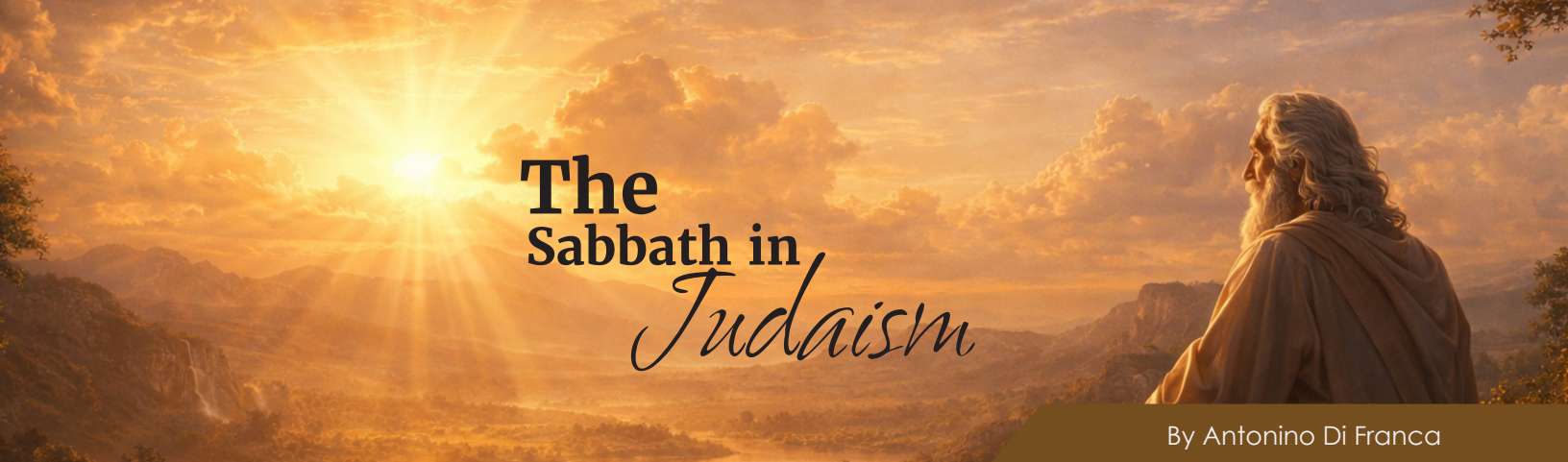
We believe:

- The all-wise, loving God created all things in the universe by His Son, Jesus Christ; He is its Owner and Sustainer.
- He met the challenge to His loving leadership and authority by reconciling the world to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Word made flesh.
- The Holy Spirit, Jesus' representative on earth, convicts of sin, guides into truth, and, when abiding in man, overcomes all unrighteousness.
- The Bible is the record of God's dealings with mankind and the standard of all doctrine; the Ten Commandments are the transcript of His character and the foundation of all enduring reform.
- His people, in harmony with God's Word and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, call all men everywhere to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus.
- Bible prophecy reveals that earth's history will soon close with the visible return of Jesus Christ as King to claim all who have accepted Him as the world's only Redeemer and their Lord.

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The Sabbath
Watchman



The Sabbath in Judaism

By Antonino Di Franca

“In antiquity, the Sabbath was one of the main Jewish identity markers together with Abrahamic descent, circumcision, feasts, dietary laws and purity rules. Because Jews, on the Sabbath, acted differently from all their neighbours in the cities of the Roman Empire, Gentiles also perceived the seventh day as a social boundary marker of Judaism. In the first century CE [Common Era], all the groups that were related to Judaism kept the Sabbath; but their attitudes varied concerning how to keep it. Disagreements arose because the Torah gives only a few details about Sabbath observance. Hence the large number of halachic discussions on the Sabbath, in which a more rigid attitude to the prohibition of work on the Sabbath coexisted with more flexible positions that admitted exceptions to the rule. Jesus’ believers were also involved in this debate, evidence of which can be found in the gospels and in other New Testament writings.” –Pierluigi Lanfranchi, “Attitudes to the Sabbath in Three Apostolic Fathers, Didache, Ignatius and Barnabas,” in *Jesus, Paul and Early Christianity*, p. 244.

Previous chapters have shown that the understanding and keeping of the Sabbath were not always consistent in Israel as a nation; there were mostly times of laxity and apostasy followed by periods of rigid enforcement. Often even the powerful voices of the prophets could not convince the leaders and people to examine or change their course of apostasy. At other times, legalism and rigidity dominated the society, as occurred when the religious rulers’ views continually conflicted with the teachings of Jesus, God’s Son. Sabbath controversies appeared frequently in the records of the gospels, such as when the Pharisees charged Jesus with violating the Sabbath commandment when He healed people on the holy day.

Because Jesus resisted the Pharisees’ objections to His ministry, some people today believe that He opposed the Sabbath in showing His authority as the Messiah over it. How are such things to be explained? Did Jesus oppose the Sabbath, or the manner in which the Jews desired to enforce it? Did Jesus not respect the

law, or did the Jews create their own laws and condemn Jesus’ acts of mercy as violations of their traditions? At present, the confusion is such as to attribute to Jesus the opposite of His intentions without considering that the problem did not lie in the miracles that He performed. This chapter will examine such conflicts and their root causes.

SABBATH VIOLATION IN THE WILDERNESS

The first period about which we have information relating to the Sabbath is that of the wilderness wandering, especially when God first gave the Israelites manna for food. The people were fully informed that on the sixth day they needed to gather a double portion, Exodus 16:5, because on the seventh day none would be supplied, 16:25. Nevertheless, “On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.” 16:27. Therefore, “the Lord said to Moses, How long will you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore, on the sixth day He gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” 16:28, 29.

That was at the beginning. Another case was when an individual did not respect God’s commandment to do no work on His holy day. “While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.” Numbers 15:32. If manna, their daily bread, was not to be collected on that day, how could this man think that he should go out and collect firewood?

Additional reports from the same period related that the Israelites “greatly profaned” the Sabbath during their travels. Reporting about that, the prophet Ezekiel wrote: “Moreover, I gave them My Sabbaths, as a sign between Me and them that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. But the house of Isra-

el rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not walk in My statutes but rejected My rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned.” Ezekiel 20:12, 13.

Such profanation of the sacred day was not an isolated event, for the verse used the plural form of the words—“they profaned My Sabbaths,” “they rejected My rules and did not walk in My statutes, and profaned My Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols.” “But the children rebelled against Me. They did not walk in My statutes and were not careful to obey My rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; they profaned My Sabbaths.” “... Because they had not obeyed My rules, but had rejected My statutes and profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were set on their fathers’ idols.” Ezekiel 20:16, 21, 24. That continued to be so, despite the fact that week after week on the sixth day the Lord gave a double portion of manna to be eaten that day and on the Sabbath so that they could rest on the seventh day.

LAXITY IN SABBATH OBSERVANCE

After the wilderness wandering, in the time of the judges, despite information about repeated apostasies and, no doubt, violations of the holy day (Judges 2:6-21), there is virtually no specific information in Scripture about the Sabbath and how it was kept. The time of the kings is where the next scriptural record of this appears, under the ministry of the prophets Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and then in the time of Nehemiah.

The prophet Amos wrote about the dominant materialistic attitude in Israelite society in the seventh century (about B.C. 760). “When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances.” Amos 8:5. This is evidence that some Israelites were usurious and even looked forward to the close of the Sabbath so that they could conduct their worldly business.

In the time of the prophet Hosea (B.C. 753-729), the spiritual decline was so steep and the people were so unfaithful that they committed sin while celebrating the feasts. It was so perverse that the Lord said through him, “And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.” Hosea 2:11.

In the days of Isaiah (B.C. 739-701), it was the same. The Lord lamented the apostasy at the time of the feasts. The conditions were so bad that He told them, “Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing them.” Isaiah 1:13.

Therefore, He appealed to them, “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 58:13, 14. Even the vision of the “new heavens and the new earth” 66:22, showed the Sabbath as the day of worship in eternity: “From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, declares the Lord.” 66:23. All of this was sufficient reason for them to return to the right path and to sanctify the day of rest so that it could be a genuine blessing to them.

In the time of the prophet Jeremiah (ca. B.C. 626-586), conditions got even worse; and the Lord declared that the consequences were coming: “Thus says the Lord: Take care for the sake of your lives, and do not bear a burden on the Sabbath day or bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem. And do not carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath or do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers. Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction. But if you listen to Me, declares the Lord, and bring in no burden by the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but keep the Sabbath day holy and do no work on it, then there shall enter by the gates of this city kings and



princes who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their officials, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And this city shall be inhabited forever. And people shall come from the cities of Judah and the places around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the Shephelah, from the hill country, and from the Negeb, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and bringing thank offerings to the house of the Lord. But if you do not listen to Me, to keep the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter by the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.” Jeremiah 17:21-27.

The prophet Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah. Writing a few years before the king of Babylon launched his first attack against Jerusalem, the prophet warned, “Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths.” “Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.” “Moreover, this they have done to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary on the same day and profaned My Sabbaths.” Ezekiel 22:8, 26; 23:38.

Ezekiel admonished the people about these violations of God’s law and warned of the imminent danger, but he also presented God’s loving perspective if they would respond with a genuine revival. The divine plans included restoration as well as sanctification of the Sabbath as the day of worship. “In a dispute, they shall act as judges, and they shall judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts, and they shall keep My Sabbaths holy.” Ezekiel 44:24. Not only ordinary citizens but also the leaders and the prince of the people were included in this. “The prince shall enter by the vestibule of the gate from outside, and shall take his stand by the post of the gate. The priests shall offer his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate. Then he shall go out, but the gate shall not be shut until evening. The people of the land shall bow down at the entrance of that gate before the Lord on the Sabbaths and on the new moons.” Ezekiel 46:2,



3. On the Sabbath, the prince would come and worship; and as the people’s representative He would set an example, presenting offerings for them. 45:17; 46:4, 5.

Nevertheless, the warnings of the prophets were ignored, and the people continued to desecrate the Sabbath. Then the judgments of God inevitably fell; Israel was invaded, and great numbers of people were taken captive. The book of Lamentations, written around the year B.C. 586, described the resulting condition of that painful experience by referring to Jerusalem as a “widow.” “How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become.” 1:1. “He has laid waste His booth like a garden, laid in ruins His meeting place; the Lord has made Zion forget festival and Sabbath, and in His fierce indignation has spurned king and priest.” Lamentations 2:6. “Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her Sabbaths.” Lamentations 1:7, King James Version. Their disobedience had affected the Sabbaths; now instead of being weekly feasts, joy, and delight, they were sadness and mourning.

After such a terrible experience, one would imagine that Israel must have learned its lesson, but not necessarily. In the fifth century B.C., after the return of the Babylonian exiles, the problem of Sabbath profanation arose again. “In those days,” is the record in the book of Nehemiah, “I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself!” Nehemiah 13:15, 16. Alarmed, Nehemiah warned the sellers and confronted the nobles of Judah about this transgression. He took immediate measures to correct

the abuses and to bring about a genuine reformation. 13:17-22.

For many people at that time, Israel's captivity in Babylon was a time of reflection, going back to the time when the believers met in the synagogue every Sabbath to worship and study the law and the prophets. According to some, that is where the process of codifying the Jewish traditions began, including the rabbinical Sabbath tradition, which the rabbis intended for the purpose of preserving and transmitting knowledge.

A Waldensian author wrote about this process in the following paragraph.

"During and after the exile the Sabbath increasingly became one of the key features of the piety of Middle Judaism. In Ezekiel 20:12, ff, and throughout this prophetic book, along with other customs, the Sabbath acquired the character of a confession of faith for the exiles and those who had remained in the country." —J. Alberto Soggin, *Israel in the Biblical Period: Institutions, Festivals, Ceremonies, Rituals*, p. 141.

THE SABBATH IN THE TIME OF THE MACCABEES

After Alexander the Great's death and the division of the kingdom in B.C.E. 198, the rulership of Palestine fell under the attacks of the kings of Syria, which turned out to be particularly intolerant and cruel. Antiochus IV Epiphanes (B.C. 175-164) conceived the plan to unify his kingdom under one regime and one religion. Among his prohibitions was that of Sabbath observance, which many Israelites already profaned. The books of the Maccabees, which even the Jews today regard as apocryphal, gave a picture of the profanation and destruction that he perpetrated against Israel and the Biblical institutions. "Her sanctuary became desolate like a desert; her feasts were turned into mourning, her Sabbaths into a reproach, her honour into contempt." 1 Maccabees 1:39.



"Then the king wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the Sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land, to forbid burnt offerings and sacrifices and drink offerings in the sanctuary, to profane Sabbaths and festivals, to defile the sanctuary and the priests, to build altars and sacred precincts and shrines for idols, to sacrifice swine and other unclean animals, and to leave their sons uncircumcised. They were to make themselves abominable by everything unclean and profane, so that they would forget the law and change all the ordinances. He added, 'And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die.'" 1 Maccabees 1:41-50; New Revised Standard Version, 1:43-52.

"People could neither keep the Sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews." 2 Maccabees 6:6, New Revised Standard Version.

The persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes was a very harsh trial that shined a spotlight on those who truly loved the truth and were ready to defend it with their lives, as opposed to those who had only a nominal faith that could not endure the violence of persecution. Many succumbed to the king's order and intrusive apostasy, but a remnant of a thousand souls resisted and remained faithful to the observance of the sacred day until they paid for their fidelity with their lives.

"At that time many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to live there, they, their sons, their wives, and their livestock, because troubles pressed heavily upon them. And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem, the city of David, that those who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the Sabbath day. They said to them, 'Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live.' But they said, 'We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the Sabbath day.' Then the enemy quickly attacked them. But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, for they said, 'Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth

testify for us that you are killing us unjustly.’ So, they attacked them on the Sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and livestock, to the number of a thousand persons.” 1 Maccabees 2:29-38.

“Others who had assembled in the caves nearby, in order to observe the seventh day secretly, were betrayed to Philip and were all burned together, because their piety kept them from defending themselves, in view of their regard for that most holy day.” 2 Maccabees 6:11, New Revised Standard Version.

That persecution produced many martyrs, some because they refused to defile themselves with unclean flesh (2 Maccabees, chapters 6 and 7); others because they were not willing to offer sacrifices to idols; and still others because they refused to violate the holy Sabbath day. They did not attempt to compromise to maintain their personal freedom but esteemed faith and obedience as more precious than their own lives. Even in the raging storm of persecution, they testified that the Lord had a faithful remnant.

A RESOLUTION TO DEFEND THEMSELVES ON THE SABBATH

But not all of the Jews reached the same conclusions and acted in faith. To some, the loyal minority paid a very high price, and they vowed that this experience should never happen again. They determined to adopt a different attitude. In the future, they would defend themselves and fight, even on the Sabbath.

“When Mattathias and his friends learned of it, they mourned for them deeply. And all said to their neighbours: If we all do as our kindred have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth. So, they made this decision that day: Let us fight against anyone who comes to attack us on the Sabbath day; let us not all die as our kindred died in their hiding places.” 1 Maccabees 2:39-41.



What about this resolution? Was it according to the teaching and spirit of the divine commandment? Could the Maccabees be sure that by taking up arms and defending themselves on the Sabbath day they would not be defeated but would overcome their enemies? The enemies continued to attack them on the Sabbath, and the Jews violated the Sabbath by fighting back with arms; but they did not always win. The same book, continuing the story of Antiochus’ persecution, presented two cases, one in which the Jews were defeated and another in which they were victorious.

“Antiochus sent Apollonius, the captain of the Mysians, with an army of twenty-two thousand, and commanded him to kill all the grown men and to sell the women and boys as slaves. When this man arrived in Jerusalem, he pretended to be peaceably disposed and waited until the holy Sabbath day; then, finding the Jews not at work, he ordered his troops to parade under arms. He put to the sword all those who came out to see them, then rushed into the city with his armed warriors and killed great numbers of people.” 2 Maccabees 5:25, 26.

“When Nicanor heard that Judas and his troops were in the region of Samaria, he made plans to attack them with complete safety on the day of rest. When the Jews who were compelled to follow him said, Do not destroy so savagely and barbarously, but show respect for the day that He who sees all things has honoured and hallowed above other days, the thrice-accursed wretch asked if there were a sovereign in heaven who had commanded the keeping of the Sabbath day. When they declared, It is the living Lord Himself, the Sovereign in heaven, who ordered us to observe the seventh day, he replied, But I am a sovereign also, on earth, and I command you to take up arms and finish the king’s business. Nevertheless, he did not succeed in carrying out his abominable design.” 2 Maccabees 15:1-5.

However, the fact that in the second case the enemy failed in his intent was no proof of the validity of the Maccabees’ resolution to take up arms on the Sabbath. If this had been the case, they would have succeeded in the first case as well; but they did not. In practice, the Maccabees fought to defend compliance with the law but with a similar result; they disagreed with the law and decided just the contrary, as described by the following author.

“When Mattathias, a previous unknown, one priest among ten thousand, resolved to interpret traditional law, to impose his interpretation upon the people, he

raised himself, perhaps without intending to do so, to the position of an opposition government.... Those who had abandoned their homes in order not to depart from the law 'either to the right hand or to the left,' were united by that very measure which infringed the Torah for the Torah's sake." –Elias Bickerman, *The Maccabees*, p. 20, as quoted in Benjamin Edidin Scolnic, *Judaism Defined: Mattathias and the Destiny of His People*, p. 199.

It is important not to compromise with evil and not to sacrifice the sacred principles enshrined in the commandments for supposed temporal advantages.

Commenting on this dramatic history of the Jews in the time of the Maccabees, some authors wrote the following.

"Under the stress of the Syrian persecution, faithful compliance with the strictest interpretation of the Sabbath commandment came to be regarded as a sign of loyalty to God, especially since previously the Sabbath had been habitually desecrated. 1 Maccabees 1:30. Many of the refugees in the mountains, thousands in number, preferred to die rather than violate the Sabbath by hurling stones upon their assailants. 1 Maccabees 2:29, et seq. This made it necessary for Mattathias to issue an imperative order that the Jews, if attacked, should defend themselves. 1 Maccabees 2:41. Nevertheless, 2 Maccabees 15:1, et seq., relates that Nicanor planned the destruction of the Jews by attacking them on the Sabbath day, when he had reason to believe they would not attempt to resist. Though the Jews implored him to honour the 'day which had been dignified with holiness by the Heavenly Ruler,' he persisted, declaring that he was ruler on earth. His expedition, however, failed. A previous raid against Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, under Apollonius, had proved successful. 2 Maccabees 5:25, 26." –Emil G. Hirsch, Joseph Jacobs, Executive Committee of the Editorial Board, Julius H. Greenstone, article "Sabbath" in *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 1901.

Did all of the Jews accept the decision to defend themselves on the Sabbath, as decreed by the Hasmonean Mattathias? An article dealing with this matter said that "This sentiment was not accepted by many Jewish sects, but was certainly endorsed by rabbinic and Pharisaic texts...."

Other texts further assert that the rabbis, led by the famous sage Shammai, declared that Jews could even initiate warfare on Shabbat for the sake of protecting or conquering the land of Israel.

This attitude should not be taken for granted. As can be seen from antiquity, a fundamentalist outlook might assert that Shabbat should be kept at all costs. The Hasmoneans and ancient rabbis taught, however, that sometimes the Sabbath must be desecrated, alas, so that the Jewish people could observe many more Sabbaths in the future. "We should live for Shabbat, but not die for it." –Shlomo Brody, *The Maccabees and Fighting Wars on Shabbat*, December 29, 2016.

In any case, whatever the various Jews' interpretations of this controversial resolution were, analogous incidents of Sabbath attack "occurred in the 4th century B.C.E. with the conquest of Jerusalem by Ptolemy Lagos and would occur later with Pompey's conquest of the Temple Mount in 63 B.C.E." –Shlomo Brody, *The Maccabees and Fighting Wars on Shabbat*, December 29, 2016.

In B.C. 63 and in the subsequent sieges of Jerusalem and other towns, the resolution of the Maccabees to take up arms on the Sabbath to defend themselves was of no help to the Jewish nation. History shows that, in other cases in which the Jews were attacked with arms on the Sabbath, despite their desperate efforts in self-defence, they were defeated. This is evidence that such actions were only human.

While on one hand the Jews took up weapons of self-defence in war and violated the Sabbath, on the other the rabbinical doctrines regarding its observance were changed constantly. In the period that reached to the time of Jesus, the situation changed many times. Sabbath keeping became a central pillar of the Jewish faith around which many norms and traditions developed. With time, they became like a law, and the leaders considered them mandatory, just like a Biblical commandment. It was logical that, sooner or later, they would become the basis for conflicts between the Pharisees and Jesus.

CONFLICTS IN SABBATH OBSERVANCE

All of the gospels do not need to be searched to find conflicts over Sabbath observance, between the teachings and practices of Jesus and those of the Pharisees, for there were very significant differences. The problem was not whether the Sabbath was to be observed or not, but rather what was allowed and what was not allowed on the Sabbath day. The main question was, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" Having noticed that Jesus' actions did not harmonize with the teach-

ings of the Pharisees, the latter questioned Him “so that they might accuse Him.” Matthew 12:10.

The differences were so great that it did not take long before the Pharisees accused Jesus, saying, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” He is “breaking the Sabbath.” John 9:16; 5:18. In another case, because He healed a man with a withered hand “... they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.” Luke 6:11. In their view, the teachings and behaviour of Jesus were so wrong that they “conspired against Him, how to destroy Him.” Matthew 12:14; Mark 3:6. This gives strong evidence that the Jews of Jesus’ time were very rigid in their practices and jealous of their traditions, which by then they regarded as an inviolable law.

“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” Deuteronomy 5:15. Since the Lord also gave the Sabbath in memory of His deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery, that meant that liberation was compatible with the Sabbath. Deliverance from slavery presented a perfect image of God’s freeing man from another type of slavery—works.

NEITHER YOU, NOR OTHERS FOR YOU

The Lord presented the wide range of the commandment in the middle part of Exodus 20:10, by explaining who was to keep the Sabbath holy in one’s household: “On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.” The same list is in Deuteronomy 5:10.

If work and activity are not properly managed, they become stressful and enslaving. The Egyptians demanded so much from the Israelites that they became slaves. Constant work from one week to another and one month to another without taking a break is overwhelming. Without the weekly rest given by the Lord, the business cycle is a closed circle, a machine that tightens around and weakens man until he is reduced to a literal slave. The Lord stepped in and delivered His people from slavery; and now, through the weekly day of rest, His earnest desire is to deliver man from the

slavery of work. Deuteronomy 5:15. Banning secular activities on the sacred, blessed day, the Lord promotes man’s physical, moral, and spiritual health. And that includes not only people such as leaders and fathers of families, but also those who depend on them. Son, daughter, male servant, and female servant, as well as animals and foreigners who visit in the country, are entitled to the same rights and privileges granted by the holy day.

In this context, it is interesting to note the different people who are blessed by the divine rest—parents and children, men and women, free people and servants, natives and foreigners, and even livestock. Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14. Foreigners were not Jews, and cattle were considered less than Jews or Gentiles; but they were all included among those who were to rest on the Sabbath. That means that everyone has the right and privilege to rest on the Sabbath day, because the Lord wants to be able to bless everyone.

A number of writers have commented on the blessings provided to all on the Sabbath.

“In giving the commandment of the holy rest, God asks man to cooperate by obeying it himself and also by blessing his employees with the day off; with infinite goodness, He gives the reason for His precepts. His law is not an oppressive yoke; it is a part of His love and respect for man. There is no greater ingratitude and folly than that which rejects God’s law.” –Dain Cohenel, *La Sacra Scrittura. Psicologia-Commento-Meditazione. Esodo-Levitico*, p. 159.

“Acts of necessity and mercy are permitted on the Sabbath, the sick and suffering are at all times to be cared for; but unnecessary labor is to be strictly avoided. ‘Turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and ... honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own



pleasure.’ Isaiah 58:13. Nor does the prohibition end here. ‘Nor speaking thine own words,’ says the prophet. Those who discuss business matters or lay plans on the Sabbath are regarded by God as though engaged in the actual transaction of business. To keep the Sabbath holy, we should not even allow our minds to dwell upon things of a worldly character. And the commandment includes all within our gates. The inmates of the house are to lay aside their worldly business during the sacred hours. All should unite to honor God by willing service upon His holy day.” –Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 307, 308.

“The fourth [commandment] is specially binding on man, being founded on the six days’ work and the seventh day rest in that creation of which He formed the crowning part. It is therefore to him of perpetual significance and obligation. Referring to a day of rest for appearing before God, it inculcates religion and prohibits secularity.” –James G. Murphy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, p. 142.

“No other part of the Bible has the breadth, depth, and height of ideas, themes, and motifs pertaining to the Sabbath as does the Pentateuch. It remains the major source for information on the origin, institution, purpose, and meaning of the seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath is grounded in Creation and linked with redemption. It is an agent of rest from work and confronts man’s religious and social relationship. It is a perpetual sign and everlasting covenant. It relates to the meaning of time. Its nature is universal, and it serves all mankind. It is concerned with worship as well as with joy and satisfaction. The themes of Creation, Sabbath, redemption, and sanctification are inseparably linked together, and with the Sabbath’s covenant aspect they reach into the eschatological future.” –Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Sabbath in the Pentateuch,” in Kenneth A. Strand, ed., *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, p. 21.

“How often is the term ‘rest’ used in the Bible? Just under 100! Intrigued by the insistence with which the Word of God returns to this word, I went to see, ... and I made interesting discoveries. First of all, the first to rest is God. One can speak of man’s rest, because one speaks of God’s rest. God rested on the seventh day, says the beginning of the Bible. Hence the law of rest for man: ‘You shall not do any work, ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.’ Exodus 20:10, 11. Man is in the image of God, therefore he is called to live with the same rhythm as his Creator.” –Cardinal

Angelo Scola, *E il settimo giorno si riposò*, riflessioni su “La vita buona.”

Will our rest be genuine if we do not work but ask others to do so for us and then pocket the gain? Will it be a true rest if we ignore God, our relationship with Him, and His teaching? The Lord consistently gives life, food, protection, freedom, and time one week after another, to the point where every week there are six days for man and for his needs. During these days, God lavishes upon people His goods and His forgiveness; and to all of this He adds the gift of the weekly Sabbath for their physical and spiritual upbuilding. How can it be considered too much to dedicate that one holy day to celebration and gratitude for His blessings and sanctification?

ENCODING RABBINICAL TEACHINGS

Over the course of almost six centuries, beginning with the first C.E. or even earlier, a multitude of rabbis collected and systematically assembled the traditions and regulations that they created for various subjects. This collection constituted the Talmud, which, along with the Bible, formed the basic text of Judaism. All of the moral and juridical Jewish traditions were based on it. First is the Mishnah (numbering about 200), which is a record of the moral law, and the Gemara (about 500), comprising rabbinical analyses and commentaries on the Mishnah. In total, the Talmud included 63 treatises of more than 6,200 printed pages. It existed in two versions—the Babylonian Talmud, which is the most extensive and important, and the Palestinian Talmud. The Hebrew word Talmud means “study,” and it preserved the old rabbinical teachings for the purpose of explaining the Torah and giving the people detailed instructions. Three of the treatises that made up the Talmud were the Shabbat, “Sabbath,” which had 24 chapters; the *Eruvīn*, a “commixture” of 10 chapters, many of which were dedicated to the Sabbath; and the *Moed Katan*, “little feast,” with 3 chapters. All together in the Palestinian Talmud, the section containing the Sabbath laws had 64 1/2 columns; while in the Babylonian Talmud the section about the Sabbath extended to 156 double folio pages.

Concerning these writings, an evangelical author made the following comments.

“A large body of teaching regarding the interpretation of the Sabbath thus began to emerge before and after the coming of Christ. These interpretations were first preserved and passed on as oral traditions and then

later put into writing. In the third century A.D., a written compilation of the oral traditions of the scribes was completed, which was known as the Mishnah. It contained 63 tractates on various subjects of the Law, requiring about 800 pages in English. Later Judaism set itself to the task of interpreting these interpretations. These commentaries on the Mishnah are called Talmuds. 'Of the Jerusalem Talmud there are 12 printed volumes, and of the Babylonian Talmud there are 60 printed volumes.'" –Bob Deffinbaugh, *The Sabbath Controversy in the Gospels*.

CODIFYING THE INHERITED TRADITION

While some authors wrote that the codification of Jewish traditions began during the intertestamental period, an American writer proposed a later period—after the two Roman destructions of Judaea—and delineated the beginning of this rabbinical work.

"For the first fifteen hundred years, this oral law had been carried only in the head of scholars; but after the two Roman destructions of Judaea—first by Vespasian and later by Hadrian, who erased even the name Jerusalem and changed Judaea to Palestine—a group of scholars had met in a small Galilean village not far from Makor to codify this inherited law. Thus they constructed what became known as the Mishnah, which men like Rabbi Asher were required to know by heart. For example, in extension of the crisp Torah injunction not to work on Sabbath, the Mishnah identified forty-less-one principal kinds of labour which were forbidden: 'Sowing, reaping..., baking..., spinning..., tying or untying knots..., sewing two stitches..., hunting a gazelle..., writing two letters..., lighting a fire..., carrying anything from one domain to another....'" –James A. Michener, *The Source: A Novel*, p. 524.

FROM ONE DIVINE COMMANDMENT TO 1,521 DERIVATIVE PRECEPTS

A renowned scholar mentions how it happened that from a single Biblical commandment for the Sabbath, the elaboration could reach the considerable discipline of "an extensive branch of knowledge."

"One of the most important points, both with respect to its extent and the value attributed to it, was that of Sabbath sanctification. The brief prohibition of work on the Sabbath which is found in the Pentateuch, and which hardly at all enters into detail (Exodus 16:23-

30; 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:1-3; Leviticus 23:3; Numbers 15:32-36; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; compare Jeremiah 17:21-24; Amos 7:5; Nehemiah 10:32; 13:15), was in the course of time developed in so many-sided a manner as to form of itself an extensive branch of knowledge. For of course the Rabbis could not rest satisfied with this simple prohibition. They must also accurately define what work was forbidden. And consequently, they at last, with much ingenuity, got out of it, that on the whole thirtynine kinds of work were prohibited, but very few are of course anywhere alluded to in the Pentateuch." –Emil Schürer, *History of the Jews People in the Time of Christ*, section 28, Life under the Law.

Trying to define the Biblical term "work" of Exodus 20:9 (in Hebrew, melakhà), the Talmudic rabbis enumerated categories of labour that went into the construction of the tabernacle and devoted a chapter to the various categories or general rules of forbidden work. They totalled 39 and appeared in the following list.

"The principal acts of labour (prohibited on the Sabbath) are forty less one—viz.: Sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding into sheaves, threshing, winnowing, fruit-cleaning, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, wool-shearing, bleaching, combing, dyeing, spinning, warping, making two spindletrees, weaving two threads, separating two threads (in the warp), tying a knot, untying a knot, sewing on with two stitches, tearing in order to sew together with two stitches, hunting deer, slaughtering the same, skinning them, salting them, preparing the hide, scraping the hair off, cutting it, writing two (single) letters (characters), erasing in order to write two letters, building, demolishing (in order to rebuild), kindling, extinguishing (fire), hammering, transferring from one place to another. These are the principal acts of labour—forty less one." –*Babylonian Talmud*, Tractate Shabbat, chapter 7 (Mishnah II).



The Jewish authors explained that these 39 categories are “archetypal labour,” or “general labour,” and that along with these are other work subcategories, the so-called rabbinic “fences,” intended to prevent causing the prior labour and all together dealing with prohibited labour. The rabbis describe these categories of labour.

“The Mishnah (*Shab.* vii. 2) enumerates thirtynine principal classes of prohibited actions, these *abot* (lit. ‘fathers’ or ‘chief categories’) comprehending, when developed casuistically, a large variety of *toledot* (lit. ‘offspring’ or ‘derivatives’). The number mentioned has been recognized as conventional even by Talmudists, the list as given containing virtual duplications, while certain kinds of work are clearly omitted (*Shab.* 74a). The explanation is that whatever was done in the erection of the Tabernacle in the desert was classified as ‘principal,’ even if this rendered certain duplications necessary.” –Emil G. Hirsch, Joseph Jacobs, H. Greenstone, “Sabbath,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

“The Talmud enumerates 39 general categories of labours that went into the construction of the Tabernacle. These are the archetypal labours that must be refrained from on the Sabbath. All manifestations of these 39 general labours make up the parameters for what is acceptable and unacceptable for the Sabbath today. Along with these general labours are rabbinic ‘fences’ to prevent indirectly causing these labours, moving objects that are linked to them, and not invoking the assistance of a non-Jew to perform them. These safeguards were enacted to preserve the sanctity of the day. Each of the 39 categories has sub-categories of labours that produce the same results and are, therefore, forbidden as well.” –Pinchas Taylor, *The Nature of Sabbath Rest*.

As already noted, the 39 general or chief categories of prohibited activities in turn expanded so widely that they each included another 39 subcategory groups so that all together (39 x 39 = 1,521) they numbered 1,521 norms or commandments for Sabbath obser-

vance! Originally, the 39 subcategories were intended to give specific explanation and guidance about what the Sabbath commandment considered forbidden work. The rabbis intended for these to protect or put a “fence around the law” (*sejag la-Torà*). In reality, the chief categories and subcategories went far beyond the original intent. So much authority has been claimed for them that they actually opposed and even overlaid the Biblical commandment itself.

Derivative prohibitions of rabbinical origin were also defined in *gezeroth* (rabbinical impositions) and, as noted, were considered binding.

“These *gezeroth*,” wrote a rabbinical authority, “are thus as binding upon every Jew as the Torah itself. Moreover, since in every case the reason for the decree lies in the frailty and forgetfulness of human nature, they must remain binding for as long as human nature remains unchanged....”

“The Jew who decides to take a *gezerah* lightly has already decided in his heart to treat lightly the Torah itself.” –Dayan Isidor Grunfeld, *The Sabbath: A Guide to Its Understanding and Observance*, pp. 43, 44.

How did these regulations relate to the Bible? To what degree were they actually Biblical? The relationship of the derivative prohibitions, or rabbinical “fences,” were sometimes so limited in Biblical content that even their Jewish authors compared them to “mountains suspended by a hair...”

“These thirty-nine principals expanded into 1,521 (39 x 39) derivatives (*Yer. Shab.* vii. 2); though even before R. Johanan b. Nappaha and R. Simeon ben Lakish, after three and a half years’ study of the Sabbath laws, had made this discovery, a Mishnah in *Hagigah* (i. 8) had characterized these amplifications as ‘mountains suspended by a hair.’” –Emil G. Hirsch, Joseph Jacobs, J.H. Greenstone, article “Sabbath,” in the *Jewish Encyclopedia*.



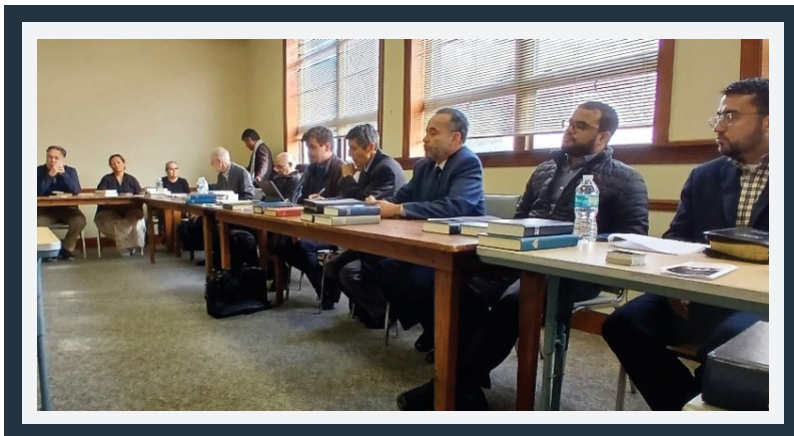


AMERICA

UNITED STATES



From December 31, 2025, to January 4, 2026, an important spiritual gathering was held at the facilities of Norman College in Norman Park, Georgia. During these days, delegates, leaders, and members came together to participate in a program focused on spiritual growth, biblical reflection, and Christian fellowship.



The event included morning and evening worship services, thematic workshops, and study sessions primarily based on the Gospel of John, highlighting the central message of Christ as “the Way.” Participants had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of teachings related to faith, conversion, truth, and practical Christian living.



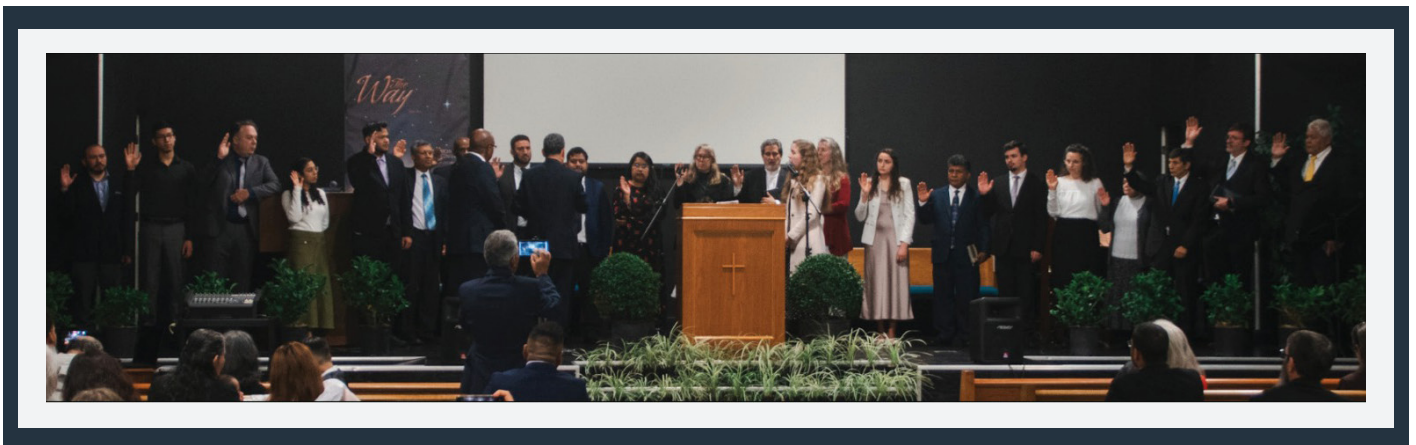
WORLD IN BRIEF

NEWS



Among the most significant moments of the gathering was the ministerial ordination (anointing) of a new pastor, in a solemn ceremony that reaffirmed the commitment to preaching the gospel and serving the church. Likewise, a graduation ceremony for students was held, along with the election of new leaders for the 2026–2028 term.

This gathering resulted in a renewed call to live a deeper experience with Christ, reaffirming the commitment to follow the way of truth and life according to biblical teachings. —AUNL February 2026





WORLD IN BRIEF

NEWS

COSTA RICA



The Costa Rican Field successfully held a Youth Retreat entitled “The Power of Words,” a special event dedicated to strengthening the spiritual life of young people and promoting Christian values in an atmosphere of fellowship and learning.



During the event, young people from different localities participated in various spiritual activities, including inspiring messages, moments of reflection, praise, and opportunities for fellowship. The program featured invited speakers who shared messages centered on the importance of the proper use of words, both in personal life and in Christian witness.





The Sabbath

Wachman

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