IN THIS ISSUE:
THE SHABBAT THEME
THE SIGNS OF THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH
part III
"Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan.”

(Lev. 25:9-10)

In Hebrew the fiftieth year is called Yovel, a celebration year, jubilee. It is the year of the blowing of the ram’s horn. Thus Yovel got its name from the shofar announcing the beginning of the year.

The sound of the Yovel declares the beginning of a new era, the era of God’s favour towards Israel. In Hebrew the word yovel can be read in two ways. Either “yovel”, which means a ram or a ram’s horn like a shofar, or in passive voice “yuval”, is led or was led, like in Isaiah 53: "he was led like a lamb to the slaughter... for the transgression of my people he was punished.”

Like a lamb which has a desire to follow its shepherd humbly, to be led, “yuval”.

The three names of the shofar are like a road signs on our salvation path: Keren, which is the name including the personal calling, rose up in smoke with the sacrificed ram instead of Isaac (Gen. 22:13). On Mount Sinai the Israelites heard the sound of that horn, Shofar, for the first time when it called the people to make the change, a turn a round, teshuva. The nation learned the sound of the shofar when The Lord himself blew the horn (Ex. 19:16). From that point on the Israelites were commanded to blow themselves on the shofar (Lev. 25:9), until The Sovereign Lord himself blows it, this time the shofar called Yovel (Zech. 9:14).

Then He will announce freedom, liberation, a jubilee to all nations, to all of those who will hear His voice.

Yeshua the Messiah, Jesus Christ, started his ministry in the synagogue declaring with the words of Isaiah 61:1-2 proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for the captives, release from darkness for the prisoners and proclaiming the year of the Lord’s favor.

Proclaiming the jubilee, which is The Messiah himself.

In Him is the heritage restored, the one we lost in the garden of Eden. In Him is the essence of Yovel. (http://torah-art.net)

Markus Nurmesniemi

In this edition:
Editorial: From the Place of Rest ................................................................. p. 2
Keijo Lindeman: Shabbat - Biblical Day of Rest ......................................................... p. 3-8
Dr John Garr: Shabbat - The Person, the Day and the Expectation ........................................ p. 9-12
Markku Hokkanen: Welcome to Joyful Celebration .................................................. p. 13-14
Kalle Venäläinen: The Shabbat and Salvation by Grace Through Faith ................................ p. 15-17
Dr Clifford Denton: Made for Man ................................................................. p. 17-18
Markku Hokkanen: The Importance of a Father ........................................................ p. 19
Prophetical Perspectives: The Signs of the Coming of the Messiah - part III ......................... p. 20-25

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Shalom u’vracha friends!

Rest. Deep and calm, with confident trust in the Almighty God. In God from whom the living waters comes flowing. The unspeakable joy and harmony, the quiet strength and certainty which breaks all uncertainty. Renewal and coming as whole from the burdens of everyday life, the spirit of celebration and being together with people alike.

That is the real connection with God and rest in Him. That is also the way of the shabbat. When it comes to the modern society, the meaning of the complete rest has been erased by the effective thinking of “getting it done” and the avalanche of digitalization. The requirements of work life are increasing constantly. You gotta do more, give more, sell more, consume more and be more available. The marketing machinery sells new trends for the people all the time, and everybody is expected to fill the picture on them: be more, buy more, use more.

The smart phone invasion is penetrating every layers of society and its leisure and work time so as they are like an organic part of a human being. Simply put: the social media, the varieties of playing, the digi-entertainment as a whole is polluting people. Back injuries, sleeping disorders and troubles with concentration are increasing fast, starting from the early teen years. Kids are diagnosed with depression at younger and younger age.

Family values being crumbled is also related to the ill being of our young ones. Family as an institute has been under many kinds of attacks for so long, that it is a sheer miracle that there still are sober, healthy living youngsters with us today. But thanks for that belongs to our Lord. As long as it is His plan, there will also be a remnant praying His protecting hand over men.

This issue offers a wide cross examination on God’s given day of rest. The shabbat has become, for most Christian denominations, some sort of a sign of being under the law, if one decides to keep it. Let’s keep in mind though that the Lord has given us numerous useful instructions that are full of wisdom, and the weekly time of rest is one of them. The believers in Yeshua has their rest in Him in their walk with him, after all He is the Lord of the Shabbat, but that doesn’t erase the fact that we all need the weekly rest from our daily work. The shabbat is made for man, man isn’t made for shabbat.

And what is a better way than sanctify the day of rest to our Lord! It is done for the glory of God, and in remembrance of His creation work, just as He rested on the seventh day after finishing His work.

So it is fitting that this sabbath coverage is brought to you, dear reader, in the seventh issue in Yovel magazine’s history.

When it comes to Jewish culture, the shabbat is foremost a family celebration. The family spends time together on the sabbath and often the relatives and friends are invited. The shabbat is like a glue. It strengthens the family ties and gives a sense of closeness and unity which often carries through the tough times of everyday work. On the shabbat the family shares its joys and sadness, it eats together communicating with every member of the family. The father blesses his wife and the children if they have them, and the wife lights the shabbat candles and blesses her husband. Spending the shabbat withholds God’s given blessings which gives their own, unique sense of strengthening for the coming week.

One can only imagine what the consequences would be for an entire nation, if the weekly time of rest would be respected again. Even I remember from my childhood the empty and quiet streets on sunday. No shops were open. Families spent their times then together. It was genuine rest, no time and task schedules, no smart phones, and no constant firing on the Playstation.

Of course the sunday is a tradition of its own, having synchretized in early years of Christendom, but nevertheless there was a time, even in my early years, when societies respected the weekly time of rest. It wasn’t spoiled by the commercial hoopla or by the artificial needs invented by “the mad men” (the marketing professionals).

Studies show us that creativity, work efficiency and the experience of pleasant living are enhanced from the place of rest. Constant stress and strain devours human resources and it may result to a condition so bad, that one may never recover to his or her normal balance again. Even among the believers the state of burn out isn’t an unfamiliar phenomenon anymore.

The hectic life of modern man can at its worst stall one’s prayer life and bring disturbance to the relationship with the Lord. The worse case scenario is that connection dies out completely.

The time of the Shalom-peace is starting to draw at its near end in these end days on earth. In Israel, Gaza, the riots have been going on for months now, and now Hamas has really been stepping on it lately. That has resulted that Israel has been forced to do stratetig blows on Hamas based targets, so that more rocket hits could be prevented. Once again when Israel is defending itself it has been condemned all over the world. I mean really, what other nation in the world would tolerate dozens and dozens of rocket hits and arsons for months and months on roll without starting a full scale war on the attacker? Yet Israel has been restraining itself for doing that. The situation is very dire in the Middle East right now, and now if ever is the time to ask for the peace of Jerusalem and the entire Israel. Let us hold together!

With blessings,
Markus Nurmesniemi
editor
The question of the Sabbath, or the Shabbat, is a controversial doctrinal subject which causes much dispute and differing opinions among the Christians.

There are Gentile believers who want to keep the Sabbath because it was the original day of rest given by God. There are others who believe that New Covenant Christians should have their day of rest on Sunday, the first day of the week, in remembrance of the Messiah’s Resurrection.

According to another interpretation Christians are not bound to a special day, but they are free to have their day of rest any day they choose, if they choose to have one at all. The most common belief is probably that the Shabbat is for Jews and Sunday for Gentile believers.

To find out the truth we will study this issue in the light of the comprehensive message and revelation of the Bible and the parallel historical evidence. As the subject is extensive we can only discuss a few central facts about the Shabbat.

Shabbat at the Creation

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested (Hebrew ‘shavat’ = rested, stopped working, celebrated Shabbat) from all the work of creating that he had done” (Genesis 2:1-3, NIV).

The Lord God made the heavens and the earth in six days, which are usually called the days of the creation (or “renovation days” according to another interpretation), and on the seventh day He rested from His work of creation and made holy the seventh, or the Shabbat day (from Friday evening till Saturday evening).

A major reason to observe the Shabbat is to show our respect for God as the Creator of the world (Exodus 20:11). For the Jews the Shabbat also represents deliverance from the bondage of Egypt (Deut.5:14-15).

God made the sun, the moon, and the stars to serve as signs to mark seasons, days, and years (Gen.1:14). So when three stars appear in the sky in the evening, Jews through generations have started and ended the Shabbat. Today Rabbis count the beginning and the ending of the Shabbat to the minute, and these times are announced in Israeli media. In the north, midsummer and midwinter pose problems, but one is always free to follow Jerusalem time.
The Hebrew word 'shabbat' (shavat) means 'to stop working, to rest, to end'. The same root gives the word 'shvita', which means 'a strike'. Thus God stopped from His creative work and rested on the seventh day, which He made holy and gave as a day of rest for all people and beasts of burden (Deut.5:13-15).

At that time there were no Jews on the earth, the only people were Adam and Eve, and to them and to their descendants God gave the Shabbat to be observed as a day of rest (Mark 2:27).

**Shabbat belongs to Adam's descendants**

"Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man (Hebrew NT: ha'adam= man, Adam), not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man (ben ha'Adam) is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28).

Right at the creation God made the day of rest, the Shabbat, for Adam, man that He had created. Yeshua confirmed this principle, when He said that the Shabbat was made for Adam. The word 'Adam' is the name of the first man, but it also means man in general in Hebrew.

Consequently the Shabbat is made for every person, i.e. for Adam's every descendant. God made it and meant it for all people, not only for Jews, as some people incorrectly teach, but for Israel it has also been given as a sign of covenant and a commandment.

The Shabbat is not equally binding to Gentile believers as it is to Jews (Messianic Jews included), but from the very beginning God's purpose was for the Shabbat to be the day of rest for all mankind and beasts of burden.

We could say, ironically, that if we are Adam's descendants, the Shabbat is for us, but if we descend from apes, as the evolution theory claims, the Shabbat is not for us.

When God gave the commandments to Israel, He obliged the strangers (non-Jews) living among the people of Israel to keep the Shabbat as well (Exodus 20:8-11). Generally speaking the Shabbat is not equally binding on Gentile believers as it is on Jews (Gal.5:1-3; Acts 21:17-26).

NT Scriptures, while condemning Gentiles for many sins, never repudiated Gentile believers because of the Shabbat, neither should they. But the fact remains that God meant the Shabbat as a day of rest for Gentile believers as well, and if we love God, we want to honour God even in this matter – trusting in grace and freedom of the new covenant, without fear nor slavery – and keep the Shabbat holy to the Lord whenever it is possible.

Shabbat = Commandment and Sign of Covenant between God and Israel

"Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. Also I gave them my Sabbath as a sign between us, so they would know that I the Lord made them holy" (Ezekiel 20:10-12).

God rested on the seventh day of creation and made it a holy day of rest for Adam and all his descendants (Mark 2:27). Although there is no mention of the Shabbat in the history of mankind after the creation, it is obvious that it was common knowledge already before the Flood, because of the seven-day period mentioned in connection with Noah's Ark and Jacob's history (Genesis 7:4, 10; 29:27).

When God brought Israel, with Moses as their leader, out of bondage and Egypt, where they had had no chance to rest, He gave Israel, on Mount Sinai, the Shabbat as a commandment and as an everlasting sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 31:12-17).

Please notice this: At creation the Shabbat was given as a day of rest for all people, but only to the people of Israel it was given as an everlasting sign of covenant.

Israelites have a saying that more than they have kept the Shabbat, the Shabbat has kept them as Jews among the nations, not letting them totally intergrate with other nations.

Certain Christian circles seek to take the Shabbat as a sign of covenant also for themselves and teach that because of Israel's failure the church of the new covenant has replaced Israel, and therefore the Shabbat is the sign of covenant also for the church of the new covenant. This kind of antisemitic Replacement theology is far away from the truth; according to the Bible Gentile Christian church will never replace Israel (Romans 11:1-2).

The Shabbat is a commandment and an everlasting sign of covenant only between God and Israel, not between God and Gentile believers of the new covenant.

**Week Shabbat or the Seventh Day**

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: These are my appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: the Lord's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord's Feast of Unleavened bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. For seven days present an offering made to the Lord by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work" (Lev. 23:4-8).

Besides weekly Shabbats, there are annual Shabbats. As on weekly Shabbats, a sacred assembly is to be held and no regular work must be done on these Shabbats.

We can find seven annual Shabbats in Leviticus chapter 23.

1. Annual Shabbat of the first day of the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread following Passover (Lev.23:7)
2. The seventh day of the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev.22:8).
3. Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-21).
4. New Year of secular year, or Feast of Trumpets (Lev.23:23-25).
5. Annual Shabbat of the Day of Atonement which for Israelis is a day of complete rest and fasting (Lev. 23:26-32). This Shabbat is also called 'Shabbat Shabboton' the shabbat of the Shabbats.
6. The first day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-39).
7. The eight day, counting from the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles, called 'Feast of the Joy of the Torah, 'shmini atseret' (Lev. 23:39).

**Shabbat Year and Year of Jubilee**
The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, ’Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ’When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the Lord. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields. In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property’” (Lev. 25:1-13).

Today as ‘green ideas’ and organic farming are becoming more and more popular, it has been rediscovered that in many aspects it is good for the land to have its Shabbat rest. People who favour organic products consider intensive farming based on chemical fertilizers and various toxic substances, which has been practised during the past decades, an abuse that spoils the land, diminishes layers of earth and pollutes environment and waterways. Many experts recommend cutting of the quantity of fertilizers and poisons and returning to the system of letting the fields rest in turns, which was usual in farming in Finland in the past. The One who has created the earth knew to give instructions for the benefit of the soil and earth to the people of Israel thousands of years ago.

Did Yeshua or Paul abolish the Shabbat?

“For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

“After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth... Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:1,4).

In this Gentile Christian world many people think that Yeshua abolished the Shabbat. This can’t be true, for He did not come to abolish the Torah, the commandments of which, the one concerning the Sabbath included, shall remain as long as the heaven and the earth stay (Matthew 5:17-19). Yeshua kept the Shabbat; for Him it was the day of rest and worship. On a Shabbat He would go to the synagogue, where He read and explained the Scriptures and also healed the sick (Luke 4:15-16;6:6-11;13:10-17).
In the Finnish Bible the verb ‘break’ (Hebrew chilel=desecrate, break the Sabbath and its holiness) in John 5:18 has been wrongly translated as ‘abolish’. Yeshua never broke God’s law nor the holiness of the Shabbat, although His enemies falsely accused Him for such a crime.

As for Paul, he also believed all that is written in the Torah of Moses and in the Prophets (Acts 24:14; 26:22). Although the Apostle of Gentiles taught that man is declared righteous by faith in Yeshua, without works of the law (Torah), this in no way abolishes the Torah, but on the contrary confirms it (Rom. 3:31).

As Paul was the first to defend the Torah and the authority of its commandments, it is impossible even to think that he could have annulled the commandment to keep the Shabbat. He could not have annulled this commandment because Yeshua didn’t, and Paul never wanted to do or say anything against his Master’s commandments.

We can read in the New Testament that according to his habit Paul was in the synagogue on the Shabbat, which was the normal day of rest and worship appointed by God in the times of the early church, as it continues to be even today in Israel and for the Israelis around the world (Acts 13:13-14; 16:13; 17:1-2).

People sometimes refer to Romans 14 claiming that because, according to Paul, days don’t matter, the same goes for the Shabbat, too. Romans 14 does not, however, speak about the Shabbat, but about days in general, therefore it can’t be taken as grounds to abolish the Bible’s comprehensive teaching about the Shabbat.

It is lawful to do good on the Shabbat

“Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?’ He said to them, ‘If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. ’ Then he said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus” (Matthew 12:9-14).

Jewish scholars have in all ages of history pondered what the Torah permits man to do on the Shabbat.

We know from the Torah that the priests offered sacrifices in the temple also on the Shabbat (Num.28:9-10). The bread of the Presence had to be put on the table before the Lord in the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:30; Lev.24:5-8).

Health care and first aid, the purpose of which is to save a person’s or an animal’s life or health, are included in this category.

The Torah of Moses instructs to help animals, if they get lost or are in danger (Ex. 23:4-5; Deut.22:1-4). According to this principle it is lawful to help animals and people in case of emergency also on the Shabbat. It is also permitted to give water to animals (Luke 13:14-15).

Jewish male childs were to be circumcised on the eighth day (circumcision can be postponed till a later date only on medical grounds because life and health are more important than other less important commandments), and it is done even on the Shabbat, if it falls on that day (Gen. 17:12; Lev. 12:1-3; John 7:22-24).

The Torah of Moses instructs to help animals, if they get lost or are in danger (Ex. 23:4-5; Deut.22:1-4). According to this principle it is lawful to help animals and people in case of emergency also on the Shabbat. It is also permitted to give water to animals (Luke 13:14-15).

In the light of this royal word we can conclude that on the Shabbat it is permitted to do everything that is good, but all trivial and useless activity that is not necessary on the Shabbat should be interrupted for the Shabbat, and people should spend this wonderful day of rest, God’s gift, serving God, relaxing and spending quality time with the family. (If it is necessary to work on the Shabbat, let us do it thanking God, and without bondage or fear.)

If our approach to the Shabbat is like this, God’s original purpose for the Shabbat is fulfilled in a beautiful way for everybody’s rest and well-being, and for the creation’s best. Our relationship with the Lord and with the family is strengthened, when we spend time with the Lord and with the family.

Shabbat – a shadow of things to come

“ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come, reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col.2:16).

Colossians 2 and Romans 14 are the principal texts used by
Gentile Christianity to annul the Shabbat or to abolish it completely. Paul’s text above does not annul nor abolish the Shabbat or other festivals God has given Israel, instead Paul points out that no one is to judge Gentile believers (the letter was written to Colossians, Gentiles who had received Yeshua as their Lord) with regard to any festival – New Moon or Shabbat – that they celebrated.

Although Gentile believers’ observance of the Shabbat and the feasts is based on grace and liberty, it is, nevertheless, advisable to choose the original Israeli feasts and the original day of rest, the Shabbat, whenever possible. However, no one has the right to judge Gentile believers for not keeping them and not considering them as binding according to the Torah or Jewish tradition as Jews do.

Nor does anyone have the right to judge messianic believers for observing the Shabbat and the Lord’s feasts instead of festivals and Sunday distorted by Rome. It is good to remember that the most important thing is to be, by faith, part of the Messiah’s body, which is the Lord’s church (Rom.12:4-6; Eph. 3:1-6; Col. 1:17-23; 1 Cor. 12:12-27).

Colossians 2:16 also tells us that Shabbat, New Moons, and festivals are shadows, or examples, of things to come in the future. The text refers to the Messiah and the Messiah’s body which is God’s church (Col. 1:18; Eph.1:22-23) (The idea of examples or shadows of things to come is manifest in biblical feasts. The spring feasts speak about the Messiah’s first coming, and the autumn feasts about His second coming that we are expecting. We have discussed these feasts in previous issues of Yovel.)

In the light of the prophetic word, the Shabbat has at least two fulfillments in the future end time events. Firstly, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, the Shabbat rest means God’s ultimate rest that the Lord’s own enter at His coming in a new resurrection body. (Heb.3:7-14; 2 Thess.1:6-10;Matt.24:20).

The resurrection condition will be the ultimate Shabbat rest believers enter, and we are warned not to stay behind, deceived by sin, on our earthly journey “in the wilderness”.

The Shabbat is also a shadow of the coming messianic millennial Kingdom of Peace (Rev.20:1-6). Several interpreters of the prophetic Word understand, on the basis of the Creation, that because there were six “weekdays”, during which God made the heavens and the earth, and the seventh day, the Shabbat for the rest, so consequently, because one day corresponds a thousand years in God’s plans, there will be about six thousand years from creation of Adam, and then comes the seventh millennium; Kingdom of Peace, time of paradise on earth and Sabbath rest in the Messiah’s Kingdom (Ps.90:4; 2 Peter 3:1-12; Isa. 11:1-9; 65:19-25).

The weekly Shabbat is its beautiful example here and now.

Where did Sunday come from?

“He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time” (Daniel 7:25).

“A contemporary of Chrysostomos calls Shabbat and Sunday a beautiful carriage and pair. In post-constantinian age Saturday, along with Sunday, had gained the status of a holy day. In many places it was forbidden to fast on Saturday. The slaves were to be given a day of rest, there were worship services and the Holy Scriptures were read. The fact that Saturday/Shabbat was kept sacred with Sunday proves that Christians had not yet thought of applying the third commandment to Sunday. However, Constantin had as early as in 321 given a law that made the honorable day of the sun the day of rest of all judges and city artisans” (Fredrik Nilson, The History of Christian Church I, translated from Finnish edition, printed by Otava in 1913, p 324).

The council of Laodicea, in 364, ordered: “Christians are not to be like Jews and stay idle on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord’s day, and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ” (Canon XXIX).

The Book of Daniel prophesies that the horn of the fourth beast, or Rome, will change times (God’s appointed times) and the law (Torah).

This became reality during the reign of Constantine, as the quotation from Church History above shows. There are many other additional literal sources that prove that Emperor Constantin, inspired by Babylonian sun cult, made Sunday, or the day of the sun, the day of rest in 321 AD.

There was something more behind the rejection of the Sabbath and consecration of Sunday, the day of the sun. Antisemitism, hatred for the Jews, murderers of Christ as they have been called, had emerged during the first centuries. Gentile Christianity wanted to separate themselves totally from those damned Jews (and from the biblical Jewish roots of Christianity as well).

That is why they abandoned the Jewish Shabbat and replaced it with the day of the sun, Sunday. It took, however, several centuries before Christians gave up observing the Shabbat and embraced Sunday as the holy day. Many church councils and decisions were needed to accomplish this.

History began thus in 321, when Emperor Constantine made Sunday, day of the sun, the day of rest. The Council of Laodicea shut Shabbat observers outside Christ in 364. Leo I, Emperor of East-Rome, gave a law that forbade agricultural work on Sunday.

The synod of Macon forbade work on the fields on Sunday in 585, and the law was ratified by the Synod of Chalons in 649. The Synod of Boniface gave orders for the consecration of Sunday in 680, so did the Synods in Frankfurt in 794, Rome in 826, and Paris in 829. In 853, with Leo IV on the papal seat, the church council ordered that Sunday was to be observed as “the Lord’s day”.

This is how the horn of the Beast of Rome (emperors and subsequent papal seat) has changed the Shabbat, the day of rest given by God, from the seventh day of the week to Sunday. The day changes to a new day at midnight, not at sunset.

Since the ninth century almost the entire Christian world has embraced the order the horn of the beast of Rome, observing Sunday instead of the Shabbat. The Jewish people alone have not followed the orders of the beast’s horn, for the Jews (a couple of Jews blinded by Babylonian lies excluded) still consecrate the Shabbat as the day of rest, as they, faithfull to God’s Torah, have been doing for thousands of years.

Restoration of the Shabbat in the Kingdom of Peace

“From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me, says the Lord. And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind” (Isaiah 66:23-24).

The so called Protestant Reformation succeeded in restoring some of original biblical truths among the believers, but sadly enough, there is much Catholic darkness outside of Babylon on many areas of faith.

Luther, the reformer, is said to have refused the restoration of
the day of rest from Sunday to the seventh day of the week – probably for fear of the mighty Catholic Church or for the aver-sion he had to the Jews. Even up today the majority of Christen-dom keeps observing the non-biblical system of consecrating Sunday as the day of rest.

This system will not, however, continue forever, for in the co-ming Messianic millenni-al

Kingdom of Peace the Shabbat will be observed the way it was originally intended.

The last two verses of Isaiah’s book tell about the judgements of the end time, and subsequent times of the Kingdom of Peace. All mankind will come and bow down before the Lord on the New Moon (at the beginning of each biblical month) and on the Shabbat. Thus the Shabbat, the biblical day of rest, will be restored on earth in the Kingdom of Peace.

Blessing that the Keeping of the Shabbat brings to Gentile believers

“This is what the Lord says: ’Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.’ Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the Lord say, ’The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.’ And let not any eunuch complain, ’I am only a dry tree.’ For this is what the Lord says, ’To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant – to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant – these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’” (Isaiah 56:1-7).

The Book of Isaiah gives mar-vellous promises and blessings to believers from other nations (Gentile believers) who, for love for the Lord and on the basis of grace and liberty, want to consec-rate the Shabbat, the original day of rest, whenever possible.

There is a great reward for keep-ing the Shabbat, as there is for keeping other commandments of the Lord, also to every Gen-tile saved by grace, at the Lord Yeshua’s coming (1 John 5:3, Psalm 19:8-12; Matthew 5:17-19; Luke 19:11-28).

May the Good God cause us to love the Lord in such a way that we keep His Shabbat while we are waiting to enter the final Shabbat rest at the Messiah’s coming.

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CHRISTIAN LESSONS FROM HEBRAIC TRUTH

Written by: Dr John Garr

The Sabbath (Shabbat) has been and remains one of the more controversial theological and practical issues for Christians around the world.

Many say that the Sabbath is “Jewish,” applying only to the Jews and consequently has nothing to do with Christians. Others declare that Sabbath observance is a clear mark of legalism and that any Christian who recognizes the Sabbath has Judaized and is, therefore, no longer a Christian.

Most Christian theologians have asserted that the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday by Jesus and the apostles. Others have suggested that Christians observe Sunday with the same restrictions that the Jews observe Sabbath because Sunday is the New Testament manifestation of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.

Others have maintained that Christians should observe every day alike and give no preference to any day, especially the Sabbath. Still other Christians, though a minority, declare that all believers in Jesus should observe the seventh-day Sabbath. Some of these assert that failure to keep the Sabbath is a mortal sin. A few even suggest that Christians who worship on Sunday are “sun god worshippers” or that worship on Sunday is the mark of the beast.

With this diversity of often radical positions, is it any wonder that the Sabbath debate usually generates more heat than light, leaving most of the Christian church on all sides of the issue in the dark as to the biblical and spiritual issues of this important subject?

As is the case with most polarized issues, there is some truth everywhere, and the answer to the problem can be found somewhere in the middle ground between the extremes.

A Question of Ownership

The first question that must be answered about Shabbat is that of its ownership. Most Jews and Christians insist that it is the “Jewish Sabbath.” While it is true that the seventh-day Sabbath has long been a unique mark of identity for the Jewish people, indeed one of the pillars of Judaism, the clear answer of Holy Scripture is that the Sabbath, both the principle and the day, is the Lord’s:

“The seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God . . .” (Exodus 20:10).

In the delineation of God’s liturgical calendar in Leviticus 23, God himself asserts about the Sabbath that “… these are my feasts. Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest . . .”

Though the Sabbath is a sign to the Jews of God’s covenant with them, it is, nevertheless, universal because it belongs to God and traces its origin to creation, the creation of all things. The very first person to observe Shabbat was God himself. In his own Shabbat, God established a principle for all subsequent Sabbaths.

For the Creator, there was no need for physical rest, for God does not grow “weary” (Isaiah 40:28) and he who keeps Israel
“neither slumbers nor sleeps” (Psalm 121:4). What God experienced in that first of Sabbaths was simply a cessation of work, a time of reviewing and celebrating the perfection of the creation that he had pronounced “very good.”

After God had blessed Adam and Eve, the seventh day was the very first thing that he blessed and declared “holy,” or set apart unto himself (Genesis 2:3). He, in effect, created a sanctuary in time, marking off by means of the heavenly bodies that he had created for “signs, seasons, days, and years” (Genesis 1:14) the divine temporal appointments (moedim) during which he would forever nurture relationship with humanity, his crowning creation.

God did not bless and sanctify a material object to be worshipped, for he is spirit, a person who seeks relationship that can only be manifested in time.

**Shabbat, the Person**

Shabbat as both cessation and rest is a profound leitmotif that ever points to the Person who is Rest. God himself is the eternal rest to those who are in relationship with him.

Just as he is Yahweh Shalom (the Eternal, our Peace), so he is Yahweh Shabbat (the Eternal, our Rest). It is in God that the redeemed trust. The repose that the human soul craves is a Person who transcends the universe but is immanent in the hearts of those who approach him in faith.

It should have come as no surprise that Yeshua ben Elohim (Jesus, the Son of God) offered a transcendent rest to those who were burdened with the toil of labor. He himself, through the Holy Spirit, would enter their very beings, imbuing a rest into their souls that no physical repose could afford (Matthew 11:28-29). Isaiah 28:12 predicted that this spiritual indwelling would be a rest (me’nuach) for the weary.

In both the first covenant and the new covenant, men and women found repose in God, rest from their own struggle for self-actualization by trusting wholly in the One who is rest.

Those who realized that their own efforts could not give them status with God came to trust simply in his chesed (tender mercy and grace). When they did, they came to realize that rest is not something one does, it is Someone one knows.

All Sabbaths (weekly and annual) are pictures of the Person who is the Sabbath, Jesus Christ. Shabbat is the true Rest who came down from heaven, the rest that remained for the believers even after the Sabbath commandment was given at Sinai (Hebrews 4:1-3).

As a matter of fact, the Sabbath that Israel was to observe was itself a weekly proclamation of the Good News that God would come in the person of his Son as the Sabbath of eternity through whom those who “have believed do enter into rest” by “ceasing from [their] own works” (Hebrews 4:10).

**The Day – An Eternal Principle**

Shabbat is an eternal, recurring theme from the beginning of history to its end. The Sabbath confirmed the perfection of creation, and the Sabbath will characterize the end of the age when all work shall cease and both God and man will rest.

Shabbat is the eternal principle of setting apart one day out of seven for the things in life that really matter: God and family. Seven is perfection, the ultimate in refinement (both pure gold and silver are refined seven times). Seven is completion.

The menorah is a clear reflection of Yahweh’s calendar: seven lamps (festivals) on one lampstand (Shabbat). In Levitical 23, the Sabbath is the major heading on the outline, with seven festivals further delineating the Shabbat principle.

**A Call to Remembrance**

The only place where remembrance is enjoined upon man in the Decalogue is in relationship to Shabbat. Shabbat, therefore, could be called a remembrance principle. God has graciously established markers in time to call his people to remembrance of his mighty acts.

Why? Because human beings, unlike the Creator, are forever forgetful. God, who seeks those who will worship him in spiritual truth, is ever setting before forgetful man mnemonic devices, the most important of which are his markers in time. Shabbat is this principle of stopping at appointed times, ceasing the mad rush of human activity to reflect on and interact with God himself.

The principle of Shabbat as a call to remembrance is manifest in the daily, weekly, monthly, annual, and generational markers that remind man of divine appointments (three hours of prayer daily, the weekly Sabbath, the new moon, the seven festivals, the Sabbath year, and the Year of Jubilee). Each of these stopping points is a time for reflection and celebration, remembering the Creator and honoring him.

Shabbat uniquely provides this sanctuary in time for weekly remembrance. First, we remember the fact that the universe is God’s creation, not the evolution of some primordial cosmic ooze, and that we are created in the image of the living God, not the product of natural selection and the survival of the fittest.

More importantly, we remember that we have been recreated, re-born by faith in God unto eternal life by experiencing the spiritual Sabbath in the person of Messiah himself. As an adjunct to that we also understand that our rest is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that frees us from a self-imposed demand for works aimed at establishing our own righteousness and allows us to rest in the completed work on Calvary that is imputed to us for our faith.

**Time for God and Family**

Shabbat was created by God and blessed by him to be a channel of blessing, a vehicle through which man can be brought near to God and family.

When rightly employed, it is a blessing blessing. On this blessed day, we bless God, and we bless one another, particularly in the context of family, both in the nuclear family and in the extended family of the community of faith.

The blessing aspect of Shabbat is a great lesson that is available to Christian believers from their Jewish counterparts. As Shabbat approaches on Friday afternoon, excitement and expectation fills the Jewish heart and the Jewish home. The best clothes are donned, and the finest meal is prepared.

After six days of toil and struggle to make it in society, the family closes the door on the world and enters the sanctuary of the Sabbath where there is blessing, not cursing, and joy, not anguish.

First the mother welcomes the Shabbat with an age-old blessing. Then the father sanctifies the event with the kiddush blessing that millions of Jewish lips have repeated since before the time of Jesus. In this blessing and in the haMotzi (bread) blessing, it is God who is blessed and honored, not the wine and the bread. Later, the husband blesses his wife in the presence of the children by reciting or singing Proverbs 31’s acclamation of the woman of valour.

The wife may reciprocate by citing Psalm 128 in honor of her husband. Then, one by one, laying his hand on their heads and affirming his love for them, the father blesses his children with
the words of the Aaronic Benedic-
tion and other scriptural bless-
sings. There is time for singing
the songs of Zion and offering
personal prayers to God. It is a
family celebration par excellence.

During the Sabbath, the family
gathers in a synagogue (meeting)
to offer corporate prayers to God
and to hear the exposition of his
Torah (the Hebrew Scriptures).
This is in fulfillment of the scriptu-
ral requirement for a “holy con-
vocation,” a collective gathering,
and is in keeping with Judaic con-
cept of salvation in the context of
community.

Christians should well reflect on
whether the Jewish people have
discovered and maintained the
key to Shabbat observance: time
for God and family.

It is not an occasion just to sleep
or to gather at an appointed pla-
ces to sing a few songs, offer a
“word of prayer,” and listen to the
postulations of a preacher, only
to rush off to do the fun things
dreamed about during the ser-
mont. It is a sanctuary in time in
which one can escape the world
and achieve oneness with God
and with family.

Which Day and What to Do?

Which day is the Sabbath, and
what do we do on that day? These
are the questions that inevi-
tably arise. Though they seem
difficult, the answers are really
quite simple. If one knows which
day is the “first day of the week,”
the question of which day is the
Sabbath becomes a simple arith-
metic problem. God, himself,
declares: “The seventh day is the
Sabbath” (Exodus 20:10).

By adding six days to the first day
of the week—which every Chris-
tian knows is Sunday—we confirm
the fact that Shabbat is Saturday.
Since the biblical day begins at
sundown so that there is “eve-
nings and morning” in that or-
der, Shabbat begins at sundown
on Friday (or in Jewish tradition
when one can see three stars or
planets) and concludes at sun-
down on Saturday.

The Sabbath is one of God’s “fo-
 rever” creations. It has never
changed, nor will it ever chan-
ge. An immutable God did not
instruct his Son who is the same
yesterday, today, and forever, to
change the date of his weekly
Shabbat. There can be no doubt
that the earliest church contin-
ued in the same tradition of
Sabbath observance that it had
inherited from the Jewish matrix
from which it was birthed. Early
on, it is likely that this Sabbath
(Saturday) celebration carried
over into the evening of the first
day of the week (Sunday), pro-
bably continuing until after mid-
night, at which time communion
was shared.

An early example of this is Paul’s
sermon in Acts 20. This practice
was, no doubt, a celebration of
the resurrection that had occu-
red at the end of the Sabbath
before daybreak on the first day
of the week. Later, in an effort
to distance itself from Judaism,
much of the church adopted
Sunday as the day of worship,
a practice that was enforced by
imperial edict under Constan-
tine the Great. Both Jesus and
the apostles, however, observed
Shabbat in the manner prescri-
bred in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The fact that other days of the
week are also identified as Sab-
baths, however, establishes the
truth that Sabbath is a principle.
The first and last days of Unlea-
vened Bread are Sabbaths, as
are Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur,
and other festival times. Each of
these Sabbaths is an invitation to
meet with God, and the fact that
they often occur on days of the
week other than the seventh day
underscores to us the truth that
God may be worshipped and fa-
mily may be affirmed on any day
of the week.

Indeed, Christians who set apart
Sunday (or any other day, for that
matter) for God and family are
practicing the principle of Sab-
bath. This is, no doubt, the rea-
soning behind Paul’s observation of
flexibility in holy day observances
in Romans 14.

Apparently Paul was extrapola-
ting from the teaching Gamaliel
in the rabbinic School of Hillel,
which before the time of Jesus
asserted that God could be wor-
shipped on any day of the week
in addition to the Sabbath (in
contradistinction to the School of
Shammai which contended that
God could be worshipped only on
Shabbat).

Of course, this flexibility and the
allegorizing of the Sabbaths in
Colossians 2 have been distorted
into a pansabbatism in which
every day is equally a Sabbath with the consequence that there is no Sabbath, that every day is equally profane, and that all bibilical holy days are disregarded with cavalier disdain.

What one should do with regard to the Sabbath is also answered simply in Paul’s Romans 14 discourse: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” The Holy Spirit is the convicting agent who leads men into truth. When one follows his leading, the result is perfect freedom in the instruction of God. To do otherwise is to live in sin on the one hand or be brought into someone else’s legalism on the other.

The Sabbath That Remains

One of the greatest features of Shabbat is the fact that it ever points to the coming Sabbath, the Messianic Age. Each weekly family and community celebration of Sabbath is but a foretaste, a sample of the unspeakable joy of the world to come.

For the Jew it is the expectation of the coming of Messiah; for the Christian it is the assurance of the return of the Messiah. The same Person in whom they have found rest for their souls will bring eternal Shabbat with the resurrection that will accompany his return.

A Prophetic Call to Restoration

While the new covenant has enfranchised believers in the grace of liberty, it has not been a license for spiritual hedonism in which eternal precepts designed by God himself for the well being of mankind are ignored.

Perhaps foreseeing the church’s trend toward abandoning the priceless treasures of scriptural truth in favor of the baubles of human tradition, the Prophet Isaiah predicted a time when even Gentiles would embrace the God of the Jews: “... the sons of the stranger... that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer...” (Isaiah 56:6-7).

As a part of the restoration of all things that is to accompany the return of the Messiah (Acts 3:20-21), God will enlighten those Gentiles who have become naturalized citizens of the commonwealth of Israel and will bring them to a humble, considerate recognition of his Sabbath. What Christian would not want to profit from the biblical celebration of the Sabbath as God outlined it for his chosen people?

Far from being a bondage of legalism, it is a liberating exercise of the perfect law of liberty that brings blessing and wholesome living into the lives of those who lay hold on its promise (James 1:25).

Far from being a burden of working hard to keep the day, it represents the releasing of the captive spirits from the bondage of self-fulfillment into the liberty of absolute trust in God as the source of everything for health and happiness.

It is time that believers everywhere reconsider the historical reasons for the church’s divorce from its Jewish heritage and purpose to restore the Hebraic foundations of their faith in Jesus. It’s time to recover what has been lost for individual and community health. May the entire church embrace the Shabbat, the time that God has set apart for fellowship of his children with their God and with their families.

(John D. Garr, president of the Hebraic Christian Global Community, has pioneered research, writing, and teaching on the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith for more than forty years, helping believers understand the theological emergence of Christianity from the matrix of biblical Judaism. John’s wife Pat and their sons, John, Timothy, and Stephen, share in promoting the widespread work of Hebraic Christian Global Community.)
First Sabbath

“God had finished his work, and on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, for in that day he rested from all his creation” (Gen. 2: 2-3)

After the day of human creation, God spent the first Sabbath in his own family. On the seventh day. Then God and all his family ceased working for creation and rested enjoying it with all their senses. Everything was finished. Everything was created for good. In the Sabbath rest were therefore, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and just created Adam as the new member of the family. Man was created in a family relationship where God is the Father.

The Sabbath celebration has therefore started from the family of God and continues through all the families. The Sabbath’s real rest is only possible when family relationships are in order, according to the mind of God.

We know how the fall of man specifically broke the unity of the family and the family relations so that the separation of man from God the Father happened. And then there was the first murder between brothers. Sin violates relationships with God and other people in a serious way. But God has not resigned from man, but we still hear the voice of God and the Father “where are you Adam”. The Father still calls the family to His fellowship.

Family Is the Major Teaching Method of God to Know His Will

The celebration of Sabbath is based on God’s own example and also on the commandment. According to it, in all the coming days, in all future families, on the seventh day the Sabbath was to be celebrated with joy and rejoicing. Enjoying with all our senses and understanding of the good that God has given us.

The family has been given to us as the most important community in which we should learn the most important thing in our lives: knowing God.

The duties of father and mother are the most important tasks in the world; to teach their children to live by God’s will. Every person should learn to feel and know in his own life the blessing of obedience.

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God gives you. (Exodus 20: 12)

“Therefore you shall lay up these my words in your hearts and minds, and bind them on your hands, and they shall be a memorial on your foreheads; and teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” (Deuteronomy 11: 18-19)

“Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse - the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you this day, but the curse if you will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you this day, and follow other gods which you have not known.” (Deuteronomy 11:26-28)

In particular, the people of Israel passed on the most important truths of their history to their new generations by the celebration of the Sabbath. Fathers and mothers taught their children to know the greatness and the omnipotence of God. God’s great works in the life of the people of Israel proved that they served the Almighty living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Also we, the New Covenant people and families, should learn from our fathers and our mothers in our own family the entire salvation plan of God from the fall of man to the eternal Sabbath rest in Jesus Christ. Through the covenants and promises made by God, we have been promised eternal life. Knowing God’s covenants
and promises should be one of the most important things in our lives. Through Noah’s family, the plan proceeded through families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Egypt. When the time was fulfilled, God released his people from Egyptian slavery with the obedience and guidance of Moses. In all phases of the history, God has faithfully fulfilled the promises of His covenant.

The plan of God has advanced to save all mankind through Jesus Christ. The liberation from the slavery of sin came through Jesus’ total obedience and sinless life, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ has freed us and redeemed us for Himself.

We are free from the life dominated by sin when we have received personally the salvation prepared by Jesus Christ. We are now pardoned for our sins. We have been paid the full price, so that we have moved from the world where sin controlled as sovereign citizens of the Kingdom of God and the heirs of eternal life.

The Sabbath is Our First and Most Important Feast

Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, our relationship with God and our family and people has been restored. According to God’s plan. This relationship we shall strengthen and restored every Sabbath. That is why the Sabbath is our most important Biblical feast. A real pleasure.

Resetting all our relationships is one of the most important tasks of Sabbath for us as people of the new covenant. In what kind of relationships do I want to live in relation to God, in relation to myself and other people? I have the choice spot. I am responsible for my own relationships.

On the Sabbath, we can thank and praise God for all of his creation and family to which we are born and where we live and grow in knowing God.

We all belong to God’s family. No one is left out. God is our Heavenly Father. There are no fatherless children when we have received Jesus, so we have also learned to know the Father. If I want to have the Father, I choose Jesus as my brother. My Lord. My Redeemer. My Savior.

The Two Candles

When we light the first candle of Sabbath, we remember the perfection of God’s creation in which man was created as God’s image. All nature was also created to be perfectly good to reflect God’s beauty and goodness for the human being. God wanted to take care of the human being and his needs when creating everything that the earth covers on it.

This candle reminds us of our Almighty God as the Creator and Maintainer of all the good.

Second candle reminds us as New Covenant people of how God’s plan of salvation has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We are freed from the bondage of sin like the Israelites of the slavery of Egypt. We are no longer in the position of a slave, but we are in the position of a child heirs.

Second candle reminds us of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who came to us as the light to our darkness.

The Sabbath Is Meant for All People

The Sabbath has been a key and indispensable factor in teaching the Biblical Jewish culture - our roots of faith - from generation to generation. Similarly, we have been obliged to celebrate the Sabbath also today to take care of our basics of our faith and in particular of our right relationship with God and our family.

We are grateful to God’s own people, Israel, for it that we have received through them all that we need to live in love and truth based according to the will of God being life as obedient disciples and followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as Jesus was obedient to his Father.

Every Christian should know how to move from the kingdom of this world’s prince as a sovereign member of the Kingdom of God, as the child of God. That is why Jesus came as a man in our midst.

The Lord of Sabbath is Jesus Christ.

“Make sure that you get along with each other, forgive each other even if you have a reason to complain. As the LORD has forgiven you, so also give.”

(Col 3:13)

(Markku Hokkanen, living in Mikkeli, Finland, is a servant of God’s Kingdom with a vision of restoring the position of man and family according to the word of God.)
Written by: 
Kalle Venäläinen

The seventh day of the week, the Shabbat, was set apart from the rest of the weekdays as the week of creation was drawing to an end:

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy; because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (1)

By "making it holy" God appointed the last day of the week of creation as a day of celebration in honour of the finished work of creation.(2) As to God´s "resting" - by which the seventh day was made holy - it simply means that after having completed everything God did not go on creating. He did not "rest" because he was tired (3), but in order to show man through his example that man was also supposed to rest on the day that "was made holy". (4)

When God "blessed" the seventh day his idea was that this day would bring blessings to man.

It is interesting to think about how man received these blessings linked to the seventh day of the week already in his sinless condition.

We should remember that Shabbat was man’s first whole day as a living being. He was hardly physically tired or in need of rest. This Shabbat rest rather prepared the scene for the satisfaction of mental and spiritual needs. Created in the image of God man was made to reflect his Creator. On Shabbat man was free to admire and adore God. That first whole day as a human being, that Shabbat, was to be the model of how to live in intimate relationship with the Creator also during the rest of the weekdays, in spite of the many daily chores.

The quiet trust in God, which man would learn on Shabbat, would prepare a firm ground from which to attend to weekly chores. Man could rely completely on God’s care and strength, and trust that it would go on guaranteeing a happy life for him and for the whole creation.

The Fall did not diminish the significance of Shabbat as a reminder and seal of that man could trust his Creator. On the contrary! Shabbat is a constant reminder of the original state of perfection. Thus it also gives hope that God can still restore everything because he is the Creator.

During thousands of years Shabbat has been passing on the message that to find the real meaning of his life man needs to return to his Maker.

The memorial of Creation

The Bible tells us that God “has caused his wonders to be remembered”. (5) Shabbat is an eternal reminder of the Bible’s first truth: “In the beginning God created...” (6) It also reminds man that though he be wondered far from God, he still belongs to God. In this way Shabbat lays the foundation for other vital biblical teachings through which God wants to gather his “prodigal sons” back to “the Father’s house”. (7)

At least three such central biblical truths can be seen:

1. The Fall and man’s distress and complete incapacity to save himself thereafter.
2. God’s salvation through Yeshua the Messiah.
3. The new world which God will prepare for the redeemed and in which he and man are again united like before the Fall.

In all these, the central factor is God, who is Creator. That is why Shabbat’s role as a continuing reminder of God’s creative power is significant.

The Sign of the Covenant

In the Shabbat of the creation is embedded the earliest picture of the covenant of grace based on the Messiah’s sacrifice, into which God is calling fallen humanity to save them from condemnation. For Adam and Eve, in their innocent state already, the most important lesson of that blessed day was that God, creator of everything, is able to take care of the human beings he has created, who, in their turn, have to believe and trust in him.

These issues are essential in that covenant of grace where God promises to redeem the fallen man by grace only, if the man receives that grace and surrenders to God. (8) When God speaks about Shabbat “as an eternal covenant” and “a sign” between him and his people, it shows that Shabbat is to remind man from week to week of how God wants to live in a covenant with him in order to be able to help man and...
redeem him. (9)

The Sign of Deliverance

According to the promises he had given to Israel’s forefathers God delivered the Israelites from Egypt’s slavery. (10) In this connection God not only emphasizes Shabbat as a memorial of his power but also as a sign of his love and care, when he delivered his people from the slavery. (11)

The deliverance of the people of Israel was God’s sovereign act of grace. The people’s own obedience - conciousent celebration of Shabbat, for instance – had as little to do with it as it was possible for Adam and Eve to keep Shabbat before they were created. God’s creative and liberating power always comes first, and Shabbat then follows as a sign of these two.

Although Israelites must have had knowledge of Shabbat as a memorial of creation already in Egypt, their miraculous deliverance by God’s power gave them one more reason to keep Shabbat as a memorial of that wondrous event.

The Sign of Redemption

The Apostle Paul says that “these things occurred” to ancient Israel in connection of their deliverance from Egypt “as examples”. (12) The greatest of “examples”, which was closely connected to the time of their deliverance, was the slaughtering of the lamb with its bodies taken down.

As we have said above, the deliverance from Egypt was taken as a further ground to keep the Shabbat when the law was re-read to the people. (14) But what is Shabbat’s connection to Pesach and the sacrifice of the Lamb of God through which man can be free from sin’s slavery?

We will find out this when we look at the time when the sacrifice of Pesach Lamb, and all exemplary sacrifices, was completed.

Luke writes about that moment: “It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.” (15) John writes: “When he had received the drink, Jesus said: It is finished. With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Now, it was the Day of Prepararation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.” (16)

John’s words “a special Sabbath” reveals that there was something unusual about this Shabbat. That year the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, that is the Passover Shabbat, 15th of Nisan, coincided with weekly Shabbat.

In his book The Time of Crucifixion and the Resurrection Samuele Bacchiocchi says: “Rabbinal sources seem to point out that the weekly Shabbat was called ‘great Shabbat’ when it coincided with Pesach, because, as Charles C. Torrey aptly puts it, ‘the specific solemnity of the day was greatly emphasized by the coinciding celebration of the most significant feast of the year.’ (18)

Speaking in a figurative sense we can say that this Shabbat was ‘great’ also because it can be compared to the Shabbat that followed the work of creation. On the sixth day of creation God had made man. Finishing thus his work he rested on the seventh day.

Similarly the Creator after becoming man, and now precisely “the Passover Lamb”, on the sixth day of the week redeemed with his own blood the fallen mankind from the dominion of sin, death, and Satan. Then he rested the seventh day in Joseph’s tomb. “It is finished”, Yeshua said on the cross.

Can there be “a greater Shabbat” than is a Shabbat after these words? (19)

The New Testament indicates in various places that both creation and redemption spring from the same power of God’s love expressed in the Messiah, (20) And Shabbat is the sign of accomplished work of both redemption and creation.

The Sign of Spiritual Rest

The Apostle Paul describes a man who receives this creating-redemptive power in the Messiah: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation”. (21) Shabbat has the same unique significance for this new creation as it had for the first human couple whom the Creator had just made. It is the sign that he has become a partner because of the finished work of the Messiah.

The words of our Creator and Redeemer, “It is finished”, give us full assurance that we may receive the rest as a gift, for how much we ever try never will our own deeds “be enough”. That is why Yeshua invites us to enjoy the rest he gives. (22) This is the real rest for the soul.

Above all it is spiritual rest such as Adam and Eve experienced on their first whole day as human beings. The Torah’s commandment to keep Shabbat is understood as a “great and glorious” gift. (23) The commandment not to do any work is seen as a commandment not to build one’s righteousness on one’s own deeds.

And the commandment to rest on the Shabbat day is interpreted as an exhortation to cling to the righteousness given as a gift through faith only. (24)

The Sign of Sanctification

In connection of such an experience Shabbat can be understood and experienced as a sign of sanctification in the life of a believer. (25) God can move in a person’s life and through a person who “rests” in Messiah and, by honouring God’s Shabbat, acknowledges God-Creator’s dominion in his life.

He ceases from his own efforts to save himself. (26) But at the same time he also ceases from deliberate sinning and surrenders to God and lets his creating and restoring power work in him. Thus the image of God can be restored in his inner being. In this life of sanctification Shabbat plays an important role in making time for fellowship with the Creator.

Thus, by God’s sanctifying grace (27) those who have received it are made worthy to enter God’s new creation. (28)

The Sign of New Creation

While Shabbat reminds us from the original state of innocence in God’s Garden, it also draws our attention to the coming new world, where all the gracious works God has done for us have their ultimate, wonderful fulfillment.

A believer living under the Spirit’s renewing work is over and over again reminded by Shabbat of the destiny prepared for him. The Bible promises an inheritance to those “who keep their feet from breaking the Sabbath”. (29) It is the inheritance of all those who belong to Messiah, (30) But already now, waiting for this fulfillment, everyone who loves the Bible’s truth has the privilege to taste, particularly on Shabbat, the Shabbat of the new world where we will enjoy the same kind of relationship with our Creator and Redeemer as the first human couple did at the end of the week of creation and before the Fall. (31)

References:
(1) Genesis 2:1-3,
(2) Job 38:7, (3) Isaiah 40:28, (4) Exodus 20:8-11. The seven-day week as a measure of time began at the creation. Although the proper commandment to rest on the 7th day seems to have been given later, Shabbat was evidently meant for man since the creation. See Mark 2:27-28.

(5) Ps.111:4, (6) Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:8-11; 31:16-17.
(9) Exodus 31:16-17; Isaiah 24:5. Shabbat and the covenant God made with Abraham are both called "eternal covenants". The main thing for man is trust in God, which appears as obedience to God (Ps.105:8-10; Genesis 15:6;17:1-8;22:15-18; James 2:21-23). Although Shabbat is referred to as a covenant between God and Israel, all believers in Yeshua from other nations as well are partakers of the blessings of the covenant, for they are given "Israel’s citizenship" (Eph.2:11-14).

(10) Ps.105:42-45.
(11) Exodus 20:8-11;Deut.5:12-15.
(12) 1 Cor.10:11.
(13) John 8:34;36;1 Cor.5:7-8; Gal.5:1,13.
(14) Deut.5:12-15.
(17) Edersheim, Alfred, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, 895.
(18) Bacchiciocchi, Samuele, The Time of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, p44.

(19) Another widely supported view concerning the exact moment of Yeshua’s crucifixion and the time he spent in the tomb is based on a literal interpretation of so called "Jonah’s sign". (Matthew 12:39-40). Because according to this view Jesus was to be in the tomb exactly “three days and three nights (72 hours),” he was crucified on Wednesday and buried towards the evening. The resurrection occurred on Saturday evening at sunset, when the first day of the week was about to begin. Even in the case that Yeshua’s blood that covered all the sins was shed on Wednesday and the next day, Thursday, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, was that “special and great Shabbat”, Yeshua rested during the weekly Shabbat. This is reason enough to consider weekly Shabbat as Redemption’s memorial, too. See more of this in https://forssa.adventist.fi/unitslyteen-juhla/.

(20) John 1:1-4,14; Rom.1:16,20; Col.1:14,16; Hebr.1:1-3.
(21) 2 Cor.5:17
(22) Matt.11:28-30.
(23) Isaiah 42:21.
(24) Isaiah 66:6(5); Rom.9:30-10:4; Hebr.4:10.
(25) Exodus.31:13; Ezek.20:12.
(26) Hebr.4:10.
(28) 2 Peter 3:9-14; Hebr.12:14; 1 Tess.5:23; Titus2:11-14; Rev.22:1,5-7,27.
(29) Isaiah 58:13,14.
(31) Isaiah 66:22,23.

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**Made for Man**

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Written by: Dr Clifford Denton

In this short article my purpose is to suggest a balanced approach to the subject of the Sabbath. First let me emphasise where my personal desire lies through memory of an experience shared with a group on a tour of Israel about 20 years ago.

We were in Jerusalem on Shabbat, out for a short walk from our hotel. There was no traffic, no bustling people, no shops open and the peace was tangible. The city was itself at peace. An older member of our party whispered in a reverent voice, “This is how it used to be on Sunday in Britain.” This was true. In Britain we used to have a law that forbade the opening of shops and caused the closing down of all but essential business, resulting in a day of rest when families spent time together. Even if a family did not go to Church, though many did, Sunday was a Sabbath day of rest and the peace was tangible, broken only, though also emphasised by the tolling of Church bells as a call to worship.

We in Britain have not benefited by the relaxing of laws that now allow Sunday trading, the pursuit of sport and so on, so that Sunday has become just like any other day of the week. Not only has a Sabbath day of rest been removed but also has the worship of the God of the Sabbath. Yet, should the Sabbath be something enforced by law or should it be a matter of the heart? A nation’s laws are there to protect, so there is something to be said for laws such as we...
once had in Britain.

Yet where does balance lie, when one considers the Sabbath in the Christian community? Now that many of us are realising that the biblical Sabbath is on the seventh day and that it was an attempt to divert the Church from its Jewish roots that transferred Sabbath to Sunday, how shall we recover what has been lost?

Especially when God clearly blessed a Sunday Sabbath, established for the right reason of giving rest to a nation, and especially when this was in ignorance of what the “early church fathers” had imposed on Christianity. What is God saying?

I have heard opinions widely different including from two prominent Messianic Jews. One stands by the opinion that if Christians observed the true Sabbath then this would result in provoking the Jews to jealousy as Paul said that we should in Romans 11. The other considers that every one of the Ten Commandments is emphasised in the New Testament except the Sabbath Day, thereby concluding that this is no longer an obligation for Christians.

From my introduction you will know on which side of the fence I stand. However, I would not see Sabbath observance as an obligation, but as gift from God.

The Sabbath was made a Commandment for Israel at Sinai, but it was already part of Torah, dating back to the day after the Lord completed His Creation. The Lord rested from the work He had done and passed on to all mankind the principle of ceasing from work, to benefit from a day of rest with ones family in the presence of God.

There are many traditions that have entered the world of the Jews over the centuries to make the day from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday a very special day, from the lighting of candles, the prayers to God, the blessings on the family to the end of Sabbath service 24 hours later.

When taken from the heart such traditions have indeed brought a rich heritage through the years. Yet, where enforced through legalism they have brought no such blessing. Indeed, this is what Yeshua criticised in His day.

Many times some of the religious leaders set up traps for Him to see if He would break the Sabbath. He is the fulfilment of Sabbath, so there was no way He could break it! He pointed out the important principle that Sabbath observance that was religiously enforced was not God’s intent, but that He was seeking a heart response for rest and building of relationship with one another and with God.

Therefore, we must seek balance if we are moving towards the restoration of Sabbath in the life of all believers today.

To make a forced shift from Sunday to Saturday or to impose a weight of traditions on one another, that robs us of the simplicity of our personal response to God, could rob us of the very peace that we seek.

I am totally for renewal of the Sabbath Day, a day to be Holy before the Lord, but let’s not spoil it through some form of law enforcement.

Let’s see how God Himself shows us how to walk with Him on that Sabbath Day’s walk. That is surely what He wants for us.

www.tishrei.org
The Importance of a Father

Written by:
Markku Hokkanen

Father’s Day is a day of celebration. Why do we celebrate then? Why is it worth organizing a celebration for the father’s glory? Because father has real value and meaning. That is why we celebrate Father’s Day.

Unfortunately, we also hear messages about how fathers themselves have not always understood the importance and value of father’s task for their children and their family. Why has this happened? Perhaps then young men have not been taught how important, valuable, and responsible father’s task is. “How could I know, if no one teaches”, could many men defend themselves for their own sake.

The other half of fatherlessness problem is that although I have heard, I have not taken the teaching I have received to my listening ears. I did not accept the task I had, that would belong to me as a man and father to take care of it. Then I cannot defend myself in any way. I can only go to myself and take my responsibility.

Or, then, the fathers have been paralyzed by the difficult crises of their own lives, like for example those men often were who had experienced war and were unable to form loving, close emotional relationships with their children and spouses. What do men do then? In what ways do men then talk and chat with their children and their spouse?

Who finally needs a father? To whom the father is meaningful and valuable? Naturally, above all for a child who needs the experience of the father who is loving, fair, truthful, trustworthy, forgiving, merciful, patient, generous, encouraging, supportive, but also safe, who can protect his child, teach children to face various threats and dangers and setting the child the limits for his/her life.

But which dad can be this before mentioned perfect dad? The answer is: no one. But there is one, who is the perfect Father. He is our Heavenly Father, the Father God. The above list of the best sides of a father describes and fits perfectly only to our Heavenly Father. Not to anyone else. Our earthly fathers, even at their best, can only partially reflect them.

It is important to know that God wants us to call him Father. God as if wants to show that there is no perfect father without Him. With His own Father’s personality, he wants to be the Father of every child, so that in this world there is no need for any orphan, fatherless child.

In fact, God provides for us, for the fathers, a true reference point in relation to our own paternity, to all fathers at all times. I dare say so. Of course, in this comparison, we will always notice to be left behind, and left behind a lot. But what’s the most wonderful thing, in fact; apparently, it must happen so, because only then can we understand the attribute of one of the most important feature of a father, namely, that what means the mercy of the loving father. It also means that we are each one perfectly pardoned fathers. Our Heavenly Father does not forsake us and loves us even though we do not fully meet all the dimensions set for a father. This way, we the fathers also have the opportunity to gradually grow into understanding the true meaning and value of the father for our children without remaining in devastating guilt, shame and fervor.

Fathers also play a great part in the whole family life and ultimately in society as a whole. Our household, family, congregation and entire society need men, who have understood the value and significance of father and are also ready to take that task as their responsibility. Fatherless community lives in the domain of orphanhood. Then our most important task, the upbringing of the future generation, will be left halfway.

Each of us in some way judges our own father. What kind has been my dad? The memories remind us how he has acted as the father of our family. Likewise, every dad judges in one way or another his own fatherhood: “How I have managed and succeeded in my role as a father.” Every father is in this in a challenging place in the chain of generations. What kind of legacy I have received myself and on the other hand, what kind of legacy I leave for my children and grandchildren about being a father and about the family life.

Who defends the father, when he needs support in his own paternity? Men need more defenders than accusers during this time! I believe that every man feels in his heart a great deal of pain and guilt even without blaming, when he has not been able to take care of his most important task in his family.

Father lives as if “between two fires” - his own father and his own children. How can you survive without being burnt to a cinder? First, by acknowledging the fact that we have neglected in many respects our responsibility both for our own father and for our own children. Secondly, we always have the opportunity to repent, correct our mistakes and errors. We always have the opportunity to go forward in life by forgiving and by asking for forgiveness. I can always write the manuscript of my life again. Free from the burdens of the past. Our biggest burdens are born in our human relationships. Broken relationships can be corrected.

Every child wants to hear from his own father: “You are important to me, you are valuable to me, you are my beloved son / daughter”.

When could men become so strong and valuable that they would belong to my father, with father’s love, express it aloud to their children?

Father’s Day could then be a real “father’s love day”. That’s just a real feast day for all of us!

On Father’s Day 11.11. 2018

(This text is published in this Shabbat-edition because of its current and ever so meaningful topic.)
Written by: 
Keijo Lindeman

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part” (1 Cor. 13.9)

“So when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation’, spoken of through the prophet Daniel – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equalled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:15-22).

The Vision Zephaniah had of the Day of the Lord and the Great Distress

“The great day of the Lord is near – near and coming quickly (Hebrew OT: maher meod = very quickly). Listen! The cry of the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord’s wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth” (Zephaniah 1:14-18).

When we talk about the day of the Lord, many people take it to mean Sunday. Some modern versions say intentionally in Revelation 1:10: “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, Sunday...” One widely used Russian version, for instance, puts it like that. The original Greek text, however, has no mention of Sunday; it has been added expressly by Bible translators (I would like to say misleaders) with the intention of fortifying the status of Sunday as a day of rest.

Some have interpreted Zephaniah’s text literally so that all people were to die on earth in those judgments. We must keep in mind though that the term “all, entire”, used much in the Bible, does not necessarily mean every single person or thing, but the most part or a majority.

In the Book of Daniel, for instance, the king of Babylon is said to have ruled the entire world and all nations (Dan. 2:37-38; 5:17-19). We know now from the history that Babylon did not rule over all nations and people on the earth, but it did have control over the central and most important part of the world of those days (605-539 BC).

We need to see Zephaniah’s text parallel with Isaiah’s text; on the
day of the Lord’s wrath the majority of mankind will die, but a remnant will be left as a “seed”, from which a new beginning will spring to the Millennial Kingdom of Peace (Isa.13:9-13; 24; Rev. 20).

According to prophet Zephaniah the day of the Lord contains many things and probably many phases which, however, occur with high speed once they start happening according to God’s timetable (Rom.9:27-28).

Zephaniah says that the Lord’s day is:
* a day of wrath
* a day of distress and anguish
* a day of trouble and ruin
* a day of darkness and gloom
* a day of clouds and blackness
* a day of trumpet and battle cry

The day of the Lord will be one of distress and anguish. Isaiah speaks about the same time as he says there will be so great a distress that no flesh would survive if those days were not shortened because of the elect (that is: Israel and believers; Isa.45:4; Amos 3:1-2; Col.3:12; 2 Tim.2:10; 1 Peter 1:1;5:13).

Daniel’s Vision of the Great Distress

“At the time of the end the king of the South will engage him in battle, and the king of the North will storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships. He will invade many countries and sweep through them like a flood. He will also invade the Beautiful Land. Many countries will fall, but Edom, Moab and the leaders of Ammon will be delivered from his hand. He will extend his power over many countries; Egypt will not escape. He will gain control of the treasures of gold and silver and all the riches of Egypt, with the Libyans and Nubians in submission. But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. He will pitch his royal tents between the seas at the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him. At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people - everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered” (Daniel 11:40-12:1).

When Yeshua spoke about the abomination that causes desolation in the holy place and the great distress, he said it was prophesied by prophet Daniel in his Book. Many theologians, mainly liberals, have interpreted that the prophecies in Daniel 11 have already come true in the past more than two thousand years ago, when the king of the North (Seleucid kings of Syria) fought against the king of the South (Ptolemaic kings of Egypt).

Daniel’s prophecy from chapter 11 verse 40 (maybe even from verse 36) onwards cannot, however, relate only to happenings of that time because they relate to Israel’s troubles, the great distress, to Messiah’s coming and resurrection at the end time (Daniel 12:1-2; Matthew 24:29-31). Daniel’s prophecy is likely to come true both in a limited and a broad meaning. In its limited meaning it means war in the Middle East, where the Beautiful Land, i.e. Israel, will be attacked by the king of the North (Syria) and his allies, and many will fall (Numbers 14:7; Jeremiah 3:19; according to the Psalm 83 all Arab countries surrounding Israel will attack Israel).

According to Ezekiel Gog at the far north and his allies will attack Israel by surprise (Ezekiel 38-39). Both Daniel and Ezekiel name Put, or Libya, and Ethiopia (Cush= Ethiopia in Hebrew, or perhaps even Sudan, Ezek.38:5-6) as Gog’s allies. It is probable that in these battles Damascus will be destroyed and alongside Syria other hostile countries surrounding Israel will be judged (Zechariah 12-14; Isaiah 17:1-2; Jeremiah 47-49).

This war will be a global war; countries invaded in the king of South’s (Egypt) camp will join it. (Ezekiel speaks about Gog’s war which will spread over all the mountains of the earth, 38:21.) The camp of the king of the South may mean the Nato camp lead by the U.S. The Gog camp of the king of the North (evidently lead by Russia) will first invade the lands of the king of the South, but then something happens at the east front that scares off the king of the North. His troops will be trapped between the huge army coming from the East (Natoland Japan, China?, others?) and the northern front (Nato?) and the destruction of the king of the North is at hand.

The battle will culminate in a nuclear war where most of mankind and the earth will be demolished (Revelation 9). During those days the world will be filled with such a distress as has never been seen on earth. The church of God will be spared from the global nuclear war because Messiah will come and fetch His own before it (Luke 17:26-30).

The Great Distress and the Great Exodus

“When you see the abomination that causes desolation standing where it does not belong – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down or enter the house to take anything out. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that this will not take place in winter, because those will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning, when God created the world until now – and never to be equalled again. If the Lord had not cut short these days, no one would survive. But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen, he has shortened them” (Mark 13:14-20).

The prophecy about the abomination and the flight came true as a prefulfillment in the days of
the early church when the Romans were besieging Jerusalem (66-70 AD). There was a break in the siege and the disciples, remembering their Master’s exhortation, fled to Pella (in today’s Jordan) and were saved from the destruction that befell Jerusalem, the temple, and over a million Jews, when the Romans finally took Jerusalem (in 70 AD).

The ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy will be in the days of the great distress, on the Lord’s day.

The Great Distress and Israelis fleeing from among the Nations

“However, the days are coming’, declares the Lord, ‘when men will no longer say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt’, but they will say, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites out of Egypt’” (Zechariah 2:5-8).

“Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign Lord” (Ezekiel 39:28-29).

The prophet Jeremiah says that the Lord will send “fishermen”, who persuade Israelis to return to Israel, their own land that God has promised their forefathers. This part of the prophecy has already been fulfilling – in the late nineteenth century Zionist Movement was born, lead by Theodor Herzl, introducing the idea of a Jewish homeland.

These fishermen of Zionist Movement and many Christians have persuaded Jews among the nations to return to their own land. Since those days waves of Aliyahs, or Exodus, have brought thousands of Jews to Palestine of that time. When the state of Israel was established on the 14th of May 1948, after two Millennia of diaspora, with the United Nations as “midwife”, Exodus really started, and today over 6 million Jews live in Israel. (Representatives of all twelve tribes are found in Israel.)

However, there are still millions of Israelis among the nations, and the Lord will gather them all to their own country (Jer.3:14; Ezek. 20:32-38). It means that there will be a great end time Exodus for those millions of Israelis. Fishermen’s tender persuasion will not move all of them for many of them live in good conditions and have close ties and relationships in the countries where they live now.

It is not simple and easy to be torn away from the life and surroundings one is used to maybe for many generations.

God will fulfill His word to the smallest dot and stroke, and He allows “hunters”, i.e. waves of global antisemitism and Israeli hatred, drive all Israelis from among the nations to their own land. Something will happen in the world that makes the so far latent antisemitism explode. Jews who live in Judea, i.e. Westbank area, will have to run away, probably from the attacking armies. Likewise Jews among the nations will have to
flee from persecution. According to many biblical prophecies God’s attention seems to be directed especially to the area north of Israel, that is Russia and the rest of former Soviet Union. Exodus from the north has already touched also Finland; thousands of Jews from Russia and the Baltic countries have immigrated to Israel via Finland.

In the future Finnish believers must be prepared to welcome masses of Exodus Jews who are fleeing from Israel through Finland.

God’s Wonders during the Great Exodus

“As in the days when you came out of Egypt I will show them my wonders. Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will lay their hands on their mouths and their ears will become deaf. They will lick dust like a snake, like creatures that crawl on the ground. They will come trembling out of their dens; they will turn in fear to the Lord, our God, and will be afraid of you” (Micah 7:15-17).

The events and wonders of this end time Exodus during these days of the Great Distress will be so remarkable that they will affect even Passover seder-meal: the three and a half Millennia old Exodus from Egypt with its wonders will no longer be remembered - instead, people will tell about the wonders God made for His people Israel during the end time Exodus.

Not in winter nor on the Sabbath – believers’ help is needed

“The Lord will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob. Nations will take them and bring them to their own place” (Isaiah 14:1-2).

“God is just; He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you” (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

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When Yeshua was speaking about the flight of Israelis from among the nations to their own country during the days of the Great Distress, He told His disciples to pray that it would not happen in winter or on the Sabbath. What does this mean? Let us consider the meaning of winter first.

In spite of latent antisemitism we have so far lived a relatively peaceful “time of the fishermen”. Israelis have been persuaded to return to their own land while the circumstances have still been rather good and peaceful. There have been troubles, of course, but as a whole immigrating Jews have been able to travel to Israel in safety by cars, buses, aeroplanes and ships e.g. (Isa.60:8-9).

But when the time of the “hunters” is at hand during the Great Distress, global antisemitism will be ablaze, which means that there will be hardly any safe place for Israelis. Exodus Jews, fleeing from among the nations, will have to make their journey in constant fear of persecutors, maybe underground, maybe through woods and deserts, with trembling hearts.

Among them are many old people, children, sick people, disabled people, and pregnant mothers, as Jeremiah prophesies. If they had to leave in cold harsh winter time, many would die on the way. That is why we need to pray that it would happen in mild summer conditions, and because of believers’ prayers and His compassion God will see to it.

What is the role of Sabbath, then, in the end time Exodus? Some interpret it to mean that it should not be on the Sabbath in order not to violate the holiness of the Sabbath. This seems to me a rather limited view in this connection.

First we need to consider that Sabbath has many meanings in the Bible and that there are different kinds of Sabbaths.

* Weekly Sabbath from Friday night till Saturday night. This is the most common Sabbath, and for many the only one they know (Genesis 2:1-3).
* Sabbaths of Feast, of which seven can be found in Leviticus 23 included in the seven principal feasts. No regular work is allowed on these Sabbaths.
* Sabbath Year every seventh year; the land was to have its year of rest (Lev.25).
* Sabbath represents also the Messiah’s Millennial Kingdom of Peace (Psalm 90:4, 2 Peter 3:8). The risen saints will then rule a thousand years with their Master (Revelation 20). That is the time of redemption of all the creation from the bondage of decay to the glorious freedom of God’s children (Romans 8:18-23).

The writer of Hebrews talks about the Sabbath rest for the people of God. He takes as an example the journey of the people of Israel made through the desert with the leadership of Moses; during this journey many died in the desert because of sin and disobedience, and they never entered that rest in the promised land, although the good news, the gospel, was first preached to them in the days of Moses (Hebr. 3:7-4:7).

The writer then says that those who came with Joshua to the land of Israel did not yet enter God’s ultimate rest, but that the Sabbath rest for the people of God would certainly come and to enter it, we have to make every effort and take care not to follow the example of Israel’s disobedience in the desert.

When do we, then, enter this final rest of the people of God?

Paul states it in his letter to the Thessalonians. It will be when the Lord Yeshua comes with his holy angels to revenge for their iniquity to those who have rejected God and objected the gospel.

The ones who believe in Him will be transfigured — they will get a glorious resurrection body like Yeshua had after His resurrection. And then they will enter the rest, after leaving the world full of distress (Phil.3:20-21). The final Sabbath rest, wonderful resurrection state, of the people of God begins at the Messiah’s coming and the resurrection.

When Yeshua told to pray that the Israelis’ flight from among the nations would not happen on the Sabbath, what He meant was that His coming and believers’ resurrection would not have occurred before that. If the people of God were already then enjoying the heavenly Sabbath rest, who would be here on earth in the days of the Great Distress and Israel hatred to help Exodus Jews fleeing for their lives to Israel?

We need to pray that the church of God, believers who love Israel and the Jews, will still then be here on earth to help the Jews to get back to their own land.

Once this ministry to Exodus Jews has been accomplished, the Church is free to enter God’s rest in the resurrection. Believers must not, therefore, pray that the church be taken from the earth before the days of the Great Distress, but, on the contrary, we need to pray that the church be still on earth in those days to help the fleeing Exodus Jews.

The taking up of the believers from the Great Distress

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:1-3).

Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matthew 24:29_31).

“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’ Then one of the elders asked me. ‘These in white robes – who are they, and where did they come form?’ I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple: and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd: he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’” (Revelation 7:9-17).

There is a widely spread understanding among the Christians that the church of God will not have to experience any anguish...
or persecution before Messiah’s coming and the taking up; in other words that the church will not be on earth during the Great Distress.

If we think along these lines we forget that there are believers in the world, from about 200 to 350 million, who are being persecuted in some 50 countries.

Believers accustomed to western world’s comfortable conditions often think that they will be spared from distress and persecution before the Lord’s coming. The Bible conveys a different kind of view of the issue. One of the signs of Messiah’s return is global persecution of believers (and also of Israelis), which will finally concern all nations (Matthew 24:9). The Bible’s message about the great distress and the taking up of believers is equally clear. According to the prophet Daniel, archangel Michael will protect the children of God’s people, that is Israelis and believers, in the days of the Great Distress.

During those days “the wise” will win souls to the Lord in the last powerful but short revival of the age of grace..., and believers are resurrected to everlasting life (Daniel also speaks about shame and eternal contempt which will come after Messiah’s Millennial reign, Revelation 20). Yeshua said that the sign of the Son of Man and the gathering of believers in the taking up will occur after the days of the Great Distress (2 Thess.2:1-3). It means that the church must remain on the earth in those days before the Lord’s coming and the taking up. Believers are needed on earth to carry out the last revival and to help Exodus Jews.

The Book of Revelation informs us, too, that people of all nations and ethnic groups will come before God’s throne from the Great Distress. When the Great Distress reaches its climax in nuclear war and judgements of God’s wrath, the church will be taken away from the war and God’s wrath (Luke 17:26-30; 1 Thess.1:10;5:9; Rom.5:9).

How Can we Come out Winners from the Great Distress?

“The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him” (Nahum 1:7).

“Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7).

“All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life” (Luke 21:17-19).

“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony: they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Rev.12:11-12).

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:25-28).

The thought of the Great Distress makes one tremble. How can we come out winners through those awesome days? We will win by abiding in the Lord. He is our rock and shelter in the days of distress. God’s care through difficult times and days of persecution is so perfect that not a strand of hair from our head drops without his knowing. We might not notice the dropping of a single hair, but God will.

We will come out winners from the anger of the enemy of our souls and from the time of distress by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, and by remaining faithful till death. By our perseverance we achieve life. By trusting in God’s power and grace even the weakest believer will be a winner, and the strongest will not make it without God’s grace and power. We have a wonderful destination: Messiah’s coming and the taking up of believers to meet the Lord in their resurrection bodies (1 Thess.4:13-18).

When the world is in distress and without hope, not understanding what is going on, we can lift up our heads and take courage: Yeshua the Messiah is then coming to take His own away from the tribulations. We have an amazing future and hope.

The wisest thing to do is to give one’s life in the faithful hands of our Saviour and King, Messiah Yeshua, and wait for His coming.
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