The Sabbath Watchman

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The Sabbath in Judaism Part 2

WORLD IN BRIEF

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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 in Judaism
Part 2

By Antonino Di Franca

HOW THE RABBIS CONSIDERED REAPING

One of the 39 chief categories of forbidden activities was "reaping." Such work included picking flowers, grass, leaves, twigs, berries, and fruit from trees or shrubs, even if such were planted in a pot. No doubt that is why on one Sabbath, when the disciples were hungry and plucked a few heads of grain and rubbed them with their hands, the Pharisees objected and accused them of Sabbath breaking. Luke 6:1, 2. The fol-lowing paragraph explained this.

"Each of these chief enactments again requires further discussions concerning their range and meaning. And here, properly speaking, begins the work of casuistry. We will bring forward just a few of its results. According to Exodus 34, ploughing and reaping were among the forbidden works. But to gather a few ears of corn was already looked upon as reaping. When on one occa-sion the disciples did this on the Sabbath, they were found fault with by the Pharisees, not on ac-count of plucking the ears, which (according to Deuteronomy 23:26) was permitted, but because they were thus guilty of doing reaping work on the Sabbath. Matthew 12:1, 2; Mark 2:23, 24; Luke 6:1, 2." –Emil Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ*, pp. 97-99, section 28, Life Under the Law.

As faithful Israelites, the disciples knew that "harvesting" was not permitted on the Sabbath (Exodus 34:21), and they did not do that; they simply picked a few heads of grain to satisfy their hunger (Matthew 12:1), because this was not the same as reaping or threshing the harvest and was not forbidden in the law. In disapproving what the law does not condemn, the Pharisees went beyond the Scriptures. In addition, they were incorrect in not distinguishing between God's law and human proscriptions; they exaggerated the importance of their own traditions and blamed the innocent for not following them. Matthew 12:7. Practically speaking, instead of being just, they exalted their own understanding and judgment and used the commandment in a very wrong, negative way, which blessed no one.

TYING AND UNTYING A KNOT

The rabbinical writings forbade tying or untying a knot in a rope, but it was permitted if it was done with one hand. Those writings also forbade tightening a knot to lower a bucket into a well but allowed it if the knot was a bandage. The prohibition against tying and untying a knot (Nos. 21, 22) was much too general to be accepted. It was necessary to state what kind of knot something applied to, and to what kind it did not.

"The following are the knots, the making of which renders a man guilty: The knot of camel drivers and that of sailors; and as one is guilty by reason of tying, so also of untying them. R. Meir says: 'Guilt is not incurred by reason of a knot which can be untied with one hand. There are knots by reason of which one is not guilty, as in the case of the camel-driver's and sailor's knots. A woman may tie up a slit in her shift and the strings of her cap, those of her girdle, the straps of the shoes and sandals, of skins of wine and oil, of a pot with meat.' And to tie strings of the girdle being permitted, it was agreed that a pail also might be tied over the well with a girdle, but not with a rope." –Emil Schürer, *History of the Jews People in the Time of Christ*, pp. 97-99, section 28, Life Under the Law.

What kind of work was permitted? To tie a knot on the Sabbath was considered work, but a knot had to be defined!

"'The following are the knots the making of which renders a man guilty of breaking Shabbat–the knot of camel drivers and that of sailors, and as one is guilty by reason of tying them, so also of untying them.' On the other hand, knots that could be tied or untied with one hand were quite legal. Further, 'a woman may tie up a slit in her shift and the strings of her cap and those of her girdle, the straps of shoes or sandals, of skins of wine and oil.' Now see what a tangled mess it caused. Suppose a man wished to let down a bucket into a well to draw water on the Sabbath day. He could not tie a rope to it, for a knot on a rope was illegal on Shabbat; but he could tie it to a woman's girdle and let it down, for a knot in a girdle was quite legal. That kind of thing to the scribes and Pharisees was a matter of life and death–that was religion. And as far as they were concerned, they were pleasing God in doing so." –Jay Mack, *The Power of Christ over the Sabbath*, 2006-2018.

NOT WRITING MORE THAN TWO LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET

It was also forbidden to switch off a lamp, sew two stitches with a needle and thread, or write two letters of the alphabet. The prohibition against writing on the Sabbath (No. 32) was defined in greater detail.

"He who writes two letters with his right or his left hand, whether of one kind or of two kinds, as also if they are written with different ink or are of different languages, is guilty. He even who should from forgetfulness write two letters is guilty, whether he has written them with ink or with paint, red chalk, India rubber, or anything which makes permanent marks. Also, he who writes on two walls which form an angle, or on the two tablets of his account book, so that they can be read together, is guilty. He who writes upon his body is guilty. If anyone writes with dark fluid, with fruit juice, or in the dust on the road, in sand, or in anything in which the writing does not remain, he is free. If anyone writes with the wrong hand, with the foot, with the mouth, with the elbow; al-so, if anyone writes upon a letter of another piece of writing, or covers other writing; also if anyone meaning to write ח has only written two ז ז, or if anyone has written one letter on the ground and one upon the wall, or upon two walls of the house, or upon two pages of a book, so that they cannot be read together, he is free. If in forgetfulness he writes two letters at different times, perhaps one in the morning and one towards evening, R. Gamaliel pronounces him guilty, the learned de-clare him free." –Emil Schürer, *History of the Jews People in the Time of Christ*, pp. 97-99, section 28, Life Under the Law.

OTHER SABBATH PROHIBITIONS

It was permitted to wear a coat, but one was not allowed to carry it on his arm. As explained below, carry-ing an object out of the house was forbidden, even if it was a dried fig or food for the Sabbath.

"It is forbidden to carry about chopped straw in quantities of a cow's mouthful, stalks in quantities of a camel's mouthful, stubble in quantities of a lamb's mouthful, herbs in quantities of a kid's mouthful, leek and onion leaves, if fresh, equal in size to a dried fig, and if dry in quantities of a kid's mouthful." *–Babylonian Talmud,* Tractate Shabbath, chapter VII, 3 Mishnah IV.

"'For the sake of your lives, take care that you do not bear a burden on the sabbath day.' So a burden had to be defined. It was defined as 'food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eyesalve,' and so on and on. It had then to be settled whether or not on the Sabbath a



woman could wear a brooch, a man could wear an artificial leg or dentures; or would it be carrying a burden to do so? Could a chair or even a child be lifted? And so on and on the discussions and the regulations went." –*Dennis Ellingburg, The Pharisee.*

OTHER SABBATH PROHIBITIONS

Other Sabbath observance aspects that the rabbis took pains to define included the following details.

"One does not sit down before the barber close to the time of the Shabbat prayer. A tailor should not take his needle on Shabbat eve just before nightfall; he may forget and go out with it. Nor the scribe take his pen. One should not begin to clean his clothes, and one does not read at the lamp-light because he may tilt it. The schoolmaster may supervise the reading of his children, but he himself must not read….

"One must not put bread in the oven on Shabbat eve before darkness, nor may the cakes be put on the coal unless there is time for the crust to form before Shabbat arrives. Rabbi Eliezer says: In time for the crust to form on the bottom….

"What may one use for lighting on the Shabbat, and what must one not use? One must not use cedar fiber, nor oakum, nor silk, nor a bast wick, nor a desert wick, nor seaweed, nor pitch, nor wax, nor castor oil, nor burnt oil, nor tail fat, nor tallow. Nahum the Mede says: One may use boiled tallow, but the Sages say: whether boiled or not, one may not light with it.

"The Sages, however, permit all oils: sesame oil, nut oil, radish oil, cucumber oil, tar and naphtha. But Rabbi Tarfon says: For lighting only olive oil may be used.

"In this way the Mishnah inspected each aspect of life and laid dawn the laws which bound Jews to their religion." –James A. Michener, *The Source: A Novel,* pp. 524, 525.

AN OBSESSION WITH PURIFICATION

Another issue was that of purification, which occupied a large part of the Pharisees' attention. Concerning this, the gospel reported: "For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, and when they



come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches." Mark 7:3, 4.

About these Jewish traditions and the Bible texts just mentioned, Ellen G. White wrote the following.

"In the days of Christ… Tradition had in a great degree supplanted the Scriptures….

"Their [the Jewish elders'] regard for tradition and formalism had destroyed all real freedom of thought or action. They lived in continual dread of defilement. To avoid contact with the 'unclean,' they kept aloof, not only from the Gentiles, but from the majority of their own people, seeking neither to benefit them nor to win their friendship. By dwelling constantly on these matters, they had dwarfed their minds and narrowed the orbit of their lives. Their example encouraged egotism and intolerance among all classes of the people….

"As before, the ground of complaint was His disregard of the traditional precepts that encumbered the law of God. These were professedly designed to guard the observance of the law, but they were regarded as more sacred than the law itself. When they came in collision with the commandments given from Sinai, preference was given to the rabbinical precepts….

"Among the observances most strenuously enforced was that of ceremonial purification. A neglect of the forms to be observed before eating was accounted a heinous sin, to be punished both in this world and in the next; and it was regarded as a virtue to destroy the transgressor.

"The rules in regard to purification were numberless. The period of a lifetime was scarcely suffi-cient for one to learn them all. The life of those who tried to observe the rabbinical requirements was one long struggle against ceremonial defilement, an endless round of

washings and purifica-tions. While the people were occupied with trifling distinctions, and observances which God had not required, their attention was turned away from the great principles of His law." –Ellen G White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 69, 150, 395, 396.

"Those Jewish teachers spoke in monotonous tones, and the plainest and most precious scriptures were made uninteresting and unintelligible, buried under such a mass of tradition and learned lore that after the rabbis had spoken, the people knew less of the meaning of the Scriptures than before they listened. There were many souls starving for the Bread of Life, and Jesus fed them with pure, simple truth." –Ellen G. White, *Christian Education,* p. 142.

Concerning the large number of traditions and restrictions that had made the Sabbath a yoke of bondage she wrote the following.

"The Jews had so perverted the law that they made it a yoke of bondage. Their meaningless re-quirements had become a byword among other nations. Especially was the Sabbath hedged in by all manner of senseless restrictions. It was not to them a delight, the holy of the Lord, and honoura-ble. The scribes and Pharisees had made its observance an intolerable burden. A Jew was not al-lowed to kindle a fire nor even to light a candle on the Sabbath. As a consequence, the people were dependent upon the Gentiles for many services which their rules forbade them to do for them-selves. They did not reflect that if these acts were sinful, those who employed others to perform them were as guilty as if they had done the work themselves. They thought that salvation was re-stricted to the Jews, and that the condition of all others, being already hopeless, could be made no worse. But God has given no commandments which cannot be obeyed by all. His laws sanction no unreasonable or selfish restrictions." –Ellen G White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 204.



EVERY GENERATION DEFINED ADDITIONAL WORK

What Ellen G. White wrote about the multitudinous restrictions imposed on the Sabbath was confirmed by the following author.

"In the Tanakh [the Old Testament] itself we are simply told that we must remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy, and on that day no work must be done, either by a man or his servants or his animals. Not content with that, the Jews spent hour after hour and generation after generation de-fining what work was and listing the things that could or could not be done on the Sabbath day." –Jay Mack, *The Power of Christ Over the Sabbath*, 2006-2018.

The creation of so many traditions and rules gave the impression that the Lord was not clear and exhaus-tive enough in the formulation of His law and that the rabbis had the duty to make it clear and thus to complete the work of the Lord! This directly contradicted what the Lord had said: "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you." "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it." Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; cf. Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18, 19.

Furthermore, by giving the rabbinical precepts credibility, the Jewish leaders placed them on the same level with or even higher than God's law. Thus, the rabbis gave the impression that they were the true and fi-nal legislators, in place of the Lord.

As a consequence of all these abuses, it was time for Jesus, the Word–the voice of God–to correct the pre-varications at various levels, especially regarding the Sabbath, to give its true meaning, and to show by word and example what constitutes its observance.

The Jews' exaggerations of the Sabbath laws had consequences for God, for the people, and for themselves. Because of their attitude in claiming to be God's people, the religious leaders projected an image of God that was the opposite of who He is, of condemnation

and punishment instead of love and benevolence. Matthew 5:45. Next, the people were unable to transmit that goodness, love, and mercy that the Lord expected: "And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless." Matthew 12:7; cf. 5:45. And then the Jewish leaders did not rightly present God's law, which is love, Matthew 22:36-40; that was totally missing. Because they were accus-tomed to making up all kinds of laws and traditions, they became like judges and accusers who believed that they had the right to impose their ideas of order, Matthew 23:4, to judge, and to condemn everyone else, John 7:49; 5:8-10; Romans 2:1-3, including Jesus, God's Son. John 9:13-16, 24, 25.

PROHIBITION AGAINST HEALING ON THE SABBATH

In the case of mild illness or localized pain, such as heartburn, a mild headache, a toothache, etc., rabbini-cal tradition did not allow a person to take medicine or receive medical care, even from a non-Jew. For a toothache, rabbinic rules allowed one to rinse his mouth with vinegar as long as the patient swallowed it; but one was not allowed to spit it out, because that would be like taking medicine. If someone's hand or foot was dislocated, he could soak it in cold water, but he was not permitted to shake it in the water. Only in case of imminent death, when it came to saving a man's life, did their law permit them to help a person on the Sabbath; otherwise, in case of chronic disease, treating or curing it was forbidden. The reasoning was based on a Talmudic concept.

"This question was asked…: From where is it derived that saving a life overrides Shabbat?... If … the homeowner is permitted to save himself at the cost of the thief's life, then a fortiori saving a life overrides Shabbat." *–Babylonian Talmud,* Tractate Joma 85a.



"Temple service overrides Shabbat, so too, a fortiori, saving a life overrides Shabbat. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya answered and said: Just as the mitzvah of circumcision, which rectifies only one of the 248 limbs of the body, overrides Shabbat, so too, a fortiori, saving one's whole body, which is en-tirely involved in mitzvot, overrides Shabbat." *–Babylonian Talmud,* Tractate Joma 85b.

In these regulations, there was no mention of any Biblical principle that prohibited the care of the sick on Sabbath. It is obvious why, for no such ideas exist in the Scriptures. The prohibition of the rabbis against caring for the sick on the Sabbath was completely arbitrary, devoid of any Biblical basis.

Because the rabbis had made laws out of their traditions, it became an untouchable commandment for them; they condemned everything–even the noblest work–that did not harmonize with the tradition. Thus, while Jesus healed and put an end to physical and spiritual pain and suffering, the religious authorities judged and condemned Him. Matthew 12:10; Luke 13:14; John 9:6. The commandment that the Lord had given for rejoicing and delight, Isaiah 58:13, 14, became the means of judging and condemning. To help them to understand the true meaning of the law, to know what the Lord's will was in giving the Sabbath commandment, Jesus asked them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" Mark 3:4. "But they were silent," and He was "grieved at their hardness of heart." Mark 3:4, 5, a hardness that not even miracles could soften. The fact that they could not answer Him showed that they had no arguments or texts to support their thesis.

The services in the temple and a major incident in the wilderness related to healing on the Sabbath day. In the latter case, poisonous snakes invaded the Israelite camp, and many people died of snakebites without a remedy. However, the Lord had a remedy. When the people repented of their sin and asked forgiveness, He provided the solution by having Moses make a brass serpent and put it on a pole. All who looked upon it were healed. What if someone was bitten on the Sabbath? Would the healing virtue from the Lord heal him?

Could helpers bring him to the brass serpent? Did the law permit such transport during the day of rest? Could people be healed? We find nothing in the Scriptures that they could not be. The record is that "if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live" Numbers 21:9, regardless of the day. God's healing power operated in the wilderness and also on the Sabbath in the time of Jesus. Why, then, did the Jews not consider His miraculous healings the same as in past time instead of condemning them and Him?

For centuries, up to the time of Jesus, the priests ministered in the temple every day, including on the Sab-bath. They performed the sacrificial services regularly for the people, presenting one sacrifice in the morn-ing and another in the evening. Exodus 29:38-42; Numbers 28:3-8. On the Sabbath day, two more lambs were offered along with the daily sacrifices, again one in the morning and the other in the evening, Numbers 28:9, 10, so every Sabbath at last four sacrifices were offered. But this was not all. According to a prophecy in the writings of Ezekiel, whenever Israel was led by a prince, it was his responsibility on every Sabbath to present an offering of six lambs and a ram as burnt offerings and a ram, Ezekiel 46:4, along with a grain offering and oil. Verse 5. Regardless of whether or not Israel ever had a prince leading the people and offering such sacrifices every Sabbath, one thing was certain: On the Sabbath, the priests worked twice as much on the Sabbath as they did on weekdays.

On the Sabbath, the temple services were not performed only in the event of a mortal risk to someone or to a group, but regularly, whether or not the situation was dangerous. Consider this. If the priests regularly carried out the ceremonial services in the temple every Sabbath, it was evident that good works and spir-itual blessings for the people were in full harmony with God's will. It was precisely this that Jesus did on the Sabbath day when He performed healing miracles for the suffering. Also, the priests worked for the whole day, while Jesus worked for only a few moments, since He healed a person with a single sentence or a simple gesture. Matthew 12:13; Mark 1:25; Luke 4:39; 13:12, 13; 14:4; John 5:8, 9; 9:6, 7. Because the priests were working on the Sabbath to help people, as was Jesus, He was doing similar work that was perfectly in harmony with the law. Therefore, on one occasion He challenged His accusers by asking: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" Mark 3:4, a question that is easy to answer, but not for the Jewish leaders. On another occasion, with no possibility for anyone to misunder-stand, He stated conclusively, "So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Matthew 12:12. In this way, it should be definitely clear that Jesus did not transgress the Sabbath, while the Pharisees were the ones who were wrong in prohibiting what the law permitted.

LIMITS TO TRAVEL ON THE SABBATH

The rabbinical restrictions also set limits on how far a person was allowed to travel on the Sabbath– around 900 meters. This is where the term "Sabbath day's journey," found in Acts 1:12, came from; it was a rab-binical rule, not a Biblical principle. It is interesting that, just as the rabbis arbitrarily created this rule, so they overruled it with arbitrary exceptions. The next quotation shows that there was no shortage of artifices, allowances, and exceptions to many rules.

"Take the case of making a journey on the Sabbath. Exodus 16:29 says: 'Each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.' A Sabbath day's journey was therefore lim-ited to 2,000 cubits, that is, 1,000 yards. But, if a rope was tied across the end of a street, the whole street became one house and a man could go 1,000 yards beyond the end of the street. Or, if a man deposited enough food for one meal on Friday evening at any given place, that place technically became his house and he could go 1,000 yards beyond it on the Sabbath day. The rules and regulations and the evasions piled up by the hundred and the thousand." –Dennis Ellingburg, *The Pharisee.*

EGGS, FRUIT, MILK AND THE SABBATH

Another question was whether it was lawful or not to eat an egg that a hen had laid on the Sabbath. Even this triviality caught the attention of those who made a regulation forbidding it. It was also not permitted to eat fruit that fell from a tree by itself on the Sabbath.

"Come and hear: An egg laid on the Sabbath or an egg laid on a Festival may not be moved, nei-ther for covering a vessel nor for supporting the legs of a bed therewith; but a vessel may be turned over it, that it [the egg] should not be broken. Here too it means that its place is required." –*Babylonian Talmud,* Tractate Shabbath 43a.

"It is this case of nolad that Massekhet Beitza opens with–beitza she-nolda be-Yom Tov–an egg that was laid on the holiday and did not exist when Yom Tov began. Is it considered ready for use on the holiday, or will it be considered muktze since it did not exist beforehand?

"Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel disagree on this point. Beit Shammai permits the use of the egg on Yom Tov, while Beit Hillel forbids it. The Gemara offers several different explanations." –Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, *Masechet Beitzah* 2a-6b.

"It is also forbidden to handle objects that came into their present form of existence on the Sabbath (nolad), as an egg laid, fruit that fell from a tree, or milk milked by a non-Jew, on that day ('Yad,' l.c. xxv., xxvi.; Oraḥ Ḥayyim, 308, 13)." –Emil G. Hirsch, Joseph Jacobs, Julius H. Greenstone, *Sabbath*, in Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906.

TRADITION'S NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Allegedly, the 39 categories of prohibited work were based on the written Torah; but in reality they were simply human traditions transformed into stifling legislation that was a "burden" Matthew 23:4, leading to unjustified accusations, condemnations, and feelings of continual guilt. While some regulations limited one's movement and the objects one was permitted to wear on the day of rest, others dealt with objects or matters one handled or touched. Thus, instead of the Sabbath day being a delight, it was turned into a real burden, a crushing weight of countless prohibitions.

The Lord did not instruct anyone to learn or practice the Jews' traditions on how to keep the Sabbath. On the contrary, Jesus called those restrictions "heavy burdens" that were "hard to bear." "They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger." "Woe to you lawyers also! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers." Matthew 23:4; Luke 11:46. However, it is not wrong to get information about them. Why? First, because it helps a person to understand that, when Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath, He had violated no Biblical commandment but only the Jews' many proscriptions. Second, because the Jews' ideas and practices remained a cause of contention between the Christians and Jews throughout the apostolic years and beyond, even up to the third and fourth centuries.

The next chapter will investigate how Jesus and the apostles dealt with the Jewish ideas. It is important to understand how complex the situation was in Jesus' time. Otherwise, there is a risk of misinterpreting His teachings and falling into the same mistakes that the Jews made and that current authors also make by in-sinuating that He violated the Sabbath, when in reality He was faithful and acted in full harmony with all of God's law. This is why some authors, perhaps unawares, have supported the Pharisees' ideas and as-serted that Jesus abolished the holy day.

Evaluating the effects of the Jewish traditions, a scholar made the following observation.

"For all their effort to fence the Sabbath the Pharisees had overstepped divine authority, which Jesus hereby restored!...

"To a large extent, the Sabbath regulations that the Jews observed in New Testament times had de-veloped during the second temple period. Although the halachic rules governing the people's activities on the Sabbath were well intentioned–to aid them in keeping the Sabbath command–they stifled the people's freedom and smothered the spirit of the Torah.... If we go back to



the Pentateuch for our information on Sabbath ideals, we discover a very different picture." –Daniel I. Block, The Triumph of Grace: *Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomic Themes*, pp. 203, 205.

RELEVANT QUOTATIONS

What did some authors write about the multitude of Jewish "laws" that so deeply affected the lives of the believers and were a severe obstacle to new converts at the time of the apostles as well as in the following centuries?

"The former [the Halakhah] (from halakh, meaning 'to go') was, so to speak, the Rule of the Spir-itual Road, and, when fixed, had even greater authority than the Scriptures of the Old Testament, since it explained and applied them." –Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,* 1883, p. 485.

"The Halakhah indicated with the most minute and painful punctiliousness every legal ordinance as to outward observances, and it explained every bearing of the Law of Moses. But beyond this it left the inner man, the spring of actions, untouched. What he was to believe and what to feel, was chiefly a matter of the Haggadah…. Israel had made void the law by its traditions. Under a load of outward ordinances and observances its spirit had been crushed….

"On no other subject is Rabbinic teaching more painfully minute and more manifestly incongruous to its professed object. For, if we rightly apprehend what underlay the complicated and intolerably burdensome laws and rules of Pharisaic Sabbath observance, it was to secure, negatively, absolute rest from all labor, and, positively, to make the Sabbath a delight. The Mishnah includes Sabbath desecration among those most heinous crimes for which a man was to be stoned…. The terribly exaggerated views on the Sabbath entertained by the Rabbis, and the endless burdensome rules with which they encumbered everything connected with its sanctity, are fully set forth….

"In not less than twenty-four chapters, matters are seriously discussed as of vital religious im-portance, which one would scarcely imagine a sane intellect would seriously entertain…. Upon this one of the Rabbis is reported as bursting into the declaration that this formed part of those Sabbath Laws (comp. Chag. i. 8) which were like mountains suspended by a hair! (Jer. Shabbath. p. 7, col. b, last lines). And yet in all these wearisome details there is not a single trace of anything spiritual–not a word even to suggest higher thoughts of God's holy day and its observance." – Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 1883, pp. 553, 554, 1011, 1012, 1598.

"The Law lays it down that the Sabbath day is to be kept holy, and that on it no work is to be done. That is a great principle. But these Jewish legalists had a passion for definition. So they asked: What is work? All kinds of things were classified as work. For instance, to carry a burden on the Sabbath Day is to work. But next a burden has to be defined. So the Scribal Law lays it down that a burden is 'food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a small member, water enough to moisten an eye salve, paper enough to write a customs house notice upon, ink enough to write two letters of the alphabet, reed enough to make a pen'–and so on endlessly. So, they spent endless hours arguing whether a man could or could not lift a lamp from one place to another on the Sabbath, whether a tailor committed a sin if he went out with a needle in his robe, whether a woman might wear a brooch or false hair, even if a man might go out on the Sabbath with artificial teeth or an artificial limb, if a man might lift his child on the Sabbath Day. These things to them were the essence of religion. Their religion was a legalism of petty rules and regulations.

"We can hardly be surprised to find a head-on collision between the scribes and Pharisees and our Lord over the issue of the Sabbath. The gospel writers record numerous occasions when the Jewish religious leaders clashed with Jesus over the interpretation of the Sabbath. Almost always this resulted from an incident in which are Lord 'violated the Sabbath' according to the legalistic teachings and interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees. Such incidents are helpful to us in our study of the Sabbath, for they allow us to see some of the ways in which the Bible was wrongly interpreted, as well as the true interpretation of the Sabbath as given by our Lord. Let us learn from the errors of the

Jewish religious leaders, and especially from the divine interpretation of the Sabbath by our Lord." –Bob Deffinbaugh, *The Sabbath Controversy in the Gospels.*

THE SABBATH AMONG THE ESSENES AND THE QUMRAN COMMUNITY

As is shown in the gospels, at the beginning of the current era, there were different groups or sects among the Jews. Two of them were the Pharisees and the Sadducees; but there were others, including the Es-senes, who were known, among other things, for their position regarding the observance of the Sabbath. The general information that we have regarding them is that, "… the Essenes, emerged out of disgust with the other two [Pharisees and Sadducees]. This sect believed the others had corrupted the city and the temple. They moved out of Jerusalem and lived a monastic life in the desert, adopting strict dietary laws and a commitment to celibacy. The Essenes are particularly interesting to scholars because they are believed to be an offshoot of the group that lived in Qumran, near the Dead Sea." *–Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.*

Their position regarding Sabbath observance was touched on in the following quotations.

"The Essenes … were meticulous in discriminating between the clean and unclean so as to observe ritual purity; they were strict Sabbath observers." –G.W. Buchanan, article "*Essenes*," Geoffrey William Bromiley (editor), The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 2, p. 153.

"The Essenes are referred to as very rigorous observers of the Sabbath, more than the Pharisees ('B.J.' ii. 8, section 9)." *–Jewish Encyclopedia*, article "Sabbath."

Although the Pharisees introduced regulations, limits, and constraints in the practice of Sabbath ob-servance, in some cases, as already noted, they tried to accommodate the situations of life; but this did not happen with the community in Qumran. In this group, the rigor of the proscriptions exceeded that of the rabbis. They believed that "Israel in general had gone astray–even His holy Sabbaths and His glorious festivals, His righteous ordinances, the ways of His truth, and the purposes of His will, 'the which, if a man do, he shall live.'" Leviticus 18:5. *–Covenant of Damascus:* The Zadokite Document, "Of the Righteous Remnant" (iii, 12-iv, 6).

Referring to the Sabbath, they wrote that they were those who had entered the covenant that God had ordered "… to keep the sabbath in its every detail, and the festivals and fasts in accordance with the practice laid down originally by the men who entered the new covenant in 'the land of Damascus.'" *–Covenant of Damascus:* The Zadokite Document, "Of the Obligation of the Covenant" (vi, 1 1-vii, 6a).

Then they presented their first general regulation, which dealt with the beginning of the Sabbath.

"Now concerning the proper observance of the Sabbath. No one is to do any work on Friday from the moment that the sun's disk stands distant from the gate by the length of its own diameter; for this is what Scripture implies when it says explicitly, Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy." *–Covenant of Damascus.* The Zadokite Document, "Of the Sabbath" (x, 1~xi, 18).

As for the day of rest itself, other principles followed.

"On the Sabbath day, no one is to indulge in ribald or empty talk. No one is to claim repayment of debts. No one is to engage in lawsuits concerning property and gain. No one is to talk about labor or work to be done the next day. No one is to go out into the field while it is still Sabbath with the intention of resuming his work immediately after the Sabbath ends. No one is to walk more than a thousand cubits outside his city. No one is to eat on the Sabbath day anything that has not been prepared in advance. He is not to eat anything that happens to be lying about in the field, neither is he to drink of anything that was not [previously] in the camp. If, however, he is traveling, he may go down to bathe and may drink wherever he happens to be.

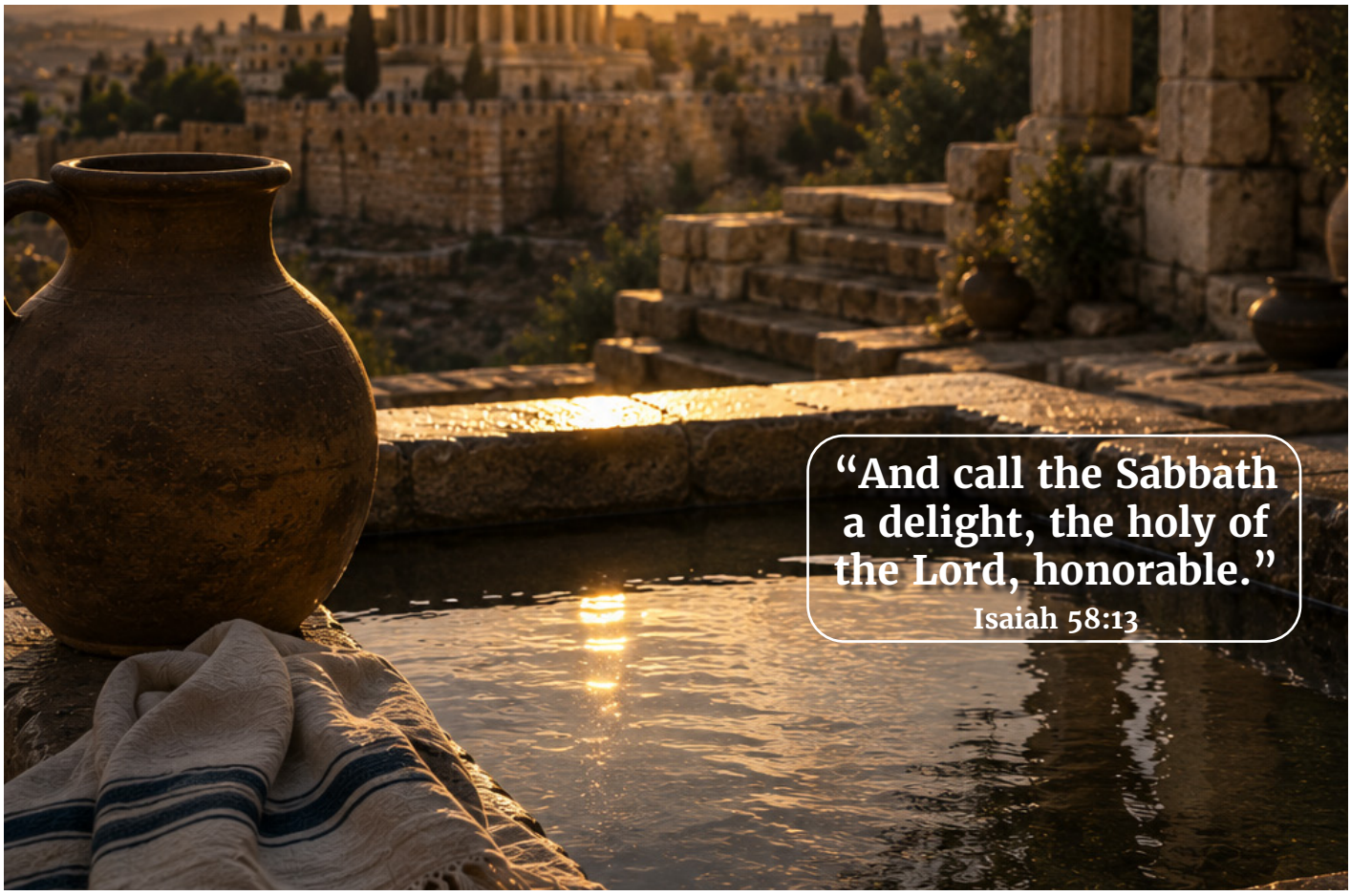


"No one is to commission a Gentile to transact business for him on the Sabbath day. No one is to wear soiled clothes or clothes that have been put in storage unless they first be laundered and rubbed with frankincense. No one is to observe a voluntary fast on the Sabbath. No one is to follow his beast to pasture for a distance of more than two thousand cubits from his city. No one is to raise his hand to strike it with his fist. If the beast be stubborn, he is not to take it outdoors. No one is to take anything out of his house, or bring anything in from outside. If he is [lodging] in a booth, he is likewise to take nothing out nor bring anything in. No one is to break open a pitchsealed vessel on the Sabbath. No one is to carry ointments upon his person or walk around with them on the Sabbath. No one is to pick up rock or dust in a dwelling place. Nurses are not to carry babies around on the Sabbath.... No one is to foal a beast on the Sabbath day. Even if it drops its young into a cistern or a pit, he is not to lift it out on the Sabbath.

"No one is to stop for the Sabbath in a place near the heathen. No one is to desecrate the Sabbath for the sake of wealth or gain.

"If a human being falls into a place where there is water or fire, one may bring him up by means of a ladder or a rope or some other instrument. No one is to present any offering upon the altar on the Sabbath except the statutory Sabbath burnt offering–as the Scripture puts it, your Sabbath offerings exclusively.'" Leviticus 23.38. –*Covenant of Damascus*. The Zadokite Document, "Of the Sabbath," x, 1~xi, 18.

Between the Pharisees and the Essenes there were sensitive differences on various points. Particularly of note is a regulation about a beast that falls into a cistern or a pit, in which the latter were stricter than the Pharisees. Even so, the rabbis were inconsistent, because they would help animals but not people. Jesus referred to such cases when He warned the Pharisees, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Matthew 12:11, 12; cf. Mark 3:1-6. These were some of the extreme requirements that made the Sabbath a heavy burden in the time of Jesus and led to His being accused of violating the Sabbath commandment and worthy of death.



AFRICA







LESOTHO



During the month, several missionary activities were carried out in Lesotho. Two prison evangelism programs were conducted, providing an opportunity to share the gospel with approximately 180 inmates.

Missionary visits and Bible studies were also held to strengthen spiritual interest within the community. From May 29 to 31, a Mini Family Conference took place, bringing together 48 members and interested individuals, offering guidance and encouragement to young people and families.

These activities made it possible to reach many people and continue spreading the message of hope and salvation.

ASIA







PHILIPPINES



Young people from different localities in Mindanao, Philippines, participated in an Interactive Youth Congress focused on spiritual growth, active participation, and strengthening the Christian faith.

The event also included the participation of children and families, fostering fellowship and unity among different generations within the church.

Under the theme of renewing the mind, strengthening the heart, and reviving the spirit, the congress left a positive impact on the participants, encouraging them to remain steadfast in their faith and committed to serving God and their fellow human beings.

AMERICA



UNITED ESTATES





Members, young people, and families participated in a spiritual conference held in California, where they enjoyed an uplifting program centered on worship and the study of God's Word.

The event included special music, Bible presentations, and moments of reflection that inspired attendees to strengthen their relationship with Christ. It also fostered Christian fellowship and spiritual growth, leaving valuable lessons for daily life and service to God.









BRAZIL



Missionary work continued to advance in Brazil through evangelistic activities carried out in Jequié, Bahia, and Juiz de Fora. During these outreach efforts, the message of the gospel was shared through Bible studies, missionary visits, and spiritual programs aimed at strengthening faith and bringing more people closer to Christ.

Participants were encouraged to renew their commitment to God and to continue proclaiming the message of hope and salvation in their communities, contributing to the growth of the missionary work throughout the region.

The Sabbath
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