

# What Days Should We Observe Under The New Covenant?

**What about holy days or holidays? Do we have the freedom to observe whatever days we please, as Bible-believing Christians under the new covenant? This is a basic question. Does it really matter to Yahweh? After all, are all of our worship traditions—whether biblical in origin or not—acceptable to Yahweh as long as we intend for them to glorify the Messiah? What does Yahweh’s Word say about this? What did the early Church practice?**

It seems to me the best way to answer this question is to go straight to the source, the Word of the Eternal. In the gospel of Mark 7:5-7, we read:

**“Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” He answered and said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophecy of you hypocrites, as it is written: This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”**

There are a few things to notice here. First, the scribes and Pharisees had devised their own worship traditions outside of the prescriptions Yahweh gave to His people. It is important to note a few things about them. First, many of these regulations were instituted with the right intention of honoring the true Elohim of Israel, not a foreign god.

Second, the traditions were not inherently evil in themselves (as would have been child sacrifice, for example). They were morally neutral traditions in themselves, but they led to an immoral end, for, whatever their intent, they did not truly lead men to Yahweh, but only to a play-acting sort of religiosity. The net result was that their worship was worthless—unacceptable

to Yahweh. So obviously, form, not just intent, was an issue for Yeshua (Jesus) and the Apostle Paul—**“Now I praise you brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.” (I Cor. 11:2).**

From this we see that when men follow humanly-devised worship traditions, they run the risk of worshipping Messiah in vain. In the last sentence of this passage Yeshua equates vain worship with *following the traditions of men*. Yet, according to Paul, there are some ordinances that are worth preserving? What are those?

When speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Yeshua told her what is expected of His followers in the new age:

**“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. Yahweh is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24).**

From this we conclude two things: The Father expects His people to worship Him. And our worship must be performed in spirit and in truth. What did Yeshua mean by spirit and truth?

As for spirit, we can see that the conversation is taking place with a woman preoccupied with places of formal collective worship—Mt. Gerizim for Samaritans vs. Jerusalem for Jews.

We should notice that the discussion is then revolving around issues of formal collective worship traditions. Yeshua responds to this issue by saying that the day is coming when we will not look to specific places to worship, for Yahweh is Spirit, His Spirit is everywhere, and worship of Him is ultimately a spiritual matter. But He does not just say that we must worship in spirit; He twice points out that we must worship in truth. What did Yeshua consider our source of truth?

**“Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.” (John 17:17).**

Here we see that we are sanctified, or made holy, at least in part through Yahweh’s word. Truth is Yahweh’s word; Yahweh’s word is truth. Moreover, a dynamic between Yahweh’s Spirit and Yahweh’s truth is further described:

**“However when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:13).**

So, worshipping in spirit leads us to truth, and illuminates our understanding of His sanctifying word. Altogether then, we see that Christians *will* worship. And rather than becoming preoccupied with *places of worship*, we will worship under the influence of Yahweh’s Spirit; and being under the influence of that spirit, we will be led to worship in accordance with the truth which, in regard to spiritual matters, has its principal expression in Yahweh’s word.

Is that clear? I am speaking in this article about *formal collective worship, or convocations; group worship*, not spontaneous personal worship which can be done anytime, anywhere, as in

Acts 2:41, 42; 20:6-12.

So let's return to our original question. Are all observances and traditions—whether biblical in origin or not—acceptable to Yahweh as long as we use them to glorify the Messiah? By now, perhaps, asking the question is as much as answering it.

In Matthew's gospel Yeshua upbraids men for directing worship toward Him through man-made traditions; and in John's gospel, Yeshua proclaims that true worshippers will worship in spirit and truth, and spiritual truth is Yahweh's word. And that those led by His Spirit will, in fact, follow that word in all spiritual matters. For what we observe impacts what we think about. And what we think about impacts what we become. And what we become is what the Christian life is all about. So, what we observe must first be correct, for it will influence much of what follows.

If one believes the Bible is Yahweh's word, then, one will believe that in terms of *biblical observances*, we should be given the *form* which best expresses the reality of our salvation in Messiah as expressed in the Bible. To conclude otherwise, is to imagine that the straight and narrow path to Messiah's Kingdom does not necessarily include what one practices.

As logical and scriptural as all this seems, we know there are a number of reasons people use to avoid observing, or feeling the need to observe the Sabbath and annual festivals given in Scripture. We should examine them very closely.

In doing so, I will use the terms "Sabbatarian" and "non-Sabbatarian" loosely. I understand there are people who do not believe the Sabbath or festivals are incumbent on them but at the same time do not consider themselves against the Sabbath or festivals in any way, and, in fact, still congregate on those days—they just consider them optional. And since the terms "Festivilians" and "non-Festivilians" won't quite do, I have chosen "Sabbatarian" and "non-Sabbatarian" for those who do not believe the annual festivals are incumbent on Christians as well.

## **Arguments Against The Sabbath and Festivals Examined**

Examined below are the substantive arguments (Roman numerals and Italics) I could find in recent Worldwide Church of God writings and the books and journals that state their present understanding of the Sabbath and annual festivals.<sup>1</sup> We will then examine the New Testament proof texts commonly used for and against Sabbath and festival keeping.

### **I. Genesis 2:2, 3**

*"The "blessing" of the seventh day signified that God blessed the creation, not the day. It isn't even clear whether God sanctified just that day or every seventh day thereafter. We cannot assume the Sabbath is still holy simply because it once was."*

The idea that Yahweh was really blessing the creation, and not the day, is half right. Undoubtedly, there are implications here for the entire creation, as has been well said:

*“(The blessing of the seventh day) expresses God’s ultimate and total blessing over His complete and perfect creation. By blessing the Sabbath, God promised to be man’s benefactor during the whole course of human history.”<sup>2</sup>*

The writer of Hebrews says as much in Hebrews chapter 4, as we shall see later, but it *is* true that Yahweh *did* bless and set apart the day itself for holy use, for Genesis 2:3 clearly says:

**“Then Yahweh blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which Yahweh had created and made.”**

It says here that Yahweh blessed and set apart this day for holy use. He did it through the act of resting from all His work of creation. Moreover, Yahweh set apart for holy use a “day” with no recorded ending, so it is most naturally seen as having not ended at creation week, but as remaining perpetual through time just as the physical creation has continued through time.

That Yahweh sanctified the seventh “day” as part of the creation of the earth means that the Sabbath, as a result of Yahweh’s action, is “baked in the cake” so to speak, whether man recognizes that “blessing and sanctification” or not. To ‘sanctify,’ means to *set apart for holy use or purpose*.

If perchance this is not correct, perhaps non-Sabbatarians can tell us: if in the first six days Yahweh created things meant to last, why not the seventh day?

*“We cannot assume the Sabbath is still holy simply because it once was”* is interesting logic when applied to creation week. I suppose one could also say by the same token that just because there are humans on the earth now, we cannot assume they are related to the same humans Yahweh created back then. Both statements are doing the same thing: severing the connection between creation week and what came after it. What right, after all, do we have to “assume” anything has a necessary connection to creation week? Can you prove it?

And anyway, what purpose could Yahweh possibly have had to set apart for holy use, or sanctify, a single day, thousands of years ago? Holy use by whom? Does the Almighty, who is inherently holy, need to sanctify days for Himself? If this was indeed an act of self-absorption on Yahweh’s part, why even put it in the Scripture?

The answer is that Yahweh told Moses, before Sinai, that the seventh day was the “Sabbath,” and that it was “holy” (Ex. 16:23). The point is, according to Yahweh, the Sabbath’s holiness *transcended* the creation week, and it was not just set apart for Himself. That will become even more clear from the following.

## **II. Gen. 2:2, 3 and Ex. 20:8-11**

*“Gen. 2:2 is an anachronism; the ‘hallowing’ didn’t really take place until Sinai, and*

*Moses wrote the creation account with that in mind. Furthermore, it is not called a ‘Sabbath’ in the creation account. There was no command for humans to keep the day at creation or any time before the Exodus. One has to read back into the creation account from Ex. 20 to get the idea that it was a ‘Sabbath’ or that it was a creation ordinance.”*

In Exodus 20, Moses writes not his own words, but quotes Yahweh from Mt. Sinai:

“For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Yahweh blessed (past tense) the Sabbath day and hallowed (past tense) it.”

If the “hallowing” really took place at Sinai, we have only two choices: either Moses is falsifying what Yahweh said from the mountain, or Yahweh is falsifying what He did at creation. If it’s the former that non-Sabbatarians would have us believe, this would mean Moses 1) essentially invented his own religion, for the Sabbath was central to Israelite worship tradition; and 2) has proven himself utterly untrustworthy as a source of divine revelation.

We should also note that the writer of Hebrews has also gotten pulled into this deception, if this is what we’re seeing, because the Apostle Paul also sees the Sabbath established at creation week (Heb. 4:4, 9). Clearly, this non-Sabbatarian suggestion is not a viable option for those who believe the Bible is Yahweh’s inspired word.

As to the question of the status of the Sabbath between creation and Sinai, we need to look at verse 11, where speaking of the creation week, Yahweh says, “Therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” He could have said “seventh day,” but He says, “Sabbath day.” So the “seventh day” became the “Sabbath day” when Yah hallowed, or sanctified it. Both its seventh-dayness and Sabbathness are inseparably linked in the language that Yah is using here. This is evidenced by the fact that the seventh day was—before Sinai—called by Yahweh the “Sabbath,” calling it, before anything was said at Sinai, “holy” (Ex. 16:23).

As for Adam and Eve, no Sabbath command was given to them in the Garden because none was needed. Before the “fall,” every day was a Sabbath, as it were. They had an entire life of rest and fellowship with Yahweh. A rest is needed only when one has to work. Eden represented all rest, all Sabbath; it was one big Sabbath. Then, when they were cast out of the Garden, they were not cast out as Yah’s people, but as enemies of Yahweh.

No Sabbath was given to them because no fellowship with Yahweh was to be had now at all—they were removed from Yah’s presence forever. So in the Garden, no Sabbath command was given because none would have been needed; after their ejection, no Sabbath command was given because none would have been appropriate. It is *only* when Yahweh **made covenants** with men (Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) that He revealed the Sabbath to them (See Gen. 6:18; 9:9; 15:18; 17:2; 26:5).

The Sabbath is not recorded as commanded until Sinai. Is this significant? Ex. 20:8-10 commands the Israelites to work six days and rest the seventh. Why? Yahweh says it’s because of what He did at creation: “For, in six days Yahweh made...” (v. 11). In other words, the reason

why His people should do verses 8-10 is because of what He did in verse 11. His actions at creation week are the reason for this command, because Yahweh Himself created the Sabbath as a recognition of his work of creation (Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:11b).

The Sabbath's purpose, in part, is to proclaim that true Elohim (God) as the ONLY CREATOR—a truth so fundamental, and a belief so critical, no one can be saved without it (Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:16, 23, 24; Re.14:7).

Of course, non-Sabbatarians say they understand Yahweh is Creator without the Sabbath. One wonders how they would respond to one who suggested he understood Yeshua (Jesus) died for his sins without partaking of the bread and wine. Surely they would tell such a person that, even so, taking part in the *kiddush* (sacred fellowship meal) would help him grow in appreciation of that fact. So it is with the Sabbath memorial of creation.

That there is no ordinance to keep the day in Genesis 2 is, from Yah's standpoint, irrelevant. Yahweh is finally taking to Himself a people, and He is formally ordaining it now, and He is referencing what He did at creation as His reason for ordaining it. It is a creation ordinance in the sense that Yah ordained it because of what he did at creation, not because the ordinance itself was actually given at creation.

The irreducible fact is that according to Moses' account of Yah's own spoken words at Sinai, Yahweh gave the Sabbath to His people because He Himself "sabbatized" the seventh day, and sanctified it, at creation. It is strange to me that some find difficulty in "reading back" from the plain words of Yahweh, spoken personally from the mountain, an explanation of His earlier actions. It is stranger still to me that they find that explanation of less value than if He had given it at another time.

### **III. Israel's Sign, Not Ours**

*"Just as circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, So the Sabbath was the sign of the Sinaitic covenant. Had the Sabbath been intended for all people, it wouldn't have been a sign that Israel alone was God's covenant people."*

The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were Yahweh's exclusive possession. It is true that some time after Sinai, He appropriated the Sabbath. He established at creation as a sign of His ownership of them (Ex. 31). They were the only people Yah was working with at the time and they were the only people He would work with for many years. So they were the only people Yahweh revealed His Sabbath to, (Gen. 26:5) and He later used it as a weekly reminder to the Israelites of who they were.

Even so, the original command included the "stranger who is within your gates," and even animals! (Ex. 20:10; 23:12). It simply wasn't a fact that Yahweh didn't want anyone else to keep the Sabbath. And Deut. 5:14 makes clear why He wished them all, Israelite and stranger alike, to sabbatize—"that they may have rest." Clearly, the Sabbath as originally commanded, was intended for everyone's benefit, and not just to signify a covenant.

But over the centuries the Sabbath indeed took on more significance and became something of a litmus test to determine who were the true followers of Yahweh (Isa. 56:2-6). This was the result of Israel's historic refusal to consistently keep the covenant sign, which eventually came to be seen as a principal reason for their exile (Neh. 13:15-18). This conviction intensified through the intertestamental period to the point where some rabbis evidently began to claim the Sabbath was the sole province of the Jews. Most historians recognize this as a reaction against the cultural invasion of Hellenism.

Those who thought or taught this did not have scriptural justification for it, for the Scripture is clear that the Sabbath was intended for non-Israelites, that they too may rest. In any case there is every reason to think this was not the majority view in the first century, for in the NT record and elsewhere gentile proselytes are seen keeping the Sabbath and openly participating in synagogue Sabbath services (Ac. 13:13-16, 26, 42; 15:21; 16:13, 14; 17:1-4; 18:4).

Moreover, the assumption which underlies this argument needs examination. The assumption is that an observance which is a sign of one covenant cannot become part of another. Their own argument should have clarified this for them, for while circumcision was given to Abraham as the sign of his covenant (Gen. 17:10f.), it also found a role in a later covenant (Lev. 12:1-3).

Likewise then, though God appropriated the Sabbath as a sign of His covenant with Israel (Ex. 31), there is no biblical reason to believe it may not have a role in a future covenant. And, the converse has also been true. Something can be merely part of a previous covenant, and then become a special sign of a later one!

Baptism, for instance, is introduced in the law of Moses (Lev. 15:18 and Num. 19:13), but it never carried primary significance for the people of that covenant. Yet it is later appropriated by Christians, replacing circumcision as the entrance ceremony for the new covenant community (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; Ro. 6:3, 4, etc.). What non-Sabbatarians imagine to be a firewall between the covenants and their respective signs is in reality something like a short hallway.

#### **IV. Matt. 12:1-8 and Mark 2:27**

*“Jesus didn’t deny they were working on the Sabbath, but there was a more important principle of human need involved. So human need is more important than the Sabbath, and working on the Sabbath cannot be a sin. When Jesus justified His disciples’ behavior by referring to David’s men’s disobedience to sanctuary regulations, He showed that the keeping of the Sabbath law of physical rest was not an inherently moral issue. Disobeying moral laws like murder to assuage hunger would not have been allowed.*

*Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man but didn’t specify when it came into existence. So we cannot deny or affirm he was alluding to the creation account. ‘Man’ was used in a general sense; there is no evidence He was broadening the day to gentiles.”*

Yeshua (Jesus) essentially presents five arguments in His disciples' defence of eating grain in the field:

1) David and his men did the same thing (Mk. 2:25, 26). On its face, this may seem like a “two-wrongs-make-a-right” argument, but it isn't. Yeshua is using the incident as an illustration to convey two critical points: human need is paramount over all ritual (I use that term in the broadest sense) concerns; and David, as the Anointed One of Israel, was exempt from the law in this case, and those who followed him were also exempt by association. Therefore, Yeshua's disciples were “innocent” because they were following and serving the new King of Israel, and were innocent by virtue of that association.

2) Priests break the Sabbath in doing their duties (Mt. 12:5). Again, this is no “two-wrongs-make-a-right” argument, but an illustration of a principle. The priests were required to perform servile work on the Sabbath, which for any other purpose would have constituted an open rebellion against the law (Lev. 24:5-9; Nu. 28:9, 10, etc.). But everyone understood that the reason why they were innocent is that they were doing holy work. The irony emerges when Yeshua explains that “something greater than the temple is here” (Mt. 12:6)—which to Pharisee ears was a nearly blasphemous claim. To Yeshua, though, this simply meant that work for this Temple (Mt. 26:61) was even more appropriate than that of the one standing in Jerusalem.

3) In the new age, heart-worship is more important than ritual obedience (Mt. 12:7, from Hos. 6:6—“I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice”). Ritual, even good ritual, should now take a back seat to the critical spiritual and attitudinal concerns of the age of the Spirit (Mt. 23:23). There's irony here as well, for the Pharisees thought they were in fact proving their loyalty to God by strictly keeping the letter of the Sabbath law! Jesus is saying here that it is possible that real, true heart-loyalty to Him might well cause a man to disregard such concerns should the two conflict.

4) The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Mk. 2:27). This teaching discomfits non-Sabbatarians because Yeshua seems to be saying that the Sabbath, in itself, was designed to benefit men. The reason why it appears this way is because that is in fact what Yeshua is saying. And by saying this Yeshua is making the point to the Pharisees that their excessive concern for regulation (and excessive regulations) was nullifying the purpose of the institution He created. This must be our conclusion based on the climactic claim that immediately follows.

5) I am Lord of the Sabbath, and I and I alone determine its proper use and role (Mk. 2:28). Here Yeshua refers to Himself as the “Son of Man” from the prophecy of Dan. 7:13, which serves as a moniker to signify His Messianic identity (see also Jn. 5:27). So Yeshua is saying, in other words, that He is the Lord; the Lord created the Sabbath; and therefore as creator of the Sabbath, He—not Moses, not scribes, not Pharisees—is the ultimate and final arbiter of all issues concerning its observance.

That said, let's address each of the non-Sabbatarians' claims here.

*“Jesus didn't deny they were working on the Sabbath, but there was a more important principle of human need involved. So human need is more important than the Sabbath, and working on the Sabbath cannot be a sin.”*

There is a price to pay for concluding that Mt. 12 indicates sabbatizing and man's needs are at cross-purposes. We must then imagine a God who imposed the Sabbath upon man arbitrarily and—it must be said—mistakenly. We must conclude nothing less than that Yahweh gave men a law which failed in its original purpose and which He was consequently forced to abolish.

The non-Sabbatarian's response to this difficulty is that "all God's laws benefited humans because they led people to Christ, but now they have been eclipsed by Christ." There's just one problem with this—it isn't what Yeshua taught the Sabbath was for! He says here that the Sabbath was made for man, for his benefit. Not as a necessary restriction to lead men to Him, but as a blessing in itself. Any other reading of Mk. 2:27 is a private interpretation.

But that Yeshua in these passages sees the literal observance of the Sabbath day as a means to an end created by God, shows that in Yeshua's mind, the Sabbath retains its power to accomplish its original purpose, and is not being superseded by His ministry or Person. This must be our conclusion based on Mk. 2:27.

Additionally, Yeshua even goes so far as to say here that He is "Lord of the Sabbath." He did not say "Lord instead of the Sabbath," or "Lord in replacement of the Sabbath," as some would have us believe. Yeshua is clearly stating that He is Lord of some real thing that objectively exists and continues to exist, and it is called the Sabbath, and He says He created it for mankind's benefit, and He emphatically desired to see its original purpose restored.

Therefore, those who call Yeshua "Lord" automatically offer the title of their souls to One who insists He also holds title to the Sabbath; and that Titleholder proclaims that He made that Sabbath to be a blessing for mankind. It is difficult to imagine men for whom 'Jesus is Lord' easily disregarding this fact.

As for Yeshua, He Himself did claim to work on the Sabbath, during another Sabbath healing event in John 5:17: "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Yeshua and his followers never practice carpentry or are found fishing on this day. Yeshua always kept the Sabbath in the manner appropriate to the Hebrew scriptures (Lk. 4:16; Mk 1:21,29; 3:1; Lk. 4:44; 13:10).

But when Yeshua and his followers are found working they are performing the Father's work—that is, healing, teaching, etc. This is why Yeshua did not break the Sabbath in its intent when He performed these things, contrary to what the Pharisees claimed. And when today Yah's ministers and members perform servile work on the Sabbath in service to Him and His people, it is not a breaking of the Sabbath, for these are priestly duties, and Christians are called to be priests (I Pt. 2:5, 9). (Yeshua didn't say, though, that just because the priests were priests they could do whatever they pleased on the Sabbath; He said when they performed priestly duties in the temple, they were guiltless.)

In any case, to appropriate the Pharisaical misunderstanding of "work"—anything that requires effort—that Yeshua risked His life to correct, and use it to claim that since

Yeshua's disciples "worked" on the Sabbath (refused to be inert in the face of immediate human need), therefore Yahweh cares not whether we "work" on the Sabbath (preoccupy ourselves with our own worldly work) is a total and complete misuse of these scriptures.

*"When Jesus justified His disciples' behavior by referring to David's men's disobedience to sanctuary regulations, He showed that the keeping of the Sabbath law of physical rest was not an inherently moral issue. Disobeying moral laws like murder to assuage hunger would not have been allowed."*

Yeshua uses the sanctuary example to illustrate that there was a "law behind the law," as it were, and the greater takes precedence over the lesser. In this case, human need is the end—not working was intended to be the means. But being inherently practical as the Sabbath law is, and being truly chaotic and unpredictable as life inherently is, Yeshua recognizes here that, on occasion, there will be situations where the two conflict; and Yeshua wants to establish once and for all that the end, or purpose, of the law must then take precedence; in this, the disciples were guiltless (Mt. 12:7; also v. 11, 12).

In this connection it is interesting to note the parallels between Yeshua's teaching on marriage and the Sabbath. In both cases, he appeals to the "law of the beginning," that is, what was intended by Yah from the institution's creation (Mt. 19:8; Mk. 2:27). There were certain marriage regulations which Yahweh gave to ancient Israel which did not reflect His desire for the institution; but the necessary change would have to wait until "the fulness of time," when the Son would be revealed. Likewise, Yeshua corrected excesses and wrong conceptions regarding the Sabbath. Yeshua resolved problems that had grown up around both the Sabbath and marriage institutions, but honored them both and abolished neither. That Yeshua would care enough to do so, in fact, speaks volumes about whether He saw them as lasting institutions.

In this regard, however, I believe non-Sabbatarians are correct when they detect a difference in the absolute moral nature of the other commandments, and the Sabbath. They are undoubtedly correct to point out about this passage that Yeshua would never have justified murder or idolatry on the grounds of simple human hunger. From this we must conclude that the Sabbath command was, and is, different from the others. Yeshua says it was "made for man," or the individual believer, in a way the other commands perhaps were not, and Yeshua establishes His authority to make such a determination (Mt. 12:8). So it seems the Sabbath command of rest is not fundamentally a moral issue in the sense that commands against murder and adultery, for instance, are.

But this does not mean that the Sabbath cannot create a moral issue for the Christian. For if keeping the Sabbath is indeed Yah's intent for human beings, and you are a human being, then refusal to cooperate raises a moral issue! Because now the issue becomes one of *compliance with the will of Yahweh*, which is always, ultimately, a moral issue.

*"Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man but didn't specify when it came into existence. So we cannot deny or affirm he was alluding to the creation account."*

Yeshua admittedly does not use the phrase "in the beginning" here as He did in Mt. 19:8,

but did He really need to? When does Scripture record the sanctification of the seventh day? No, Yeshua didn't specify when the Sabbath came into existence here, for He already told us that at Sinai, where He made very clear that He made it at creation, as the writer of Hebrews confirms (He. 4:3, 4, 9).

We know this much: the Sabbath was made at creation. And nothing was made without the Word. Yeshua claimed Lordship over the Sabbath because He was its Maker, and He made it for mankind (Gen. 2:2; Jn 1:3; Ex. 20:11; He. 4:3, 4, 9; Mk. 2:27, 28). Neither the Old nor New Testaments teach that it was an invention of Moses, or that it was only made for ancient Israelites or Jews.

*'Man' was used in a general sense; there is no evidence He was broadening the day to gentiles.'*

First, there is an assumption underlying the contention that Yeshua was not "broadening the day to gentiles." That is, that He needed to! He had already "broadened" the day to gentiles in Ex. 20:10 and Deut. 5:14, and it is clear that men in the first century understood this very well (Acts 13:13-16, 26, 42; 15:21; 16:13, 14; 17:1-4; 18:4). Thus while it is true that the subject of gentiles per se seems not to be the subject, it didn't need to be.

Going further, to note that Yeshua used 'man' in a general sense" as an explanation of why He didn't think it was for man generally is to deny a truth by stating it! Yes, "man" (anthropos) is a general word and all mankind is encompassed within it; and if we do not have explicit statements in the NT indicating Yeshua could not have meant "man" in this sense, we run a serious risk of openly rejecting the words of our Master. Note that He doesn't say "The Sabbath was made for Jews," as non-Sabbatarians claim. Yeshua was clear that "salvation is of the Jews," and was not afraid to say so (John 4:22). But here He says the Sabbath was made for "man."

Now, let's think about this. The Sabbath was made for man, and whoever that is, it is clear from this scripture that Yeshua thinks it was made for their benefit, not burden. We can also agree that He gave this Sabbath first to His chosen people, the Israelites. Now, are we to think that there was something about sabbatizing that only Israelites needed or could benefit from? At a minimum Yeshua's words show He did not think the Sabbath was made for a covenant; it was made for man, for his benefit; the need for it is based in his present bodily predicament, one that all human beings everywhere and at all times share.

## **V. Paul's Example**

*"If we use Paul's example of keeping the Sabbath at synagogue, we must attend synagogue. The fact that these are synagogues should alert us to the historical situation. Paul went there because that is when and where people were assembled to hear discussion of the Scriptures, and it was these people he wanted to evangelize. Besides, Paul kept other Mosaic customs, so his example is not authoritative. But his teachings about days are."*  
*There are a few essential arguments here:*

*(1) The fact that the Sabbath was kept in synagogues shows that it was only an historic Jewish custom;*

*(2) Paul only went there to preach;*

*(3) Since Paul kept other Mosaic customs, his personal example of worship is not authoritative.*

First, let's note that on the one hand, non-Sabbatarians claim Paul's interest in attending the synagogue on the Sabbath was only tactical—to gain converts. Then, they argue that Paul kept the Sabbath for personal worship—just as when he performed Jewish rites. It is impossible that Paul's motive could have been exclusively both. Even so we'll look at all of these arguments.

First of all, the Sabbath was not only kept in synagogues in Acts. For instance, in Phillipi, in Macedonia, the gentiles gathered by the riverside to pray on the Sabbath (16:13). There is no synagogue involved here. Wherever God-fearing people were, Jew or gentile, Paul and his band would go worship with them on the Sabbath.

It is also important to note that in Antioch in Pisidia, the gospel did indeed begin in the synagogue (13:14). But the Jews left unconvinced after Paul finished preaching. Only the gentiles remained, and they begged Paul to preach to them again—the next Sabbath (13:42). If Paul was as unconcerned about Sabbath observance for gentiles as non-Sabbatarians want us to believe, with such intense interest on the part of the gentiles, Paul certainly could have simply invited them to hear him the next day, or any day of the week. But instead the gentiles regather to hear Paul—the next Sabbath, and not in a synagogue. So it is not true that the Sabbath was only kept in synagogues, though that's where God-fearing people would go in that time.

Did Paul only gather with the God-fearing on these days to evangelize? We should first note that there is much to suggest Paul kept the Sabbath (Ac. 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 19), as well as Apollos, Aquila and Priscilla (Ac. 18:24-26). It could go without saying that James and Peter, as apostles to the Jews, did also.

But, Paul's underlying attitude for this activity is not made entirely clear in the passing references themselves. For that we need to examine his own confessions of his faith, like this one, late in his career:

“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the Elohim (God) of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and the Prophets” (Ac. 24:14).

If there was any doubt as to what Paul meant by this, in Ac. 21:20-26 Paul entered into a temple purification ritual to make a public statement to the Jerusalem church that he personally “walked according to the (Mosaic) customs” and “kept the law.” This, of course, would include the Sabbath and annual festivals. If Paul were not keeping these days, this symbolic act of allegiance to the law would have constituted a deliberate misrepresentation of Paul's true feelings and personal habits. (See also Ac. 23:6; 25:8).

Of course the Sabbath events often have an evangelistic element attached to them. This is what would be expected. Evangelizing, after all, was Paul's job. But the idea that Paul only showed up for Sabbath gatherings to evangelize are rendered untenable by the plain statements of Paul himself. It is striking to note how closely correlated are Paul's writings which are alleged to speak against the biblical observances, and his personal observance of those days. During Paul's first missionary journey, his party went to the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia for Sabbath services (Ac. 13:14). There is no indication they knew an evangelistic opportunity would arise there, but one did, and Paul addressed both men of Israel and "those who fear God," or non-proselyte gentiles, on this Sabbath day, with not even a hint of their being in bondage because of it.

Not long after, Paul wrote Gal. 4:9, 10, and helped precipitate the Jerusalem Conference. During his second missionary journey, he met with gentiles every Sabbath in Corinth (Ac. 18:4), then wrote Ro.14:5, 6 from there. After leaving Corinth, he hurries past Ephesus to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost (Ac. 20:16). Then we see mention of Atonement on Paul's way back to face imprisonment in Rome (Ac. 27:9), where he writes Col. 2:16, 17.

In all this we see that Paul and the other apostles were also keenly aware of and keeping the annual festivals (poss. Ac. 18:21<sup>3</sup> ; 20:6, 16; 27:9; I Cor. 16:8). It is said by some that all these mentions of festivals were only to mark time for Luke's readers. What is not considered is that the gentile Luke is writing principally to his gentile patron Theophilus. If all Luke needed were benchmarks of time, it would have been much more appropriate, given his own background and that of his audience's, to use Greco-Roman ones.

While we're discussing gentiles, it is difficult to imagine that Paul, the apostle who fretted most of all about the unity of the Jews and gentiles in Christ (Ro. 3:29; 10:12; I Cor. 12:12, 13; II Cor. 5:18-19; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-18; Phil. 3:3f.; Col. 3:11; I Thess. 1:13-16), kept these worship observances without his gentile brethren—when he dwelt in their lands for years and years at a time!

And his comments to gentile churches regarding biblical worship days support this. For instance, to the Corinthians, Paul writes that he will "wait in Ephesus until after Pentecost" (I Cor. 16:8). What was he doing telling two gentile churches that he would organize his travel schedule around a festival if he wasn't mindful of them or didn't want these gentiles to be mindful of them? Are we to imagine that Paul went off by himself and kept Pentecost apart from his beloved gentile brethren?

But, some might ask, what did Paul mean when he said in I Cor. 9:21 that he lived as a gentile in gentile lands? This does not mean Paul worshipped as a pagan or stopped worshipping at all when he travelled in gentile countries. It does mean, however, in situations such as that in Antioch, for instance, where a Jew would normally be expected to separate himself from gentiles for reasons of ceremonial uncleanness, he disregarded the ritual concerns that would have created a barrier between him and his prospective converts (Gal. 2:11-14).

Finally there is the claim that Paul kept other Mosaic customs, so his example alone

should not be normative for us. The two instances this refers to are his Nazarite vows of Acts 18:18 and 21:26. Both events were intimately and necessarily tied up with the Jewish temple services at Jerusalem, which executed the biblical instruction regarding such vows in Nu. 6:1-21.

The temple services, of course, eventually came to be understood as ready to vanish (He. 7-10). The Sabbath and festivals, however, were not tied to the temple ceremonies, and were kept everywhere Christians were gathered (Ac. 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 19; poss. Ac. 18:21; 20:6, 16; 27:9; I Cor. 16:8).

## **VI. The Argument From Silence**

*“Nowhere does Holy Scripture enjoin Sabbath and Holy Day observance on Christians. The NT never criticizes anyone for breaking the Sabbath. If the Sabbath were a requirement, it would be astonishing that the NT never mentions it as a command, or that people are never criticized for ignoring it.”*

Without understanding the situation within which the NT was written and the assumptions the writers wrote under with regard to their readers’ observance traditions—i.e., everything just discussed above—then indeed these things might seem astonishing. Jews and former gentile proselytes to Judaism in any case—which made up the bulk of the membership of that time (Ac. 10:2; 11:19, 20; 13:43, 44; 14:1)—would only be continuing to keep the days they had been keeping, but now with a Christ-centered understanding. So neither command nor correction was warranted. Moreover, in regard to observances, first century converts were expected to simply follow the apostles’ example (I Cor. 11:1, 2).

In I Cor. 11 Paul details some very fine points regarding collective worship, making a big issue of head coverings in communal prayer. To think that something like this would have been so important to Paul, but the primary observance command of what he considered Holy Scripture (II Tim. 3:15, 16) was not, is more than difficult to imagine.

Actually, if it’s astonishing silence you’re after, consider that in the midst of much controversy and pointed teaching about the abrogation of circumcision, the most obvious and regular scriptural observance of them all—the Sabbath—is never included in the discussion.

After all, as one of the Ten Words, the Sabbath was unquestionably a major religious institution and perceived as a required observance at the birth of the Church. Where there is silence, the burden of proof cannot be upon those who argue for the continued observance of an institution like this, but upon those who argue for its discontinuance. We would not normally expect *re-commandment* of something everyone is already doing, but we would expect discussion as to why they didn’t need to do it anymore.

## **VII. The Spiritual And Moral Argument**

*“Proof that the Sabbath is not spiritually or morally significant is that you can keep the Sabbath and still be a devil. The fourth commandment doesn’t appear on any lists of sins or virtues. After all, God is interested in ends, not means. What matters is moral and spiritual*

*transformation through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And having the Holy Spirit of love would not automatically communicate to us that we should sabbatize each seventh day. The Sabbath is not eternally true because the day-night cycle will cease in the new heaven and new earth.”*

All of these objections can be raised against the bread and wine ritual. This is not an attempt to prove the Sabbath through the Passover. It is asking non-Sabbatarians to apply their reasoning consistently, and they obviously cannot.

We need to understand that neither the Passover nor any other observance is moral in the sense of how we treat our neighbor. It is an issue of “worship,” not morality or virtue in that sense. This is why they are not included in any of the sin or virtue lists in the NT.

It is true that a seventh-day Sabbath observance is not going to be eternally kept because, for one thing, the day-night cycle will cease, but also because our eternal rest is what the Sabbath is pointing to in the first place!

Eternal beings do not need rest. Only physical ones who must yet fight physical and spiritual battles do. When we are made eternal, we will finally have rest. It will be our total, eternal lifestyle. That is one of the things the Sabbath is supposed to be teaching us (He. 4). Those who seek to do away with the Sabbath now are simply jumping ahead of Yahweh.

### **VIII. The Requirement For Salvation Argument**

*“If the Sabbath is mandatory, that is saying it is required for salvation. And if it is required for salvation, we are not saved by grace through faith.”*

Again, if this reasoning is correct, people who say this have the same problem with the Passover. Does this mean those who partake of the bread and wine are thwarting God’s grace? Of course not. The NT is clear that we are saved through faith in the sacrifice of Yeshua Messiah and receipt of His Spirit (Rom. 8:9; 10:9). And Yahweh only gives His Holy Spirit to those who will obey Him (Acts 5:32). His Spirit, in the hearts and minds of His followers, will produce loving obedience.

So, the question is, will those who have Yah’s Spirit ignore His will in regard to observances? No, and that’s the point! The biblical observances are not seen in the NT as ends in themselves, but as means to the ends of true spirituality and as memorials and foreshadowings of Yahweh’s redemptive plan (Col. 2:16, 17). Those who have Yahweh’s spirit and are being saved have no problem participating in those things He has designed for man’s spiritual growth and understanding; those who are not led by Yahweh’s spirit, do.

The Apostle Paul teaches that to be “led by the Spirit” means that one loves and obeys Yahweh’s commandments. A ‘carnal mind’ is typified by one who is an enemy or hostile to Yahweh because such a mind cannot subject itself to Yahweh’s commandments for it is not even able to do so (Rom. 8:6-8).

## IX. The Christ-Replacement Argument

*“The New Testament teaches that Christ is our Sabbath, and that the literal observance of it has been replaced with the spiritual reality of Christ’s presence in our lives every day. The Sabbath was always pointing forward to the time of eternal glory, and the NT proclaims that in Christ the real, eternal Sabbath of the age to come has already broken into history. It is offered to us in the gospel, just as all other blessings of the last day are offered us in the gospel.”*

The least we can ask those who say things like this is that they provide us with at least one passage of Scripture which teaches it. Yeshua indeed claims that He will give us rest (Mt. 11:28), but He never intimates, much less says, that He has or will replace the Sabbath; nor do any of the apostles. The first sentence quoted here is simply an assertion without any scriptural support whatsoever.

It is correct that the Sabbath has always pointed to the time of eternal glory, as we’ll see in Heb. 4. But it is obviously not the case that in this physical life we have received all the blessings of the last day. It seems this is another case of good theology and poor timing.

No one disputes that some of the benefits of the Kingdom are had by Christians now, in this present age. We are given partial peace now (Mt. 11:28); but not yet ultimate peace (I Cor. 9:24-27). We have partial freedom from sin and partial spiritual transformation now (Ro. 8:31-37); but not yet complete freedom from sin and spiritual transformation (Ro. 7:13-25). Here again we see the tension between the “already” and the “not yet.”

Non-Sabbatarians in other instances recognize this tension, but when they willfully disregard it where it obviously applies, they appear to be simply arbitrary. Doubly so when they apply this kind of argument to only certain observances. Do we not have the benefits of Christ’s justifying blood now? Has He not already died once for all? Yet there is an observance which recognizes this fact, to be observed now (1 Cor.5:7, 8). If non-Sabbatarians’ reasoning is correct here, there is no reason why it wouldn’t also apply to the Passover; the fact that it obviously does not shows all by itself that this is faulty reasoning.

## X. The Practical Problems of Sabbath-Keeping

*“Is it possible that not a single day has been lost in thousands of years of human existence? And on a round world, when does the Sabbath begin? In Palestine, Greenwich or the International Date Line? If it’s the International Date Line, how do we know they got it in the right place? Then there are questions as to what exactly is permissible to do on the Sabbath. If one cannot know for sure if or when one has sinned by breaking the Sabbath, how can such a thing possibly be a moral absolute? And if festivals are required, we would have to ask, how many of the Old Testament customs are required? Bitter herbs, homemade dwellings?”*

While man may have lost track of the seven-day cycle between creation and the exodus, Yahweh did not, and delivered it to His people, stopping the manna from heaven every seventh day for forty years (Ex. 16:23, 26, 35). Then, all Israel was commanded to convocate each Sabbath day (Lev. 23:3). During this time the priesthood was established, by which Yah’s

oracles were preserved to the time of Yeshua (Ac. 7:38). Even non-Sabbatarians admit Yeshua didn't break the Sabbath, and we know the calendar integrity since His day; so there is no good reason to believe that the seventh day we keep today does not coordinate directly with the seventh day of the seven-day cycle established by Yahweh at creation.

The general answer to the whole issue of "when really is the Sabbath?" among Sabbatarians has always been that it's the seventh day of the week wherever you happen to be at the time. The Sabbath is not a cosmic institution. "The Sabbath was made for man" (Mk. 2:27), and it was Yahweh who made men to dwell throughout the earth, determining the boundaries of their habitation (Ac. 17:26). So wherever the man is, that's where the Sabbath occurs for him. The Sabbath travels around the world, time zone by time zone, until all of Yah's people have had opportunity to avail themselves of its blessing; when it has run its course, all who have kept the Sabbath have kept the same Sabbath.

As for the International Date Line, in the absence of any biblical injunction it is not inappropriate in Yahweh's sight for humans to make such decisions, and not impossible for Yahweh to work through their efforts (Ro. 13:1).

Knowing that all kinds of questions about many different matters would arise in the course of time, Christ at the outset gave His Church the authority to make administrative decisions, and this would seem to include what to do in extraordinary cases of people living, for instance, in the Arctic Circle, and which festival particulars to observe in the modern context. This isn't (or in the right hands, wouldn't be) using human reasoning to limit our obedience; it is a necessary function of Christian ministry (Mt. 16:19).

As for what is allowed and not allowed on the Sabbath, there are no NT instructions concerning exactly how to keep the Sabbath because in the age of the Spirit, such is unnecessary. In everything we can monitor our hearts in the Spirit and by doing so, we'll sense the difference between liberty and license. That's the whole point of Yahweh having made a new covenant in the first place. The point of the Sabbath is to keep the day in a way that effectively recognizes its Maker, and brings us closer to Him. To involve ourselves in activities that neglect or ignore these necessary requirements is contrary to the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Even so, perhaps some would still be troubled by the fact there are no clear NT guidelines for Sabbath observance, and if it is impossible to really know when one has broken the Sabbath, how can the Sabbath be in any sense an absolute? This is a fair concern, but perhaps we should consider that we don't have all the answers to a lot of sin issues raised in the new covenant.

For one of the ironies of the new covenant is that since Yahweh's laws are written on our hearts, much of what is called sin in the NT is mental, attitudinal and spiritual. Sin, we're taught from the Sermon on the Mount onward, occurs first, and perhaps most importantly, in the mind! And it really is sin, and we all recognize that. Yet, who can say what is the precise moment when sincere anger becomes sinful rage? Who can say exactly when simple desire becomes covetousness, or when one's necessary struggle to make money constitutes greed?

We must admit to ourselves that there are many times in our Christian walk when we really don't know if we've crossed the line into sin or not. Sabbath-keeping might be something like this too. I believe the Sabbath is fundamentally a mental and spiritual event, not a physical one. What our bodies are allowed to do on the Sabbath is not the primary concern, as seems evident in Mt. 12. It seems in fact that what we do with our bodies on the Sabbath is important only insofar as it impacts our ability to focus on the things of Yahweh.

Having said that, though, we should at least recognize that rest is the very root of the word itself (shabath = "desist from exertion"). The entire concept is unintelligible in the context of working for a living; indeed, the servile work of this age is one of the main things we need liberation from! In most cases I would think there would be little if any spiritual benefit to be had from a Sabbath that is spent working for personal gain or pleasure. The whole purpose of Sabbath, as one well expressed it, is for believers to "cease from their work to allow Yahweh to work in them."

While Mt. 12 is clear that we have liberty in regard to the Sabbath, the NT is just as clear that Yahweh made it, and intended men to benefit from it (Mk. 2:27), in preparation for the Kingdom now and future (He. 4). Thus, Christ's command to "seek the Kingdom first" (Mt. 6:33) would apply to those wondering whether to work for a living this day.

### **Conclusion To The Arguments**

It is clear to me that non-Sabbatarians have yet to prove their case that the Sabbath and festivals saw their termination at the death and resurrection of Jesus; and there are a number of important, scriptural reasons to conclude the opposite. Anyone hoping to dispense with observances that were established by Yahweh and kept by Yeshua and the apostles had better have pretty good reasons for doing so—better reasons than what we've seen here. Lacking that, their proof-texts would need to be utterly conclusive for their case.

### **The Sabbath and Festival Proof-texts**

Last time we saw that none of the arguments non-Sabbatarians use to prove the Sabbath and annual festivals saw their terminating fulfilment in the death of Yeshua were compelling. Dispensing with observances that were established by Yahweh requires, then, that their proof-texts be conclusive for their case. I will examine those proof-texts now, along with two that are put forward by Sabbath and festival-keeping groups.

#### **Rom. 14:5, 6**

From the top of this chapter in this epistle, we know a couple of things of what this is going to be about: first, this is regarding those who are "weak in the faith." Second, it involves "doubtful things," things which no one can be dogmatic about (v. 1). What were those doubtful things? What people choose to eat (v. 2, 3).

That this chapter is chiefly about food customs is evident by the fact that food and drink is mentioned sixteen times in the chapter, from beginning (v. 1) to end (v. 23). "Days" are

mentioned only in passing (v. 5, 6).

Non-Sabbatarians claim that Jew/gentile tensions in Rome created conflict with respect to OT unclean meats regulations, and therefore the reference to “days,” while unspecified, would most naturally have been the Sabbath and festivals. In fact, the non-Sabbatarian interpretation of this passage as it pertains to days is almost entirely dependent upon their interpretation of the food issue (see James D.G. Dunn, *The Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 795f.). So we should examine it closely.

Three possibilities are most often cited about what exactly the nature of the food controversy was: 1) Jewish fears of eating unclean animals, 2) Jewish fears of eating meat that had not been properly drained, and 3) conscience problems in eating meat offered to idols. We should look at each of these three possibilities against the scriptural data of the entire chapter.

### **Jewish Fears of Eating Unclean Animals**

On its face, verse 14 would seem to confirm this as the likely candidate, for it uses the word “unclean” (koinos). Second, this view has something to commend it from the standpoint of the larger context of the letter, much of which concerns the relative status of Jew and gentile under the new covenant (esp. chs. 2, 3). If there were conflicts between Jew and gentile in Rome, it could conceivably have been over OT laws and how to keep them.

But the connection between koinos and unclean animal regulations is not as taut as would appear at first, for even those who argue for a Jew vs. gentile conflict, like Dunn, admit koinos had a broad usage and could have referred to any of the possibilities listed here (Mk. 7:2; He. 10:29). And, that Paul dealt with issues of Jew and gentile elsewhere in the letter would not force a conclusion to any of these three possibilities; Jew/gentile interaction and differences in approach could have been an irritant in any of them.

But this position only begins to look less than likely when we consider that in verse 2, Paul says that the weak ones are only eating vegetables. If this problem is about the unclean meats regulations of Lev. 11, there would have been plenty of clean meats that could have been had in a city the size of Rome.

Additionally, in v. 17 “drink” is mentioned, and in v. 21, wine. So the problems at hand did not just have to do with food and eating, but also with wine and drinking. But there were no general regulations concerning wine or drinking in the Torah, or Judaism generally. On this point, then, the weak members’ concerns could not have stemmed from OT regulations or common Jewish customs.

### **Jewish Fears of Eating Improperly Drained Foods**

This possibility does not suffer one weakness of the previous view, for vegetarianism would have certainly ensured that one would not eat meats that might have not been properly drained. But remember the problem also involved wine and drink, which wouldn’t apply in this case any more than to the first.

## Conscience Problems in Eating Foods Offered to Idols

This possibility is the only one which doesn't share the weakness of the other two. If the problem in Rome was food offered to idols, then vegetarianism would not have been an inappropriate response, for all the meat available would have been "tainted," which only vegetarianism could have fully resolved for the conscience-stricken.

Additionally, in Rome wine was also offered to the gods just as meat was, which makes this the only possibility which really fits v. 17 and v. 21. And we know conscience concerns regarding foods offered to idols was by no means a remote possibility, for Paul had to deal with this same matter in another gentile city (I Cor. 8).

So it is far from certain that the food issue was Jewish scruples regarding the eating of unclean animals. For all we know, it may not have involved Jewish scruples about anything; it could very well have been a conscience issue of meat and wine offered to idols that Roman gentiles, as in Corinth, felt acutely.

This is the only view commonly put forth on this chapter that does not suffer textual counter-evidence; but because of Paul's lack of specificity, we can't be certain one way or the other.

Going further, then, verse 5 and 6 also includes the matter of "days." Two possibilities exist here. One is that these were the biblical observances in view. We'll examine that in a moment. The other possibility is that these "days" were personal days of feasting or fasting.

It is difficult for Western moderns to conceive of this, since we have so few religious observances in our culture, but the ancient world took its religion seriously, and naturally developed a host of personal observance customs not explicitly taught in the official religious traditions.

We get a hint of this in Luke 18:12 when Yeshua quotes the Pharisee: "I fast twice a week..." This was a well-known personal observance regimen of that time. As late as c. 120 AD, the Didache instructs its Christian readers:

"Don't fast on the same days with the hypocrites (Pharisees), for they fast on Monday and Thursday; but you must fast on Wednesday and Friday."

We may think this almost humorous today, but ancients took these things seriously. Special days of feasting or fasting is how days might have become tied up with food in Rome, for there is a direct connection made in this letter between food and days (v. 6).

But what of the possibility that in "days," Paul was speaking of the biblical observances? Well, since there are real problems attendant to its corollary that the "food" issue related to OT unclean meats regulations, the scenario which underlies this position seems unlikely. And there is no mention of Sabbath or festivals in the text.

Moreover, equating the “days” in this chapter with the biblical observances runs into this problem: Paul called the folks in question “weak,” and in 15:1, he puts himself in the category of the “strong.” But Paul himself kept the Sabbath and festivals, and at times took great pains to do so (Ac. 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 19 + poss. Ac. 18:21; 20:6, 16; 27:9; I Cor. 16:8)! To categorize himself as one who easily disregarded the biblical days would have constituted an entirely unconvincing stance.

In the final analysis, I don’t believe it is possible from this vantage point to know exactly what specific issues Paul was speaking to. The text as it stands just doesn’t allow us to know with any certainty, since the days in question are not specified.

Therefore, if we cannot know that Paul is referring specifically to biblical days, there is no way of knowing that he would say these things if that were, in fact, his topic. To generalize Paul’s vague comments about these “days,” whatever they were, in an attempt to establish his point of view on biblical days specifically is to pull these words out of its murky context to conclude something we cannot know Paul would ever say.

Therefore, I believe propagating a view of the Sabbath and festivals with this passage as a basis—as non-Sabbatarians almost always do—is more than inappropriate; it is irresponsible.

### **Galatians 4:9, 10**

The Sabbath and annual festivals are not specifically mentioned here. The “days, months, seasons and years” Paul cites could refer to either biblical or pagan observances. For the reasons stated below, I think the former is more likely, but in the end I think we’ll find it actually makes little difference. Beginning in v. 8, Paul says:

“But, indeed, when you did not know Yahweh, you served those which by nature are not gods.”

He is speaking here of the Galatians’ former life without Yahweh in paganism. James Montgomery Boice, in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary (vol. 10, p.475), writes:

“The reference is clearly to the idols of paganism, which, in typically Jewish idiom, Paul terms ‘no gods.’ Then, in verse 9, Paul asks: “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years.”

Now they are returning to something elemental, something physical, in a slavish mentality. Since these were gentiles, wouldn’t these be pagan observances? How could they “turn again” to something they weren’t doing before? These are good questions, but there is reason to think these may have been biblical, or at least Jewish, observances which the Galatians were beginning to view as they used to view their pagan days!

Why is this even a possibility? First, it appears in the letter that the ones troubling the

Galatians were probably the same group or type of Jerusalemite Jew who troubled Titus and Antioch (2:1-4, 12). Believing Pharisees would have been the last people on earth to compel pagan anything upon anyone.

Moreover, in this very chapter, Paul, after a parenthetical section in v. 12- 20, returns to the subject in v. 21: “Tell me, you who desire to be under the law...” Every historical source and scripture we have suggests that the theological pressures of this early date (48-49 A.D.) issued almost exclusively from Palestinian Judaism. Gnosticism, which indeed included in its systems pagan elements, was not yet, as far as anyone can tell, a threat to the church.

Boice explains well how Paul could use such language in relation to biblical days (p. 476):

“The law is good and from God. Nevertheless, even the law, when distorted into a way of trying to earn salvation, can be used by religious leaders to increase man’s bondage. That Paul, the Jew, would even consider the Jewish observances in the same context as the pagan festivals shows the intensity of his estimate of the deadly character of legalism.”

If this is true, we may be seeing why Paul can write 4:9 & 10 to the Galatians in reference to biblical days on the one hand, and keep the Days of Unleavened Bread with the gentile Phillipians (Ac. 20:6), and tell the Corinthians he will “wait in Ephesus until Pentecost” (I Cor. 16:8), and so on. Paul was not double-dealing the gentile churches, and he was no hypocrite. I would suggest that we may be seeing Paul’s radical distinction between justification by grace apart from works and living the sanctified life. I believe we’re seeing a strong concern here about motive.

It may well be that Paul felt this young church was doing the right things for the wrong reasons; that is, to establish right-standing with Yahweh through an almost superstitious conception of days of observance. That is what the context of the letter shows, was the problem, not the days themselves. Some non-Sabbatarians, of course, would say they were doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons. But they haven’t stopped to consider that Passover is a “day” as well. (And Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, etc. would also apply). For whatever it is Paul is saying about days, he is both categorical and dogmatic about it. If Paul is not condemning the Galatians’ motives for keeping these days, Paul must be condemning any involvement with calendrical observances, for any reason; for his language is general, and would apply to all days of observance—including his own Sabbath and festival keeping!

I believe Paul, writing from afar and—it is not unfair to say, being somewhat desperate (5:12), might here be attacking even the good things to which this young gentile church was becoming attached, for they were becoming attached to them with all the wrong motives, with a superstitious and slavish attitude, and under a dangerous misunderstanding of their justification with Yahweh and upon what that was based. Paul’s objection to the Galatians’ keeping of biblical observances could not have been with the fact—he himself kept them all—but the “motive” which was, for him, all-important (see Gal. 5:2 vs. Ac. 16:1-3).

So, regardless of whether these are pagan or biblical days in view here, the lesson for us

is the same: observances should not be thought of as preconditions for justification, or right-standing with Yahweh, as the Galatians apparently did. In the context of this letter we see that days of observance cannot serve this purpose any more effectively than circumcision did (5:1-4); for no human activity of any kind can possibly produce right-standing with Yahweh, which is granted freely by grace through faith (2:16).

### **Colossians 2:16, 17**

In Colosse we see what appears to be a very different situation being played out. The problem Paul was reacting to there was heretics who were promoting man-made (probably gnostic) spiritual supplements to Christ. Evidence for this is all over the chapter. In 1:19 and 2:9, Paul applies the term “fullness” in regard to Christ; for a major feature of Gnostic practice was their attempt to apprehend the fullness of God through ascetic observances, which Paul condemns. And in 2:8 Paul calls their teaching a “philosophy and vain deceit, according to the tradition of men.”

What were those traditions? They included worship of angels (v. 18), ascetic regulations (v. 21), including deliberate self-humiliation through neglect of the body (v. 23). None of these things appear in the OT, which is why Paul again calls them “the commandments and doctrines of men” (v. 22). Unlike his letter to the Galatians, Paul does not cite a single OT passage here, showing clearly that OT laws or observances were not at issue in Colosse. The issue was whether having Christ was sufficient or whether men needed to add ascetic practice to what He has done and is doing.

Verse 16, then, begins a conclusionary statement, beginning with “Therefore...” In other words, “Since all the preceding things are true about what Christ alone has done (v. 11-15),” “let no one judge you...” The verb for “judge,” *krino*, does not mean ‘condemn.’ After all, one can’t keep another from condemning if that is what he wants to do? It means, “Don’t allow anyone to take you to task.”

“In food or in drink...” This is an unfortunate translation. *Brosis* and *posis* are *verbs* referring to the *act* of eating, and the *act* of drinking (cf. I Cor. 8:4 and II Cor. 9:10 with I Cor. 6:13, 8:8, 10:3 and He. 9:10).

Indeed, there are no drinking regulations in the OT, save for those that relate to priests and Nazarites, which these gentiles would hardly mistake themselves for. Therefore, we see from the top that what Paul has in mind in these two verses, as in the rest of the chapter, are *man-made* regulations, not biblical ones, and he is encouraging the Colossians to not allow anyone to take them to task for not obeying them.

“Or regarding...” The English “regarding” we normally read as meaning “concerning.” But the predominant NT word for “concerning” is *peri*, a preposition, used this way over fifty times in the NT. The word translated “regarding” in v. 16 is not a preposition, but a noun, used here as *en merei*, from *meros*, literally, “part of.” Thayer sees its usage here as if to say, “any particular,” or, “‘in this particular’...” Paul then, by his use not of *peri* but of *en merei* indicates that he is concerned about the particulars of what is about to follow.

So a more precise wording might be, "...in the particulars of a festival..." This sense is consistent with the context, because we have already seen that the heretics were indeed taking the Colossians to task over particulars of eating and drinking. It would make sense, given their ascetic outlook (v. 20-23), that they would be taking them to task over their manner of feasting as well. "...a festival or a new moon or sabbaths..." Almost certainly the annual, monthly and weekly biblical observances are intended here. For if these were pagan days, Paul would not say that they were "shadows of things to come."

Given this, we should not hurry past the fact that in order to be taken to task over the particulars of how they were keeping these biblical observances, the Colossians *must have been keeping them*.

The alternative is to imagine that the Christians at Colosse were not keeping these days, but the heretics were forcing them upon them. Two facts militate against this view. First, as we've already noted, Paul's concern is with the heretics' human regulations, their "commandments of men" (v. 4, 8, 18, 20- 23). Paul knew very well where the biblical days came from, however, and knew that whatever else they were, the observances of Ex. 16 & 20 and Lev.23 were not commandments of men.

Moreover, it is very clear that the heretics' commandments involved ascetic regulations (v. 21f.), and asceticism is the attitudinal and behavioral opposite of feasting. You don't promote asceticism by promoting feasting. You promote asceticism by criticizing the way someone is keeping a feast, or the fact that they are feasting at all.

"...which are a shadow of things to come..." The word "are" translated correctly here from the NKJV is *esti*, and it is present in tense (see 1:15, 17, 18, 27), which is important to note because the NIV translates *esti* in the past tense "were," which puts an unhelpful spin on Paul's meaning here (they translate *esti* in the present tense everywhere else in the letter). This issue is important because non-Sabbatarians claim that all that could be relevant to us in any of the biblical observances has already seen its fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Yeshua.

Obviously, Paul would be reflecting that viewpoint if he were indeed putting this in the past tense "were," but he isn't, and this is significant. For by putting the "shadowing" function of the biblical days in the present ("are"), and looking forward ("to come"), it's clear Paul believes they also point to events in Yahweh's redemptive plan that are being fulfilled today and to those that lay yet ahead, all of which are of course historically beyond the events of the life, death and resurrection of Yeshua.

The word for "shadow" is *skia*, used both literally and figuratively in the NT. The two instances where it is used figuratively other than here are Heb. 8:5 and 10:1, where they are likened to the tabernacle and sacrifices, respectively. But if the writer of Hebrews uses "shadows" for things that are now defunct, are the Sabbath and festivals now defunct as well?

Like the different use of *stoicheia* here and in Galatians 4, Paul may have another thought in mind in using "shadows" here than he did in writing to the Hebrews. For in the two texts a

different reference point is put against *skia*. Here, *skia* (shadow) is contrasted to *soma* (body—relating to Christ). In Hebrews 10:1, *skia* is put against *eikeon* (true form—relating to heavenly forms of perfection), which obviously implies an inferior/superior comparison.

Here, however, in relating *skia* to *soma*, Paul's terminology does not pit one against the other, but rather turns gnostic teaching on its head through an analogy which shows Christ (the body) as the fullness and the observances the shadow which the body casts.

Thus, Christ is the preeminent object of concern, and the observances are a rough outline, Paul might say, of His great redemptive work on our behalf. This would counter the heretics' gnostic teaching that observances must be conducted a certain way (ascetically, apparently) to gain association with the "fullness." There is no concern at all with gnosticism in Hebrews, and the writer's use of *skia* there serves an entirely different purpose.

Secondly, let's remember that Paul himself participated in these days (Ac.13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 19, poss. 21; 20:6, 16; 27:9; I Cor. 16:8 + Ac. 24:14). So his position would have to be that it's one thing for Jews to keep them but that they should not be imposed upon gentiles. The problem is, that isn't his argument here. If Paul were seeking to dissuade the Colossians from being persuaded to keep the biblical observances, the argument would have to be because they are merely shadows, therefore of little worth or import at all. But that would be declaring a defect in the days themselves, and such an inherent shortcoming would apply to the keeping of them by anyone, Jew or gentile; including, of course, Paul himself.

Still, some would say that the biblical observances indeed foreshadowed what would come in Christ and were good and useful for that purpose, but now that the reality is here, the shadows are no longer necessary. If this is true we cannot deduce it from this scripture, for three reasons.

First, it is using Paul's terminology to create an argument Paul does not make. He does not say the shadows are no longer necessary. He simply says the days are shadows of things to come. Theirs is, at best, an importation of the sense of other scriptures from another context from another letter from (scholars generally think) another writer (Hebrews).

Second, again, Paul himself was observant of all these days, and not just in the company of Jews (Ac. 20:6; I Cor. 16:8). At other times, he openly took pains in his travels within gentile lands to travel to Jerusalem for certain high days (poss. Ac. 18:21; Ac. 20:16), which in those times was no small undertaking. Certainly it was not Paul's sense that these days were no longer special.

Third, non-Sabbatarians apparently have not considered that the very first thing the annual days foreshadowed was the sacrifice of Christ, which we of course have now; so then, if their reasoning is correct, the very first observance rendered unnecessary in any form should have been the Passover.

"...but the substance is of Christ." That Paul's purpose is not to abrogate these days is clear enough, but it is equally clear that he is trying to set them in proper perspective. The

heretics, from Paul's standpoint, were preoccupying the Colossians with false teaching about the proper manner of and motive for these observances. Paul is warning them not against the Sabbath and festivals per se, but against those who 1) foster preoccupation over questions of how to keep a festival or Sabbath (manner), and 2) promote observance practices as means in themselves to achieve a mystical association with the "fullness," or Christ (motive).

Paul's purpose is to emphasize that the shadow must not become the substitute for the reality, which is Christ alone. His is the Body (soma) which casts the shadow; to focus on the shadow to the exclusion of the Body is to miss the whole point of the observances! Furthermore, ascetic rigor in keeping the biblical observances in the hopes of achieving a higher form of fellowship with Christ was unnecessary, Paul maintains; in fact, it is impossible, for the Colossians have complete association with Him already (2:2, 3, 10).

In summary then, there is every reason to believe that in this passage Paul is not saying, "Don't let anyone impose upon you the Sabbath and festivals," but, "Don't let anyone take you to task about how you keep the Sabbath and festivals." Perhaps a paraphrase of 2:16, 17 might read:

"Therefore let no one take you to task over your eating and drinking, or the particulars of your annual festival, new moon or Sabbath observances, which after all, are a shadow of things to come; always remember that the Body which casts the shadow is Christ."

**If this analysis is correct, these verses reveal that in the first century the Sabbath and annual festivals were in fact *kept by gentile Christians* and were not considered appropriate only for Jewish Christians.**

But let's say for the sake of argument that all this is incorrect; that the Colossians had not been keeping the Sabbath and festivals in any way, and the heretics' aim was, in fact, to force their observance upon them. If Paul kept these days himself, as seems indisputable, then his warning to the Colossians would have to be that they should not adopt the biblical observances for the reason the heretics proposed—namely, to participate mystically in the "fullness" of Christ; which we understand today. So either way, these verses in context do not well serve the non-Sabbatarian's argument.

### **I Cor. 5:8**

The phrase translated "let us keep the feast" is from the single word *heortazomen*, from *heortazo*, according to Thayer, literally, "celebrate a festival."

On its face, Paul's choice of wording forms a literal instruction to celebrate a literal feast. But is it possible that this literal wording could have been intended figuratively, and that when Paul says "you truly are unleavened" he meant spiritually unleavened through Christ our Passover? Of course. So let's go with this interpretation and see where it leads; we'll find it does not make as much difference as some seem to think.

First, Paul certainly would have known how ineffective this sermon would have been if

he had structured it around a festival most of these gentiles didn't know much about or weren't keeping. For most of the growth from Paul's work in Corinth took place after he abandoned the Corinthian synagogue (Ac. 18:1- 11).

To get a sense of the overwhelmingly gentile makeup of this church, we only need to note that the sin which precipitated this sermon was a distinctly gentile sexual sin, which observant Jews would not have readily taken in stride—indeed, taken in pride—the way this church obviously did (v. 1-6; 9-13).

Even that being the case, it is significant that this sermon assumes an understanding of the symbolism and purpose of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and a mindfulness of it in these gentiles' lives. Notice Paul is not informing them of the feast, he's reminding them of its relevance to their moral situation. This reveals prior teaching by Paul of these days, which is only to be expected, as he was keeping them himself at this time (Ac. 20:6).

So regardless of whether one chooses to take *heortazomen* literally or figuratively, this passage reveals Paul's conviction that this annual festival was just as important and spiritually relevant for his gentile followers as for himself. This is plainly seen through Paul's conjunction of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (v. 7).

Paul treats the two observances as equal in importance and meaning. For Paul, this fact was of no consequence; the Feast of Unleavened Bread was just as relevant to his gentile followers as the Passover.

If any of the apostles would have thought Yeshua not explicitly commanding the other six annual observances was significant, it would have been Paul, who, we know, strenuously objected to the introduction of any unnecessary observances upon his gentile converts (Gal. 5:2). Clearly Paul did not see the Feast of Unleavened Bread in that light. The Paul of those who say he instructed his gentile followers to disregard biblical days is not the same Paul who wrote this passage.

### **Hebrews 3, 4**

The argument we are concerned with has its beginning in 3:5 and continues to 4:13, and there are clues all along the way that should inform our understanding of the verses more critical to our Sabbath question, 4:9 and 10. The keynote for the passage is struck in 3:6, wherein the writer tells us we are Christ's house if:

“...we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”

In verses 7-11, he quotes Ps. 95:7-11 about the negative example of the faithless and rebellious Exodus generation. He then exhorts his audience in verse 12 that they must not likewise depart from the living God, exhorting each other daily, lest sin overtake them. Then he says something in verse 14 which echoes his point in verse 6:

“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”

In verses 15-18 his exhortation receives illustration again in the example of the faithless and disobedient Exodus generation, asking finally:

“And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?”

So we see that his preoccupation in this chapter has been that we remain faithful and obedient so we might endure to the end and participate in some future blessing of rest. Now we arrive at chapter 4:

“Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those that heard it” (v. 1, 2).

Due to unbelief, the promise of rest went unclaimed by the Exodus generation, and is available for the faithful to claim now. There are two important things to notice here. First, the promise of rest yet remains—it is yet future. Something isn’t a promise if it has already been delivered.

Second, whatever this promised “rest” is, it cannot be the seventh-day Sabbath, for Israel already received that at Sinai, and had access to it throughout their history. Third, we should notice that this is a rest about which we must fear “lest any...come short of it.” So we Christians can fall short in some way and not receive this “rest.” What exactly is the nature of that “rest” is not yet clear. But v. 3 says:

“For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said, ‘So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest,’ although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day this way: ‘And Yahweh rested on the seventh day from all His works,’ and again in this place: ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ ”

Thus far we’ve seen that the author’s “rest” was some future event. But he shifts gears for the moment. For the verb “enter” here is present tense. Those who have faith—“we who have believed”—in some sense enter the rest now which was established “from the foundation of the world.” In what sense are we to understand our present experience of “rest?” He endeavours to answer by moving immediately to the fact that the “rest” he speaks of was established at creation week, when Yahweh sabbatized, or rested, on the seventh day. So our present experience of rest is to be understood in and through the creation-week Sabbath. Non-Sabbatarians see this present “rest” exclusively in light of Mt. 11:28: “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

No doubt it is Christ living in us, which produces this present experience of “rest,” inasmuch as Christ in us provides all our present spiritual blessings, but this is not the writer’s

thought or concern in this particular passage. The writer does not identify our “rest” here with the indwelling or Person of Christ, but with the seventh-day Sabbath. It is this which was established “from the foundation of world,” and it is this which he insists illuminates our present “rest.”

Verses 5-8: In this parenthetical section, the writer reminds us that Yahweh rejected the Exodus generation of Israelites, so the “rest” remained for someone to enter. Then he notes that Joshua did in fact bring a people into a restful promised land (Josh. 21:43-45), but then, afterward, David repeated the promise, by saying, “today.” So this particular “rest” he is speaking of could not have been exhausted in Joshua. The writer is clear here that the rest the Sabbath ultimately pointed to was not Canaan, as some non-Sabbatarians have argued on the basis of Dt. 5:15. That brings us to v. 9:

“There remains therefore a rest for the people of Yahweh.”

This resumes the thought-flow from v. 4 and serves as something of a climax to his argument. God founded a “rest” at creation when He created the Sabbath. Whatever that rest was, by and large the ancient Israelites did not claim it, though they had the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and the physical promised land.

Thus we have a rest typified by the creation Sabbath which they did not claim and so “remains...for the people of Yahweh.” The word here for “rest” is *sabbatismos*, and everywhere else it is *katapausis*. Sabbatismos, then, is equated with the katapausis. This interchange suggests that the katapausis- rest he has been discussing all along is best understood in light of the sabbatizing rest of Yahweh on the seventh day of creation. Verse 10 helps us understand more:

“For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as Yahweh did from His.”

Some have seen this verse in the present, and some see it referring to something yet future. Which it is more likely to be depends on how well each point of view meets the demands of the details of the verse.

The first detail to examine is the word translated here “has entered.” This word is in the aorist tense, which means it occurred at some particular point in the past, and continues to the present. Because there are both past and present elements contained in this, translators have ended up translating this word both in the past tense (NKJV, NASB) and present tense—usually, “enters” (RSV, NIV, NEB). So the grammar of this word will not likely lead us to a sure conclusion, and we need to look at the other details of the verse.

The other important phrase to the present/future question is “ceased from his works.” There are three common explanations which correspond to the “present” view and one which corresponds to the “future” view.

The first explanation of the “present” camp is that believers have rest because they no longer attempt to be justified before Yahweh through their own works. The second view is that

this “ceasing from works” is our ceasing from sin, from “dead works.” But neither of these can be correct, since we are told that in this rest we cease from our works “as Yahweh did from His,” and Yahweh obviously never tried to justify Himself though works and has never sinned. Both of these, of course, are explanations offered by non-Sabbatarians.

Sabbatarians, for their part, see in the phrase “cease from his works” our cessation from worldly work in present-day Sabbath-keeping. If this were the intent however, “rest” here would be sabbatismos, but it is katapausis.

So then, all attempts to see this verse in the present appear misguided, and that leaves us to conclude that the writer has returned to the future, eternal aspect of the katapausis-rest, which is where the argument was headed from the start. Perhaps the “rest” he speaks of is akin to Rev. 14:13:

“ ... Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’ ” (see also Mt. 11:12; Lk. 13:24; Ro. 8:18-23; I Cor. 9:24-27; Eph. 6:1-17; II Tim. 2:1-5).

I believe here we see that when we enter the promised future eternal rest, typified by the Sabbath at the physical creation, the spiritual creation being wrought in us will be finished, just as the physical creation Yahweh wrought on creation week was finished (v. 3). Then we will receive our ultimate, final rest. This conclusion is supported by v. 11:

“Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience.”

This promised “rest,” linked to the “rest” in v. 10 (which in turn is linked to the “rest” in v. 9), is something it says here we must diligently enter into. One may diligently keep the Sabbath, but one hardly strives to enter into it. To exhort Christians who are already justified to diligently enter justification apart from works is even less coherent.

So we are left to conclude that this verse equates the katapausis with eternal life in Yah’s Kingdom. This makes sense since this was where the whole argument was headed from the beginning, having picked up several statements concerning a future “rest” along the way (3:6, 14, 18). If we needed any more confirmation that this passage is a focus on the future, the last two verses provide it; for here he exhorts us to obey Yahweh so we might be prepared for the Judgment (v. 12-13).

Before we leave this, we should note that if it is correct that this complete realization of the Sabbath-rest is yet future, the rest to which the Sabbath pointed cannot then only be our present spiritual rest in Christ; therefore, the Sabbath’s terminating fulfillment was not found in the first advent of Christ.

There is yet a future fulfillment of rest, reflected in and illuminated by the Sabbath, which we have not yet entered.

But the question remains, is there a directive here for Christians to keep a literal seventh-day Sabbath? Sabbatismos has as its root that which is used in the Septuagint (from which the writer quotes throughout the book), for literal Sabbath-keeping (Ex. 16:30; Lev. 23:32; 26:34; II Chr. 36:21). The term itself is later found in post-NT Christian writings, and it is consistently used in all these places to mean, literally, “a keeping of the Sabbath.” Like *heortazomen* in I Cor. 5:8 for “keep the Feast,” it is a literal term for the actual keeping of a day (or, in the case of I Cor. 5:8, feast).

But the context and flow of the argument here seems to be such that, while literal observance might well be implied inasmuch as it is assumed, an explicit command for literal observance does not appear to have been the writer’s purpose. In context, the use of *sabbatismos* appears to principally serve the writer’s purpose in equating the *katapausis* with Yahweh’s sabbatizing the seventh day of creation.

And we noted earlier that the Israelites received the seventh-day Sabbath rest, but they did not enter the rest the writer speaks of in this passage. Moreover, if the writer is addressing Jewish Christians who were likely keeping OT observances, as the consensus among scholars seems to be, would he expend this much effort to merely command them to do what they were already doing? Obviously, no.

So it seems most likely that the *katapausis* that dominated this passage is not the literal keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. However, by equating the *katapausis* with the creation Sabbath, the writer links both our present and future rest—granted us in and through the new covenant—with the Sabbath.

In doing so the writer is emphatic that the Sabbath is a new covenant institution, not principally an old covenant one.

If the Sabbath were still to be kept by Christians, we would expect the NT to use it to expound its implications for and place in God’s redemptive plan— and we see this writer doing exactly that! Some say that since this passage is not discussing the Sabbath’s literal observance but the fulfillment of its blessings, no inference can be made from it about its literal observance.

This would certainly be true if the audience were not keeping the Sabbath, for an explicit instruction to do so would be warranted in such a case, and the absence of such an instruction would be significant. But if the author understood his audience to be Christians who kept the OT observances (as non-Sabbatarians indeed understand and argue is the case here), that he does not launch a polemic defense of literal Sabbath-keeping but rather expounds the Sabbath’s meaning and exhort his readers to participate in its blessing leads us to the conclusion that its literal observance was assumed, and of course approved of.

It is important that not all OT institutions receive such benign treatment in this letter; in fact, none but the Sabbath does. The writer spends four chapters explaining the obsolescence of the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices in ch. 7-10, which he insists are now “annulled” (7:18) and “abolished” (10:9), but the Sabbath’s purpose and significance, he says, “remains” (4:9).

The Sabbath is not only NOT abrogated (and the writer is hardly afraid to abrogate), it is here held in the highest regard for what it still signifies for Yahweh's people today. This is illustrated two ways. First, in ch. 4 he expounds the Sabbath's centrality to the past, present and future work of Yahweh. The Sabbath recognizes His work of physical creation (v. 3, 4, 9), but also informs our understanding of His present spiritual re-creation in us (v. 3, 4, 9), and most importantly typifies our future eternal rest (v. 9, 10, 11).

By this, both the "already" and "not yet" aspects of the Kingdom is seen to be reflected through the Sabbath. To the writer of Hebrews, then, the Sabbath spans all redemptive history, including that which is yet future, and its application has by no means terminated in the death and resurrection of Christ, as have some other OT observances. By returning to Ge. 2:2, the writer sees in the creation Sabbath the satisfaction of ultimate purpose in all creation—especially our spiritual re-creation (in both senses of that term).

Second, in 10:25, he exhorts his audience to "not forsake the assembling of yourselves together," and these Hebrews, there is every reason to believe, would have understood this in the context of their Sabbath gatherings. If anyone was clear as to which OT observances Christ had superseded, the one who wrote He. 7-10 was. Were it appropriate to do so, he would not likely have missed this opportunity to set his audience straight on the Sabbath also, which was an observance normally kept much more often than any Levitical ritual.

But the writer obviously does not see Christ superseding or replacing the Sabbath, as non-Sabbatarians claim is the case. To the writer of Hebrews, the Sabbath—unlike the Levitical observances—is, not was. And it "remains" for partakers of the new covenant.

Some would say that this means little, since the letter was written to Hebrews, not gentiles, and only if the letter was addressed to gentiles would this be significant to us as non-Jewish Christians. To them I would ask: Is this letter part of your canon or is it not? Should we then disregard chapters 7-10 as well, for is not the matter at hand in those chapters a "Jewish" one as well? Who is qualified to say we must heed the writer when he abrogates certain biblical observances, but ignore him when he supports others?

### **Conclusion To The Arguments And Proof-Texts**

We mentioned earlier that since, upon examination, none of the arguments set forth by non-Sabbatarians were persuasive, their proof-texts would need to be conclusive for their case that the biblical observances are not expected of Yahweh's people today. We have seen that these scriptures do not lead us to such a conclusion.

In sum, the picture we have is of a first century Church that was in the main, and as far as we can tell, a Sabbath-keeping, festival-keeping body, and there was every apostolic example and teaching for, and no apostolic instruction against keeping them.

That said, upon what basis can a case be made that Christians ought to keep the biblical observances? I believe the case is summed up in this:

1) Yeshua warned that following worship traditions devised by men leads to vain worship (Mt. 15:8,9), and explained that His Father seeks men to worship, and worship only according to truth (Jn. 4:23, 24), which to Him was Yahweh's Word (Jn. 17:17).

2) Scripture teaches that the Sabbath was created at the foundation of the world by Yahweh through the Word for the benefit of man (Ge. 2:2; Ex. 20:11; Mk. 2:27, 28; Jn 1:3), and for the purpose of teaching us fundamental truths regarding His past, present and future redemptive work (He. 4:3, 4, 9).

3) The Sabbath was habitually kept by Yeshua and the apostles (Lk. 4:16; Mk 1:21, 29; 3:1; Lk. 4:44; 13:10 and Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4, 19, 24, 36) and there is no other regular weekly collective worship tradition in the Bible; despite clear abrogation of key OT observances, the Sabbath is never among them.

4) As for the annual festivals, it is clear that they were ordained by Yahweh and kept and taught by Yeshua, the apostles and as far as we can tell, gentile churches (Lev. 23:2; Mt. 26:17f.; Jn. 7:10, 37; Ac. 18:21; 20:6, 16; 27:9; I Cor. 5:8; 16:8; Col. 2:16). It is significant that there is no attitudinal difference to detect in Paul between the Sabbath and annual festivals. He makes no qualitative distinctions between them (to the Colossians he says they all foreshadow things to come); this would not be lightly regarded by those seeking a biblical Christianity.

Some who are aware that I believe the Ten Commandments reflect Yahweh's will for all men have asked why I don't include that as one of my reasons here. Because the sad fact is that when you bring the law of Moses (which is actually Yahweh's law, since Moses commanded no laws of his own devising) into a discussion of what observances we ought to keep, it ends up diverting the discussion into a discussion about the law of Moses, and not observances.

Second, I keep the annual festivals just as I do the Sabbath, and they are not contained in the Ten Commandments. And those who are keeping the annual festivals because they are commanded in Leviticus ought to understand that anti-Sabbatarians are very happy to challenge you on those grounds. In fact, if you don't bring it up, they'll do it for you!

When I was still in the WCG, I sent this material in to headquarters, and, as here, I didn't argue for the biblical observances on the basis of their being commanded in the law. Nowhere in the paper did I even mention the law of Moses. As here, I based the entire argument on the NT concern of how we might worship in Spirit and in truth. WCG headquarters' lengthy reply never once mentioned worshipping in Spirit and in truth, and only discussed the law of Moses! They were especially keen to show the difficulties involved with proving that the annual festivals are commanded of Christians today because they are commanded in the law:

“Why do we not have to obey Nu. 15:38, 39 which requires tassels on garments? It's a clear command...and had a good purpose. This wasn't a ceremonial law or sacrificial law for priests only. Rather, it was a statute for all Israelites...The law about tassels was given to ancient Israel through Moses, just as the festivals were. Is there any biblical reason we should designate one as eternal and the other as temporary?”

And on it went, page after page. Obviously, it's pretty difficult to avoid appearing arbitrary when one claims that certain commands in the law are "commanded" but other commands in the law are not. Mr. Armstrong never presented to the Church a method to determine which of the 613 laws of the Torah are commands for Christians and which aren't. His successors have traded mightily on this, and diverted members' attention from the real, New Testament, new covenant concern concerning observances — worshiping in Spirit and in truth.

## **Conclusion**

Let's see if we can now answer our original questions: Have the observances Yahweh commanded Israel to keep, carried into the age of the new covenant? Are they requirements for salvation? Can we say Yahweh desires us to keep them, or does He have no particular preference one way or the other?

Given all that was cited above, it seems unarguable that the Sabbath and annual festivals were observed faithfully by the apostles in their understanding of the new covenant, and there is no NT evidence to think otherwise. Therefore, we can confidently say they were carried over into the new covenant age by the apostles.

But should we think of them as requirements for salvation? First, the facts surrounding Gal. 4:10 should give pause to the man who would present any calendrical observance as a means of achieving right-standing with Yahweh. Such a notion is preposterous. At the same time, it's hard to see how a willful disregard for anything Yahweh created for us would not say something about one's spiritual state.

For Spirit-led Christians, a "requirement" is anything Yahweh would have us do, whether or not He explicitly states it as a requirement for salvation. There are countless instructions in the NT that aren't stated as requirements for salvation (e.g., Eph. 4:29; I Thess. 5:16; He. 13:2, et al). Should we assume then that they are unimportant to Yahweh? Once "must" is explored, shouldn't we be willing to examine the possibilities for "ought?"

In regard to the biblical observances, what would indicate "ought?" Chiefly Mt. 15:8, 9; Jn. 4:23, 24 + 17:17, which we examined earlier. The principal points there were: Yahweh wills Christians to worship (Jn. 4:23). Yet it is a danger of man-made traditions—even morally neutral ones established with the best of intentions—that they lead to vain worship (Mt. 15:8, 9). So, Christians must worship in truth (Jn. 4:23, 24), and for Yeshua, Yah's word is the singular source of spiritual truth (Jn. 17:17).

Since the Sabbath and annual festivals are the principal biblically-ordained days, it is impossible to come to any other conclusion except that, where there is regular collective convocation (and there must be regular collective convocation) Yahweh would have His Church worship Him through those observances, and not through the traditions of men.

Still, some argue that since the Sabbath and annual festivals are not specifically commanded by Yeshua or the apostles, it is legalistic to teach that they are anything more than

optional. It is true that we are not commanded to keep all these days in the NT. But we are commanded to worship in spirit and truth, and we are commanded to reject the worship traditions of men. **And the NT example of Yeshua, His apostles and their churches is how we know how to fulfill those commands.** If anyone knows of a better way to execute Christ's will in this matter, I'd love to hear about it.

Moreover, it should be said that the Scripture teaches that Spirit-led people are by definition those who are drawn to Yahweh's light, drawn to Yahweh's truth (Jn. 3:18-21; 8:32; 12:36; 16:13; 18:37; I Cor. 13:6; Eph. 5:9; II Thess. 2:13; I Jn 1:5-7; 4:6). To proclaim little value in God-ordained observances and considerable value in human-devised ones like Christmas and Easter is, at a minimum, an exchanging of a greater light for a lesser light. Why would any one of Yahweh's children want to do that?

It requires a special mental ability, I think, to claim that one is embracing a more biblical Christianity by devaluing observances that are biblical, and embracing those that are not. The uncomfortable fact is, those who insist Yahweh cares so little about our collective worship that we should consider traditions borrowed from paganism, are not really trying to avoid legalism so much as they are revealing their lack of concern for Christ's instruction on this matter.

Christians do not call Messiah "Lord" in everything, but their observances. They live to do His will wherever possible, and certainly in their religious practices. Within the spiritual environment created by the new covenant, we should not need Yahweh to hold salvation over our heads to do His will. It should simply be enough to understand what He would have us do, and then live in accordance with His revealed will, through loving obedience, which is only made possible through His Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32).

May Yahweh help us to understand how to truly worship Him in Spirit and in Truth!

**1** These include Verdict magazine, Vol. 4, Nos. 4, 5, 6, Robert Brinsmead, ed.; From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective, by A.T. Lincoln, From Sabbath to Lord's Day, D.A.Carson,ed.; and Sabbath in Crisis, by Dale Ratzlaff.

**2** Samuele Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath to Sunday, Rome, Pontifical Gregorian Press, 1977, p.21