

Sabbath in the Bible

([Gen 2:1](#)) And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their host. ([Gen 2:2](#)) And on the seventh day . . . [Elohim] completed His work which He had made. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. ([Gen 2:3](#)) And . . . [Elohim] blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because He rested from all His work on it, which . . . [Elohim] had created to make.

While the word Sabbath does not appear in the English text, it appears in the original Hebrew twice, where it is translated "he rested". The idea of rest in the Hebrew word shabbath is a late one, and dependent on the concept of the Sabbath day rather than the other way around. The original, earlier meaning of the word is to cease, as in Genesis 8:29. The textual use of the word suggests that it also means "to sabbatize" or "to celebrate Sabbath".

A candid reading of the Hebrew Bible makes it very clear that the Sabbath goes back to creation, whether or not that is clear in the biased translations that we have. But the first mention of the Sabbath in the KJV is still before the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. Therefore, the claim that the Sabbath was first given in the Sinai covenant with the Jews falls flat in any case.

The Sabbath and the Manna

([Exo16:23](#)) And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and see the that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. ([Exo 16:24](#)) And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. ([Exo 16:25](#)) And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a Sabbath unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field. ([Exo 16:26](#)) Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none. ([Exo16:27](#)) And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. ([Exo 16:28](#)) And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?([Exo 16:29](#)) See, for that the LORD hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.



From this text we can be certain of the following claims: 1) Yahuwah commanded Sabbath observance; 2) Yahuwah marked the day of the Sabbath by performing the quadruple miracle of the manna: it was twice as abundant on the sixth day, the double portion did not spoil, no manna fell on the seventh day, and manna saved over on the first to the fifth days spoiled; 3) some people ignored the Sabbath and were blamed for doing so; 4) the people were not to go out and gather manna on the Sabbath.

From this we can draw the following conclusions. 1) The facts that the manna came in a double portion on the sixth day, that no manna fell on the seventh day, that the manna spoiled if saved over on other days, and that the manna did not spoil on the seventh day, demonstrates that the Sabbath is a particular day of the week and not one in seven to be chosen by an individual or a church. 2) Yahuwah demanded

obedience in regard to Sabbath-keeping. It was not optional.

There are four prominent arguments against the observance of the Sabbath based on the Hebrew Scriptures. They are that 1) it refers to one day in seven, 2) that it is optional, 3) that it is a temporary ceremonial legislation, and 4) that it was for the Jews only. This text clearly demolishes the first two of these.

The Sabbath and the Decalogue ([The Ten Commandments](#))

([Exo20:8](#)) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ([Exo 20:9](#)) Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ([Exo 20:10](#)) But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy . . . [Elohim]: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: ([Exo 20:11](#)) For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

These words make up part of the Decalogue which is described as having been spoken directly and publicly by Yahuwah, Himself, to the entire group of people, numbering millions, who had left Egypt. We can be certain of the following claims in this passage: 1) The commandment refers to the weekly cycle, not just one day of it; 2) the commandment specifies six days for work and the Sabbath as marked by the appearance of manna to be without work; 3) the commandment prohibits superiors laying any obligations on inferiors on the Sabbath; 4) inferiors are defined as children, employees, foreigners, and domestic animals, all of which have non-negotiable rights to be free of obligations on the Sabbath; 5) the Sabbath must be remembered during the six preceding days, so that work is organized and planned throughout the week to prevent the temptation to take care of unforeseen contingencies on the Sabbath; 6) the property owner is responsible to see that the Sabbath is kept by all those who enter on his property; 7) the divine right of imposing the Sabbath is based on the claim of divine sovereignty implied in creatorship, and having marked, blessed, and made the day sacred from creation.

From this text we can draw the conclusions that 1) the obligations and blessings of the Sabbath extend beyond the mere circumstances of the giving of the manna; 2) that the social contracts of families, employees, relations with strangers, and the use of domestic animals for labor are valid; 3) that the Sabbath is not for Israel alone, but applies to foreigners and animals; 4) that the Sabbath relates to the basic process of earning a living; 5) that the Sabbath limits the authority of superiors over inferiors.

This text demolishes the final two arguments against the Sabbath based on the Hebrew Scriptures. It is clearly a social and moral institution rather than a ceremonial one, because it affirms the rights of subordinates and limits the powers of superiors. It clearly extends beyond mere Jewish rights to human rights in general. It guarantees not only human rights, but animal rights. Given that working for a living is not limited to one tribe or people, but is a universal human necessity, to deny the non-negotiable rights implied in the Sabbath to non-Jews is incredibly biased.

While the nature of the Sabbath is obviously universal, the same can be said for its extension in time. The Sabbath cannot be logically abrogated as long as humankind is constrained to obtain food. Many consider that the Sabbath ended at the crucifixion of Christ. However, since the crucifixion of Christ did not relieve humankind of the obligation to obtain food, it cannot by nature relieve humankind of the necessity of resting from such labors as well.

Sabbath: A Perpetual Covenant

([Exo31:13](#)) Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. ([Exo 31:14](#)) Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ([Exo31:15](#)) Six days may work be

done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. ([Exo 31:16](#)) Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

The Sabbath has already been established by earlier texts as dating back to creation, as being a specific day of the week, of necessary obligation, a social rather than ceremonial institution for all humankind for all time. This passage gives the Sabbath a completely new dimension. The new claims found in this passage are 1) that the Sabbath is a sign between Yahuwah and Israel; 2) the Sabbath functions to make Israel know that Yahuwah sanctifies or sets them apart; 3) the death penalty is to be given for Sabbath-breaking; 4) the Sabbath is a perpetual covenant with Israel; 5) the new details in regard to the Sabbath given here relate specifically to Israel. Foreigners and animals are not included, as mentioned in the Decalogue.

On the basis of this information, we can draw the conclusion that there are universal aspects of the Sabbath, as mentioned in the Decalogue, and aspects of the Sabbath that are particularly applicable to Israel only. The particular is noted to be perpetual, which implies that the general must also be perpetual. The fact that there are universal and permanent aspects of the Sabbath and particular and possibly temporary aspects of the Sabbath has contributed to confusion. Christians have often been led unthinkingly to dispense with the universal and permanent on the basis of the particular and temporary.

The Decalogue is paraphrased in Moses' sermon in Deuteronomy 5, but in that case it is applied specifically to the experience of Israel. That aspect of the Sabbath is more clearly developed in the following verse.

([Exo35:2](#)) Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. ([Exo 35:3](#)) Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.

The new information in this passage is the prohibition of kindling fire in the house on the Sabbath day. It is not clear whether this is a general or particular aspect of the Sabbath. The association with the death sentence, however, and the inclusion in the same context as the preceding mention, suggest this to apply specifically to Israel.

([Lev19:3](#)) Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my Sabbaths: I am . . . [Yahuwah] your . . . [Eloah].

This is a reiteration of the positive commands in the Decalogue. All of the others are expressed as negatives. The universal and permanent aspects of the Sabbath are reaffirmed here.

([Lev19:30](#)) Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

This text is ambiguous. It is not clear whether it refers to the annual festivals, the weekly Sabbath, or to one or both. But as such it can be considered an affirmation of the weekly Sabbath.

([Lev23:3](#)) Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.



The new aspect of the Sabbath here is the holy convocation. Everything else mentioned places this text in the same category as the permanent and universal aspects of the Decalogue. On the other hand, the convocation appears to be a ceremonial act. Whether this applies to the Mosaic covenant alone or to all people at all times is not clear. But surely to gather on the Sabbath day is not only appropriate to the spirit of the day, but is facilitated by the fact that we are clearly told not to work at making a living on that day. We are freed to gather for worship.

Ceremonial obligations in reference to the Sabbath and the other annual feasts of the Mosaic covenant are mentioned in [Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28:9,10](#) . These include animal sacrifices, food and drink offerings. It is important to remember that such ceremonial obligations are described for the Sabbath in this text, because they became a point of contention in the early church. The annual festivals are referred to as Sabbaths here, as is the day of atonement in Leviticus 16, but these are distinct from the weekly Sabbath. Another ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath was the placing of the shewbread on the table in the sanctuary. ([Lev 24:8](#)) Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant.

The partition of the Promised Land included Sabbath rest of the land in the seventh year as described in [Leviticus 25](#) . This has no implication in regard to the weekly Sabbath. The same subject continues in the next chapter as well, but the weekly Sabbath is reaffirmed in verse two. ([Lev 26:2](#)) Ye shall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

The final text in the books of Moses is a tragic story. ([Num 15:32](#)) And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day.

The death sentence for Sabbath-breaking was confirmed by divine revelation and carried out in this case. The solemn obligation of the Sabbath was thus shown by the most telling possible case. Yahuwah was serious about the Sabbath as it was revealed in the books of Moses.

In summary, we can say that the books of Moses show the Sabbath to date from creation, to be a specific, non-moveable day of the Biblical week, the seventh, to be obligatory, to be a safe-guard for human and animal rights, to be universal and permanent, to demand that daily tasks be set aside and to provide a regular time when people are free from daily cares to gather for worship. Besides its universal and permanent aspects, it also had a particular and temporary application to Israel, a sign of the covenant specially made with Israel, by which the death sentence for Sabbath-breaking was legislated in addition to ceremonial aspects in additional animal sacrifices, food and drink offerings, and the changing of the shewbread in the tabernacle.

Sabbath: History of the Kings

In the historical books the Sabbath is generally mentioned merely in passing. Such an occasion is found in the story of the Shunammite woman. ([2Ki 4:23](#)) And he said, Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? it is neither new moon, nor Sabbath. And she said, It shall be well.

In [2Kings 11](#) is the story of the coronation of Josiah. Adam Clarke in his Commentary on the Bible notes the following in regard to the Sabbath in this chapter. "It appears that Jehoiada chose the Sabbath day to proclaim the young king, because as that was a day of public concourse, the gathering together of the people who were in this secret would not be noticed." The story is repeated in [2Chronicles 23](#) .



The final mention of the Sabbath in the books of Kings is ([2Ki 16:18](#)) And the covert for the Sabbath that they had built in the house, and the king's entry without, turned he from the house of the LORD for the king of Assyria.

The books of Chronicles comment more on the legislations in the books of Moses. The first reference relates to the shewbread on the Sabbath. ([1Ch 9:32](#)) And other of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the shewbread, to prepare it every Sabbath.

The special offerings for Sabbaths are also mentioned. ([1Ch 23:31](#)) And to offer all burnt sacrifices unto the LORD in the Sabbaths, in the new moons, and on the set feasts, by number, according to the order commanded unto them, continually before the LORD. ([2Ch 2:4](#)) Behold, I build an house to the name of . . . [Yahuwah] my . . . [Eloah], to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet incense, and for the continual shewbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts of . . . [Yahuwah] our . . . [Eloah]. This is an ordinance for ever to Israel. ([2Ch 8:13](#)) Even after a certain rate every day, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the Sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles. ([2Ch 31:3](#)) He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings, to wit, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of the LORD.

Chronicles has just one hint of the moral message attached to the Sabbath in the prophets to be seen later. ([2Ch 36:21](#)) To fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths: for as long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill threescore and ten years.

This idea that neglect of the Sabbath along with the sabbatic land statutes was the reason for the Babylonian captivity colors every mention of the Sabbath in the book of Nehemiah, especially at the end of chapter 13. There was an overriding concern not to cause the same or worse catastrophe Sabbath by neglect of the Sabbath. Nehemiah recognizes that the Sabbath is a direct divine revelation, rather than a Mosaic application. ([Neh 9:14](#)) And madest known unto them thy holy, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant. But Nehemiah does not ignore the ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath. ([Neh 10:33](#)) For the shewbread, and for the continual meat offering, and for the continual burnt offering, of the Sabbaths, of the new moons, for the set feasts, and for the holy things, and for the sin offerings to make an atonement for Israel, and for all the work of the house of . . . [Yahuwah].

The Sabbath in the books of Moses is primarily attached to activities of acquiring food. This universal aspect of the Sabbath, as opposed to its ceremonial aspects, is recognized by Nehemiah. He notes that not only harvesting, gathering and preparing food on the Sabbath is forbidden, but also buying it. ([Neh 10:31](#)) And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the Sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the Sabbath, or on the holy day: and that we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt.

The Sabbath: Trusting in Yahuwah



There is a deep psychological issue involved in the cessation of food-getting on the Sabbath. That is evident from both the Creation story and the story of the manna, but it comes into its own in Nehemiah as well. The primary purpose of the Sabbath was to counteract the natural inclination of people to consider that they sustained themselves by their own work. The stopping for re-evaluation on the Sabbath was designed to reinforce the realization that people are dependent on the Creator for sustenance.

This aspect of food-getting in relation to the Sabbath is brought out very strongly in chapter 13. ([Neh 13:15](#)) In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. ([Neh13:16](#)) There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. ([Neh 13:17](#)) Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? ([Neh 13:18](#)) Did not your fathers thus, and did not our . . . [Eloah] bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. ([Neh13:19](#)) And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day. ([Neh 13:20](#)) So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. ([Neh 13:21](#)) Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath. ([Neh 13:22](#)) And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my . . . [Eloah], concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

The practical aspect of avoiding work to gain one's livelihood on the Sabbath is not well developed in the books of Moses. There is the manna story, and the detail not to gather firewood for cooking, but aside from that the details are sparse. This passage of Nehemiah focuses on transporting and the buying and selling of food as also forbidden.

In summary, the historical books add little to our knowledge of the ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath. But they do enhance our understanding of why we should set aside our daily labors on that day. First of all, the details of transporting and buying and selling food are prohibited, which is a clarification over the books of Moses. The attachment of the Sabbath to the process of food-getting is made more precise, so that we understand how important the Sabbath is in making us understand in a practical way that we are dependent, not on our own work to sustain us, but on the divine blessing and providence that makes that work effective.

It is precisely the relationship of human efforts to gain sustenance on the six working days and the pause to reflect on the reality of constant dependence on Yahuwah for life and nourishment that the Sabbath reveals in a practical way. The failure of Christians to realize that the Sabbath is a practical revelation of our complete dependence on Yahuwah for life is at the root of Christian failure to understand the process of grace in the provision of salvation and eternal life as well.

The Sabbath and the Psalms

While the Psalms are the prayerbook of the second temple, with its pageant of worship on the Sabbath and other holy days of Judaism, the Sabbath itself goes largely unmentioned. It is mentioned in the Psalms only in the heading of one of them. ([Psa 92:1](#)) A Psalm or Song for the Sabbath day. It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High.

There is every probability that the entire fourth book of Psalms, the section containing Psalm 92, was compiled for the purpose of Sabbath worship.

The Sabbath and the Prophets

The prophets, quite predictably, focus on moral issues in relation to the Sabbath, just as they do in relation to many other aspects of the Law. We see that immediately at the beginning of Isaiah.

Isaiah

([Isa 1:13](#)) Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.

Here Yahuwah complains through Isaiah about the hypocrisy of maintaining religious forms as a cover for injustice. This is the central theme of most of the prophets, even when other concerns are evident. This text in Isaiah relates especially to the ceremonial aspects of Sabbath observance.

But Isaiah recognizes the moral aspect of the Sabbath as well. Here Isaiah recognizes the role of Sabbath-keeping in fostering righteousness, and its effectiveness for keeping people from doing evil. ([Isa 56:2](#)) Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.

Isaiah recognizes that the Gentile convert to the worship of the true . . . [Eloah], Yahuwah, is also responsible to maintain the Sabbath. He is not to make a distinction between himself and Israel. ([Isa 56:3](#)) Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.



The Jewish and entire Middle Eastern culture considers offspring one of the most important parts of life. Isaiah takes the importance attached to having children in the Middle East and uses it to emphasize the importance of the Sabbath. He shows that Sabbath observance lays up a treasure in heaven that is of even greater importance than having children. ([Isa 56:4](#)) For thus saith the LORD unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; ([Isa 56:5](#)) Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off. ([Isa 56:6](#)) Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbathSabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant.

Those who would contend that the Sabbath is abrogated generally focus on the Sabbath as a legal and ceremonial duty. They never focus on its real role as affirming dependence on Yahuwah's hand safeguarding the non-negotiable rights of subordinates. By the same token, they never discuss the fact that the Sabbath is not a mere obligation, nor even a mere safeguard to human and animal rights, but also a delight. Every true Sabbath-keeper has experienced such delight. Isaiah also notices this aspect of Sabbath observance. ([Isa 58:13](#)) If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words....

Finally, Isaiah points to the future observance of the Sabbath. Depending on one's view of the prophecy, the Sabbath is to be a central part of the delight of the return from captivity on the part of the Jews or in the restored new earth to come. ([Isa 66:23](#)) And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah mentions the Sabbath in a more limited context than does Isaiah. He merely reaffirms the principles of Sabbath observance mentioned in Nehemiah. Jeremiah actually wrote before Nehemiah, and no doubt strongly influenced Nehemiah's actions and writing. ([Jer 17:21](#)) Thus saith the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no

burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; ([Jer 17:22](#)) Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.... ([Jer 17:24](#)) And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work therein;... ([Jer 17:27](#)) But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and its hall not be quenched.

It is also from the writings of Jeremiah that Nehemiah realized the role that the neglect of the Sabbath played in triggering the Babylonian captivity. ([Lam1:7](#)) Jerusalem remembered in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and none did help her: the adversaries saw her, and did mock at her Sabbaths. ([Lam2:6](#)) And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and Sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest.

Ezekiel



Ezekiel brings forward a completely different aspect. He bases his remarks in regard to the Sabbath on [Exodus 31:13-16](#). He thus emphasizes the Sabbath as a sign between Yahuwah and Israel ([Eze 20:12](#)) Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. ([Eze20:13](#)) But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my Sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them.... ([Eze 20:16](#)) Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my

Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.... ([Eze 20:20](#)) And hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am . . . [Yahuwah] your . . . [Eloah].

While Ezekiel emphasizes the Sabbath as a sign of the special covenant between Yahuwah and Israel, he also recognizes some other issues in regard to the Sabbath. He especially focuses on idolatry, and the fact that the Sabbath brings a knowledge of Yahuwah. We have already seen how the Sabbath brings knowledge of Yahuwah in a practical way, by showing that humankind is constantly dependent on Yahuwah for life and nourishment, and by showing that superiors have limited powers over their subordinates. Ezekiel notes that such knowledge is essential to avoiding idolatry. The idolatry of Israel was associated with neglect of Sabbath observance. There is a direct relationship between the increasing neglect of the Sabbath in the early centuries of Christianity and the rise of a false theory of Yahuwah and the Trinity. These go hand in hand, occurring over the same period of time.

Ezekiel does not fail to describe the results of idolatrous Sabbath-breaking in Israel, with the consequent implications for the same phenomenon among Christians later. ([Eze 20:21](#)) Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my Sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness.

Sabbath-breaking idolatry in the book of Ezekiel is also associated with neglect of justice in carrying out divine judgments in cases of dispute. ([Eze 20:24](#)) Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols.

Two chapters later, Ezekiel points out how Sabbath-breaking affects human perceptions, so that a person is incapable of distinguishing between holy and unholy, clean and unclean. Sabbath-breaking goes hand in hand with the idea that uncleanness and Christianity are compatible. Idolatry, Sabbath-breaking, and eating loathsome things without a qualm are seen all around us today, and only repeat what Ezekiel saw in his own day. ([Eze 22:8](#)) Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my Sabbaths... ([Eze 22:26](#)) Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. ([Eze 23:38](#)) Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my Sabbaths.

Ezekiel returns to the issue of social justice and the Sabbath, which was left rather sketchily stated in chapter 20. In his final predictions of the coming rise of justice, he mentions the reinstatement of Sabbath observance along with justice before the law. ([Eze 44:24](#)) And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments: and they shall keep my laws and my statutes in all mine assemblies; and they shall hallow my Sabbaths.

Ezekiel's prediction of the second temple has never been fulfilled in detail. But the restitution of the ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath to some extent were reflected in its services. ([Eze 45:17](#)) And it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the Sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel. ([Eze 46:1](#)) Thus saith the Lord GOD; The gate of the inner court that looketh toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath it shall be opened, and in the day of the new moon it shall be opened. ([Eze 46:3](#)) Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the LORD in the Sabbath and in the new moons. ([Eze 46:4](#)) And the burnt offering that the prince shall offer unto the LORD in the Sabbath day shall be six lambs without blemish, and a ram without blemish. ([Eze 46:12](#)) Now when the prince shall prepare a voluntary burnt offering or peace offerings voluntarily unto the LORD, one shall then open him the gate that looketh toward the east, and he shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, as he did on the Sabbath day: then he shall go forth; and after his going forth one shall shut the gate.

Thus Ezekiel carefully distinguished between the social and moral aspects of the Sabbath on one hand, and the ceremonial and signal aspects on the other. He wrote about both, but in different passages.

Hosea

Two minor prophets joined their voices to the Sabbath message. Hosea speaks of the cessation of the ceremonial figures. ([Hos 2:11](#)) I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts.

The message of Hosea complements that of [Isaiah 1:13](#) . Because the ceremonies of the faith have been used as a cover for moral and social injustice, they are to be taken away in punishment, and Israel is to be left bare, vulnerable and visible in her unfaithfulness. The Sabbath is a central issue in this matter, simply because it contains both the moral and social elements and the ceremonial ones. Here again there is a striking parallel today. Just as ancient Israel failed to keep in mind the social justice that the Sabbath implied, while all the time maintaining the sacrifices and ceremonies, so too Sabbath-keepers today are strong to contend for the specific day and the Sabbath as a sign of obedience, but generally

fail to recognize the Sabbath as a witness to constant human dependence on Yahuwah for life and nourishment and as a practical safeguard to human and animal rights by limiting the powers of superiors.

Amos

This social and moral aspect of the Sabbath, so neglected by ancient Sabbath-keepers, is also mentioned by Amos. ([Amo 8:5](#)) Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit?

The prophets greatly enhance our understanding of the Sabbath. The first issue the prophets approach is the ceremonial observance of the Sabbath as a form of hypocrisy among those who used it to cloak social injustice. Isaiah, Hosea and Amos emphasize that point. Jeremiah focuses on the Sabbath as a sign of Yahuwah's covenant with Israel. Jeremiah brings more detail into proper Sabbath observance and shows how its neglect helped to cause the Babylonian Captivity. Ezekiel emphasizes the role of the Sabbath as a sign of the special covenant between Yahuwah and Israel. At the same time he shows how neglect of the Sabbath causes idolatry, inability to distinguish between holy and unholy, clean and unclean, and social injustice before the law. He predicts the restitution of the ceremonial aspect of Sabbath observance in the second temple. Isaiah goes on to show that the Sabbath blessings belong to the Gentile convert as well as to Israel, and how Sabbath-keeping is a greater treasure than even the greatest treasure in Middle Eastern thought, offspring. Isaiah points out that the Sabbath is not a burden, but a delight, and he predicts its restitution after the Captivity and in the view of many in the earth made new.

The Sabbath and the Gospels

The Sabbath is mentioned more often in the Gospels than in the books of Moses. Had it been the intention of [Yahushua](#) (Jesus) to do away with the Sabbath, he could have said so, instead of engaging in so many discussions of the details of proper Sabbath observance. But the purpose of the Gospels, in regard to the Sabbath, is not to abrogate it, but to teach us how to observe it better.

The expression the Law and the Gospel is an old one and often heard. But more often than not, it is spoken with the intention of separating and contrasting the two, rather than keeping them together as one. If, as many Christians seem to contend, the Gospel supersedes and does away with the law, then the so-called Old Testament need never have been preserved in the Bible at all. But the reality is that Yahuwah has preserved the Bible among Christians, both testaments. That fact should alert us to the fallacy of separating the law from the Gospel. The one is the foundation of the other, and the second is the illumination of the former. Indeed, Christ said "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets." [Matthew 5:17](#) .

The Sabbath is first mentioned in the Gospels in Matthew 12. ([Mat 12:1](#)) At that time . . . [Yahushua] went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. ([Mat 12:2](#)) But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day. ([Mat 12:3](#)) But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungered, and they that were with him; ([Mat 12:4](#)) How he entered into the house of . . . [Yahuwah], and did eat the shew bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? ([Mat 12:5](#)) Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? ([Mat 12:6](#)) But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. ([Mat 12:7](#)) But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. ([Mat 12:8](#)) For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.

This story is repeated in [Mark 2:23-28](#) and [Luke 6:1-5](#) . A number of issues should be noted. First of all, by one interpretation of law, as long as the grain was not removed from the field, there was no breaking of the Sabbath by harvesting and eating it. Thus by Rabbinical method itself, the accusation of Sabbath-breaking may fall. Secondly, the lack of hospitality on the part of the very people who raised the criticism was a breach of law. The disciples were forced to gather food in order not to break the Sabbath by fasting. The critics themselves had placed them in this situation of a double bind for hostile purposes.

Interestingly, Yahushua does not accuse the critics, but offers a Scriptural antecedent for their behavior on the Sabbath, the example of David. By interpreting this Scripture in this way, Yahushua took advantage of the opportunity to affirm his messianic authority as the son of David, and his divinely appointed role in the interpretation and implementation of Scripture. He thus denies the authority of Rabbinical method, replacing it with messianic authority. His interpretation is specifically not in accordance with the rules of Rabbinical interpretation. It is authoritative instead.

This affirmation of messianic authority on the part of Yahushua comes to a pinnacle in the final verse. This passage really says little about Sabbath observance as such. The subject of the episode is messianic authority. Still, the sentence in [Mark 2:28](#) gives pause. ([Mar 2:27](#)) And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

While the sentence primarily condemns the implication behind Pharisaical thought, that the Sabbath was a value in itself to be served by human action, another idea rises from the beginning of the sentence. The Sabbath was made for man. That is, the Sabbath was not made for Jews, but for all humankind. Furthermore, the Sabbath is a divine creation, a gift of grace, for humankind. The way one relates to the gift reveals what one thinks of the Giver.

The second story appears in [Matthew 12:9-14](#) . ([Mat 12:9](#)) And when he was departed thence, he went in to their synagogue: ([Mat 12:10](#)) And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse him. ([Mat 12:11](#)) And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? ([Mat 12:12](#)) How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days. ([Mat 12:13](#)) Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. ([Mat 12:14](#)) Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.

This story is repeated in [Mark 3:1-6](#) and [Luke 6:6-11](#) . It is far different in character from the preceding. Here Yahushua affirms that healing is lawful by reference to a Rabbinical verdict. There was Rabbinical disagreement on the issue of whether an animal fallen into a pit could be rescued without breaking the Sabbath. Some Rabbis affirm that it is lawful. Yahushua's answer was completely within the Rabbinical context. What is implicit in the story is Yahushua's acceptance of the validity of Sabbath law. While those who would abrogate the Sabbath generally believe that the abrogation took place after the crucifixion and in function of the death of Christ, they still often appeal to the Gospel texts referring to a pre-crucifixion era to support abrogation. This is a clear exegetical error. If in fact the Sabbath can be shown to have been abrogated before the crucifixion, then the Christian argument of its abrogation as a shadow of things to come must also fall.

For the Sabbath-keeper this story is important in affirming that actions of mercy are appropriate to the Sabbath.

The next text to occur is ([Mat 24:20](#)) But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day.

Sabbath-keepers refer to this text as proving that the intention of Christ is to affirm Sabbath-keeping after his resurrection, at a time when most Christians claim the Sabbath is abrogated as a shadow of things to come, which are fulfilled in the crucifixion. The response to this argument is that the command merely acknowledges the situation in Jewish-dominated Palestine just before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. The Sabbath-keeping of the Jews would make it hard for the presumed non-Sabbath-keeping followers of Christ to flee. There are several problems with this argument, most prominent of which being that there is no evidence of non-Sabbath observance among the followers of Christ at that time. Even after the rise of Sunday observance near the beginning of the second century according to Mozna and Bacchiocchi, Sabbath was still observed by all Christians (Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity, Biblical Perspectives*, 1977). Therefore, the prophecy had to refer to a Sabbath-keeping community. If Yahushua intended that his death should abrogate Sabbath-keeping, he lost the opportunity of telling his followers to stop observing the Sabbath, as it might facilitate their flight from Jerusalem. Instead, he affirmed their Sabbath observance.

Whether or not the command is relevant to later generations, the affirmation of Sabbath observance by his followers as late as C.E. 70 reduces the argument that it was abrogated by his death to exegetical error, failure to harmonize all relevant textual evidence. [Matthew 24:20](#) is proof positive that Yahushua did not accept the idea that Sabbath observance came to an end at the cross. It establishes a precedent that requires us to find a harmonizing exegesis of [Colossians 2:16,17](#), and failing that to deny canonicity to the epistle to the Colossians. It is far preferable to accept Sabbath observance and interpret Colossians in harmony with Matthew if at all possible.

The final reference to the Sabbath in the first Gospel is ([Mat 28:1](#)) In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher.

While some readers of the Bible make much of the Greek in this and similar texts, the KJV translation is essentially correct. The word for week actually means week in the context and the word for dawn, however, it is interpreted, does not affect the fact that the Sabbath is mentioned in passing and affirmed. Given that the disciples did not yet know of the resurrection, the Sabbatarian argument that this affirms the Sabbath after the crucifixion is weak.

A similar passage is found in Mark. ([Mar 16:1](#)) And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

Mark also contains some passages dealing with the Sabbath that are not reflected in Matthew. The first is ([Mar 1:21](#)) And they went into Capernaum; and straightway on the Sabbath day he entered into the synagogue, and taught. ([Mar 1:22](#)) And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes. ([Mar 1:23](#)) And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, ([Mar 1:24](#)) Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou . . . [Yahushua] of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of . . . [Yahuwah]. ([Mar 1:25](#)) And . . . [Yahushua] rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. ([Mar 1:26](#)) And when the unclean spirit had torn him, and cried with a loud voice, he came out of him. ([Mar 1:27](#)) And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him.

The Sabbath is mentioned only in passing in this passage. The focus of the passage is the Messianic authority of Yahushua, much in the same way as in the first Sabbath passage of Matthew. The Sabbath reform that Yahushua brings forward is seen by both Matthew and Mark to be intimately connected with his role and status as Messiah. The implication is that rejection of the Sabbath is to reject the Messiah himself. In fact, we see that in practice, for non-Sabbatarian Christianity often denies Yahushua, at least by making him the second person of the Trinity rather than the only-begotten son of Yahuwah or Christ. This same story is reflected in [Luke 4:31-37](#).

[Mark6:1-5](#) remarks on Yahushua visiting his home town on the Sabbath. More even than Matthew, Mark focuses on Yahushua' messianic authority in connexion with the Sabbath. In this passage Yahushua shows his power in his authoritative teaching. ([Mar6:2](#)) And when the Sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?

But he is met by the unbelief bred of familiarity. For this reason he did not do many miracles there, and at the same time avoided confrontation about healing on the Sabbath. This story perhaps refers to the same occasion as reported in ([Luke 4:16](#)) And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

Yahushua' s interpretation of the haftarah reading as a prophecy of his own ministry was calculated to bring on the reaction that it did.

The Sabbath is mentioned only one more time in Mark, when Joseph of Arimathaea asked Pilate for the body of Yahushua. ([Mar 15:42](#)) And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath.

The same evening is mentioned in Luke ([Luke 23:54](#)) And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on. ([Luk23:56](#)) And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment.

While it is no surprise that the Sabbath should be observed, it is perhaps significant that it is mentioned in the Gospel as a given, not as something strange. The expressions of John in some places show slightly more distancing.

While the focus of Matthew is on the discussion of Jewish interpretation of how the Sabbath should be kept, and the focus of Mark is on the Sabbath as an indicator of Yahushua' messianic authority, the focus of Luke is different still. Only in Luke do we find that all of the miracles of healing that Yahushua is reported to have initiated himself, without being asked, were performed on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is thus associated with Yahushua' acts of mercy. These differences in the synoptic Gospels reflect the differences generally among the three. Matthew is the most Jewish of the Gospels, Mark focuses on power and authority, and Luke focuses on mercy and social issues. It is to be expected that these differences of perception should be reflected in the Sabbath as well.

Some of these healings initiated by Yahushua on the Sabbath are mentioned only by Luke. The first such is ([Luke 13:10](#)) And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ([Luke 13:11](#)) And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. ([Luke 13:12](#)) And when . . . [Yahushua] saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. ([Luke 13:13](#)) And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified Yahuwah. ([Luke 13:14](#)) And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that . . . [Yahushua] had healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day. ([Luke 13:15](#)) The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? ([Luke 13:16](#)) And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day? ([Luke 13:17](#)) And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

Here Yahushua returns to the argument of the ox in the pit, reflected in the Talmudic word the Mishna, book 4, Qama Bava 3:10. This appears to be the single most important Rabbinical argument that Yahushua uses to justify his acts of healing on the Sabbath. What is notable is that he engages in such discussion, thus affirming the obligation of the Sabbath by discussing how it should be observed. It is notable as well that he meets his critics on their own ground with their own methods.

The same argument is pressed in the following chapter, in regard to another healing initiated by Yahushua and thus showing the Sabbath as an icon of mercy. ([Luk14:1](#)) And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched him. ([Luke 14:2](#)) And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. ([Luk14:3](#)) And . . . [Yahushua] answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? ([Luk14:4](#)) And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; ([Luke 14:5](#)) And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day? ([Luke 14:6](#)) And they could not answer him again to these things.

The Sabbath issue in John differs from that in the synoptics in a similar way to the differences in the usage of the term son of Yahuwah. In the synoptic the term son of Yahuwah is merely an equivalent for the term Christ or Messiah. In John this concept is enlarged to focus on Yahushua as life-giver. The accusations of claiming deity found in John are associated with accusations of Sabbath-breaking. In response, the concept of Yahushua as life-giver is associated with the Sabbath healings.

This association of ideas is already apparent in the first event in John. ([John 5:9](#)) And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the Sabbath.... ([John 5:10](#)) The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the Sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.... (John 5:16) And therefore did the Jews persecute . . . [Yahushua], and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day.... ([John 5:18](#)) Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that . . . [Yahuwah] was his Father, making himself equal with . . . [Yahuwah].

The text states the two accusations, of claiming deity and Sabbath-breaking, outright. Strangely, rather than focusing on the ministry and message of Yahushua, who presents his role as Christ to bring life and victory over death on the Sabbath, most Christian commentators actually accept the accusation against Yahushua as true, and present him as a Sabbath-breaker and claiming to be Yahuwah, Almighty. One can hardly see this as other than defamation and blasphemy as well as failure to penetrate the message of Yahushua as expressed by John. Why the claims of hostile witnesses should be accepted in exegesis but not in other contexts is a mystery.

According to John, Yahushua uses a different argument to justify the acts of healing mercy on the Sabbath. ([John 7:22](#)) Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the Sabbath day circumcise a man. ([John 7:23](#)) If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?

Instead of the ox-in-the-pit argument based on Rabbinical discussion, he appeals directly to the harmonizing of Torah law. This actually constitutes an argument directed at the Sadducees, who denied the oral law. Thus the Gospels portray Yahushua as defending his Sabbath actions by using both Pharisean Rabbinical arguments and Sadducean Torah arguments.

But John astutely brings forward another type of Sabbath action on the part of Yahushua ([John 9:14](#)) And it was the sabbath day when . . . [Yahushua] made the clay, and opened his eyes.... ([John 9:16](#)) Therefore said some of the

Pharisees, This man is not of . . . [Yahuwah], because he keepeth not the Sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.

Many Gospel narratives show Yahushua's critics trying to trap him with sophistry. Yahushua always turns the tables with an astute answer. John 9 presents Yahushua using the Sabbath to cause division among his critics. Again, the thoughtless reader is tempted to take the hostile accusation against Yahushua at face value. He thus misses the thrust of the conflict between Yahushua and his critics, and how wisely Yahushua is able to deal with them.

The final mention of the Sabbath in the Gospels is John's remark on the crucifixion. ([John 19:31](#)) The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

In sum, the Gospels show Yahushua interacting on the issue of the Sabbath. He never abrogates the Sabbath. He enters into detailed discussion with his critics on how the Sabbath should be observed. He justifies his practice of mercy on the Sabbath by using both Rabbinical and Sadducean methods, thus turning the table on his accusers. He establishes his messianic authority by his Sabbath action in both teaching and healing, and finally affirms his messianic role as life-giver through his Sabbath reform.

The Sabbath: Acts and the Epistles

In contrast to the Gospels, the book of Acts mentions the Sabbath only in passing, without entering into the issue of Sabbath theology and practice. The Sabbath is a mere assumption in the book of Acts. Given the rather complex structure of the Sabbath as presented in the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospels, rather complex discussion would be required for dismantling it. It is so entwined with the central issues of the Gospel itself, that to abandon it would require the invention of a completely new Gospel system. That is, in fact, what non-Sabbatarian Christians do.

The first mention is in ([Act 1:12](#)) Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day's journey.

The second mention is ([Act 13:14](#)) But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and sat down.

This text is ambiguous, and should not be used to support or deny Sabbath-keeping on the part of the apostles at this period. Verse five would suggest by the expression "synagogue of the Jews" that the mere mention of the word synagogue does not imply a Jewish institution as opposed to a place of gathering for the followers of Christ. However, the following verses identify it as a Jewish place of gathering and show that Paul and his companion have come there, whether or not to participate in the Sabbath reading of the law, at least for the purpose of bringing the message of Christ to the Jews of that place. That situation neither establishes nor denies Sabbath observance.

Paul includes a reference to the Sabbath in his discourse on this occasion, and while the general tone of the mention is positive, it is within the context of specifically Jewish practice and cannot be taken as a witness for or against Sabbath observance by the apostolic community. ([Act 13:27](#)) For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.



The tone in regard to the Sabbath as a Gentile practice is raised somewhat, however, later in the chapter. This text shows clearly that no Sunday gatherings were made at that time for the Gentile believers. They too gathered on the Sabbath. ([Act 13:42](#)) And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath... ([Act 13:44](#)) And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of . . . [Yahuwah].

The assumption that the Gentile believers would be present on the Sabbath to hear the reading of the law appears in [Acts 15](#) as an argument for the imposition of no more than avoidance of things offered to idols, fornication, things strangled, and blood. The clear implication of the word "for" (gar) at the beginning of verse 21 is that if they were not listening to the reading of the law, then more should have been imposed on them. Furthermore, the word synagogue here clearly refers to the Jewish institution in regard to "old time", but is ambiguous in regard to the time at which it was spoken. It may well include the place of gathering for the followers of Christ, in which case we must assume that the liturgy at that period included the Torah lesson being read, perhaps in Greek or perhaps in the Palestinian fashion, in Hebrew with a translation or "targum" of each verse. ([Act 15:21](#)) For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.

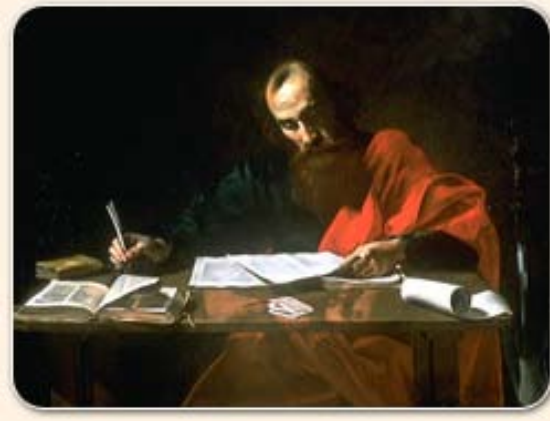
Sabbatarians sometimes refer to the following verse as proof that the Sabbath was kept outside of Jewish institutions. This is based on the false premise that the word synagogue must always refer to a Jewish institution. That is simply not the case. Secondly, it is based on the false assumption that Jews who did not know Christ always had a building in which to gather on the Sabbath. That too is obviously not the case. This verse can well refer to an ordinary place of gathering for ordinary Jews. It does not support or deny Sabbath observance among Gentiles. ([Act 16:13](#)) And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

The following verse can also be considered merely evidence of Paul's custom of joining the Jews on the Sabbath in order to preach Christ to them. ([Act 17:2](#)) And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, however, the following verse includes Gentiles in the place of gathering and on the Sabbath. ([Act 18:4](#)) And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. Most of the book of Acts merely assumes the Sabbath within a Jewish context. Only a few passages suggest Sabbath observance on the part of Gentiles.

The epistles mention the word Sabbath in only one text. ([Col 2:16](#)) Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: ([Col 2:17](#)) Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Much has been made of this text as an abrogation of the weekly Sabbath, which is supposed, by the preceding passage, to have been "nailed to the cross." This interpretation neglects the exegetical principle in regard to New Testament writings to examine the Hebrew passages to which the subject makes reference. The New Testament is a great measure a book of commentary on the Hebrew Scriptures. Much weak exegesis is the result of failure to consider this vital fact. The five subjects mentioned in verse 16 are all gathered in only one place: [Leviticus 23](#). There the animal sacrifices and the food and drink offerings appropriate to the weekly Sabbath, the first day of the month, and the annual feasts, are presented.

Much care is needed in interpreting the Pauline epistles. Peter, who lived at the time and knew the circumstances, still found them difficult to understand. Even the most skillful and knowledgeable of us today must realize that we can easily jump to false conclusions when it comes to Paul. We should therefore be careful about being dogmatic in our understanding of Paul.



The Pauline epistles are generally addressed to specific churches in view of specific problems that are not outlined in detail, but merely hinted at. All of us lack the essential background knowledge. Taking the Hebrew scriptural reference as a hint of what problem is being addressed here, we may make the following tentative assumption. There was a conflict in the church in regard to the food and drink offerings to be offered on the three categories of days also mentioned. Paul's response is to leave that issue to the conscience of the individual, whether or how to provide such offerings, since they are in any case merely shadows of things to come, which have already been fulfilled. That is the extent of the teaching, and to go beyond that is to read one's own bias into the

text.

The text implies that the animal sacrifices, not being mentioned, are not a cause of dispute. They could only be offered in the temple in Jerusalem. No doubt some were saying the same for the food and drink offerings, and others were disagreeing. The text also implies that the people of this church were engaged in observing all of the festivals mentioned, including but not exclusively the Sabbath. Paul's remark gives no indication of whether such observance is right, superseded, wrong or necessary. He does not refer to that issue at all. He refers only to the issue of food and drink offerings on those days. He thinks they should not be a matter of conflict.

The word Sabbath does not occur elsewhere in the epistles, although some references to days may be relevant. The seventh day, in reference to the Sabbath, is appealed to in [Hebrew 4](#) as a figure of the rest that remains for Israel in Christ. That passage does not deal with actual Sabbath observance at all, either positively or negatively.

In sum, Acts and the epistles give little new information on the Sabbath. As such, they provide no discussion warranting change. Furthermore, if they did teach that the Sabbath was abrogated and done away with, what would that prove? That would only prove that the epistles are in conflict with the Law and the Gospel. In that case, we should be constrained to reject them as non-canonical and spurious, as no divine revelation at all. As they stand, however, they can well be harmonized with the Gospel, which gives a vital, spiritual understanding of the Law in regard to the Sabbath.

The Sabbath: Think about it...

By a strange twist of illogic, those who oppose Sabbath observance often make accusations of legalism. Yet they themselves affirm all of the other moral principles of the law as binding on all and expect others to avoid adultery, murder, theft and the like. Why legalism is attached to one moral practice and not to another cannot be explained rationally. It is based on a mere prejudice, or on the misunderstanding that everything related to the Sabbath is ceremonial and a shadow of things to come, just because some things are. For them the Sabbath must include animal sacrifices, food and drink offerings, death sentence, and the renewing of shewbread, or then nothing at all. Such people do not even recognize the moral and social aspects of the Sabbath presented in the Decalogue, nor the Sabbath as a vehicle of divine mercy as presented in the Gospels. Actually, they are the legalists in regard to the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance does not weaken the importance of Paul's discourse on the law to the Galatians any more than avoidance of adultery and murder do. The same view on the Law and faith can be maintained by the Sabbath observer as by the monogamist and non-violent. The Sabbath as seen in the Bible fosters the concept and experience of [salvation](#) by faith through grace.

There are four major arguments against Sabbath observance proposed by Christians on the basis of the Sabbath. 1) There are direct commands for all of the other commandments of the Decalogue in the New Testament, but not for the Sabbath; 2) Yahushua broke the Sabbath and thus showed it to be abrogated; 3) The Sabbath consists entirely of ceremonial obligations which are shadows of things to come and "nailed to the cross"; 4) The text of the New Testament does not show the early church to have kept Sabbath. These as well as the four major arguments based on the Old Testament have all been adequately responded to here in some detail.

In sum, a [Bible](#) harmony of the passages in reference to the Sabbath is neither difficult nor in conflict with the Gospel. Rather, it contributes to the better understanding and implementation of the Gospel itself. It intimately integrates recognition of divine sovereignty, it illuminates Yahuwah as Creator and Provider, it limits the power of the powerful and alone among moral commandments transforms human society to one of justice and order from being under the law of the jungle. The Sabbath becomes the vehicle for the penetration of the Gospel of life and mercy into the world. Its neglect is one of the major factors for the limited influence of the Gospel of Christ in the world today.