

GOD'S COMMANDED



HOLY DAYS

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The Weekly Sabbath and the Annual Holy Days—

Are They Still Binding On Us Today?

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Why did ancient Israel and Judah have to go into captivity? Was God angry with them? And why does God warn this modern world that calamity is fast approaching? Is God angry with us? Is there a correlation?

Could our failure to observe God's weekly Sabbath and His annual Feast Days have anything to do with it? Before we shrug our shoulders and scoff at such an idea, let us review God's Word—the Bible—to learn what our Maker has to say about our national, collective and individual sins.

To suggest that God still requires man to observe the Seventh-Day Sabbath and His annual Holy Days sounds strange, indeed, to most people. After all, weren't those days given only to the Jews, ultimately to be replaced by Christians with Sunday and with such festivals as Christmas, Easter, and even Halloween? Wouldn't the keeping of the Sabbath and the annual Feast Days mean returning to Old Testament rituals that were done away by Christ when He died for us? Weren't the Sabbath and the annual Festivals just part of the Old Covenant that was replaced by the New Covenant?

Undoubtedly, these are some of the arguments you have heard over the years, intended to convince you that the observance of the original Holy Days, and especially the weekly Sabbath, is no longer required or even permitted. Are these arguments based on Scripture, or are they based on human reasoning and opinion? How can you know the truth of the matter?

We believe this booklet will present the Biblical truth regarding the Sabbath and Holy Day observances. First, though, a word of caution: If we prove to you from the Bible that God requires you to keep the Sabbath and His annual Holy Days, then you are *bound* to do so and God will hold you accountable if you don't. If you *want to know* the truth and *you want to obey God*, then this booklet is for you.

PART 1: THE HOLINESS OF THE WEEKLY SABBATH

Throughout both the Old and the New Testaments, the Bible commands the observance of the weekly Sabbath. In fact, God made the Sabbath when He made man. Christ would later explain that the Sabbath was made holy *for man* (Mark 2:27) and was to be

kept holy *by man*. The Sabbath was made for *all* of mankind. It was not made exclusively for the Jewish people, as they did not exist at the time God created Adam and Eve. They are the descendants of Judah—one of the sons of Jacob—a grandson of Abraham.

THE SABBATH WAS MADE IN THE BEGINNING

God created Adam and Eve on the sixth day of the week. He finished His work by “resting” on the seventh day. We read in Genesis 2:2–3, “And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” The Hebrew word for “rested” is “*shabbath*.” It literally means “to cease, rest, keep Sabbath” (*Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*). God rested, or ceased, from His work of creating in the first six days, and He kept the Sabbath on the seventh day. God did not *have* to rest from His work. He was not tired or weary. God is never weary (Isaiah 40:28). But He did it for us—for mankind—to give us an example to follow in observing the Sabbath. (Similarly, Christ would later allow John the Baptist to baptize Him though He did not *have* to be baptized, since He had not sinned and had noth-

ing to repent of. He did it for us—to give us an example to follow in being baptized—in order to “fulfill all righteousness,” Matthew 3:13–15.) In the same manner, then, God *showed us how* to keep the Sabbath as He did—by resting from our daily work—even though He Himself did not *need* to rest.

We read in verse 3 of Genesis 2 that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. Now, when someone, or something, is “sanctified,” he, or it, is set apart “for a holy purpose.” The Sabbath was set apart as holy time by God at the creation of man, and God intended it to be *kept* holy by man. How can man *keep* it holy unless he learns *how* and *when* to do so?

WHEN THE SABBATH STARTS AND ENDS

God has revealed in His Word exactly when the Sabbath starts and when it ends. God reckons each day, including the Sabbath, beginning at sunset and continuing through until the following sunset. **Today, we would say that the Seventh-Day Sabbath starts Friday evening, when the sun sets, and lasts until Saturday evening, at sunset.**

We know from the Jewish people when to keep the Sabbath. It is the Jews to whom God committed His revelations or His “oracles,” as Paul clearly explains in Romans 3:1–2. These “oracles of God” included the Old Tes-

tament Scriptures, as well as the knowledge of the week and of the Sacred Calendar. The Jews preserved the knowledge of which day the seventh day of the week is. Without an understanding of when a week begins and ends, we would not have been able to tell, from the Bible alone, which day the seventh day of the week actually is. Today, the Jews keep the Sabbath on Saturday, beginning Friday evening, at sunset. Nobody questions today that the **Sabbath**, as preserved by the Jews, is the **seventh or last day of the week**. All understand that **Sunday** is the **first day** of the week—although there have been some attempts in Europe to actually *change* the calendar in order to deceitfully pretend as if Sunday, and not Saturday, was the seventh day of the week.

The Bible reveals that days start and end at sunset, in the evening. Notice Genesis 1:5: “God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.”

Many Scriptures associate the meaning of the word “evening” with “sunset.” For instance, a period of one day regarding a ritualistic, temporary law is noted in Leviticus 22:6–7: “The person who has touched any such thing shall be unclean *until evening*... And when *the sun goes down* he shall be clean.” (Note the same definition in 2 Samuel 3:35.) Further, we are told

in Leviticus 23:32 to keep God’s Sabbath “from evening to evening.”

SABBATH IN EFFECT BEFORE THE “OLD COVENANT”

Some would argue that God introduced the Sabbath to the “Jews” (erroneously believing that the ancient house of Israel was identical with the “Jews”) at the time of the Old Covenant and, since the Old Covenant is no longer binding, neither is the Sabbath. The Bible shows that this is not a valid argument.

First of all, this argument does not take into account that a covenant and a law are two different things, and that abolishing a covenant does not automatically annul the law(s) on which the covenant is based (For an in-depth study of this important question, write for our free booklet, “*And Lawlessness Will Abound...*”).

Secondly, the Sabbath command was in effect long before the “Old Covenant.” We have already seen that God instituted the Sabbath at the time He created man. Now notice what happened later—several weeks *before* the Old Covenant at Mount Sinai was made. God had led Israel out of Egyptian captivity, through the wilderness, and toward their destination of Mount Zion. During their travel, they complained that they did not have anything to eat. Although this was not true—they did have plenty of live-

stock—God honored their request, telling Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not” (Exodus 16:4).

What law was God concerned about? What was the law by which the people were to walk? Verse 5 gives us part of the answer: “And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.” Why were they to gather twice as much on the sixth day? Verses 23 through 26 explain, “Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning. So they laid it up until morning. . . Then Moses said, Eat that today, for today is the Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.”

Again, these events took place *before* the Old Covenant was made. God had to *reintroduce* the people to the Sabbath law because they had been in Egyptian captivity where they were not allowed to keep the Sabbath and ultimately had forgotten about it. At this time, then, God chose to *show* them—through a miracle—that the extra

“bread from heaven” or “manna” that they gathered on the previous day in preparation for the Sabbath, remained fresh on the Sabbath, while on other days it became uneatable when left over (Exodus 16:19–20, 24). In spite of this, some would still go out on the Sabbath to gather manna. Notice God’s response to this conduct (vv. 28–30): “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD *has given you* the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day [that is, in order to gather manna]. So the people rested [Hebrew, “*shabath*”] on the seventh day.” They had to learn, from God, *how* to keep the Sabbath.

There are some principles we can learn from this account. We learn that the Sabbath command was a law that God required to be kept. It had been in force for a long time—in fact, since the creation of man. He asked the people, “HOW LONG do you refuse to keep it?” We also learn that the Sabbath is *holy* to God. God sanctified the seventh day when He created man. It was set aside for a *holy* purpose. We learn that God *gave* the Sabbath to man—the Sabbath is a *gift* from God. James 1:17 tells us that God only gives us “good and perfect gifts.” Finally, we learn that the people rested—“*shabath*”—kept the Sabbath on the

seventh day by not going out and engaging in the work of gathering bread.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN EXODUS 20

Weeks later, God thundered the Ten Commandments to the people from the holy mountain. He did not, however, just suddenly bring the Ten Commandments into existence at that time. They had been already in existence since the creation of man (for detailed proof, see our booklet, “*And Lawlessness Will Abound...*”). But God found it necessary to remind the people of His law and to impress upon them the absolute *need* to observe it.

Notice the wording of the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8–11: “**Remember** the Sabbath day, **to keep it holy**. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

Again, we see that God created the Sabbath when He created man. He blessed the Sabbath day and “hallowed it,” that is, He made it “holy.” That is

why He tells His people to *remember* the Sabbath day to “*keep*” it holy. We also find that the Sabbath *belongs* to our God. It is His, but He *gave* it to us to *honor Him* on that day. One way to keep the Sabbath day holy is to cease from working, just as God ceased from His work. He expects us to do likewise.

Later, in Exodus 23:12, God repeats this command, but He adds another piece of important information. He says, “Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest [Hebrew, “*shabbath*”], that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.”

All of us—be it ourselves or be it any employees or animals under our control—are to rest on the Sabbath day, in order *to be refreshed*. (Later in this booklet, we will discuss in more detail the fact that the Sabbath is not to be a burden for us, but rather a joy.) While animals are to be refreshed in a physical sense, God’s people are to be refreshed in a spiritual way, as well as being physically refreshed by not working on that day.

A SEPARATE SABBATH CONTRACT

It is true, of course, that the Fourth Commandment was part of the Old Covenant. But, the Old Covenant did not bring the Ten Commandments into existence, since they were in force and effect *since the creation of man*.

Rather, the Old Covenant was *based* on the Ten Commandments. To clarify this, we need to first understand that a covenant is simply a contract that is *based* on law—it does not create law—and when a contract is annulled, the law on which it is based is *not* annulled along with it.

Additionally, we are introduced to a separate contract in Exodus 31. The subject matter of that contract is the Sabbath. We read in Exodus 31:14–17: “You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest holy to the LORD... Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested [Hebrew, “*shabath*”] and was refreshed.”

We can glean several important principles from this passage. First of all, we are told that everyone who did not observe the Sabbath in ancient times had to be put to death—physically. Today, the penalty is spiritual death—eternal death—for those who *know* they must keep the Sabbath but *refuse*

to do so, and deliberately and maliciously refuse to repent from such a transgression. Secondly, the Sabbath law here is incorporated into a separate or special agreement or covenant. It is referred to as a “perpetual” covenant between God and the people of Israel throughout their generations. So then, if you are a physical descendant of the house of Israel, this contract is binding for you. But it also applies to all of us who are spiritual Israelites today (compare Romans 2:28–29), and as such, we are obligated under this contract. The contract has never been abrogated, or nullified. Thirdly, the Sabbath is holy to God, and it must be holy to us. When we work on the Sabbath, we profane, or defile, what God has made holy, in this case the Sabbath. Finally, the Sabbath is considered a “sign” between God and the children of Israel (both physical and spiritual) forever.

Indeed, the keeping of the Sabbath is an identifying sign in several ways:

- (1) It identifies us to God. God made the Sabbath holy for us, and when we keep it, we are showing God that we *want* to belong to Him. God says in verse 13 of Exodus 31 that the Sabbath is a sign between Him and us, so that we may know that it is He “*who sanctifies us.*” God sanctified the Sabbath when He created man, and when we keep His Sabbath holy, God is willing to sanctify us as well.

- (2) It identifies us to others as belonging to God. When we keep the Sabbath, it will be noticeable to those with whom we have close relationships—our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Our lack of participation in sports, school or college events that are scheduled on the Sabbath, as well as not going to theaters or working on the Sabbath, will become very obvious, and so these people will come to realize our commitment to God.
- (3) It identifies God to us. When we keep the Sabbath, showing by our actions that it is holy to us, then we “*may know that [God is] the LORD*” (verse 13).

ADDITIONAL SABBATH INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BOOK OF EXODUS

The Bible can be viewed as a big puzzle. It contains pieces of the puzzle in different places—here a little, there a little (Isaiah 28:10). We must put all the pieces together in the right way in order to get an accurate and complete picture. In studying the Scriptures on the Sabbath that are sprinkled throughout the Old and New Testaments, we find that they complement each other, shedding more light on certain passages and giving us further explanations, additions, or clarifications.

For instance, we read in Exodus

34:21: “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest [Hebrew, “*shabath*”]; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest [Hebrew, “*shabath*”].” Here we find that the Sabbath command, indeed, applies to the time of plowing and harvest. The reason for this is that our focus needs to be on God on the Sabbath day, rather than on our own personal pursuits or our work. We are told in Exodus 35:2, “Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest *to the LORD*. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.”

God tells us that the Sabbath is holy to Him. That is the reason—and quite frankly, the *only* reason—why the day is holy to us. Only God can establish anything as holy. Our focus must be on God on that day. It is a Sabbath rest “*TO the LORD*.” Working on that day would detract from the holy purpose of the Sabbath.

The very next verse, however, has created a problem for some. It reads, “You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day” (Exodus 35:3). Remember, the context of the passage is working or not working on the Sabbath. God instructs us here not to kindle a fire for the purpose of working. He is not talking about kindling a fire to warm ourselves, or to cook a meal, or, as some interpret this today, to turn on a light

switch. In the original Hebrew, the thought is conveyed of “kindling a *consuming* fire.” The context in which this command was given was the work of building the tabernacle (compare Exodus 35:10–19).

This understanding is confirmed when reviewing Exodus 12:16. Here we read: “... No manner of work shall be done on them; *but that which everyone must eat—that only may be prepared by you.*” While this passage deals with an annual Holy Day, we will see later in this booklet that annual Holy Days are also referred to in Scripture as “Sabbaths.” **What we find here is a Biblical definition of work that can be done and work that must not be done on a Sabbath.** We can do what we must do in order to prepare a meal; this is *not* considered *prohibited* work. At the same time, it follows from Exodus 16:23, that baking and boiling should be done on the previous day (Friday). Put together, we find, then, that *heavy* baking or boiling should be done on Friday, but that it is not prohibited to “kindle a fire” to cook or heat a meal on the Sabbath day.

SABBATH INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

When we focus on a few pertinent passages in the book of Leviticus, we find that God repeats the theme of the holiness of the Sabbath, while adding further important information and in-

structions. We read in Leviticus 19:2–3: “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.”

Why the connection between holiness, Sabbath keeping, and respect for our parents? We have already seen that the Sabbath is holy to God. Since we are to become holy, we are to keep the Sabbath holy, thereby showing God that we respect His holiness. The word “Sabbaths” is used here in the plural, showing that God is speaking about the weekly *and the annual* Sabbaths (more about this later). At the same time, we are to revere our parents, who teach us the holiness of the weekly and annual Sabbaths. The Sabbath command may sound strange to young people. Humanly speaking, it makes no sense to keep the Sabbath holy, as distinguished from Friday, Sunday, or any other day of the week, or to observe certain annual Holy Days. The only reason why we must do so, is because God has decreed it. We are to respect our parents for teaching us God’s word, and accept and learn from them, rather than looking down on them and their “strange religion.”

One of the most famous Old Testament Scriptures relating to the weekly and annual Sabbaths can be found in the 23rd chapter of the book

of Leviticus. Notice the important details God gives us, teaching us not only that we *are* to keep the Sabbath, but also *how* we must do it. We read in Leviticus 23:2–3: “Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: The *feasts* of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be *holy convocations*, these are My *feasts*. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of *solemn rest*, a *holy convocation*. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.”

God wants us to *assemble* together on His holy days. The Sabbath assembly is called a *holy convocation*. Those who are able to attend Church services should do so. (This means they have to leave their house for the purpose of assembling for worship services. The prohibition in Exodus 16:27–30, as discussed earlier, only refers to leaving our home for the purpose of working or pursuing our own pleasures on that day.) Those members who are scattered should do the best they can to assemble with Church members in their minds—whether by participating in live Internet Church services, by listening to sermon tapes, or by reading the Bible or Church literature. God warns us NOT to forsake “the assembling of ourselves together, as [had become] the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

The Sabbath is a FEAST day. It is

GOD’s Feast day. Rather than doing our customary work on that day, we are to reflect on the solemnity and holiness of the day. We should keep the Sabbath as a means of glorifying God by “feasting” with God’s people on *His word* (compare Matthew 4:4).

SABBATH INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

Moses and the children of Israel were introduced to a new situation when one of them went out on the Sabbath “gathering sticks” in the wilderness. God instructed the congregation to stone the man (Numbers 15:32–36). Why? This certainly seems to be a harsh penalty, but we must understand the background. The gathering of sticks in the wilderness was obviously a time-consuming and laborious task. It also appears that this man gathered the sticks for the purpose of “kindling a fire” on the Sabbath so that he could *work*. He apparently was in a hostile and defiant attitude against God, because if he had deeply regretted what he had done and was repentant, then God, who is merciful and compassionate, would not have ordered the execution of the man. God was using this situation to teach the congregation of Israel that He would not allow His holy Sabbath to be defiled. The execution of the violator was to serve as a warning and an example for others.

Although the Bible states very

clearly that “no work” must be done on the Sabbath, we are also told that certain types of “work” *are* permitted. We have seen that it is not wrong to kindle a fire on the Sabbath for the purpose of warming ourselves or to heat a meal. Work that is permitted on the Sabbath is mentioned in Numbers 28. God *commands* the congregation to bring Him His offerings “at their appointed time” (verse 2). While two lambs had to be offered each day (verse 3), God *required* the sacrifice of two additional lambs on the Sabbath day (verses 9–10). Later, Jesus Christ commented on this *enjoined* practice in Matthew 12:5, “Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?”

This means that, even though they worked on the Sabbath, they were blameless because they brought offerings to God, and in doing so they focused on God, not on their own pleasures or selfish pursuits. In the eyes of Pharisaic critics, they “profaned” or “desecrated” the Sabbath (Christ used these words to show the mindset of the Pharisees), but Christ said that they were “blameless” when they brought the sacrifices because it was a directive from God.

Numbers 28:25 explains more about *what kind of work* cannot be done on the weekly and annual Sabbaths. This Scripture refers specifically to the an-

nual Sabbath of the Last Day of Unleavened Bread, but it can be applied to all weekly and annual Sabbath days. God says: “And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation [as is also the case for the weekly Sabbath]. You shall do no *customary* work.” (Also compare Numbers 28:26 for the annual Sabbath of Pentecost; Numbers 29:1 for the annual Sabbath of the Feast of Trumpets; Numbers 29:12 for the annual Sabbath of the First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles; and Numbers 29:35 for the annual Sabbath of the Last Great Day, the eighth day immediately following the Feast of Tabernacles. We will cover these annual Holy Days in more detail later).

We see, then, that the kind of work prohibited on the Sabbath is “*customary* work.” This kind of work draws our attention away from the holiness of God and His Sabbaths. “Customary work,” by Biblical definition, does *not* include kindling a fire to warm oneself or cooking or heating a meal, and it does not include the bringing of sacrifices by the priests. Later in this booklet, when we cover the New Testament Scriptures about the Sabbath, we will discuss how this applies to us today.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT IN DEUTERONOMY

Careful consideration of the wording of the Fourth Commandment given in Deuteronomy 5:12–

15, as compared with the wording in Exodus 20:8–11, reveals several important distinctions. In the book of Exodus, God emphasizes the sanctity of the Sabbath in view of His rest from work on the seventh day, while in the book of Deuteronomy He gives us an *additional* reason why we are to keep the Sabbath holy. He says in Deuteronomy: “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy [margin, “to sanctify it”], as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. *And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; THEREFORE the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*”

We see, then, an additional reason why the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath day holy—because God had freed them from slavery. There is a spiritual correlation for us today. We were all, at one time, slaves. We were slaves of Satan the

devil, slaves to the world around us, and slaves of our own carnal desires and human nature (compare Hebrews 2:14–15; Galatians 5:1; Romans 8:12–15; 2 Timothy 2:24–26). Most people still live in this kind of slavery today. Only those whom God has called out of this world—to give them His Holy Spirit—has He freed from spiritual captivity. The observance of the weekly Sabbath reminds them continuously of the fact that God has freed them in order to bring them into His very Family. When we keep His Sabbath holy, we tell God by our actions that we appreciate our freedom and that we thank Him for it.

ANCIENT ISRAEL AND JUDAH VIOLATED THE SABBATH

After Joshua led the nation of Israel into the Promised Land, they began, in due time, to disobey God and forsake His law, including His commandments regarding Sabbath observance. God subsequently sent His prophets to warn them of dire consequences if they did not repent of their transgressions and return to God’s instructions.

THE WARNINGS OF ISAIAH

The famous prophet Isaiah gave the house of Judah an encouraging, albeit embarrassing, message to the effect that even Gentiles would soon begin

to keep the Sabbath. Why then, Isaiah asks, does the very house of Judah refuse to do so? Isaiah's message is as relevant for us today as it was at the time of ancient Judah. Reading from Isaiah 56:1–7: "Thus says the LORD: Keep justice, and do righteousness, For My salvation is about to come, And My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is **the man** [not just the ancient Jews] who does this, And the **son of man** [not just the modern Jews] who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil. Do not let the son of the foreigner Who has joined himself to the LORD Speak, saying, The LORD has utterly separated me from His people; Nor let the eunuch say, Here I am, a dry tree. For thus says the LORD: *To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths*, And choose what pleases Me, And hold fast My covenant, Even to them I will give in My house And within My walls a place and a name Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name That shall not be cut off. Also the *sons of the foreigner* Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants—**Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath**, And holds fast My covenant—Even them I will bring to My holy mountain And make them joyful in My house of prayer."

How can one read those statements

and reject the plain meaning that God intends that *everyone* keep His Sabbath? God made the Sabbath *for man*, and He wants *all of mankind*—not just the Jews—to keep His Sabbath holy. God says that the man—the person—is BLESSED who keeps His Sabbath. He will experience joy and blessings if he does so.

Isaiah was trying to encourage the house of Judah to cease violating the Sabbath, showing them that eventually everyone will keep it. He gave another prophetic admonition in Isaiah 58:13–14: "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure [or pursuing your business] on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

So then, we see that we delight in God when we delight in His Sabbath. God instructs us not to do the things that we normally do during the week in order to make a living. It also includes our own pleasurable interests, hobbies, or affairs that have no direct focus on God and His Work and Creation—as all of these things detract

from concentrating on God and His holiness on His holy day. These admonitions from Isaiah bring out the fact that the Sabbath is holy to God, that it should be holy to us, and that we must focus on God, His Word and His Work on His Day.

The house of Judah, though, would not listen, even as the house of Israel had not listened. Isaiah tries again in Isaiah 66:23: “And it shall come to pass That... from one Sabbath to another, *All flesh* shall come to worship before Me, says the LORD.” What a *powerful* future message he conveys in these few words, but his audience does not get it! It will happen very soon, God says through his prophet Isaiah, that *everyone* will keep the Sabbath. He asks why those who are privileged to know about the holiness of the day aren’t already keeping it. The same question is being asked today. What is your response?

THE WARNINGS OF JEREMIAH

The prophet Jeremiah also chided the ancient house of Judah for violating the Sabbath. Notice how he addresses this issue in Jeremiah 17:21–27: “Thus says the LORD: Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow [keep holy] the Sabbath day, as I com-

manded your fathers. But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction. And it shall be, if you heed Me carefully, says the LORD, to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it, then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever... But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.”

Viewed in context, Jeremiah specifically addresses the carrying of burdens for the purpose of selling them. The people violated the Sabbath in that they continued to trade their merchandise. This will be discussed in more detail later in this booklet when we look at additional Scriptures in this regard.

Sadly, the house of Judah did not heed God’s warning. They continued violating the Sabbath day, just as they also continued to break the other commandments of God. Since they did not *appreciate* the gift of the Sabbath and the Holy Days that God had bestowed

on them, God took the gift away from them. We read in Lamentations 2:6 that God “has destroyed His place of assembly; The LORD has caused The appointed feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion.”

This can be said, to a large extent, to us today. As we will see, the New Testament Church continued to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days for a while, but as time passed, Sabbath-keeping became more and more a thing of the past, or just a *Jewish* observance. Today only a very few churches claiming to be Christian observe the Sabbath. Most observe Sunday, a day which God NEVER sanctified. And even those Christians who do keep the Sabbath and the annual Festivals must be careful that they appreciate the gift that God has given them. If they observe God’s weekly and annual Holy Days only as a matter of routine—not really from the heart—or if they only do it because they *have to*, rather than *really wanting to*, their understanding of the continuing sanctity of the Sabbath and the Holy Days will gradually slip away and they won’t even realize it.

THE WARNINGS OF HOSEA

When Jesus Christ returns to this earth, He will enforce the observance of the weekly and annual Sabbaths, as we will soon see. The Bible predicts, however, that prior to His return, most,

who hear the gospel preached to them, will not heed. Even many of those in God’s Church, who—at one time—believed in the sanctity of God’s holy days, might very well let it slip. Sadly, the history in the Church of God shows that this did happen to quite a number of people.

Notice God’s frightening warning for the modern nations of Israel and Judah, as well as His Church today, in Hosea 2:11: “I will cause all her mirth to cease, Her feast days, Her New Moons, Her Sabbaths—All her appointed feasts.” And in Hosea 9:5–6: “What will you do in the appointed day, And in the day of the feast of the LORD? For indeed they are gone because of destruction” (Hosea 9:5–6).

In addition to containing a warning for God’s end-time Church, these passages also show a repeat of history of the nations of the houses of Israel and Judah. What happened to ancient Israel and Judah has also happened to the modern nations of Judah (falsely called “Israel” today) and of Israel—the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and other Commonwealth nations. Just as it happened then, the violation of God’s commandments—including those enjoining the observance of His Sabbath and His annual Feast Days—have much to do with the disaster decreed for the modern houses of Israel and Judah. (For a thorough discussion

of these frightening times, soon to come upon us, ask for our free booklet, “*The Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.*”)

We pray that *you* will not be one of those who are being addressed in these Scriptures. You and I can obey God now by keeping His Sabbath, or we *will* suffer the consequences.

JUDAH’S WORSHIP AFTER THEIR RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

God led the ancient houses of Israel and Judah into captivity because they had consistently violated God’s laws and refused to properly keep the weekly and annual Sabbaths. The house of Israel never went back to the Promised Land. However, many from the house of Judah did. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah report how the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. In the ninth chapter of the book of Nehemiah we read how the Levites confessed their sins and the sins of the people—sins that led to their captivity—and how they made a covenant or contract with God to never practice these sins again. In Nehemiah 9:13–14 we read, “You came down also on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And commanded them precepts, stat-

utes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your servant.”

However, the people had not listened carefully. “They refused to obey” it says in verse 17. Skipping to verse 26: “They were disobedient, And rebelled against you, Cast Your law behind their backs And killed Your prophets.” Then in verse 34: “Neither our kings nor our princes, Our priests nor our fathers, Have kept Your law, Nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies.”

We learn here that the Levites and the people wanted to learn from their mistakes. They were now dedicated to upholding the law. The covenant, or contract, that they made with God included the following provision: “... if the peoples of the land brought wares [merchandise] or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day, we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath, or on a holy day [an annual Holy Day]” (Nehemiah 10:31).

Human nature being what it is, they initially may have had a desire to keep God’s laws, but the willpower to follow through was lacking and the people soon slipped back into old habits. In Nehemiah 13:15–22 we are told how the Jewish people violated the Sabbath and how they let merchants and strangers enter Jerusalem on the Sabbath to sell their merchandise. Notice the stern condemnation of such practices by Nehemiah: “In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine

presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and *loading* donkeys with wine, grapes, figs and *all kinds of burdens*, which *they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day*. And I warned them about the day on which they were *selling* provisions.” [Note: They carried burdens into the city to sell them. The context here is engaging in trading and selling of merchandise.]

Continuing in verse 16: “Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that *no burden* would be brought in on the Sabbath day. Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. Then I warned them, and said to them, Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you! From that time on they came

no more on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day.”

Here we see a description of a very common practice in our Western world today—a farmer’s market being conducted on the Sabbath. People were carrying burdens into the city to sell them there. But God did not—and does not—approve of such practices. If we want to be God’s people, we are not to participate in such activities.

WRONG SABBATH-“KEEPING”

Part of the problem was that the people might have been “keeping” the Sabbath “pro forma” for a while, but they never did it from the heart. If the Sabbath is kept only by not working, yet anxiously waiting until the sun sets so we can pursue our own pleasures and activities, then we have missed the entire purpose of Sabbath-keeping. It’s not really in our heart to *keep the Sabbath holy as God made it holy*. In addition, when we compromise in one aspect of God’s law, we soon compromise in other aspects, as well.

Notice how the prophet Amos described the attitude of the people in ancient Israel prior to their captivity: “The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore... Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, And make the poor of

the land fail, Saying, When will... the Sabbath [be past], That we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, Falsifying the scales by deceit, That we may buy the poor for silver, And the needy for a pair of sandals—Even sell the bad wheat?” (Amos 8:2, 5–6).

Although they might have ceased from working and trading merchandise on the Sabbath, their minds were not directed toward the sanctity of the day at all. Rather, they were focused on worldly endeavors. This led to their willingness to cheat and defraud others, making the poor even poorer and forcing them into slavery to pay off their debts. One transgression—one violation—of the spiritual intent of the Sabbath commandment led to the next violation—dishonesty and fraudulent conduct. No wonder God was very angry with His people!

RIGHT SABBATH-KEEPING

Notice, in contrast, Psalm 92—a psalm for the Sabbath. This psalm focuses on God. It encourages us to thank God for what He does in our lives and it inspires us to meditate over God’s past, present, and future works. It gives us ideas on how to spend our time on the Sabbath day to please God. Rather than thinking or talking about our customary work, we should focus on God and *His work*, as well as pray to God and read His words for us—the Bible.

THE SABBATH A BURDEN?

Since the Jews were very much aware that their past Sabbath-breaking was a primary reason why God led them into Babylonian captivity, and since the people who had returned to Jerusalem still fell repeatedly into the trap of breaking the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders wanted to make sure that the Sabbath would not be violated again. By the time of Jesus Christ’s first coming as a human being, they had adopted many Sabbath rules and regulations that were not found in the Bible, but which were meant to protect the heart and core of the Sabbath law. They felt that these additional man-made rules constituted a “fence” to protect the substance of the Sabbath. They reasoned that no one would violate the heart and core of the Sabbath law if they were prevented from breaking certain provisions that “fenced in,” and thereby “protected,” the Fourth Commandment. Although the motives might have been laudable, the net effect was that the Sabbath was no longer a day of joy, but rather a burden and a heavy yoke.

HUMAN INVENTIONS OF SABBATH “RULES”

From God’s perspective, the Sabbath is a Feast Day, intended to be a day of joy and happiness, as well as physical and spiritual renewal. We can learn from the mistakes of the Phari-

sees and avoid repeating them today. By adding humanly devised restrictions to God's Sabbath commandment, the Pharisees did, in fact, *violate* God's law (Matthew 23:4; Mark 7:8–9, 13). The Jewish historian, Moses Hadas, explains in "*Hellenistic Culture*," on page 82: "The rabbis were men of faith, and their object was the service of religion, but their method of securing discipline was, like Plato's, to provide authority for men's smallest actions."

The Pharisees totally misinterpreted the prohibition against carrying burdens on the Sabbath. They decreed that a person was guilty of breaking the Sabbath if he carried a sheet of paper, or any food that weighed as much as a dried fig, or if he carried more than one swallow of milk, or enough oil to anoint a small part of the body.

If a fire broke out in a person's home on the Sabbath, he could carry out only the necessary food to be consumed on the Sabbath. This meant that if the fire broke out at the beginning of the Sabbath—right after sunset—the person could take out enough food for three meals; but if the fire broke out on the afternoon of the Sabbath, he could only take out enough food for one meal. The rest could not be carried out and had to be left behind, to burn with the building. Further, only necessary clothes could be taken out of a burning house on the Sabbath.

Very likely, the Pharisees had been subconsciously influenced by their former Babylonian environment when they devised those Sabbath rules. The Babylonians had set apart the seventh day of the Babylonian week, called "*Shabattum*," as "ill omens" or "evil days." For instance, it was forbidden on those days to eat flesh cooked upon coals. One must wonder whether we find a reason here why some Orthodox Jews have misunderstood the above-described passage in Exodus 35:3 regarding "kindling a fire," falsely concluding that even turning on a light switch was prohibited. The Babylonians also forbade the change of garments on those days, as well as calling for a physician. As we will see, Christ had to deal with a similar Pharisaic concept. The Pharisees in His day insisted that He should not heal anyone on the Sabbath—that people were not supposed to request healing on that day. Again, the parallel to Babylonian superstition is evident.

We might laugh about those restrictions today, but these were no laughing matter at the time of Christ. He had confrontations with the Pharisees on numerous occasions when He refused to abide by their man-made Sabbath rules.

We must be careful today not to create for ourselves, and others, similar rules on how to keep—or not

keep—the Sabbath, when such rules cannot be found in Scripture.

CHRIST SHOWS US HOW TO KEEP THE SABBATH

Jesus Christ restored the original intent of the Fourth Commandment, using much of His time to show us *how* to observe the Sabbath. Since the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes had created many prohibitions, Christ began to show the people all that could be done on the Sabbath. The fact that the Sabbath had to be kept was not in doubt, but Christ had to show—by words and deeds—*how* to keep it. He also clarified the spiritual intent and purpose of the Sabbath law, which cannot be ascertained by simply saying, “Unless the Bible tells us that we can do a certain thing on the Sabbath, we cannot do it.” Rather, Christ came to “exalt the law and make it honorable” (Isaiah 42:21). A strict set of do’s and don’ts does not exalt the law, nor does it honor God.

The Pharisees were quick to condemn Christ and His disciples because they did not keep the Sabbath in accordance with their own Pharisaic ideas and opinions. Christ showed that their ideas were wrong, and in fact, added insult to injury when condemning those who kept the Sabbath correctly. Let’s notice some individual situations where Christ shows how to correctly observe the Sabbath law.

PLUCKING HEADS OF GRAIN ON THE SABBATH

We read in Matthew 12:1–8: “At that time Jesus went through the grain-fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath! But He said to them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord [even] of the Sabbath.”

This important episode teaches us a great deal about the right attitude toward observing the Sabbath. First of all, Christ points out that it is not the Pharisees—or any human being for that matter, but only God Himself, through His Son Jesus Christ—who is to tell us how to keep the Sabbath as far as what is permitted and what is prohibited. This is not just a matter of

pointing at a particular statement in the Bible. One has to focus on the context and on the spiritual application. Christ was chiding the Pharisees for being merciless. They did not allow the disciples to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath, even though they were hungry. Christ compares this situation with David when he and his men ate from the showbread because they were hungry. The law against eating from the showbread was not given, however, for a situation where someone was hungry and had nothing else to eat. Likewise, as we already discussed, the commandment against work did not apply to the priests who brought sacrifices at that time, nor to God's ministers today who engage in ministerial functions on the Sabbath.

CHRIST—THE LORD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Christ makes it very clear that **He is the Lord of the Sabbath** (Matthew 12:8). [Note that the word “even” in this passage was added by the translator.] **God the Father created everything, including the Sabbath, through Jesus Christ** (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; John 1:1–3; 1 Corinthians 8:5–6; Hebrews 1:1–2). God the Father addresses *Jesus Christ* in this way in Hebrews 1:8–12: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever... You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens

are the work of Your hands... You are the same, And Your years will not fail.” These passages from Hebrews are direct quotes from Psalm 45:6 and Psalm 102:25–27, addressing the “LORD.” These passages apply to Jesus Christ, showing that it was Christ who dealt with the people in the Old Testament as the “LORD.”

Christ is also the “Lord of the Sabbath” because He created the Sabbath and He set it aside as a holy day. In fact, in spite of many wrong ideas to the contrary, it was actually Jesus Christ—not God the Father—who dealt directly with humanity as the God of the Old Testament, as is substantiated in many Scriptures. We read, for instance, in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that it was *Christ* who accompanied the Israelites when they left Egypt. Paul warns us not to tempt *Christ* in the same way that ancient Israel did in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:9). He explains in Hebrews 11:26 that Moses esteemed the “reproach of *Christ*” greater riches than the passing pleasures of Egypt. We are told in 1 Peter 1:10–11 that the Spirit of *Christ* was in the prophets of old.

Christ said that no one ever heard the Father's voice nor saw the Father's form (John 5:37; compare also John 1:18; 6:46 and 1 John 4:12). However, we know that people did see the glorified “form of the LORD” (Numbers 12:8; Exodus 33:18–23; 34:5–8), and

they did, of course, hear His voice (Exodus 19:19–21; 20:1). The “LORD” of the Old Testament, then, who dealt directly with the people, was the One who would later become Jesus Christ.

DON'T CONDEMN THE INNOCENT

It was Jesus Christ—the LORD of the Sabbath—who *created* the Sabbath, following the directive and command of God the Father. It is God—both the Father and the Son—who expects man to *keep* the Sabbath holy. Only God has the right to tell us how to keep the Sabbath holy. In Matthew 12:1–8, Christ tells us that mercy allows for a hungry person to get and eat food on the Sabbath. We see here a very important distinction to the time when God did not provide ancient Israel with manna from heaven on the Sabbath. In Christ's day, food *was* available. The disciples *could* pluck heads of grain from the field. Under the law, the landowners were not allowed to harvest completely all grain, but they had to leave some of it in the field, so that those who were hungry could pluck and eat it.

While this is true, it must be emphasized that the disciples did not “harvest” the field on the Sabbath. They just plucked a few heads of grain to satisfy their hunger. We should also take note of what the Scripture does *not* address here. Notice that it does

not reveal whether the disciples were traveling or whether they were close to home. We are not told *why* the disciples were hungry to begin with, and why they had not prepared food on the previous day for the Sabbath. The reason we are not told is that it is irrelevant for the point that Christ is making here. The message rings loud and clear: Don't condemn the innocent as to *how* they keep the Sabbath. They will have to give account to their own Lord and Master—Jesus Christ (Romans 14: 4, 9–13). Instead, *WE* are to show mercy and compassion. Mercy teaches us that it is wrong to prohibit a hungry person from getting food for himself and to eat it on the Sabbath.

This is not to say, however, that a Christian should engage in shopping on the Sabbath, except in a real emergency (compare Nehemiah 13:15-22). Nor should this episode be used as justification or an excuse for a refusal to prepare for the Sabbath on the previous day.

Note also that the disciples were in the presence of Christ while they were eating. They were with God—in the person of Jesus Christ—and were focusing on God. They did not profane the Sabbath by forgetting the sanctity of the day when they plucked grain to eat it. If Church members today eat occasionally in a nice, quiet restaurant on the Sabbath or a Holy Day after Church services, for instance, while,

at the same time fellowshiping with other brethren and speaking about the things that pertain to God, then we must not condemn them for that. For instance, Church members might be traveling for quite a distance to attend Church services, looking forward to spending additional time with their brethren after services. If, on the other hand, your conscience does not allow you to go to a restaurant on a Sabbath or a Holy Day, then you must not do so, since “whatever is not from faith [or conviction] is sin” (Romans 14:23). It would be advisable, though, to review the Scriptures to see whether your conscience is based on the Bible or merely on man-made traditions. God never accepts *our* conviction as justification for the violation of *His* law, and man-made regulations *can*, as we saw, cloud the intent of God’s commandments in the minds of men.

HEALING ON THE SABBATH

Following this episode, Christ comes under attack again by the Pharisees because He heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. He explains that His act is lawful by giving them an example. He asks them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on

the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:11–12).

According to the Pharisees Christ sinned. He “broke” the Sabbath, based on their opinion (compare John 5:18). However, from God’s point of view, He did not break the Sabbath. Christ never sinned—otherwise you and I would not have a Savior (Hebrews 4:15). The religious leaders told the people, “Don’t come on the Sabbath to be healed. You can come to be healed during the remaining six days of the week” (compare Luke 13:14). Christ’s approach was quite different, however. This man was not plagued with a life-threatening disease that needed immediate attention. Still, Christ was willing to heal him on the Sabbath. In the parallel account, in Mark 3:4, He asks the Pharisees, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”

Christ emphasized mercy. If it is merciful to lift a sheep out of a pit on the Sabbath, or to feed and water our animals on the Sabbath (compare Luke 13:15), then it is much more merciful and proper to heal a sick person on the Sabbath! He “*saved*” life in the sense that He made life *more enjoyable* for that person. Rather than focusing on strict literal rules, Christ encouraged us to look at *the spiritual meaning behind the rules*. God desires mercy—not sacrifice. There was no need for this sick man to stay sick. It pleased Christ to bring joy to the man

by healing him—doing something good for him. Christ was grieved “by the hardness of the hearts” of the Pharisees, who were unwilling to consider that they might be wrong with their rigid and legalistic approach.

As we already saw, one reason why we keep the Sabbath is to remind ourselves that God has freed us from the bondage or slavery of Satan, this world, and our own desires and human nature. With this understanding, then, we can see why Christ healed people—even on the Sabbath—who had been sick for a long time because of what Satan inflicted upon them. We need to realize that not every sickness is strictly a “natural” consequence of heredity or of wrong conduct by the sick person or others. As it was true then, so it is also true today that Satan and his demons do afflict persons at times with sickness (compare 2 Corinthians 12:7). Christ freed those persons from that very real form of slavery, and He did so—purposefully—on the Sabbath, which pictures release from captivity (Luke 13:16). Remember, He did it to show mercy.

SABBATH-KEEPING AND MERCY

When we are tempted to condemn others for their Sabbath-keeping because it does not match our ideas and concepts of how to keep or how not to keep the Sabbath, let us remember to show mercy. We may not know all the

circumstances prompting the person to do what he or she does, and our understanding of Godly Sabbath-keeping might also be flawed at times. We all need to *grow* in the knowledge of Jesus Christ concerning how to live in accordance with the law of God (2 Peter 3:18). Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). God wants us to show mercy to our fellow man. We cannot love God if we don’t love our neighbor, and we cannot love our neighbor if we don’t show him mercy and grant him the benefit of the doubt. We are specifically commanded not to condemn a brother (James 4:11–12).

ASSEMBLY ON THE SABBATH

As we pointed out, Christ taught us by His words and His deeds *how* to keep the Sabbath. We read that He went to the synagogue to teach on the Sabbath “as was His custom” (Luke 4:16; Mark 1:21). He understood—after all, it was He who gave this commandment to ancient Israel—that the Sabbath is a holy “*convocation*,” during which time we assemble with others. Today we are to assemble in Church, if this is possible for us, thereby following the *custom* of Jesus Christ.

CARRYING A BED ON THE SABBATH

In John 5 we find another remarkable example of how some of the Jewish leaders at that time had perverted

and misinterpreted the meaning of the Sabbath command. As stated earlier, this was probably due to Babylonian thinking and superstition that had been passed on. We read that, on the Sabbath, Jesus healed a man of an infirmity that he had been afflicted with for 38 years. This man was lying on his bed and when Christ healed him, He told him to “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (verse 8). One would think that the people would have been extremely grateful to God that this man *was healed*. Far from it! Notice what they told the man, “It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to *carry your bed*” (verse 10).

They grossly misapplied the law against carrying a burden to this particular situation, rather than glorifying God for having worked a mighty miracle. Christ, though, had shown mercy to this man. His bed was apparently all that the man had. Further, the command against carrying burdens applies foremost, as we have seen, to carrying merchandise to be sold. This does not mean, however, that we should engage in the work of moving our belongings from one house to another on the Sabbath, except, of course, in a real emergency.

Christ told the people that His Father and He were “working” on the Sabbath (John 5:17). Christ did not do His *customary* work as a carpenter—but He did do the work of God, that is, He did do good things on the Sabbath, including healing people.

SABBATH OBSERVANCE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

After Christ’s death and resurrection, His disciples *continued* to keep the Sabbath. They did not believe, as so many erroneously do today, that Christ’s death and His resurrection made Sabbath-keeping obsolete. Paul taught on the Sabbath in the synagogues “as his custom was” (Acts 17:2), thereby following the example of His Master, and ours, Jesus Christ, who did the same “as His custom was” (compare, again, Luke 4:16. See, too, Acts 13:14, 42–44; Acts 18:4).

Paul did not keep the Sabbath just when he was in the company of Jews. He also kept the Sabbath when he worshipped with the Gentiles. In Acts 13:42 we read: “the Gentiles begged him that these *words might be preached to them the next Sabbath*.”

Yes, Paul kept the Sabbath—as Christ also had done—and he taught the Gentiles to do likewise. He gave them a *specific commandment to keep the Sabbath*—he commanded them to “imitate” him as he “imitated” Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Paul had not heard—nor would he have followed—the argument that Christians had to observe Sunday instead of the Sabbath because “Christ was resurrected on Sunday.” The reason for Paul’s refusal to accept such a false teaching is twofold:

First, even if Christ had been resur-

rected on Sunday, there is no statement in the Bible commanding us to keep that day holy.

Also, Christ was not resurrected on Sunday, but rather on the late afternoon of the Sabbath (Saturday), just before sunset. Although we will not discuss this issue in detail here, please realize that Christ prophesied He would be in the grave three days and three nights. He said that this was the only sign He would give to prove that He was the Messiah (Matthew 12:38–40). If He had been crucified on Friday afternoon and resurrected on Sunday morning, He could not have fulfilled that sign. He would have been in the grave for less than two days. He did, however, fulfill the sign. He was laid in the grave on Wednesday afternoon (just prior to the *annual* Sabbath or “high day”; i.e., the First Day of Unleavened Bread, which fell that year on Thursday; compare John 19:31), and He was resurrected late Saturday afternoon. (Later in this booklet, we will explain in more detail that the reference to the “Sabbath” in John 19:31 applies to an annual Holy Day, the First Day of Unleavened Bread, and not to the weekly Sabbath.)

Notice in John 20:1 that Jesus *had already risen* on Sunday—the first day of the week—when it was “*still dark*.” He did not rise Sunday *morning*. As Matthew 28:1 tells us, the resurrection took place “in the end of the Sabbath,

as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (*Authorized Version*). Many commentaries realize that the expression, “as it began to dawn toward the first day,” does refer to the *end* of the Sabbath, not to Sunday morning. They point out that the phrase, “dawn toward,” is also used, in the Greek, in Luke 23:54 (translated there with “drew near”; the literal meaning is “shining upon”). It does not refer to sunrise, but it refers to the fact that lights were kindled for the evening, as the new day, beginning at sunset, drew near. In Luke 23:54, this phrase can *only* refer to the evening of the day, and not to the next morning. (Remember that days start with the evening, according to the Hebrew calendar.) In translating the phrase as, “*dawn toward*,” the *Authorized Version* has contributed to the wrong idea that Christ’s resurrection took place on Sunday morning. However, it happened “in the end of the Sabbath”—when the new day drew near at sunset. On the other hand, even the phrase, “*dawn toward*” does not need to refer to the morning. *Webster’s dictionary* defines “dawn” with “beginning or rise of anything,” or with “to begin, open, develop.” In other words, a new day was “dawning”—*beginning* at sunset, and not in the morning.

The truth that Christ was resurrected on Saturday, just before sunset, rather than Sunday morning, had been

clearly understood by the early New Testament Church. In his “Easter Sermons,” Gregory of Nyssa (335–394 AD) expresses the understanding of the New Testament Church, although he himself might have believed in and taught other wrong concepts. He writes, “The only testimony about the time of resurrection is produced by Matthew 28:1, ‘Late on the Sabbath.’ That means..., it was already late in the evening (this evening being the beginning of the night before the first day of the week)... The time of resurrection is Saturday evening according to Matthew 28:1.”

Other New Testament Scriptures that allegedly “prove” that the early disciples held religious worship services on Sunday are likewise without merit. When it says, for instance, that they “broke bread” on the first day of the week, it only means that they had a *common meal* together on that day. The Bible consistently shows that the early disciples continued to have *worship* services on the Sabbath.

For a discussion of the false arguments that the Sabbath became obsolete when the Old Covenant was abolished, or that Jesus Christ brought a “new law” that did away with the Fourth Commandment, please read our free booklet, “*And Lawlessness Will Abound...*” This booklet also explains, in much more detail than we’ll go into here, that all of the Ten Command-

ments, including the Sabbath commandment, are still the constitutional foundation for every Christian.

Christ even warns the end-time generation of His disciples to pray that their flight from evil things to come would not occur on the Sabbath (Matthew 24:20). He expects that His Church will still be keeping the Sabbath up until the time He returns, and He is pointing out in this passage that fleeing in a time of turmoil and oppression is surely not the best way to keep the Sabbath peacefully. It would be almost impossible on such a day to focus on God and His holiness under those circumstances. Of course, God’s people would clearly be permitted to flee on the Sabbath, as this would constitute an “ox-in-the-pit” exception. (Luke 14:5, “Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?”) Fleeing on the Sabbath would, however, not be the most desirable way to keep the Sabbath.

FURTHER PROOF THAT THE SABBATH MUST BE KEPT TODAY

There is a most powerful statement in the New Testament that makes it abundantly clear that God’s people must still keep the Sabbath today. This proof can be found in Hebrews 4, where Paul explains that after God renewed the surface of the earth and created man, He rested from His work

on the Seventh Day—the Sabbath (verse 4). This *weekly* rest also pictured the *Millennial* rest for all of mankind under the soon-coming rulership of Jesus Christ upon His return to this earth (verses 6–8, 10). Our weekly Sabbath observance today is a reminder that none of us have entered our final rest yet. This is why Paul states in verse 9: “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.”

In this verse, Paul uses a different Hebrew expression for the word “rest” than he does elsewhere. Normally, he uses the word “*katapausis*” (in Hebrews 3:11, 18; 4:1, 3, 5, 10, 11). In verse 9 of Chapter 4, though, he uses the word “*sabbatismos*.” It literally means “Sabbath rest” (*Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*) and conveys the meaning of “keeping of the Sabbath.” The *New International Version* reads, “There remains, then, a *Sabbath-rest* for the people of God.” Perhaps the clearest rendering is in the *Lamsa* translation, which reads, “**It is therefore the duty of the people of God to keep the Sabbath.**” If we claim to be God’s people, then it is *our duty* to keep the Sabbath. When we do so, we look back at the time when God created man, and we look forward to the time when man will finally reach his ultimate potential. Far from being obsolete, keeping the Sabbath holy, as God made it holy, is very relevant for the life of every Christian today.

There is coming a time—very soon now—when all of us will be tested on the issue of Sabbath observance. Immediately prior to Christ’s return, the proverbial “mark of the Beast,” spoken of in the book of Revelation, will be imposed on this world. You need to know what this “mark” of the Beast is, and how it relates to Sabbath observance. God says that if you accept the mark of the Beast, God will punish you severely. If, on the other hand, you refuse the mark of the Beast, you may very well be tortured by men, unless you have God’s protection. For more information, please write for, “*Europe in Prophecy: The Unfolding of End-Time Events*.” This free booklet also gives you historical evidence of how Sunday worship replaced the seventh day Sabbath observance, including many quotes by Catholic priests and Protestant ministers, who admit that the Bible does not sanction such a change.

SUMMARY

The Biblical teaching regarding the Sabbath is consistent from beginning to end. God made the Sabbath, in the beginning, *for man*, and man is to *remember* the Sabbath by keeping it holy because God made it holy. God’s people, especially, have a *duty* to keep the Sabbath holy. The Sabbath has not been abolished. Whenever God’s people—and others who should know better—refuse to keep the Sabbath,

they can expect punishment from God for their disobedience. In keeping the Sabbath holy, we are identified to God as His servants and as those who truly seek to please Him. Likewise, others will note that we literally keep the Sabbath in the way God's Word reveals. Soon, in the very near future, the whole world is destined to observe the Sabbath as God commands. This will be accomplished when Jesus Christ establishes the rule of God's Kingdom on the earth.

We keep the Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset by attending Church services (if possible) and by refraining from secular labor, or customary work, which includes school, college or university attendance. We devote, instead, God's holy time to worship, spiritual study, prayer, fellowship with Church members, and physical rest.

When we keep the Sabbath, we are reminded of the Eternal God—the Creator of all there is—who made the Sabbath for man. We are reminded that God freed us from pain and suffering and from the slavery and bondage of sin, just as He freed ancient Israel from Egypt. We look forward to the ultimate Sabbath rest, as pictured by the Millennium—soon to be established on this earth—when Satan's activities and influences have ceased and all of mankind will finally rest from their

unprofitable labors and begin to live God's way of life.

The Sabbath is a perfect gift from God, full of meaning and instruction in living God's way. Let us be thankful for it, and let us not treat it lightly.

PART 2: THE HOLINESS OF GOD'S ANNUAL FEAST DAYS

In addition to the weekly Sabbath, God enacted seven annual Holy Days for His chosen people. Beyond their being kept by the ancient houses of Israel and Judah, they are also to be observed by God's Church today. Once fully understood, these Holy Days explain in great detail God's plan for all of mankind. Before we get into a discussion of the necessity of keeping the annual Sabbaths, we offer a brief overview of all seven annual Festivals and what they mean for us today.

OVERVIEW OF GOD'S ANNUAL HOLY DAYS

As will become fully apparent in this booklet, it is a tremendous blessing to know about, and to keep, God's weekly Sabbath and His annual Holy Days. These special days picture the entire plan of God for *all* of mankind. They give us hope for the future and an understanding of why this world is in constant turmoil, with problems continually mounting and solutions out of reach.

God originally decreed that angels

were to live on this planet, which had been created in a beautiful state. When Lucifer (the “lightbringer”) and his angels rebelled against God—thereby becoming Satan (the “enemy”) and his demons—this earth became void and empty, and God’s government of love, cooperation, justice, peace, and equity was removed from this earth. Satan, the “ruler” of this dark world (compare John 14:30) and the “god of this age” (compare 2 Corinthians 4:4), had replaced it with his government of anger, competition, hate, prejudice, injustice, and war. God subsequently renewed the face of this earth within six days and created Adam and Eve to replace Satan and his rulership, and to restore God’s government on this earth.

THE WEEKLY SABBATH

When God renewed the earth He set aside the *weekly Sabbath* (as was discussed in the first part of this booklet), to be kept holy by man (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:8–11). The Sabbath was established to remind man that GOD is the Creator of everything. It was also established to provide a special time for the development of a personal relationship between God and man, thus constantly reminding man to be subject to God and to resist Satan. Adam and Eve, however, gave in to Satan’s deceptive influence by eating from the tree of knowledge of good

and evil. Thus, mankind lost that close relationship with God. Now being cut off from God, mankind also lost the opportunity—at that time—to restore God’s government on this earth.

God, however, had already devised a plan to ultimately replace Satan and to restore happiness and peace on this planet. While this plan would encompass some 7,000 years in developing, the weekly Sabbath would continually point to man’s future of universal happiness (compare Hebrews 4:1–10).

But, the weekly Sabbath is just the *beginning* of God’s plan for mankind. It is followed by *seven annual Feasts or Holy Days*, which are listed in numerous places of the Bible, including the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus.

PASSOVER

The list starts with Passover. Although Passover is not a Holy Day, *per se*, it is vitally important that God’s people partake of it once a year. In due time, Jesus Christ—the “Word” or “Logos” in John 1:1—became a flesh and blood human being for the purpose of dying for man’s sins, thereby paying the *death penalty* for sin (Romans 6:23), and restoring a unique relationship between God and those who would be called by God to repentance (John 6:44), accept Christ’s sacrifice and

follow His way of life. As an outward symbol of acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, Christ's disciples observe the death and sacrifice of Christ as a memorial once a year, during the evening *Passover* ceremony (Luke 22:14–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

SEVEN DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Even after one's past sins have been forgiven, he must strive to live in obedience to God. Therefore, immediately following Passover, the *Days of Unleavened Bread* are to be observed for seven days. The first and the last days of this seven-day period are set aside by God as annual Holy Days. As part of this observance, leavened food is not eaten throughout these seven days, since leaven is used in the Bible as a symbol for sin and false teaching (Matthew 16:6, 12). These days remind us of our *commitment* to live a sinless and truthful life (compare Acts 20:6; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

PENTECOST

We know, however, that it is impossible for man to live in obedience to God and His truth without God's Spirit dwelling in us. God decreed that after man repents and receives forgiveness of his past sins, and after he has shown his willingness to remain obedient to God's Word, he would receive a Helper to enable him to stay obedient—that Helper

being God's Holy Spirit of power. God founded the New Testament Church on the annual Holy Day of *Pentecost* by pouring out His Holy Spirit on those whom He had individually called. He also spoke His Holy LAW—the Ten Commandments—to the ancient nation of Israel on the day of Pentecost.

Man will become more and more able, with the gift of the Holy Spirit, to keep God's law. When, in that process of becoming more and more perfect, man breaks the law—after having received the Holy Spirit—he can again obtain forgiveness, *IF* he repents of, and confesses his sin, 1 John 1:7–9. He can thereby continue—with the help of the Holy Spirit—to overcome sin in his life. The observance of the Feast of Pentecost is a reminder of God's precious gift of His Holy Spirit that He bestowed on His church. This is the same Holy Spirit that He bestows on individuals called by God after repentance of their sins, acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, and baptism as an outward sign of their repentance and faith (Acts 2:1–4; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8).

FEAST OF TRUMPETS

However, only very few are chosen at this time to receive the gift of God's Holy Spirit and to prepare for the time when God will replace Satan and restore His government over all the

earth. These few who are chosen are called “firstfruits” (James 1:18; Revelation 14:4). They are being taught and trained by God so that they can later teach mankind to reject the rule of Satan and to submit to God’s authority. That time of massive re-education will begin when Jesus Christ returns—in great power and great glory—as the KING of kings and the LORD of lords. He is coming back to restore ALL THINGS on this earth. God wants us to keep the annual Holy Day of the *Feast of Trumpets* as a reminder of the monumental future event of Christ’s return. Those in Christ still alive when He returns will be changed to immortality, and those who have died in Christ, will be resurrected from the dead to eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:49–54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; John 3:3–8).

DAY OF ATONEMENT

In order to bring perfect peace and happiness to this earth, Satan—who has become the arch enemy of God and man—will have to be removed from his power over this earth (compare Revelation 2:13). Only then can man truly become “at one” with God. God created the annual Holy Day of *Atonement* to foreshadow the event of Satan’s removal in the near future (Acts 27:9; compare, too, Romans 16:20).

SEVEN DAYS OF FEAST OF TABERNACLES

Following the removal of Satan, Christ and His saints will begin the awesome task of restoring all things. Those who qualify, will rule with Christ on this earth for 1,000 years (the “Millennium”) (Revelation 20:4), governing those who survived the incredible time of suffering just prior to Christ’s return, as well as those who will be born during the Millennium. Under Christ’s leadership—and along with Him—we will restore what had been taken away through Satan’s rebellion and what Adam and Eve failed to restore. We celebrate this unique and unparalleled time in the entire history of mankind every year for seven days when we observe the *Feast of Tabernacles* (see John 7:2–14; Daniel 7:27). The first day of that seven-day Festival is to be observed as an annual Holy Day.

THE LAST GREAT DAY

God’s plan, as pictured in His weekly Sabbath and His annual Holy Days, will still not have been completed by the end of the Millennium. One tremendous event will still occur. It involves the masses of people who have died without ever having been called by God (John 6:44) or known about Jesus Christ, without whom none can be saved (Acts 4:12). God established that all of those people will be resurrected to physical life after the

Millennium and will then have the opportunity to accept Christ and to live a godly life. It is the same opportunity being given to those being called by God today, an opportunity that will also be given to mankind during the Millennium. Virtually no one outside the Church of God understands this vital aspect of God's plan for mankind, but God has revealed it to His people. God is fair in His dealings with man, and He *had to* make it possible that EVERYONE would be given an equal opportunity to respond to—accept or reject—God's calling.

The final annual Holy Day of the **Last Great Day**, which immediately follows the Feast of Tabernacles, symbolizes a period of—most likely—100 years (Isaiah 65:20), called the “Great White Throne Judgment” (Revelation 20:11–12). This is that time during which all persons who had not been called before will be resurrected to physical life and, will then be given their first real opportunity to accept or to reject God's calling (John 7:37).

Those who will have become immortal members in the very Family of God, will rule with God and Christ for all eternity over all things (Revelation 22:5). This will be the KINGDOM OF GOD ruling over creation, with God's plan for mankind having been completed.

Without the weekly Sabbath and God's annual Festivals, including His seven annual Holy Days—the First

and Last Day of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Trumpets, Atonement, First Day of Tabernacles, Last Great Day—we could never understand God's great plan for mankind. Without obeying God by keeping these days faithfully—in their entirety—we would eventually lose this tremendous knowledge as to what they picture. What a great privilege it is to understand what most people cannot comprehend. What a priceless gift it is to be able to keep God's weekly and annual Sabbaths in spirit and in truth, realizing the awesome and incredible human potential they portray. What a tragedy it would be to reject this precious knowledge, or, once understood, to lose it again—to just let it drift away. This is the only knowledge that can truly give us hope, comfort, and strength in times of trials and discouragement.

BUT... ARE THE ANNUAL HOLY DAYS STILL TO BE OBSERVED TODAY?

Most professing Christians today claim that one of the Ten Commandments—the keeping of the weekly Sabbath—is not necessary to observe. We have discussed and proved from the Bible the error of that position.

At the same time, most—even some who do keep the *weekly* Sabbath—claim that God's *annual* Sabbaths are no longer binding for Christians. That concept is equally untrue,

as will be explained in this part of the booklet.

Many people embrace the erroneous argument that God's annual Holy Days are no longer binding for us because they allegedly came into being with the so-called Old Covenant, and when the Old Covenant was done away, so were the Holy Days. (We have already touched on this false concept in discussing the keeping of the weekly Sabbath. Again, we would encourage our readers to study our free booklet, "*And Lawlessness Will Abound...*," which addresses the entire concept of the Old and the New Covenants in great detail.) Furthermore, some will say that the Holy Days were not binding prior to the events at Mount Sinai, a statement that is also not true.

ANNUAL HOLY DAYS IN EFFECT PRIOR TO OLD COVENANT

Notice, for instance, just *when* the *Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread*—including the first two of God's annual Holy Days—were officially instituted. We read in Exodus 12:6 and 11 that the *Passover* (although not a Holy Day *per se*, it is a commanded assembly—one of God's annual Festivals—to be observed annually) became a binding law *in Egypt*, *before* Israel was led out of slavery. It was associated with the eating of the Passover lamb, which is specifically called the "LORD'S Passover." It also refers to the

destroyer *passing over* the houses of the Israelites who had placed the blood of the lambs on their houses (vv. 13, 23, 27). In addition, God instituted the *Feast of Unleavened Bread*, and with it the first two annual Holy Days, in Egypt at the same time, long before Israel had reached Mount Sinai. Exodus 12:15–16 and Exodus 13:6 inform us that the Israelites had to eat unleavened bread for the seven days of the Festival, and that there were to be holy convocations on the first day and on the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, as these two days were annual Holy Days.

Exodus 13:7–10 gives us additional instructions pertaining to the Feast of Unleavened Bread: "Unleavened Bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt. It shall be as a SIGN to you on your hand and as a MEMORIAL between your eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year."

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was designated as a SIGN, so that God's law would be remembered—the law of observing God's Festivals and of keeping

His annual Holy Days holy. Recall that the weekly Sabbath is also a SIGN (Exodus 31:16–17). Those who claim that we must keep the weekly Sabbath but we do not have to keep the annual Holy Days, must explain why they make such a distinction, given the fact that BOTH are signs between God and His people, setting them aside for His holy purpose. As we saw earlier in our study of the weekly Sabbath, God brought *all* of us out of slavery—the slavery of Satan, the world around us, and our own carnal nature. One reason we keep God’s annual Holy Days—in this case the Days of Unleavened Bread—is to show our appreciation for the fact that we were FREED from our spiritual “Egyptian” captivity.

GOD’S ANNUAL HOLY DAYS PART OF THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM?

Some claim that we don’t have to keep God’s annual Holy Days anymore because they were supposedly part of the sacrificial system, and when that system was done away, the Holy Days were done away as well. Note the error of that argument in reading Jeremiah 7:22–23: “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall

be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.”

God did not command them at the time He brought them out of Egypt to offer sacrifices. The sacrificial system was not in place yet. It was instituted *one year after* God spoke the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. But God DID command them, when He brought them out of Egypt, to walk in ALL His ways. We have already seen that God commanded them—while they were still in Egypt—to keep the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread from then on. So, God’s annual commanded convocations and His Holy Days are clearly different from the sacrifices and must still be kept today by God’s people.

However, God’s commandment to observe His annual Festivals does not only apply to the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, as we will see shortly. In addition, we need to point out that sacrifices were not given *only* on the annual Holy Days, but also on the weekly Sabbath, and, as a matter of fact, on every day—in the morning and in the evening. Those who claim that the annual Holy Days don’t have to be kept today because they were part of the sacrificial system [which they were not], yet still keep the weekly Sabbath [although sacrifices were given on that day as well], *do* have a problem with consistency. So do those

who keep Sunday “holy,” as sacrifices were also given on that day.

WEEKLY AND ANNUAL SABBATHS—A COMPLETE PACKAGE

Our primary focus here is that the weekly Sabbath *and* all of God’s annual Holy Days stand and fall together. They are all part of the same package. When you understand that you must keep the weekly Sabbath, then you must continue with your understanding and keep the annual Sabbaths as well. It is, in principle, the same concept explained by James, an apostle of Jesus Christ: When you break one of the Ten Commandments, you break all of them (James 2:10–11). The Ten Commandments are also a package that cannot be separated. If you remove one of the commandments from that package, you no longer have a complete package (compare our free booklet, “*And Lawlessness Will Abound. . .*”).

In order to see the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days as a complete package, let’s return to the 23rd chapter of the book of Leviticus. We read in verses 1 and 2: “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts.”

Note that all the Holy Days that follow (including the annual Passover)

are designated as the “feasts of the Lord.” They are ALL holy convocations. The first feast and holy convocation listed is the weekly Sabbath (verse 3). The weekly Sabbath is followed by the feasts and holy convocations of Passover and the First and the Last Days of Unleavened Bread (vv. 4–8); then Pentecost (v. 21); Trumpets (v. 24); Atonement (vv. 27, 32); Tabernacles (vv. 34–35); and the Eighth or Last Great Day (vv. 36, 39). The way this is listed shows us that the weekly Sabbath, Passover, and the annual Holy Days belong together.

In addition, some of the annual Holy Days are specifically called “Sabbath.” In reference to the Feast of Trumpets, God says in Leviticus 23:24: “Speak to the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation.”

In the original Hebrew, the word for “sabbath-rest” is “*shabbathon*,” meaning “Sabbath” (*Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*). The *Authorized Version* translates this word correctly with “sabbath.” The above-cited rendering of the *New King James Bible*, “sabbath-rest,” does convey, quite accurately, the intended meaning of the word “Sabbath.”

We find that Leviticus 23:27 and 32 also describe the annual Holy Day of Atonement as a “Sabbath.” We read in the *Authorized Version*: “Also unto

the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls. . . . It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.”

God calls the annual Holy Day of Atonement “a Sabbath.” While the time from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset designates the weekly Sabbath, certain times within the year are annual Sabbaths or Holy Days. We see, then, that the annual Holy Days are called Sabbaths, too. It is inconsistent to keep the *weekly* Sabbath and then neglect or refuse to keep the *annual* Sabbaths.

Notice a third example in Leviticus 23:39, which refers to the annual Holy Days of the First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last or Eighth Day: “Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath” (*Authorized Version*). Both annual Holy Days are called “Sabbath” here. They are to be kept holy and holy convocations are to be held on those days.

We already alluded to another example in the New Testament, in John 19:31, where the word “Sabbath” is used for the annual Holy Day of the

First Day of Unleavened Bread. It reads: “Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.”

The reference to the “Sabbath” here is NOT a reference to the *weekly* Sabbath, but rather to the *annual* Sabbath at the beginning of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The margin of the *New King James Bible* points out that John 19:31 is referring to the First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, giving as a parallel Scripture, Exodus 12:16, which discusses that very annual Holy Day.

This Holy Day is called both a Sabbath and a high day in this passage, showing thereby that this was not a *weekly* Sabbath, but an *annual* Sabbath. It was still a Sabbath, and a very special Sabbath at that. It had to be kept holy in the same manner as a weekly Sabbath.

As was already discussed, there is a clear connection between the weekly Sabbath and the 1000-year Sabbath of the Millennium in the fourth chapter of the book of Hebrews. Most accurately translated in the *Lamsa* translation, Hebrews 4:9 reads: “**It is therefore the duty of the people of God to keep the Sabbath.**” Note that the remainder of the passage, beginning in

verse 1, speaks mainly about the Millennial rest still ahead of us, which is symbolized by the Feast of Tabernacles. Paul is telling us in Hebrews 4 that when we keep the weekly Sabbath, we should also keep the *annual* Sabbaths—God’s *annual* Holy Days—as they *do* reveal to us God’s plan for salvation.

We can conclude from all of these references that the weekly Sabbath and the annual Sabbaths belong together. God is serious about us keeping *all* of them holy—so serious that He gives stern warnings against breaking His Sabbaths.

THE WARNINGS OF EZEKIEL

Let’s look at an interesting passage in Ezekiel 22:8, 26 regarding breaking the Sabbaths: “You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths... Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and the unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.”

These are powerful words! God was *angry* with His priests in ancient times because they did not teach His people the sanctity of the Sabbaths. Notice that the word Sabbaths used here is plural, referring to God’s *annual* Sabbaths or Holy Days. The word “Sab-

baths” can refer to the weekly Sabbath as well, but it usually does so exclusively only when another word or reference in the same context relates to the annual Holy Days, such as “feasts” or “festivals.” If used in the plural by itself, as is the case here in Ezekiel 22, the expression “Sabbaths” focuses mainly on the *annual* Sabbaths, although it would still include the weekly Sabbath. (Remember that the weekly Sabbath is included as a total package with the annual Sabbaths. Remember also from Isaiah 58:13–14 that the *weekly* Sabbath is described as God’s *holy day*, showing that both the weekly and annual Sabbaths are described in the same way—as “Sabbath” *and* as “holy day”—and are inseparable.)

We might also add here that God does not change. As He was angry with the priests of Israel for not teaching His people, He is angry with His ministers of spiritual Israel today who do not powerfully proclaim the continued sanctity of His Holy Days. God blamed the priesthood then, and He blames the ministry now, for the fact that He is profaned among His people.

The time will come, though, when all of God’s ministers *will* do the job they were given by God to do. Notice Ezekiel 44:23–24: “And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In controversy

they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths.” In the future, this truth will be taught by *ALL* of God’s ministers to *ALL* of the people. However, there are, in fact, some few true ministers today, in whose hearts God’s law abides and who are teaching God’s people right from wrong, as God has directed. These few are **BOLDLY** teaching the holiness of God’s weekly and annual Sabbaths already.

We find another remarkable passage in Exodus 31. We already discussed this chapter in the context of the weekly Sabbath, pointing out that the Sabbath is a sign and a separate perpetual covenant between God and His people. Verses 14 through 16 clearly talk about “the Sabbath,” the weekly Sabbath in this context.

But now notice how this entire passage is introduced in verse 13. God tells Moses: “Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Surely *My Sabbaths* you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations...” In this verse, it talks about “Sabbaths” in an unqualified way, therefore addressing—or at least including—the annual Holy Days. The entire passage in Exodus 31, then, speaks about both the weekly and the annual Sabbaths. Recall that not only the weekly Sabbath, but also the an-

nual Sabbaths, are signs between God and His people, as we saw in Exodus 13:7–10 when discussing the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Notice another proof of the fact that God’s annual Holy Days are a sign for true Christians—spiritual Israelites and Jews—in Ezekiel 20:10, 12–13, 19–20. God speaks about the rebellious house of Israel, saying: “Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness... Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments which, if a **man** does, he shall live by them; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths... I am the LORD your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.”

Both the weekly *and* the annual Sabbaths are signs. They identify God to us. They identify us to God. They also identify us to the world. They can’t be separated. They stand and fall together. They are all regarded as statutes **for all people**—not *just* the Jews.

JESUS CHRIST KEPT THE ANNUAL HOLY DAYS

Those who claim that we do not need to keep the weekly Sabbath, nor the annual Holy Days, should think about the fact that Jesus Christ kept them both. We have already seen that He kept the weekly Sabbath. Let's notice the fact that He also kept the annual Sabbaths.

We are specifically told in John 2:13 and in Luke 22:1–15 that Christ kept the Passover. We are also told in John 7:2–14 that Christ kept the Feast of Tabernacles. In addition, John 7:37–39 points out that He kept the Last Great Day—“the last day, that great day of the feast.” Since Christ kept these annual Holy Days, in addition to the weekly Sabbath, there is no reason to assume that He did not keep the other Holy Days as well.

THE EARLY APOSTLES KEPT THE ANNUAL HOLY DAYS

After Christ's death and resurrection, the apostles and the New Testament Church followed Christ's example and continued to observe the annual Holy Days. We are specifically told that the early Church kept the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 5:6–8). We are also told that Luke wrote the book of Acts to Theophilus, a *Gentile*, who had become a Christian. Luke makes reference, in Acts 12:3–4 and Acts 20:6,

to the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When Luke wrote this, he took it for granted that Theophilus—a Christian with a *Gentile* background—knew about these annual Holy Days. If the *Gentiles* were not required to keep those days, Luke's reference to these days in a report to a former *Gentile* would make little sense. (Imagine, for instance, that you would write to an American about the “*Bretzelfast*” in Germany. He would not know what you are talking about, since he never kept this local festival. He would understand, however, if you were to write him about the Fourth of July, or Thanksgiving Day.)

We can also clearly see from the Bible that the New Testament Church kept the Feast of Pentecost. Acts 2:1 reports that it was on that day, when the Church was assembling together, that they received the gift of the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts 20:16 that Paul wanted to keep the Feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem. He had kept it all the time, whether in Jerusalem or not. He would, of course, still have kept it, even if he had not been able to arrive in Jerusalem on time.

The early Church continued to keep the Day of Atonement as well. In Acts 27:9, we find a reference to “the Fast.” This is describing the Day of Atonement, as the margin of the *New King James Bible* points out. It also gives parallel Scriptures from Old

Testament passages that deal with the Day of Atonement. (The Scriptures quoted in the margin are Leviticus 16:29–31; 23: 27–29; and Numbers 29:7.)

There is another reference to the annual Holy Days in the New Testament, namely in Jude 12: “These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear...” The word “love” in “love feasts” is a translation from the Greek word, “*agape*,” that is, Godly love. When we keep God’s annual Holy Days, we are expressing God’s love in us by doing what God tells us to do. 1 John 5:3 explains: “For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments.”

ANNUAL HOLY DAYS TO BE KEPT IN THE FUTURE

Looking to the future through God’s Word, we can see that His annual Holy Days *will* be kept by all of mankind. Isaiah 30:27–29 contains a prophecy for the future that describes the final punishment of end-time Assyria, especially its last king. We read: “Behold, the name of the LORD comes from afar, Burning with His anger, And His burden is heavy; His lips are full of indignation, And His tongue like a devouring fire. His breath is like an overflowing stream, Which reaches up to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of futility; And there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, Caus-

ing them to err. You shall have a song As in the night when a holy festival is kept.”

We see here that God’s judgment on the king of Assyria (vv. 31, 33) is being compared with a song *in the night* when a holy festival is kept. This could refer to the Night to be Much Observed at the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:42), or to the Opening Night of the First Day of the Feast of Tabernacles (compare Psalm 134:1).

We find another remarkable prophecy in the 45th chapter of the book of Ezekiel, describing the time after Christ’s return. Notice that man is asked to observe, for instance, the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten” (Ezekiel 45: 21).

We are also told in Ezekiel 46:9 that the “people of the land” are to “come before the LORD on the appointed feast days.”

We might note, in passing, a strong admonition to God’s Church in Nahum 1:15. In addressing the end-time work of God’s Church, God prophesies and warns: “Behold, on the mountains The feet of him who brings good tidings, Who proclaims peace. O Judah, keep your appointed feasts, Perform your vows.

For the wicked one shall no more pass through you; He is utterly cut off.”

God admonishes the modern house of Judah to keep His designated annual Holy Days, showing them that they will be keeping them in the Millennium. Part of the message that is directed toward the people of this world *today*—including the Jews—is that we are *still* to be keeping God’s annual Holy Days. Many Jews today don’t keep them at all—physically nor spiritually. Others only keep some of the Holy Days, but not all of them.

Additionally, there is a strong indication in Nahum 1:15 that the “wicked one”—perhaps the “beast” or the “false prophet”—will specifically try to prevent those Jews who want to keep the Holy Days from doing so. Since true Christians are spiritual Jews, this could be a warning for us, as well. We already mentioned the warning in Hosea 9:5–6 in our discussion about the holiness of the *weekly* Sabbath. Hosea includes in his warning the *annual* Holy Days: “What will you do in the appointed day, And in the day of the feast of the LORD? For indeed *they* are gone because of destruction.”

In the Millennium, God will deal with those nations and peoples who refuse to keep His Holy Days. Zechariah 14:16–19 describes, in

very vivid terms, the punishment of nations and individuals in the Millennium who refuse to keep the Feast of Tabernacles: “And it shall come to pass that **everyone** who is left of all the nations... shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the LORD strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of **all the nations** that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”

Yes, the Feast of Tabernacles will be kept by everyone—not only by the Jews. When God is so determined that His annual Holy Days will be kept in the Millennium, why would it not matter to Him that they be kept today? The fact of the matter is, they are to be kept today by everyone, and a world oblivious to this fact will soon be shaken up to the reality that God is not mocked, and that man reaps what he sows. God has told us in His Word what we must do. Will you *choose* to do it?

PART 3: THE HOLINESS OF THE SABBATH AND THE ANNUAL FEAST DAYS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Some claim that several New Testament Scriptures; i.e., Colossians 2:16–17; Romans 14:5; and Galatians 4:10, clearly prove that the annual Holy Days, as well as the weekly Sabbath, are not commanded to be kept today. In this part of the booklet, we will discuss these arguments in detail, letting the Bible provide the truth of the matter.

IS COLOSSIANS 2:16–17 PROOF THAT THE WEEKLY AND ANNUAL SABBATHS ARE NO LONGER BINDING ON US TODAY?

Colossians 2:16–17 reads, in the *New King James Bible*, as follows: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival [margin: “feast day”] or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”

Does this passage mean that the Christians in Colossae **did not keep** the Sabbath or the Holy Days, and that Paul was essentially telling them not to worry about the fact that they **didn’t keep** them?

First of all, note that “Sabbaths,” “a festival,” and “a new moon” are mentioned. As stated before, the plural word “Sabbaths” can refer to the weekly Sabbath in the same context

as the annual Holy Days. That is the case here, as the annual Holy Days are mentioned in the same sentence, being identified as “festival” or “new moon.” It does not say here in the Greek, “new moons,” as some inaccurately quote this passage, but “a new moon,” referring to the Feast of Trumpets—the only annual Holy Day to be celebrated on a new moon. Therefore, Paul is addressing both the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days.

Is Paul telling the Colossians that they do not have to keep them anymore? This would be rather strange, as he was so diligent in teaching both the Jews and the Gentiles the continued observance of the weekly Sabbath, as we already saw.

Let’s first look at the phrase, “the substance is of Christ.” The word “is” is not in the Greek. It was *added by the translator* in an attempt to make the meaning clearer; however, this addition has, to the contrary, confused and perverted the meaning. Without the word “is” in that particular phrase, it simply states, “...but the substance of Christ.” What is the substance of Christ?

THE BODY OF CHRIST

If you have a *New King James Bible*, you might want to check the margin. It says there that the literal meaning for the word “substance” is “body.” That is correct. The Greek word here

is “*soma*,” and it is otherwise translated as “body” throughout the New Testament.

Limiting this discussion just to the letter to the Colossians, the *New King James Bible* has translated the word “*soma*” consistently as “body.” Only here, in Colossians 2:17, it is translated as “substance.” Why? Simply because the translators did not, and do not, understand the meaning of the passage.

Notice it for yourself. Notice, too, what is being referred to when the phrase “body of Christ” is used elsewhere in the following passages:

Colossians 1:18: “And He is the head of the body [“*soma*” in Greek], the church.” Christ is identified here as the Head of the body, which is the Church.

Colossians 1:24: “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body [“*soma*” in the Greek], which is the church.” Again, we see that the body of Christ is identified here as His Church.

Colossians 2:19: “... and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body [“*soma*”], nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.” Again, the reference is to the spiritual body of Christ, the Church.

Finally, let’s notice Colossians 3:15: “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called

in one body [“*soma*”].” We all belong to that one body—the Church, of which Christ is the Head.

These Scriptures clearly show that the references in that letter to the *body of Christ* is to the *Church of Christ*. With that understanding, let us turn again to Colossians 2:16–17, where Paul says: “Let no one judge you... regarding a festival or Sabbaths... but the body of Christ.” In other words, let no one, except the body of Christ—the Church—judge in those matters. The Church, the body of Christ, the preserver of the truth, can and should judge in that regard.

“LET THE BODY OF CHRIST JUDGE...”

It is interesting that Greek scholars recognize—in simply looking at the Greek structure of the sentence—that the first part of the statement, “Let no one judge you...” requires a second statement to explain who should do the judging.

Professor Troy Martin wrote an article entitled, “*But Let Everyone Discern the Body of Christ (Col. 2:17)*,” which was published in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* in the Summer of 1995. In that article, he confirms—based on the Greek structure of the sentence—that the second part of the statement in Colossians 2:16–17 explains who is doing the judging.

He first points to a parallel passage

in 1 Corinthians 10:24 that states: “Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well being.” In order to understand this passage correctly, one has to repeat in the second phrase the opposite of the beginning of the first phrase. In other words, the clear and intended meaning of this passage is: “Let no one seek his own, but let each one seek the other’s well being.”

This Scripture is grammatically structured in the same way as Colossians 2:16–17. Therefore, according to Professor Troy in regard to both 1 Corinthians 10:24 and Colossians 2:16–17, “The verb judge determines the action that is forbidden [by the first phrase = let no one judge you...] and then enjoined [or commanded, by the second phrase].”

With this understanding, the sentence in Colossians 2:16–17 has to read this way: “So let no one judge you... regarding a festival or Sabbaths..., but let the body of Christ judge you.”

Professor Troy gives a second example to prove this conclusion, namely Romans 14:13, which reads: “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way.” In the Greek, the word for “judge” and “resolve” is exactly the same, namely “*krino*.” This word is used in Colossians 2:16–17 and translated there as “judge.”

Romans 14:13 tells us that we must

not judge one another, but that we must judge how not to become a stumbling block for others. This statement in Romans 14:13 is identical in structure with the structure used in Colossians 2:16–17. No one is to judge the Colossians regarding the Sabbath and the Holy Days, except for the body of Christ, the Church. **This means, then, that Colossians 2:16–17 says exactly the opposite from what critics of the Sabbath and the Holy Days want us to believe. The Colossians were not criticized for NOT keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, but rather, they were criticized for KEEPING them.**

Comparing Romans 14:13 with Colossians 2:16–17, Dr. Troy concludes that Paul is telling the Colossians in Chapter 2 that they should not let a man judge them for keeping the Holy Days and the Sabbath, but that the Church—the Body of Christ—should judge this matter. The Colossians were criticized by their opponents, not by Paul, when **they kept the Sabbath and the Holy Days.** Paul is essentially saying to them: *I am speaking on behalf of the Church, when I tell you that you should continue keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days, as this is what the Church has judged and resolved to do, based on the Biblical Scriptures.*

The Church has understood the correct meaning of this passage in

years past. In 1976, Herbert Armstrong, late Pastor General of the Church of God, wrote a booklet entitled, "*Pagan Holidays or God's Holy Days—Which?*" On page 35 he writes: "So these little-understood verses ought to be translated clearly: 'Let no man therefore judge you... but [rather let] the body of Christ [determine it].' Let Christ's body judge these church matters. Greek scholars recognize that the last clause 'but [rather] the body of Christ' demands that a verb be added, but have often not seen that the missing verb should be supplied from the most logical and grammatical parallel clause so as to read properly, 'Let the body of Christ judge [these matters].'"

Unfortunately, a few years after Mr. Armstrong's death in 1986, the wording of this section in the same booklet was changed. A new and unauthorized explanation was given regarding Colossians 2:16, paving the way, of course, for subsequent drastic changes. The revised wording was: "Therefore the Christians at Colossae were not to let themselves be taken to task by heretical teachers concerning matters such as eating, drinking, holy days, new moons and Sabbaths. [In passing, as explained, it does not say in the Greek, "new moons," but "a new moon," referring here to the Feast of Trumpets, the only annual Holy Day

to be celebrated on a new moon.] After all, how could such matters possibly transcend Christ? He is the body, the substance, the very center of God's plan of salvation. All else is a mere shadow that holds no value as a replacement for him."

One can easily see how this "new" explanation, adopted from Protestant and Catholic thinking that wants to do away with God's weekly and annual Sabbaths, clouds the correct understanding and misinterprets the intended meaning.

A SHADOW OF THINGS TO COME

What *did* Paul mean when he described these things as being a shadow of things to come? Let's review once again the insightful comments of Prof. Troy in the above-mentioned article. He states: "These Christian practices may comprise the shadow, and they are not presented negatively except by the opponents... The tense is present [Note carefully that the text reads, "these ARE," not "WERE" "a shadow of things to come"], and affirms that these things are now shadows. [Some] commentators translate the past tense and conclude that these stipulations have ended now that the true substance has arrived since they *were* only shadows... In spite of this..., the text affirms a present... validity to the shadow."

The weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days have tremendous meaning for us today, *foreshadowing* events to occur in the future, when the whole world will be ruled by Christ and taught by Him to keep God's Law—including the weekly and annual Sabbaths—as God's people already do today.

Rather than doing away with Sabbath and Holy Day keeping, Colossians 2:16–17 teaches the exact opposite. It teaches us not to worry about people who say that we should not do so, but to concern ourselves with the truth, as taught by Christ's Body—the Church.

Many of us can identify with what Paul is telling the Colossians. When one begins to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days, he or she is open to criticism from relatives and friends.

Paul wrote to Christians in Colossae, which was a predominately *Gentile* city, although some Jews undoubtedly lived there as well. Paul told the Christians in Colossae who had begun to keep the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days: "Don't listen to your former friends and your relatives, who try to convince you not to keep those 'Jewish traditions'—but rather, listen to what the Church is telling you."

HOW TO KEEP THE SABBATH AND THE HOLY DAYS

It is very likely that Paul was *not only* addressing criticism from those oppo-

nents who tried to persuade the Colossians NOT to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days at all, but that he was also addressing criticism from those who were not necessarily opposed to Sabbaths keeping *per se*, but who wanted the Sabbath and the Holy Days to be kept *in a very stringent way*. Recall how the Pharisees condemned Christ and His disciples for the manner in which they kept the Sabbath. Undoubtedly, the Christians in Colossae found themselves to be objects of similar condemnation.

Since both the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days are Feast days, the Christians in Colossae kept them of course as FEAST days. They would eat and drink on those days (except, of course, during the "Fast"—on the Day of Atonement). Some, though, apparently criticized them for that, teaching that no eating and drinking should take place on any of those days.

Colossians 2:16, correctly translated from the Greek, states: "Let no one judge you regarding eating and drinking." Paul is addressing here the ACT of eating and drinking, not the KIND of food and drink being partaken of. Some critics felt, however, that Christians should fast on those days, rather than eating or drinking anything. Notice Paul's reference to this kind of self-imposed ascetic, or austere, religion in Colossians 2:20–23 ("...why... do you subject your-

selves to regulations—‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?’”).

Rather than agreeing with these human ideas, Paul states that this kind of philosophy is useless and is a doctrine of man that is derived from the “principles of this world.” He specifically condemns such teaching in Colossians 2:8: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”

Some were apparently trying to introduce those philosophies into the Church, especially pertaining to how to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days. Paul, in addressing these attempts, essentially told the Colossians: “Let no one judge you for keeping the Sabbath or the Holy Days with eating and drinking, rather than fasting, but let the Church determine or resolve this.”

In conclusion, Paul told the Colossians to continue keeping the Sabbath and the Holy Days in the same way as they were doing it, rather than listening to those who were trying to tell them not to do it at all, or not to keep them *as feast days*.

IS ROMANS 14:5 PROOF THAT WE DO NOT HAVE TO KEEP THE WEEKLY AND THE ANNUAL SABBATHS TODAY?

Some quote Romans 14:5 to argue that the Sabbath and the Holy Days are no longer mandatory holy convocations. Romans 14:5 reads: “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”

Note carefully the context here. Romans 14:2–3 is addressing the consumption of vegetables and meat (“For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables”). Some thought that they must not eat meat. They had become vegetarians for religious reasons. Part of the reason for their decision might have been that the meat, which could be purchased in the market, was probably offered to idols. Knowing this, some had a conscience problem with eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols (compare 1 Corinthians 8:1–13).

The context in Romans 14:5 is the consumption of certain foods. Paul addresses the fact that some esteem a certain day above another. In the very next verse, he shows the connection between the consumption of food and the regard for days. He says in verse 6: “He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not

observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.”

What is the connection between eating food and observing days?

The connection here is conscience. Paul talks about new Church members who still had a weak conscience and thought they had to FAST on particular days. That is, they thought they could not just fast on ANY weekday of their choice, but that it could only be done on particular designated days. (Note again verse 6, “... he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat.” The context of the discussion is FASTING.) Others understood that one can fast on ANY day of the week, and that God does not enjoin us, except for the Day of Atonement, to fast on a specific day during the week.

This is the reason Paul says, “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike.” The context is eating and drinking and fasting. Paul is really saying in verse 6, “He who observes [or better, “regards,” as the *Authorized Version* has it] the day [as a fast day] observes [or regards] it to the Lord; and he who does not observe [or regard] the day [as a Fast day] observes [regards] it to the Lord, too, because the one who does not eat

on that day, does it to the Lord, and the one who does eat on that day does it to the Lord, too, as he thanks God for the food he partakes of.” Paul’s point is to *not judge another* for the way they worship God, as long as it is done on the basis of Scripture.

Surprising as it may sound to those who read Romans 14:5 with preconceived notions, **the weekly Sabbath and the annual Holy Days are not even addressed there.** By contrast, in Colossians 2:16–17, Paul *does* seem to address the issue that fasting is not a requirement for Sabbath-keeping. There, he specifically mentions the Sabbaths and a Festival and a new moon, in addition to eating and drinking. In Romans 14:5, however, he does *not* mention the Sabbaths or a Festival at all, showing that he was not addressing them in that passage.

Certain commentaries agree that Paul did *not* have the Sabbath or the Holy Days in mind when he wrote Romans 14:5. Both the *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Book 10, page 146), and *Hasting’s Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, point out that Jews and Gentiles had set aside specific days on which to fast [we might think of the Pharisee in Luke 18:12, who was proud because he fasted two times a week], and that Paul was only addressing the issue of *prescribed fasting* in Romans 14:5.

IS GALATIANS 4:10 PROOF THAT THE WEEKLY AND ANNUAL SABBATHS ARE NO LONGER IN FORCE TODAY?

Let's examine a third passage that is sometimes used to "explain" that the Sabbath and the Holy Days are no longer valid. Galatians 4:10 reads: "You observe days and months and seasons and years."

The interpretation given by opponents of Sabbath-keeping is that Paul was rebuking the Galatians for still keeping God's Sabbath and God's Holy Days. Is that what Paul meant? Again, we need to look at the context in which it was written, and we also need to notice an important principle in order to properly understand Paul's letter to the Galatians. Whom is Paul addressing?

When Paul addresses Jews, he says, "we," since he himself is a Jew from the house of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5). When Paul talks to Gentiles, he says, "you," because Paul was not a Gentile. Now notice this distinction in the following examples:

In Galatians 3:23–25, he uses the words "we" and "our" four times, referring to himself and other Jews.

In Galatians 3:26–29, however, he uses the word "you" five times, referring to non-Jews, or Gentiles.

Returning, then, to the fourth chapter of the letter to the Galatians, we notice that the entire passage, be-

ginning with verse 8 and including verse 10, is addressed to non-Jews or Gentiles, as Paul consistently uses the word "you." In Galatians 4:8–9, Paul reminds the Galatians that prior to their conversion they did not know God, but instead served pagan gods. (By contrast, when Paul addresses the Jews, he makes clear that they did know—to an extent—the true God; compare Galatians 2:15, "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles..." Also compare Romans 9:3–5, "...my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain... the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God..."). Paul is clearly not addressing Jews in Galatians 4, but rather Gentiles.

These Gentiles had come to a knowledge of the true God upon conversion, but after that initial understanding, they returned to those "beggarly elements" (compare Galatians 4:9) that they had originally worshipped, by observing again "days and months and seasons and years" (verse 10). **This practice cannot refer to God's Sabbath and Holy Days, as those had not even been known, let alone observed, by the Gentiles before their conversion.** Rather, Paul is talking here about **pagan** festivals, such as Christmas, Easter or Halloween (For an in-depth study of the subject of "Christmas," you might want to read our free

booklet, “*Don’t Keep Christmas.*”)

In addition, Paul would not be addressing God’s Sabbath and Holy Days here, as those days don’t come from “beggarly elements,” but were, in fact, enacted by GOD. Paul would NEVER have said that the Sabbath or the Holy Days were derived from “beggarly elements.”

Some claim that the converted Gentiles in Galatia had begun to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days only because *Jews* allegedly induced them to do so, and that Paul was now opposing this practice. This claim is false, however, because we read in verse 9 that the Galatians turned AGAIN to the weak and beggarly elements (“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?”). The Galatians had RETURNED to what they had done BEFORE they became Christians. Jewish influence on them AFTER their conversion is clearly NOT what Paul is addressing here.

What then, specifically, did Paul have in mind when speaking about the Gentile practice of “observ[ing] days and months and seasons and years”? To answer that question, we need to consider first the meaning of the word “observe.”

The Greek word for “observe” is “*paratereo*.” [As an aside, this is a different word than the one used in Ro-

mans 14:6, where we read that he who *observes* the day observes it to the Lord]. In our free booklet, “*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*,” it is explained that the Greek word, “*paratereo*,” is always used in Scripture in a negative way. Some commentators point out that the “observation” that Paul is addressing here, is done in a superstitious way, which just does not fit when talking about God’s Sabbath and the Holy Days. It does, however, fit in connection with astrology and Gnostic speculations. Looking at it from that point of view, we can see that Paul was talking about an observation of times and seasons that were controlled by heavenly bodies and spirits.

OBSERVATION OF SEASONS OR TIMES

Let’s focus in more detail on the observation of seasons, or “times,” as more correctly translated in the *Authorized Version* (“Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years”). Looking for the Biblical explanation, we’ll read some other Scriptures pertaining to this subject.

In Leviticus 19:26, we read, in the *Authorized Version*: “Ye shall not eat anything with the blood: neither shall ye use enchantment, nor observe times.”

We find the same prohibition in Deuteronomy 18:10, in the *Authorized Version*: “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his

son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch.”

Finally, in Deuteronomy 18:14, in the *Authorized Version*, God says: “For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners; but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.”

So then, what is meant by the phrase, “observers of times?” Literally, it means, “to observe the clouds.” This practice is associated with divination by the observation of the clouds. The study of the appearance and motion of the clouds was a common way of foretelling good or bad fortune.

This superstitious observation of times was often accompanied by lighting candles and decorating the doors with garlic. Its connection was clearly demonic. Note 2 Chronicles 33:6, in the *Authorized Version*: “[Manasseh] caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom; also he observed times, and used *enchantments*, and used *witchcraft*, and dealt with a *familiar spirit [a demon]*, and with *wizards*: he wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger.”

OBSERVATION OF DAYS

Remember, Paul also rebuked the Galatians for observing days. The

Greeks, for example, did observe days to worship their dead. On those days, no work was to be done. Actually, both the Greek and the Roman calendars designated one-third of all the days as days of misfortune. On those days, one could not perform any political or legal activities and the people were supposed to abstain from any private pleasures. One was not to engage in war on those days, or marry, or travel.

OBSERVATION OF MONTHS

Paul also addressed the superstitious practice of observing months. The pagan world had set aside certain months for the worship of their gods. Pagan festivals were kept during the months of April and October to honor the goddess Apolla, while the highest Greek god, Zeus, was worshipped during the months of February and June. The month of April was also set aside for the worship of the god Artemis. The wine god, Baccus, was honored during the month of January.

OBSERVATION OF YEARS

Finally, Paul rebuked the Galatians for the observance of years. Indeed, certain years had been set aside for worship activities by the Greeks and the Romans. For example, the Olympic Games were already being celebrated at that time in certain yearly intervals, but they were accompanied with pagan worship and rites.

By now, we can clearly see what Paul was addressing in Galatians 4:10. He was not talking about God's Sabbath and the Holy Days, but rather was concerned about the Galatians returning to *pagan* worship customs—celebrating again the *heathen* days, months, seasons and years.

CONCLUSION

As we have shown you throughout this booklet, God's weekly Sabbath and His annual Festivals are still to be kept holy today. God wants EVERYONE—including YOU—to observe them. There is *no Scripture* in the New Testament that does away with God's requirement to keep His weekly Sabbath and His annual Holy Days holy, as He made them holy. God had to severely punish ancient Israel and Judah for violating His commandments, including profaning His Holy Sabbaths. God is very angry with the world today—especially the modern houses of Israel and Judah, who should know better—for trampling His Sabbaths under foot. His judgment is coming soon on the whole world.

You have now heard the truth. You have read it in this booklet. You now know better. God expects you to *choose* to “worship Him in Spirit and in truth” (compare John 4:24). Do you really want to *know* God? Do you want to be known and accepted by Him? You cannot really be part of God's Family, and

God will not be a real part of your life, unless you keep His commandments, including His weekly and annual Sabbaths—ALL of His Holy Days. Jesus Christ, the “Lord of the Sabbath,” tells us, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Remember, too, 1 John 5:3: “For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments.” God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He wants *everyone* to obey Him. Ecclesiastes 12:13 states, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole **duty of man**” (*Authorized Version*).

If you have never kept God's weekly and annual Sabbaths, NOW is the time to begin (compare Hebrews 3:7–11). Once you start, you will experience a joy and inner peace that you have never felt before. God promises that He will be found “if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29). To those of you who once kept God's weekly and annual Sabbaths, but forsook the truth that you first learned, NOW is the time to return and begin again to act on the truth that you once understood (compare Ezekiel 33:14–16). God will accept you back, if you *want* to return to Him. He says in Zechariah 1:3, “Return to Me... and I will return to you...”

The choice is yours. God wants you to make the *right* choice, and so do we.

God's Annual Holy Days

Summary and Calendar

The **Passover** is observed once a year in the evening by engaging in a foot-washing service as an example of humility in accordance with Christ's example, and partaking of the unleavened bread and wine, symbolizing physical and spiritual healing and forgiveness of sin. The entire service symbolizes a remembrance of Christ's death (Leviticus 23:5, Luke 22:14-20; John 13:1-5; 1 Corinthians 11:20-29).

The **Days of Unleavened Bread** are observed once a year by not partaking of any food prepared with leaven for a period of seven days following the Passover. The partaking of the unleavened bread symbolizes the commitment to live a sinless life (Leviticus 23:6-8; Acts 20:6; 1 Corinthians 6:7-8).

The **Feast of Pentecost** is observed once a year. This day symbolizes the coming of God's Holy Spirit for the purpose of converting those called by God at this time (Leviticus 23:15-16, 21; Acts 2:1-4; 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8).

The **Feast of Trumpets** is observed once a year. This day symbolizes the soon coming return of Jesus Christ to this earth (Leviticus 23:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16), and our resurrection or change to immortality, to be born again into the Kingdom or Family of God (1 Corinthians 15:50-54, 42-49; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; John 3: 3, 5-8).

The **Day of Atonement** is observed once a year by refraining from partaking of any and all solid food or liquid for a period of 24 hours. This day symbolizes those called by God during this life, having received at-one-ment with God, and the transfer of sin to Satan as the one who is ultimately responsible for all sin (Leviticus 23:27-32; Acts 27:9).

The **Feast of Tabernacles** is observed once a year, for seven consecutive days, by attending one of the Church's designated sites around the world. This period symbolizes the reign of Christ for 1,000 years, together with His saints made immortal, during which time Satan will be bound and the entire world will be living under the government of God (Leviticus 23:33-35; John 7:2-8, 10-14; Daniel 7: 27; Revelation 20:4).

The **Last Great Day** which immediately follows the Feast of Tabernacles, is observed once a year. This day symbolizes a 100-year period called the "Great White Throne Judgment," during which all persons who have ever lived and who were never called by God for salvation during this life, will have their first opportunity to accept Christ as their Savior (Leviticus 23:36; John 7:37; Revelation 20:11-12). At the end of that period, there will be a judgment during which all people who have ever lived and who have refused to accept Christ as their Savior, will be finally condemned to eternal death and destroyed in Gehenna fire (Revelation 20:13-15).

God's Annual Holy Days

Roman Year	First Day of Sacred Year	Passover	Days of Unleavened Bread	Pentecost	Feast of Trumpets	Day of Atonement	Feast of Tabernacles	Last Great Day
2003	April 3	April 16	April 17–23	June 8	Sept. 27	Oct. 6	Oct. 11–17	Oct. 18
2004	March 23	April 5	April 6–12	May 30	Sept. 16	Sept. 25	Sept. 30–Oct. 6	Oct. 7
2005	April 10	April 23	April 24–30	June 12	Oct. 4	Oct. 13	Oct. 18–24	Oct. 25
2006	March 30	April 12	April 13–19	June 4	Sept. 23	Oct. 2	Oct. 7–13	Oct. 14
2007	March 20	April 2	April 3–9	May 27	Sept. 13	Sept. 22	Sept. 27–Oct. 3	Oct. 4
2008	April 6	April 19	April 20–26	June 8	Sept. 30	Oct. 9	Oct. 14–20	Oct. 21
2009	March 26	April 8	April 9–15	May 31	Sept. 19	Sept. 28	Oct. 3–9	Oct. 10
2010	March 16	March 29	March 30–April 5	May 23	Sept. 9	Sept. 18	Sept. 23–29	Sept. 30

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