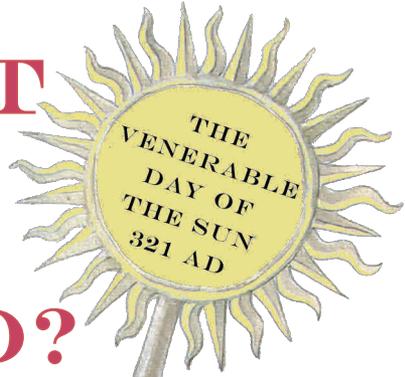


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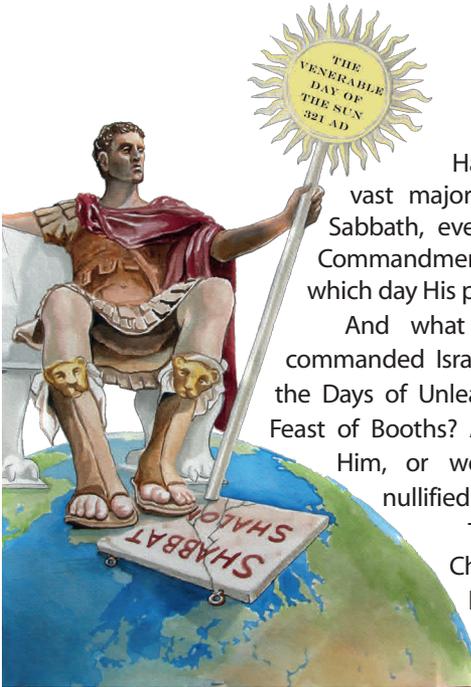


*The Demise
and
Restoration
of the
Sabbath*



A TWELVE TRIBES FREEPAPER

SHABBAT SHALOM?



Have you ever wondered why the vast majority of Christians don't keep the Sabbath, even though it is one of the Ten Commandments? Does it really matter to God which day His people honor above all the others?

And what about the festivals that God commanded Israel to keep, such as Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and the Feast of Booths? Are they no longer important to Him, or were they somehow fulfilled or nullified by the New Covenant?

There is a growing movement in Christianity to restore Sabbath keeping and the festivals, seeking to get back to the Hebrew roots of the New Covenant faith. Surely

there must be some lasting significance to the rich heritage of the faith of Abraham. After all, are not the disciples of the Messiah supposed to be Abraham's offspring by faith?

We are a people who follow Yahshua¹ the Messiah in the most radical (i.e., back-to-the-roots) way we know how. We live together in communities called *clans*, and the clans in a particular geographic region function together as a *tribe*. There are twelve tribes of our people, and together we aspire to be the spiritual Israel that Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, has always wanted.

We keep the Sabbath together in all of our dwelling places, on the seventh day of the week, from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. And every day, morning and evening, we gather in all of our households to worship our Creator, and to hear from Him by His Spirit speaking through each other and teaching us from the Scriptures.

We are coming to understand from the Scriptures the deep significance of the sabbaths and the festivals that Yahweh commanded Israel to keep. It is from this understanding, in the context of our life together as a tribal people, that we write this paper, from our hearts to yours, hoping to find others who desire to "share in the nourishing root of the olive tree." (Romans 11:17) ❁

¹ *Yahshua* is the original Hebrew name of the one called *Jesus* in most English Bibles. See "The Name Above All Names" on page 40 for more about this name.

THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH

*Above all you shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a **sign** between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, Yahweh, sanctify you... And He gave to Moses ... the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exodus 31:13,18)*

Imagine being there, at the top of Mount Sinai, and receiving those two stone tablets engraved with the ten most important instructions from the heart of the Creator to His highest creation, *man*. Wouldn't your heart have been pounding? Wouldn't you have read them very carefully, and cherished them in your heart, and felt an urgency to pass on His words to everyone you loved so that they would be able to please their Creator? What could be a greater treasure than to have your Creator's infinite wisdom condensed into ten simple commandments, given out of His great love for His people?

Perhaps you haven't thought of the Ten Commandments in that way before. You may not even remember them all, or know where to find them in the Bible. Most people have forgotten at least one of them. Ironically, it is the only one that begins with the word, "*Remember...*"

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy... (Exodus 20:8)

If you are a Christian, you are probably already saying to yourself, "Oh, the Sabbath was for the Jews. Sunday has replaced the Sabbath as our day of rest." Perhaps you have been taught that Jesus fulfilled the Law, therefore the commandment to keep the Sabbath is no longer binding upon Christians. You may remember that the Savior said to His disciples:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law until all is fulfilled. (Matthew 5:17-18)

But there is a problem with this line of reasoning. If Yahshua, the Messiah, fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, and if that means that His followers are released from keeping the Sabbath, then are we not also released from honoring our father and mother? Are we now free to murder and to commit adultery? Can we now worship other gods, and make idols, and take His name in vain? After all, we're free from the Law. Ridiculous! Yes, but why is it not also ridiculous to set aside the fourth commandment? After all, right after the verse quoted above, Yahshua also said:

Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

So even if you consider the keeping of the Sabbath to be the least of the commandments, shouldn't these words of the Savior cause you to pause? Ironically, the commandment to keep the Sabbath is the one about which *more* instruction is given in the Bible than any other commandment. It is also the first commandment which, when broken, resulted in the death penalty for the offender.¹ Why, then, is it routinely ignored by the vast majority of Christians?

Actually, there is a very good reason lurking in the pages of church history.

Most Christians do not realize that the early church kept the Sabbath. According to the New Testament, the first disciples rested on the Sabbath, and then after the sun had set, marking the beginning of the first day of the week,² they gathered to break bread, as is clear from Acts 20:7-8.³ It became the custom for the early church in the second century to rest on the seventh day and then have a festival on the first day of the week, at which there would be teachings and other ways of celebrating the resurrection. Ignatius wrote early in the second century: "And *after the observance of the Sabbath*, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection day..." As late as the early fourth century it is recorded that Christians observed both the Sabbath and the "Lord's Day" in their different ways.⁴ But by the end of the fourth century, Sunday had replaced the Sabbath in the minds and habits of most Christians.

A SIGN BETWEEN YAHWEH AND HIS PEOPLE

"So what's the big deal?" you might ask. "What difference does it make whether I go to church on Saturday or Sunday?"

It doesn't make any difference at all for those who are not Yahweh's people, but for His people, it makes a *big* difference! But the Sabbath is much more than a day of the week to cease working and attend a religious gathering. For Yahweh's holy people, it is actually a prophetic event of great significance, which this passage expresses in the strongest terms:

And Yahweh said to Moses, "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, Yahweh, sanctify you.

"You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the

¹ Numbers 15:32-36 ² Each day was considered to span from sunset to sunset, as in Genesis 1:5,8,13, Leviticus 23:32, etc. If you read this passage carefully, you will see that it was evening — the eve of the first day, not Sunday morning. ³ See also Luke 4:16, "...as was His custom, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day..." ⁴ See also "The Best of Complements" on page 13 for more about this.

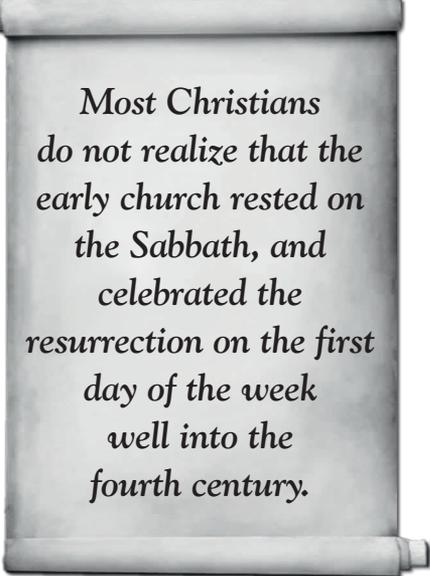
seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to Yahweh. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.

"Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel that in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

And He gave to Moses, when He had finished speaking with him on Mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exodus 31:13-18)

The Sabbath is a *sign* between Yahweh and His people that He has *set them apart* unto Himself, and is purifying them, which is what *sanctify* means. Israel was always intended to be a set-apart people, as even Balaam reluctantly prophesied: *"Behold, a people who dwell apart, and will not be reckoned among the nations."*⁵ That meant that they dwelled together and did not live according to the cultures and the values of the nations around them. Instead, their rich tribal life, characterized by care for one another and trust in their Elohim, was to be a light to the nations around them. According to the prophet Isaiah, being this light was Israel's prophetic purpose, for by it they would bring salvation to the ends of the earth.⁶ Paul carried this right over into the New Covenant as the purpose of the church.⁷

Their keeping of the weekly Sabbath would be a profound expression of that care and trust as they set aside their regular work, with its potential to increase their income, and focused their attention on their relationships with one another and their Elohim. Even their servants and their livestock were to rest, as well as any visitors who were within their gates.⁸ It wasn't an individual thing, as if one person could keep the Sabbath alone, or by merely going to a religious service on Saturday. The Sabbath was a set-apart day for Yahweh's holy people to keep *together*, "in all your dwelling places"⁹ — a stipulation that was based on the assumption that they dwelt together as a people set apart from the cultures around them. As a people, they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt, and as a people they were to enter into rest,



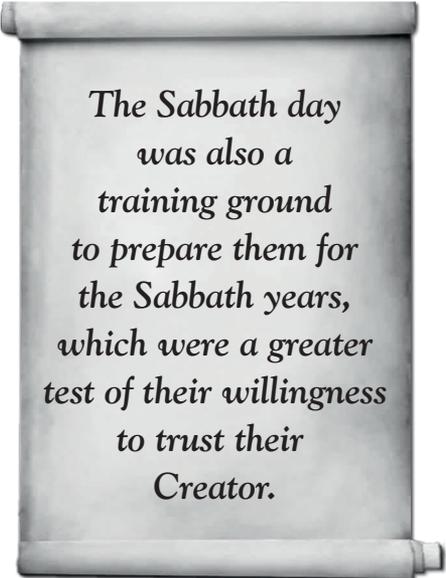
**Most Christians
do not realize that the
early church rested on
the Sabbath, and
celebrated the
resurrection on the first
day of the week
well into the
fourth century.**

⁵ Numbers 23:9 ⁶ Isaiah 49:6 ⁷ Acts 13:47 ⁸ Deuteronomy 5:12-15 ⁹ Leviticus 23:3

experiencing the spiritual liberty of Yahweh's people, set free from anxiety and restless energy. That would be a *sign* that their Elohim was winning their hearts and making them into His holy nation.

THE SABBATH AS TRAINING GROUND

But the Sabbath *day* was also a training ground to prepare them for the Sabbath *years*, which were an even greater test of their willingness to trust their Creator and live in peace with their brothers:



**The Sabbath day
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Creator.**

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: "When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to Yahweh. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to Yahweh. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land. And the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you: for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, for your livestock and

the beasts that are in your land — all its produce shall be for food." (Leviticus 25:2-7)

Imagine that, for an agricultural society! To the natural mind, it would seem foolish and irresponsible for the whole nation to take a year off from planting and harvesting. But those with spiritual understanding saw that their Elohim had promised them that He would command a blessing in the sixth year so that the land would produce a crop sufficient for three years.¹⁰ Would they trust Him enough to obey this radical command? And if that were not enough to test their trust for Him and their love for their brothers, they were also commanded to forgive all debts every seventh year:

At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because Yahweh's release has been proclaimed... If among you, one of your brothers should

¹⁰ Leviticus 25:21

become poor, in any of your towns within your land that Yahweh your Elohim is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, "The seventh year, the year of release is near," and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to Yahweh against you, and you be guilty of sin. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this Yahweh your Elohim will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. (Deuteronomy 15:1-2,7-10)

THE SABBATH DEPENDS ON LOVE

How on earth could anyone ever attain to such a high standard? Certainly old Israel never did! They reasoned their way around the clear intent of the commandment regarding the Sabbath, but the Elohim of Israel never forgot. The prophets tell the sad story of Israel's mistrust and unbelief. Jeremiah foretold seventy years of exile — one year for each of the years the land did not have its Sabbath rest.¹¹ In at least some sincere hearts, the question must have burned, "Would Israel ever keep all the Sabbaths, *including* the Sabbath years? Or would it be reduced to rote ritual and an opportunity to point the finger?"

So when you consider all that the Sabbaths entailed, it is not hard to see why, many years later, Yahshua made such a sweeping statement to the Pharisees when they asked Him which was the greatest commandment:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:36-40)

In other words, it is impossible to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law¹² and all that the Prophets had spoken without loving Yahweh with all of your heart, soul, and strength¹³ and loving your neighbor as yourself.¹⁴ It is easy to *think* that you love Yahweh supremely, but it is tested by how you love those closest to you, which is what *neighbor* actually means.¹⁵ Or as the Apostle John put it:

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

¹¹ Jeremiah 25:11-12; ² Chronicles 36:21 ¹² Romans 8:4 ¹³ Deuteronomy 6:4-5

¹⁴ Leviticus 19:18 ¹⁵ *Neighbor* comes from *nigh*, meaning *near*, and *gebore*, meaning *dweller*, hence, "one who dwells near."

And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:20-21)

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

Apart from this high standard of love being lived out among a spiritual people who dwell together as a distinct society, there is no possibility of keeping the Sabbath days or years in sincerity. For if I truly love my neighbor as myself, how can I find rest unless my neighbor also finds rest? It's not a matter of what day religious activities are scheduled; it's a matter of sharing a life of love and care for one another, based on a radical trust in Yahweh.

That is why Yahshua was continually making a point of healing and otherwise caring for people on the Sabbath in full view of the religious leaders of His day.¹⁶ Their indignation exposed the empty ritual to which the Sabbath had been reduced, devoid of compassion or concern for one another, and full of lawlessness, malice, and the pointing of the finger.¹⁷ They had set aside the very purpose of the Sabbath; His desire was to restore it:

And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27-28)

And if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath. (Matthew 12:7-8)

For three and a half years the Lord of the Sabbath labored to form in His disciples a heart of compassion and care for one another, and to write the spirit of the Law on their hearts so that they could fulfill its righteous requirements and bring about all that the Prophets had spoken. He was raising them up to be apostles, to be the very "finger of God" by which the Law could be written on the hearts¹⁸ of a new spiritual Israel of twelve tribes¹⁹ who would be a light to the nations,²⁰ showing them the Father's lovingkindness and the good fruit of keeping His word.

A LIFE WORTHY OF THE SABBATH

It is no accident that the result of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost was the birth of that New Covenant Israel as a commonwealth:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the

¹⁶ Matthew 12:1-13; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:2-17; 7:22-24; 9:13-17 ¹⁷ Isaiah 58:9,13 ¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 3:3 ¹⁹ 1 Peter 2:9-10; Galatians 6:16; Acts 26:7 ²⁰ Matthew 5:14-16; Acts 13:47; Isaiah 49:6

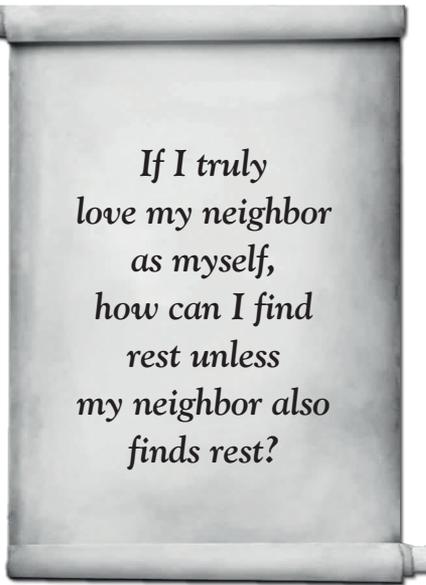
apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:41-45)

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Sovereign Yahshua, and abundant grace was upon them all.

There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

The people had responded to what they heard,²¹ which gave them the faith to utterly abandon their old lives and throw their lot in together to be a living demonstration of the heart of the Law and the Prophets.²² Contrary to what most Christians have been led to believe, that common life of love and unity continued and multiplied throughout the Mediterranean world for several decades through the ministry of Paul²³ and the other apostles. The life of the early church began to bear the fruit of righteousness and justice that old Israel had never consistently borne, which is why the kingdom was taken away from them and given to this new spiritual Israel.²⁴

Their days, weeks, and years were punctuated by the appointed times and feasts that had been given to old Israel,²⁵ to be expressed in a new and living way.²⁶ They gathered daily,²⁷ every morning and evening, as a spiritual



**If I truly
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my neighbor also
finds rest?**

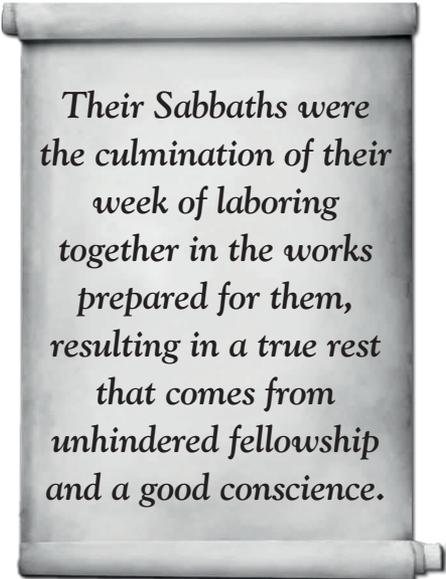
²¹ Acts 2:40 ²² Jeremiah 32:38-39; Ezekiel 36:26-27. These verses speak of Abraham's offspring being restored to their land in the next age, but they must first be fulfilled by spiritual Israel in this age, to move a remnant of the Jews to jealousy (Deuteronomy 32:21; Romans 10:19) and prepare their hearts for the return of the Messiah, to mourn over Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

²³ 1 Thessalonians 2:14 ²⁴ Matthew 21:43 ²⁵ Acts 20:6,16; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 16:8

²⁶ Hebrews 10:19-25 ²⁷ Acts 2:46; Hebrews 3:13,15; 10:25

priesthood²⁸ to offer up spiritual sacrifices of praise and prophecy.²⁹ Their Sabbaths were the culmination of their week of laboring together in the works prepared for them,³⁰ resulting in a true rest that comes from unhindered fellowship and a good conscience.³¹ That kind of spiritual rest made room for the good deeds that love demanded on the Sabbath, such as reaching out to the lost.³²

For such a people, their keeping of the Sabbath in spirit and truth was a clear sign that they belonged to Yahweh,³³ the Elohim of Israel, who had



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established the Sabbath as a perpetual covenant³⁴ between Him and His set-apart people. If they remained faithful, the Sabbath days would lead them into keeping the Sabbath years, which would lead them to the Sabbath age — the return of the Messiah and His millennial reign. But it would take them, as His body on earth,³⁵ putting all of His enemies under His feet³⁶ — the spiritual enemies such as the selfishness³⁷ and pride that divide and degrade mankind.

THE SAD FACTS OF CHURCH HISTORY

It is a sad fact of history that the early church did not maintain the light of that life of love and unity for very long,³⁸ for the very reason their Master stated in Matthew 22:37-40 — they ceased loving their Elohim with all their heart, soul, and strength, and grew weary of loving their neighbor as themselves.

These two commandments are like two solid signposts from which hang a sign identifying an establishment, and below that sign hang many smaller signs that identify the services of this establishment. The sign of the Sabbath signifies a people set apart by their love for their Elohim and for each other, and the signs hanging from it encompass all that the Law and the Prophets say Israel must fulfill. And Yahshua told us how His set-apart people would do this great feat: by upholding the signposts of love.

²⁸ 1 Peter 2:9; 1 Chronicles 23:30 (The spiritual priesthood of the New Covenant was the reality to which the Old Testament Levitical priesthood pointed.) ²⁹ Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 4:11; 1 Corinthians 14:26 ³⁰ Ephesians 2:10; 4:16 ³¹ Hebrews 4:9-12 ³² Acts 13:42,44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4 ³³ Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12,20 ³⁴ Exodus 31:16 ³⁵ Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18,23 ³⁶ Hebrews 10:13 ³⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 ³⁸ John 1:4; Acts 5:20

But the early church left that first love³⁹ — their wholehearted love for Yahweh and for one another — and as a result, all that “hangs” on that love fell by the wayside. (And remember, *everything* in the Law and the Prophets hangs on that love!) They ceased living together in community, since they were unwilling to pay the high cost of loving⁴⁰ and forbearing with one another⁴¹ and sharing their lives and possessions. Their gatherings became stale weekly rituals at which only one “Nicolaitan”⁴² would speak, and their Sabbaths were reduced to a dry religious form⁴³ that lacked the social warmth and evangelistic power that it had in the days of the apostles.⁴⁴

Rather than fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and bringing about the return of their Master, they drifted away from the apostolic faith.⁴⁵ Thus they effectively “cut off the finger of God” that could engrave the spirit of the Law on their hearts.⁴⁶ This internal falling away from love was the necessary precursor to what was to come. Cold, rigid doctrine replaced fervent love and community as the litmus test of orthodoxy.⁴⁷ The once-solid signposts of love rotted and were eaten away by creeping things, and eventually gave way, and the sign⁴⁸ that used to signify a set-apart people fell to the ground. Nothing remained but a form of godliness, increasingly shrouded in ritual.

But it is amazing how enduring rituals can be. By the end of the third century, the church had splintered into almost 2000 bishoprics whose bishops were divided from one another by innumerable controversies. Meanwhile their parishioners dutifully followed their well-established rituals, including resting and fasting on the seventh-day Sabbath and going to church on Sunday, unaware that their religion was virtually unrecognizable in comparison to its original nature.⁴⁹ But Yahweh was not unaware of the difference, and soon He would act to make the distinction very clear.

ENTER CONSTANTINE, SERVANT OF GOD!

Christianity thinks of him that way. After all, he ended state-sanctioned persecution of the church, and gave it official status and legal protection throughout the empire. Not only that, but he rolled up his sleeves and got to work trying to unify all the bickering bishops, helping them hammer out a doctrinal creed to which they could all substantially agree. Yet this sun-

³⁹ Revelation 2:4 ⁴⁰ 1 John 3:14,16,23 ⁴¹ Ephesians 4:1-3 ⁴² Revelation 2:6,15 — The word *Nicolaitan* is derived from *nikao*, meaning “to conquer,” and *laos*, meaning “people,” hence, “people conquerors” — a professional clergy that replaced the spontaneous outspokenness of all the people in the lively gatherings of the early church. The clergy is a system that Yahweh hates. ⁴³ 2 Timothy 3:5 ⁴⁴ Acts 13:42,44; 16:13 ⁴⁵ Hebrews 2:1-3 ⁴⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:3-6 ⁴⁷ John 13:34-35; 17:21-23; 1 John 3:14,16 ⁴⁸ Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:20 ⁴⁹ “Between the years AD 100 and AD 500, the Christian Church changed almost beyond recognition.” Tony Lane, *The Lion Book of Christian Thought* (Lion Publishing Company, Batavia, Illinois, 1984), page 8.

worshiping pagan emperor, who declined to be baptized a Christian until he was on his death bed, unwittingly did his greatest act of service to Yahweh when he got rid of the fallen sign that they were Yahweh's people.

In 321 AD, Constantine issued an edict proclaiming "the venerable day of the Sun" to be the official day of rest in the Roman empire, and the process he unleashed by sanctioning the church and recognizing the authority of the bishops soon brought an end to the Sabbath in the life of the church. Indeed, they instituted a literal "Anti-Fourth-Commandment," forbidding rest on the Sabbath and mandating work instead!⁵⁰ Thus, through the agency of Constantine, Yahweh officially disowned the fallen-away church by taking away the sign of the covenant⁵¹ that had set them apart for Him, and a new religion was established under the sign of the Sun god. That religion is Christianity.

Almost 1700 years have come and gone since that time, and never in all that time has there been a spiritual nation of twelve tribes⁵² dwelling together in love and unity under the sign of the Sabbath — until now. The restoration of all things has begun, starting with the restoration of the first thing lost: the "first love"⁵³ that formed the "first church"⁵⁴ as a community of those who saw the Pearl of Great Price and gladly sold everything to obtain that Pearl.⁵⁵ On that foundation of love for Him and for one another,⁵⁶ our Father is faithfully writing His Law on our hearts and fulfilling the words of the Prophets. We are looking for others who desire this treasure we have found, and are willing to forsake everything to have it.

We gather every Friday evening to bring in the Sabbath together. Come and enter in with us! ✨



⁵⁰ At the Council of Laodicea, c. 364 AD, there must have still been a remnant of Sabbath-keepers who needed to be brought into line, since Canon 29 from that council reads, "Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring 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."

⁵¹ "between Me and you" — Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:20 ⁵² Acts 26:7; 13:47; Isaiah 49:6; James 1:1 ⁵³ Revelation 2:4; Ephesians 6:24 ("undying love" in the NIV); John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:14, 16 ⁵⁴ Acts 2:44-15; 4:32-35 ⁵⁵ Matthew 13:44-46 ⁵⁶ Matthew 22:37-40

THE BEST OF COMPLEMENTS

SABBATH AND FIRST DAY FESTIVALS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

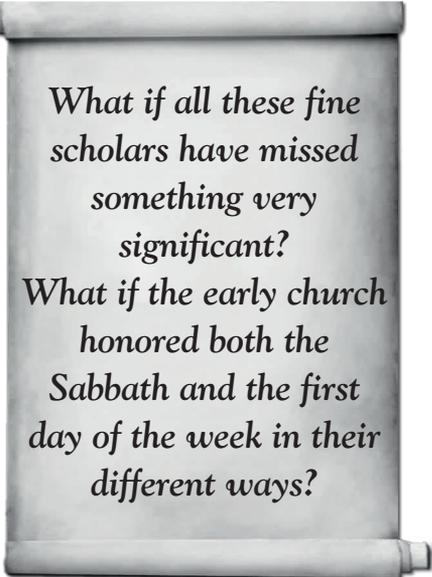
If the early believers did not honor the seventh-day Sabbath (as so many say), then it certainly matters very little which day believers gather together. But if they *did* honor the Sabbath, and if those gatherings were full of spiritual and prophetic meaning, then the Sabbath is just as important to New Covenant Israel as it was to Old. While it would be strange if it weren't, given its importance in the Old Covenant scriptures (which is all the church had in the beginning), so many say it isn't. And what they point to more than any other fact of history is the way the early church observed the first day of the week.

However, what if all these fine scholars have missed something very significant? What if the two days, the Sabbath and the First Day (Sunday), were *not* in competition for the affection and loyalty of the early believers? What if they actually complemented each other?

Today, Sunday certainly has the sanction of an enormous weight of tradition, but in the first centuries of the church it was something else, something very special. It was the *complement* of the Sabbath, fulfilling another need in the lives of individual churches and believers beyond the weekly *Sabbath rest*. The day of the Savior's resurrection was both festive and instructive, a day clothed with vision of His eternal reign to come.

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

To understand what we find in these ancient documents, we have to go further back, all the way back to when Yahweh called His people out of Egypt. At Mount Sinai, He gave them the Law that established them as a distinct and peculiar people. In that Law, the day itself did not begin at midnight, but at sundown — as one day was ending a new day was beginning.¹ This is the basis of all reckonings of time in the New Covenant scriptures, too. Acts 20 records the famous breaking of bread in the city of



*What if all these fine scholars have missed something very significant?
What if the early church honored both the Sabbath and the first day of the week in their different ways?*

¹ Genesis 1:5,8,13,19,23,31; Leviticus 23:5,32

Troas, where the unfortunate boy, Eutychus, fell out of the upper window sound asleep. The gathering *began* at sundown, immediately upon the end of the Sabbath. Remember, the Sabbath is the *seventh* day of the week.

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. (Acts 20:7-8)

The “Teachings of the Twelve Apostles,” a document dating somewhere between 80 and 120 AD, taught this very thing:

But every Lord’s day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.²

Not long after this, a new thing developed. Sometimes those in smaller communities would travel to a nearby larger community that could accommodate a “First Day Festival.” We know this from several accounts, the first by Ignatius, who died in 107 AD:

And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s day as a festival, the resurrection-day...³

The Epistle of Barnabas, written around 130 AD, emphasizes the joyful aspect of this festival — and the reason for it:

Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Yahshua rose again from the dead.⁴

The gathering of believers all around is seen in this quote from Justin, born c. 110, and writing this about 150 AD:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits... Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly.⁵

Obviously, Sunday was not their day of rest, for if it were they would not travel so far to gather together in one place on that day. Sunday was a festival day *after* the Sabbath, which they also kept. In a story that happened just a few short years after this, the Hebrew reckoning of days is clearly part of the church’s understanding. In Smyrna, Polycarp was martyred, uttering his celebrated words before the Roman ruler of that place in 155 AD:

² *The Lord’s Teaching through the Twelve Apostles*, chapter VIII.

³ Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, Ch. IX. Ignatius lived from 30 to 107 AD.

⁴ *The Epistle of Barnabas* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, Chapter XV. *Wikipedia* states, “Many scholars today believe it was probably written in the years 70 – 131...”

⁵ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Ch. LXVII, written between 147-161 AD.

And when the proconsul pressed him, and said, "Swear, and I will release thee, revile Christ;" Polycarp said, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and in nothing hath he wronged me; and how, then, can I blaspheme my King, who saved me?"⁶

Immediately before this in the account of his final days, the author notes two key terms relating to the Sabbath: the "day of preparation" and the "great Sabbath."

Having, therefore, with them the lad, on the day of the preparation, at the hour of dinner, there came out pursuers and horsemen, with their accustomed arms, as though going out against a thief.

And when he had finished his prayer, having made mention of all who had at any time come into contact with him, both small and great, noble and ignoble, and of the whole catholic church throughout the world, when the hour of his departure had come, having seated him on an ass, they led him into the city, it being the great Sabbath.⁷

These two terms are both found in the New Covenant. The day of preparation is the day before the Sabbath, when all is made ready so that all can rest on that day. The great Sabbath specifies the Passover, just as in John's gospel:

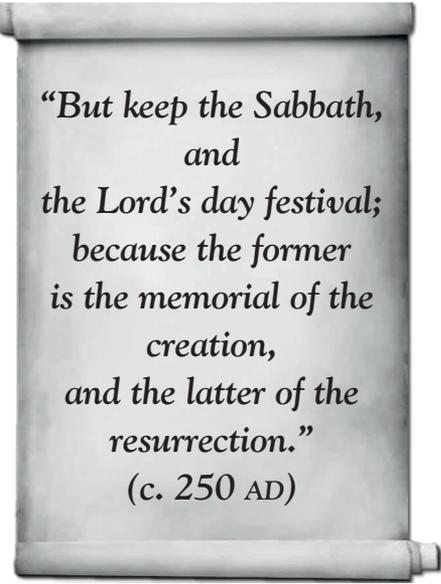
The Jews therefore, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. (John 19:31)

In about 200 AD, Tertullian again wrote of festivals on the first day of the week:

Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray towards the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity.⁸

And about fifty years after this, a compilation called the "Apostolic Constitutions" explicitly makes the connection between the two special days:

⁶"Martyrdom of Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna," Verses 9.3. Charles H. Hoole's 1885 translation. ⁷ *Ibid*, Verses 7.1 and 8.1. ⁸ Tertullian, *Ad Nationes*, Book I, chapter XIII.



**"But keep the Sabbath,
and
the Lord's day festival;
because the former
is the memorial of the
creation,
and the latter of the
resurrection."
(c. 250 AD)**

*But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection.*⁹

The significance of both days was obviously alive and well in the hearts of the churches. "Keep the Sabbath" and equally so, "keep the Lord's day festival," for doing so set their minds on heavenly things and gave them the rest their bodies and souls needed. A few chapters later, the vision they had for the Sabbath is written in the following amazing words:

*O Lord Almighty, Thou hast created the world by Christ, and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day Thou hast made us rest from our works, for the meditation upon Thy laws. Thou hast also appointed festivals for the rejoicing of our souls, that we might come into the remembrance of that wisdom which was created by Thee... On this account was there appointed one week, and seven weeks, and the seventh month, and the seventh year, and the revolution of these, the jubilee, which is the fiftieth year for remission, that men might have no occasion to pretend ignorance... For the Sabbath is... the inquiry after laws, and the grateful praise to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon men.*¹⁰

HOSTILITY TOWARDS THE SABBATH

Sadly, in the face of this revelation, excitement, and encouragement about the Sabbath and the First Day Festivals, and the sense of fellowship that brought them together from their different places, another powerful trend was at work in the early church. It began in only a few places, principally Rome and Alexandria, but they were both centers of imperial power. As such, the wealth and status of the "believers" there tended to exceed considerably the smaller, poorer places. With that wealth went influence, and with the education and refinement of the philosopher-theologians of the second and third centuries went a growing appeal to non-Christians of the same class and outlook — including their negative outlook on the Jews.

Violent Jewish uprisings in the years 66-70, 115-117, and 132-135 had turned the Roman elite permanently against the Jewish people. The respect of the old Republic and even the first emperors towards them and their ways vanished. This was clearly noticed in the church, especially in Rome, where a distaste and then a hostility developed towards the Jews as a people. In a short time, this was followed by a highly negative view towards the sacred scriptures themselves. The Jews faced first mockery from both the Romans and the Christians, then special taxation,¹¹ and with the rise of

⁹ *Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions*, Book VII, Chapter XXIII. ¹⁰ *Ibid*, Book VII, Chapter XXXVI ¹¹ The *fiscus judaicus* was introduced by Vespasian (69-79 AD) which was intensified by Domitian (81-96 AD) first, and by Hadrian (117-138 AD) later. (S. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, Chapter 6.)

Christianity as the new religion of the Empire, active persecution. The woes of many centuries began.

Still, more than a hundred years after Constantine made Sunday (the day of the sun god) the official day of rest in the Roman empire, a historian named Socrates could write that everywhere except Rome and Alexandria the Sabbath and First Day Festival pattern endured. He wrote this in about 450 AD:



*The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria.*¹²

People just would not lightly give up their allegiance to the wonderful two-day pattern that culminated one week and began the next — not even when the Council of Laodicea excommunicated *all these people* in 364 AD. They were *anathema!*

*Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring 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.*¹³

In time, the might of the Church, often backed by emperor and king, prevailed, and the well-known pattern of Sunday-go-to-church Christendom became the norm. But consider how long the *true* pattern endured even long after the purity of first-century church was lost! How tenaciously they held on to that special pattern of Sabbath and First Day, of rest and festivity.

Yes, the love that had once caused them to share all things in common, to lay down the sword, and to live very humble and godly lives before their neighbors had long since been lost. Communal living was clearly a fading memory by the time James wrote his epistle early in the second century. So Constantine was right to take the sign down, for however firmly many held onto the Sabbath, it was only an outward form. They were no longer Yahweh's people, obedient to the gospel.¹⁴

However, the very tenacity with which so many held onto the Sabbath testifies to their confidence that it went back to the apostles and the Messiah Himself. The early church kept the Sabbath until its leaders compromised with the Roman power that hated both the Jews and their

¹² *Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Sozomen – Comprising a History of the Church, from A.D. 323 to A.D. 425, Chapter XIX.* ¹³ "Synod of Laodicea," Canon 29, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3806.htm> ¹⁴ John 14:15, 21, 23; who loved as John 13:34-35, and who obeyed the Good News as John 3:36 (NAS).

religion. That Constantine hated them, let there be no doubt. His words to the churches in 325 AD make this point abundantly clear:

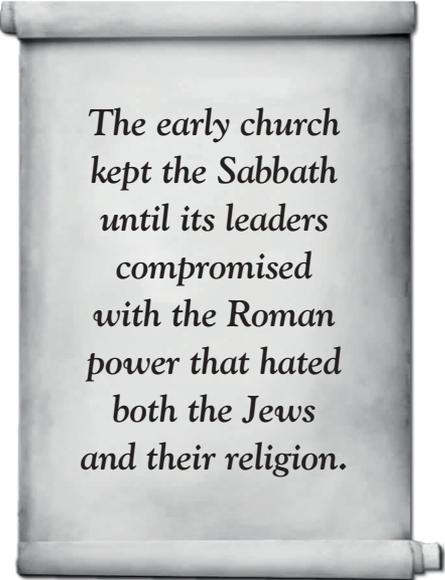
And in the first place, it seemed very unworthy of this most sacred feast, that we should keep it following the custom of the Jews; a people who having imbrued [drenched] their hands in a most heinous outrage, have thus polluted their souls, and are deservedly blind...¹⁵

This “most sacred feast” was the Passover of Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23. The same hostility worked in Constantine and his churchmen towards the Sabbath, and to the same end. It was not hard for him to take down the sign of the seventh-day Sabbath in favor of the day of the sun god (Sunday) for his favored, pet religion.¹⁶

THE SIGN OF THE SABBATH TODAY

Once again, in our day, among all of life’s struggles and difficulties, the sign of the Sabbath is being lifted up over a people. It is hanging upon its twin signposts: the love of Yahweh and the love of one’s neighbor.¹⁷ Those posts are what everything in the Law and Prophets depends on, including the Sabbath, the festivals, and all the prophecies.¹⁸ Yes, everything depends on loving Yahweh with all of our heart, soul, and strength, and in the same, whole-hearted fashion, loving our neighbor. Your *neighbors* are the ones closest (*nigh*) to you, your brothers and sisters in the community of faith — the ones with whom you share all things in common.¹⁹ Why?

Because you love them! ❁



The early church kept the Sabbath until its leaders compromised with the Roman power that hated both the Jews and their religion.

¹⁵ Socrates Scholasticus, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Book I, Chapter IX, “Constantine Augustus, to the Churches” ¹⁶ Which happened in 321 AD with the decree making Sunday the official day of rest for the Roman Empire. ¹⁷ Matthew 22:37-40

¹⁸ Including, if people could realize it, the Jews returning to their land! ¹⁹ This sharing of all things in common forever marks those who believe — see John 3:16 and Acts 2:44. They are the exact same word in Greek, and in the heart of the believer.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month — on the Day of Atonement — you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. (Leviticus 25:8-10)

Every seventh year in faithful Israel was to be a sabbath year, when the land would lay fallow, debts would be forgiven, and slaves would be released. Every seven sevens of years was even more special, demanding far more from the hearts of the Israelites than even the sabbath years. That monumental time in the life of Israel was the Year of Jubilee. We know very little how it (or even the sabbath years) would actually affect a people, because old Israel always found some way around the righteous requirement of the Law, but it is very dear to the heart of Israel's Elohim. There will be a people who keep this command and who do so because they take on His heart.

The land in modern Israel can now be "sold" to someone else for the Sabbath year for a token amount of money, and then bought back after the year is over. This allows them to still benefit from the produce of the land without "breaking the Law" by farming it themselves. They get around the Law in that way, which is to say they get around trusting Yahweh in that way. Keeping the Law and trusting Yahweh is the same thing. There are two other things that go together, also.

LOVE AND JUSTICE GO TOGETHER

In Leviticus 25:10, the Most High commanded that the *shofar* would be blown in all the land when the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, had come. The 50th year was to have been a time to restore the way our Father called Israel to live. Yahweh commanded that all land be restored to its original owners in Leviticus 25:10. *There is no such command anywhere else in the world.*

All the buying and selling of the previous 49 years was to be undone. At the Year of Jubilee, all the land was to return to the families Yahweh had given it to when Israel conquered their land. Doubly so was it the Promised Land — promised to Abraham in Genesis 15:18, and promised again to the individual families when Joshua divided the land. Israel never understood how close the two promises were in the heart of Israel's Elohim.

No other religion of men has dared to address the hold that possessions and lands have on men's souls. Indeed, they cannot, since all prosperous

religions depend on the good will of rich and powerful men. They could only obey such a radical set of commands as Yahweh gives in Leviticus 25 if they actually believed in Him.

He commanded that they forgive all debts of their brothers. All those born into slavery or sold into it must be freed.¹ He proclaimed liberty to all in the moving words, "Each of you shall return to his family."

Above all else, the 50th year was a time to remember the One to whom the land belonged. They could not sell the land permanently to anyone.

The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is Mine and you are but aliens and My tenants. (Leviticus 25:23)

What a celebration that would be! This is the society the Elohim of Israel intended, one where love and justice would rule every human relationship. There is no true justice unless it arises from real, heart-felt love. Love and justice go together like man and wife. Love is the motive; justice is the result.

At every Jubilee celebration, the whole people were to come together to celebrate the greatest accomplishment any nation had ever known: *the triumph of love-based justice*. They were to restore what the poor had lost to their more gifted or even more aggressive brothers. As Moses said in Leviticus 25:17, "Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your Elohim."

They only bought the land until the next Jubilee.² Just think how rich would be the land that a true Israelite would give back to its original owner! That is, *if* he realized who the real and permanent owner of the land was — Yahweh Himself. Oh, if only they had such a heart!³ But they never kept this law because they did not truly fear their Elohim.

Only a society of people determined to carry out these two commands (the greatest commands in the Law) would be able to obey Leviticus 25:

Hear, O Israel: Yahweh our Elohim, Yahweh is one. Love Yahweh with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Leviticus 19:18)

Any society determined to put these words into effect must have Yahweh's help and a life of faith, which would produce a *brand new culture*.

ONCE LONG AGO AND ALMOST FORGOTTEN...

Once, a long time ago, there was a band of Jews who lived this way. They followed the teachings of Yahshua. As a man's spirit inhabits his body, so Love lived and expressed itself on the earth in Him. The fruit of His life was a completely new society. There were literally thousands of men, women, and children living together in peace. They had true peace, with no needy among them. Thus, they fulfilled Deuteronomy 15:4-8, that there were no poor and needy in the land.

¹ Leviticus 25:39-43 ² Leviticus 25:14-16 ³ This was the hope Yahweh expressed in Deuteronomy 5:29.

His Spirit enabled them to love, and justice was the result. But what happened? That life waned. Love could not stay where He was no longer welcomed. He left those communities and walked on. For nearly two thousand years He longed for a new body of people to live in. The terrible words of Daniel the prophet came true, "Messiah was cut off and had nothing."⁴

AND WHEN THE SOIL WAS READY...

Now, He must still have a people for His very own. It is what He has always longed for. We cannot belong to Him and Mammon at the same time; Leviticus 25 makes that perfectly clear.⁵ There must be a nation expressing His character to the ends of the earth or the end cannot come.⁶

Once again, Love dwells in a body on the earth. He has found a new and lasting home; this is where we live.

Israel was to keep this body of law in Leviticus 25. If it had, it would have been a light to the world. *Torah* also means the body of prophetic instruction. Keeping it would have led them to fulfill their prophetic destiny as a people. And this has not changed; indeed, it cannot change. Only those who keep Sabbath years until the Year of Jubilee will prove to be the Israel of Elohim. Then *all the land* goes back to its rightful owner — Yahweh.⁷ The trumpet of the Year of Jubilee is the *last* trumpet of this age, of which Paul prophesied:

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

We invite you to come and be a part of the people to whom the mysteries are being unfolded. The glory of Yahweh, which is love, is the highest goal and aspiration of our life together. That is why we share all things in common, that is why we struggle to carve a culture, a new way of life, out of this fallen world. And that is why we open our homes to all those who long for these things, too. ❁



⁴ Daniel 9:26 ⁵ Matthew 6:24 ⁶ Matthew 24:14 ⁷ Revelation 11:15-18

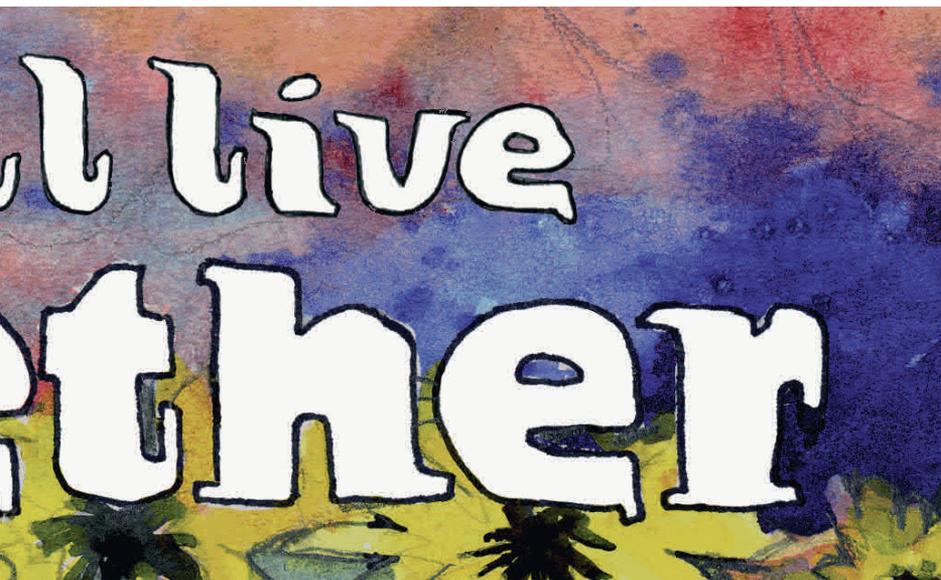


We who wrote this paper actually live together like an extended family, sharing all things in common, just as the first disciples did in the first century. The Bible plainly says regarding the first church, “All who believed were together and shared all things in common.”¹ It goes on to describe how they were of one heart and soul, and that there was not a needy person among them, for they gave up all their possessions to meet the needs of their spiritual brothers and sisters.² Some people say this was only for back then, but we’ve been living this way for over 40 years. You can come and see for yourself at any of our addresses, which are printed in the back of this paper and on our web site, www.twelvetribes.org.

In each of our communities, there are one or more houses in a cluster, some in cities and some on farms. Several families and single people live together in each house, according to the size of the house. We like large houses because we like to live together. Married couples have their own rooms, plus as many adjacent rooms as needed for their children. The single men share one or more rooms, as do the single women. We all share a common kitchen and dining room, where we take our meals together “with gladness and sincerity of heart.”³

In at least one house in the cluster we have a large gathering room where we gather together every morning and evening to worship our Creator in song and dance as in Psalm 150, using the prescribed musical instruments that we are learning to build and play. We are all free to speak from our hearts the things we are learning, as our heavenly Father teaches us through one another, according to the gifting and grace given to each per-

¹ Acts 2:44 ² Acts 4:32-35 ³ Acts 2:46



son.⁴ As a spiritual priesthood, we pray together for the pressing needs of our people and for our Father's will to be done on earth.

After our morning gathering we have breakfast together and then go to work in our various places, doing the deeds prepared for each one of us.⁵ We work together in our own cafés, farms, cottage industries, and trades, not as independent contractors or employees of outside companies. All income from our various endeavors goes into a common purse from which all of our needs are met equitably. We don't have our own independent income or debts to carry by ourselves, except for the debt of love we owe to our Savior, which we repay by loving and caring for one another.

We love and cherish our children. We teach them at home, using a curriculum we are developing ourselves, to give them the basic skills they need to read, write, and speak effectively, to live together in peace, and to fulfill their created purpose. Our children's training goes far beyond the classroom, however, as they are fully integrated into every aspect of our socially and spiritually rich tribal life. They learn to cook and sew, build and farm, care for animals, sing and dance, play musical instruments, and most importantly, extend hospitality to the constant flow of guests who are drawn to the light of our life of love.

Together we are experiencing and demonstrating the restoration of all things spoken of by the prophets of old,⁶ and by our Master Yahshua,⁷ whose life, death, and resurrection make this life possible. ✨

⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:26; 1 Peter 4:11; Romans 12:6 ⁵ Ephesians 2:10 ⁶ Isaiah 49:6; Jeremiah 30:20; 31:1,4,13,14; Malachi 4:5-6 ⁷ Matthew 5:17-19; 17:10-11; 22:37-40; Luke 1:17; 24:44 (*Yahshua* is the original Hebrew name of the one called *Jesus* in most English Bibles. See page 40 for more about this name.)

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE EARLY CHURCH

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. (Acts 2:42-44)

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Sovereign Yahshua, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)

What was the church like when it began in the first century? What image do you picture in your mind? Probably a very common one that you've seen drawn many times by artists, maybe even in a movie. The Savior is walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee with His twelve apostles, teaching these rough-looking fishermen to become "fishers of men." But then flash ahead to today. Why is the image so different, so less radical today than it was then? It's an image of comfort now, with rows of nicely-dressed people bowing their heads as the priest or the preacher leads them through the liturgy.

THE EARLY CHURCH WAS A COMMUNITY

You may be surprised to find out that the early church was not a weekly gathering in a church building, looking at the backs of the heads of people you rarely see during the week. In fact, there is no record of a church building for the first two hundred years.¹ No, the early church was a community of people, a group of disciples sharing a common life together, who gathered every morning and evening in a circle, as in Mark 3:34. In fact, they were together every day, working together, and sharing their new life

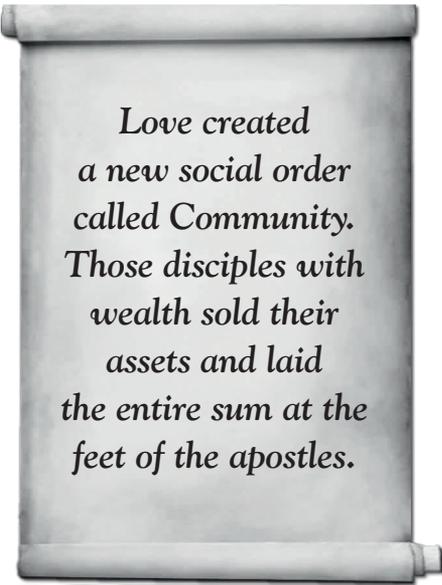
¹ The earliest known church building dates from AD 232. "As Christian congregations grew in size, they began to remodel their homes to accommodate their growing numbers... The earliest identifiable Christian meeting place was simply a private home remodeled as a Christian gathering place around AD 232... [It] was essentially a house with a wall torn out between two bedrooms to create a large living room." (*Pagan Christianity*, F. Viola and G. Barna, Tyndale Publishing, 2002, p. 15)

with others.² These communities were organized into twelve tribes in their different geographical locations, which formed a new spiritual nation called *Israel*.³

Although they lived in normal towns and were not *isolated* from society, they were *insulated* from the fallen culture of the society around them.⁴ They were set apart, having a different culture altogether.⁵ Where the Romans were devoted to entertainment and pleasure, the disciples were devoted to loving one another, especially caring for widows and orphans.⁶ There were no poor among them,⁷ because those who had means gladly shared all they had.

Love was the primary message of the early church. But their message was not a mere sermon from a pulpit. (They didn't even have a pulpit or a single person doing all the talking — *all* came prepared to share thanksgiving, a song, a teaching, even a prophecy.⁸) No, the message was lived out by all. Every day was spent caring for each other in practical ways, and laying down their lives for each other. This was the substance, the visible reality of the new commandment of their Lord: "*Love one another as I have loved you. By this all men will know that you are My disciples.*"⁹

This love created a new social order called *community*. Those disciples with wealth sold their assets and laid the entire sum at the feet of the apostles.¹⁰ This simple act revealed their belief as nothing else could. Because of the love of Yahweh that had been poured into their hearts,¹¹ they gave all they had — all they'd gained in life, all that supported them. Their generosity to their poorer brothers, their radical forsaking of material wealth, and their affectionate trust for their shepherds, were part and parcel of their faith. Such acts were not merely the noble zeal of a few impulsive zealots, but a *way of life* practiced by all.¹² Community life was love in action, making it very clear who were and who were not believers.¹³

A scroll with text, likely representing a biblical passage or a key message. The text is centered on the scroll and reads: "Love created a new social order called Community. Those disciples with wealth sold their assets and laid the entire sum at the feet of the apostles." The scroll is unrolled at the top and bottom, with a dark binding visible on the right side.

Love created
a new social order
called *Community*.
Those disciples with
wealth sold their
assets and laid
the entire sum at the
feet of the apostles.

² Acts 2:42-48; 4:32-37 ³ Acts 26:7; Isaiah 49:6; James 1:5; Revelation 21:12; Galatians 6:16; Ephesians 2:12 ⁴ As the royal priesthood of 1 Peter 2:9, they kept themselves pure, just as the apostles instructed them (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). ⁵ 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 ⁶ James 1:29-31 ⁷ Acts 4:34 ⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:24-26 ⁹ John 13:34-35
¹⁰ Acts 4:34-35 ¹¹ Roman 5:5 ¹² When one couple pretended to give all in Acts 5:1-11, their sudden death was a sobering object lesson to all. ¹³ Malachi 3:16-18

As they obeyed the new commandment to love one another as their Master had loved them, each disciple was assured in his own heart that he had truly passed out of death and into life.¹⁴ They knew their Master was pleased with them, for He had prayed for His disciples to be one, just as the Father and the Son are one.¹⁵ This confidence grew as the watching world observed the visible demonstration of their love for one another.¹⁶ But more than that, the Holy Spirit communicated to their hearts an assurance that they had eternal life¹⁷ because they were loving their brothers and living together in unity — the very place where Yahweh commands the blessing of eternal life.¹⁸ If they ever lost their love and drifted apart, they would lose this confidence as well. Confidence apart from self-sacrificing love could only come from *another spirit*¹⁹ — not the Holy Spirit.

Love produced a full-featured culture based on the teachings of the Messiah. He had said that all of the Law and the Prophets hang on two commandments: to love Yahweh with all of your heart, soul, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.²⁰ All of the prophecies yet unfulfilled depended on this love being expressed first and foremost. All of the instructions in the Law were impossible to fulfill without clinging to love just as a climber scaling a cliff clings to every handhold in the rock. No benefit would come from trying to obey the Law without love. The scribes and Pharisees had demonstrated that all too well. But as the first disciples hung on to love, a new and living way to fulfill the Law opened up to them.

THE SABBATH WAS A SIGN OF BEING SET APART FROM THE WORLD

They kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the same way they kept all the feasts and sabbaths: in a new and living way.²¹ The early disciples understood that they were set-apart from the world into communities in order to be made holy.²² The process of being made holy or pure meant learning to overcome their iniquities and to love one another from a pure heart.²³ The Sabbath was a sign between Yahweh and His people that He was doing this work of purification, called *sanctification*.²⁴ That is why there was a command in the New as well as the Old Testament to keep the Sabbath:

There remains therefore a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9)²⁵

¹⁴ 1 John 3:16,24 ¹⁵ John 17:21 ¹⁶ Matthew 24:14; 1 Peter 2:12 ¹⁷ Psalm 133; 1 John 3:24 ¹⁸ Psalm 133:1-3 ¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:4 ²⁰ Matthew 22:37-40

²¹ 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; Acts 20:6 and in Acts 20:7-8 they gathered to break bread at the end of the Sabbath, after the sun had set, marking the beginning of the first day of the week. Paul departed the following morning, not wanting to travel on the Sabbath. ²² 1 Corinthians 1:2 ²³ 1 Timothy 1:5 ²⁴ Exodus 31:13-18 ²⁵ It is not “rest” as many translations say, but literally “Sabbath-keeping.” The problem in translation for this verse does not lie in the Greek, but in the translator’s theology.

At first, most of the early disciples were Jews who had grown up keeping the Law, many with the zeal of Peter, who could say as a mature adult and disciple, "I have never eaten anything common or unclean." When they became disciples, they continued keeping the Law, not in the legalistic way of Judaism, with its man-made regulations, but with revelation and joy, knowing that it was their Father's wise instruction to His people.²⁶

For example, they understood that the Sabbath was an important sign, coming from the Law of Moses which they knew so well:

Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, Yahweh, sanctify you [set you apart]. (Exodus 31:13)

Now more than ever, the early disciples were set apart for a special purpose — to love. This was how they would fulfill Israel's prophetic purpose of being "a light to the Gentiles" and "bring salvation to the ends of the earth."²⁷

Because of their great importance prophetically,²⁸ Paul instructed the disciples that they were not to let anyone but the Body of Messiah judge them about how they kept the Sabbath or the New Moon festivals.²⁹ As their new culture developed, the early disciples also began to gather on the first day of the week for festivals. The Sabbath was for resting and for evangelism, while the first day of the week was for celebrating the resurrection, beginning on the evening of the first day (what we call Saturday night). Sometimes those in smaller communities would travel to a nearby larger community that could accommodate a "First Day Festival." We know this from several accounts, the first by Ignatius, who died in 107 AD:

And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection-day...³⁰

The second and later account was by a man named Justin Martyr. He was a Samaritan philosopher who grew up pagan. After becoming a believer in Christ, he defended the beliefs of the early church to governors and officials. Somewhere around 150 AD, he described what the church did then:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits... Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly.³¹

²⁶ Romans 8:4 ²⁷ Isaiah 49:6 ²⁸ See also "The Year of Jubilee" on page 19.

²⁹ Colossians 2:16-17 — Literally, in the Greek, this passage reads, "Let no one judge you ... but the body of Christ." Most English translations render the last phrase as "...but the substance belongs to Christ," translating the word *soma* as "substance" (although it is everywhere else translated "body") and inserting the words "belongs to" which neither exist nor are implied by the text.

³⁰ Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians*, Ch. IX. Ignatius lived from A.D. 30 to 107.

³¹ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, Ch. LXVII, written between 147-161 AD.

CHANGE BRINGS LETTERS OF CORRECTION

The first community was in Jerusalem, but the gospel quickly spread around the Mediterranean Sea, north to Turkey, west to Greece and Italy, and south to Egypt and Africa. The pagan influences in the new places pulled much harder on the souls of the new disciples. These people did not have the background in the Law of Moses as the first disciples in Jerusalem did, but had been steeped in the idolatry and immorality of the day. They required more care and instruction to remain set apart and not slip back into the popular culture, but it was a constant battle — one that was often lost.

In the beginning, the communities were self-governing clans, loosely connected in a confederation under the care of the apostles. Local elders ruled the clans,³² watching over their flocks and themselves to preserve the unity and love between them, both within and between their communities. Yahshua had said, “The kings of the nations lord it over them; but you are not to be like that. The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.”³³

In a short time, charismatic bishops arose to keep the flock in check. Their power came through the force of their great intellects, both within and without the church. They often had a philosophical or legal background, which equipped them to engage in complex arguments to attempt to make *their* religion agreeable to the governors and philosophers of the day. The apostles noticed a change, and wrote letters of correction and warning. The most outstanding of these is First John, but the letter of Jude addresses the same issues, and so do the opening chapters of the Book of Revelation. Their first love was fading, but only a few overcomers noticed.

A paradigm shift took place: right doctrine replaced brotherly love as the “litmus test” of true belief. “Keeping the faith” used to mean holding fast to the love they had at first, which was the basis for everything a disciple did. Eventually, “the faith” was reduced to intellectual argument about words and doctrines.³⁴ The prevailing Greek culture was known for its love of debate, its rhetoric, and its logic. These aspects seeped into the church undetected, as the precious but fragile culture of love collapsed under the spiritual blows of those who loved “to have the preeminence among them.”³⁵

The disciples in the different places abandoned the love they had at first. Paul had exhorted the Ephesians to “*love our Master Yahshua the Messiah with an undying [or incorruptible] love.*”³⁶ But forty years later, the Revelation the Apostle John received included a solemn warning from Yahshua Himself to the church in Ephesus:

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the

³² Titus 1:5 ³³ Luke 22:26 ³⁴ 1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 2:14; 4:3 ³⁵ 3 John 1:9-10
³⁶ Ephesians 6:24

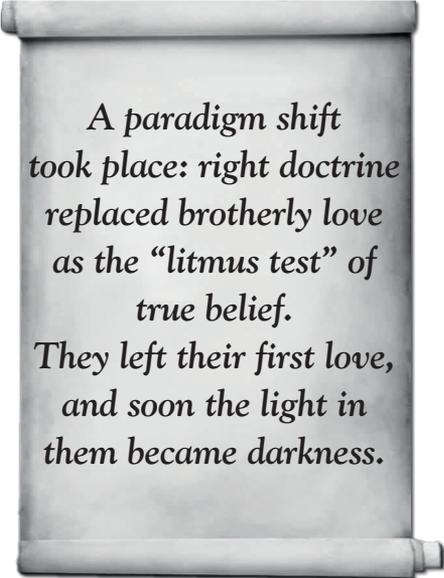
works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Revelation 2:4-5)

In just forty years, the church had nearly completed the process of losing its lampstand. The fuel for these lampstands was the love between brothers, shining for the world to see. The churches were out of oil. Since there was no light, the lampstand would be removed, too, and most would not even notice the difference. The Holy Spirit was not confirming the disciples for their life of love, and soon He would depart completely. Millions of new converts would come in over the coming centuries, but none would receive the Spirit who empowers true disciples to live together in unity.

It is not known when all the lampstands of the early church were taken out of the way, but it seemingly started with the Corinthians. Paul noted *during his lifetime* that they had received “another Jesus... a different spirit... a different gospel” — and that they “bore it beautifully!”³⁷ And the Savior Himself took note of the fall of the Ephesian church. They fell out of love with their Savior and one another, and fell into what it is now: a weekly meeting where everyone looks at the backs of each other's heads, rather than daily gathering in a circle to speak and sing to one another, discerning the Body of Messiah.

The key to understanding what happened is realizing that everything hangs on obedience to the two greatest commandments He spoke of Matthew 22:37-40. When love left, only ritual remained, and the cancer spread like gangrene throughout all the clans and tribes.

Along with the change from love to doctrine came the Nicolaitan (clergy/laity) system, dominated by bishops who did most of the talking and ruling, lording it over their flocks. With the rise of the Nicolaitan the priesthood of all believers ceased to have any reality in the churches, which is true to this day. These mutated churches were warned that Yahweh hates this system, as it suppresses the full participation by each and every member.³⁸ In the face of such a stern warning, the bishops seized more and more power, gaining clout over large areas that would eventually take on the Roman name of *diocese*. The same Ignatius quoted earlier was a chief



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They left their first love,
and soon the light in
them became darkness.*

³⁷ 2 Corinthians 11:2-4 ³⁸ 1 Corinthians 14:26

early proponent of such ruling bishops.³⁹ He wrote after the death of the last apostle, John, that the churches were to:

Do nothing without the bishop... It is not lawful to baptize without the consent of the bishop. On the other hand, whatever has his approval is pleasing to God.

A new religion was beginning — one far from the simple life of love the Community in Jerusalem had known.

Out of the fifty “Early Church Fathers” whose writings remain, only two make even a passing reference to the commandment of our Master to “love one another as I have loved you.”⁴⁰ Beginning in the second century, creeds and catechisms of faith became increasingly important as keystones in Christianity. Surprisingly, *none* of these contains a single reference to the Master’s “new commandment” or the two greatest commandments on which hang all the Law and the Prophets. In fact, even the words, “love one another” are strangely absent from all of them.

Over time, the communities lost their distinction of being set-apart from the surrounding society. They were not being purified in their love. Divisions were rampant and bitter, especially among the leadership as they strove to prove their points. Their weapons became carnal, and as history shows, soon enough they became physical. Those who had been rich or poor outside the church remained rich and poor inside.⁴¹ Pagan customs and rituals slipped into the church. Of course, they stopped living in community. One can hardly blame them — without love, community is a torture chamber for the flesh.

THE LAMPSTANDS ARE OUT

A fire broke out in Rome in 64 AD, destroying much of the city and the Emperor’s palace. The disciples were blamed for it, unleashing the wrath of the Romans against them. Three years later, the Jewish people in Palestine revolted, and three years after that the city of Jerusalem was flaming ruins. These events worked together to effect a change between the two groups.

In the beginning, it was convenient for the early church to be known as a “sect of the Jews,”⁴² as it gave them legal status in the midst of Roman culture. But when the Jewish uprising against Roman rule unleashed fierce persecution upon them, many in the church wanted to distance themselves from their Hebrew roots.

Paul’s warnings against Jewish legalism were a good excuse to get rid of any unnecessary Jewish baggage. Within several generations, many

³⁹ There were be many more after him in the rise of the episcopate system that culminated in the greatest Nicolaitan of all — the bishop of Rome. He would (and does) claim authority over the entire church as the living voice of Peter the apostle.

⁴⁰ These scholars came to be called the “Early Church Fathers.” ⁴¹ James 5:1; and so the great hope and calling of Deuteronomy 15:4 ended, along with the rest of the prophecies of how Yahweh’s people would be a light to the world. ⁴² Acts 24:5

Christians saw little benefit to keeping the Sabbath anymore. The process was much more noticeable in Rome than in the East. But from our Father's perspective whether they kept the Sabbath on the seventh day mattered far less than whether they loved one another as the first disciples had in Jerusalem. Without that self-sacrificing love and sharing, the sign of the Sabbath was invalid, as it no longer signified that Yahweh was their Elohim and that they were His set-apart people whom He was purifying. In many places, they stopped keeping the Sabbath. Instead, the Christians were known for their faithful attendance in the pagan festivals of the day. The farther they were from the days of the apostles, the faster things changed. Tertullian writes in 197 AD:



To we Christians nowadays, the Sabbaths are strange, and the new moons and festivals are just a memory of what was formerly beloved by God. But alas, we frequent the Saturnalia and New-Year's and Midwinter's festivals and Matronalia. Presents come and go — New-Year's gifts — games join their noise — banquets join their din! We do everything that the nations do. Alas, they are more faithful to their own sect than we to ours. They would not have participated in the Lord's day, nor Pentecost, even if they were invited, for they would be afraid of appearing to be Christians. But we are not the least bit worried about appearing to be heathens!⁴³

And so it is to this day!

But... there is a people who are restoring the pure and undefiled life of the first-century church, living together in love and unity as they did in the very beginning, loving Yahweh, our Elohim, with all of our heart, soul, and strength, and obeying His commandments, and being true to the Scriptures. You are welcome to come and see for yourself. We would love to meet you and share our life of faith with you. Our addresses and phone numbers are on the back of this paper. ✨

⁴³ Tertullian, *Of Blasphemy*, ANF03, Ch. XIV in Apology. Many of these festivals from ancient Rome live on in Christendom today, but under assumed names. *Saturnalia* is now Christmas, New Years remains New Years, and *Matronalia* became Mother's day.

CALLED TO BE SAINTS

To a Catholic, the word *saint* may bring to mind spooky-looking figures in robes, with halos around their heads, each with his own particular realm of authority to answer prayers. Sainthood was a classification out of reach of ordinary people, reserved only for the most devout Catholics who were so holy they could perform miracles even after they were dead. In fact, most of those considered saints had that honor bestowed on them long after their deaths.



Nothing could be further from the truth of what the Apostles taught about becoming a *saint*. On the contrary, *all* believers in Yahshua, the Messiah, are *called to be saints*, and the earnest expectation of the Apostles was that *all* would attain to that calling *during their lifetime*. That transformation from helpless sinner to steadfast saint can only occur in a set-apart place where all who believe live together and share all things in common, as the first disciples did in Acts 2:44.

There is a secret hidden in plain sight in the beginning of Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. Its radical implications are overlooked simply because the life it takes for granted is completely foreign to the vast majority of Christians, yet it reveals the very pattern of discipleship which this apostle considered normal:

To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in the Messiah, Yahshua, called to be saints together with all those in every place who call upon the name of our Sovereign Yahshua, the Messiah, both their Lord and ours. (1 Corinthians 1:2)

Paul understood that *all* believers are called to be *saints*, that is, *holy* men and women who are completely devoted to Yahweh and who have been purified from anything unclean in His sight. But he also understood that one cannot become a saint *alone*, but only *together* with all those in every place who call on the *same* Lord.¹ That is why they must first be *sanctified*, which means *set apart* from fellowship with the world and brought into fellowship with Yahweh in Yahshua, the Messiah — in the *place* where He dwells.

There are three words Paul uses here that are essential for us to understand or we will completely *misunderstand* and *misapply* everything else Paul says in his letters.² These words are *sanctified*,³ *saint*,⁴ and *place*.⁵

¹ Not *another Jesus*, as some of the Corinthians called upon later (2 Corinthians 11:4).

² As many have done, to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). ³ *hagiazo*, #37 in *Strong's Concordance* ⁴ *hagios*, #40 in *Strong's* ⁵ *topos*, #5117 in *Strong's*

“AS FOR THE SAINTS WHO ARE ON THE EARTH”⁶

First, let’s establish the objective of discipleship, which Paul made crystal clear in his letter to Titus:

...who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous for good works. (Titus 2:14)

Yahshua⁷ gave up His life to obtain “a people” for His own possession. His objective was not just to save individuals who continue to live independent lives, much the same as all the other decent people in the world except for their new-found personal conviction and a religious gathering to attend on Sunday. “A people,” according to *Webster’s Dictionary*, is a body of persons that are united by a common culture, tradition, or sense of kinship, having a common language, institutions, and beliefs. Therefore, Yahshua’s people must be a recognizable body having the same culture, traditions, structure, and beliefs, who are being purified from all that is foreign to His nature. As Jude wrote,⁸ it’s all about “our *common* salvation,” because Yahshua is not going to return until this *people* is made ready, like a spotless Bride prepared for her King.⁹

The Apostle Peter also wrote about “a people for His own possession” in a way that sheds light on the objective Yahshua had in mind as He was suffering on the cross:¹⁰

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

He was after a *holy nation*, that is, a spiritual nation of *holy ones (saints)* who would no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died, and went into death, and rose again on their behalf.¹¹ They are a full-time royal priesthood of twelve tribes who serve Him night and day,¹² daily offering their bodies as one living sacrifice,¹³ daily laying down their lives for one another out of love for Him.¹⁴ Because of their sincere and whole-hearted devotion to Him they have the expectation of being made like Him *in this life* as they give themselves to the purifying fire of their life together.¹⁵

“SANCTIFIED IN CHRIST JESUS”

There is not the slightest possibility of this objective coming about apart from the *sanctification* Paul wrote of in 1 Corinthians 1:2, and which he also described explicitly in his second letter to the Corinthians:

⁶ Psalm 16:3 ⁷ *Yahshua* is the original Hebrew name of the one called *Jesus* in most English Bibles; see “The Name Above All Names” on page 40 for more about this name. ⁸ Jude 1:3 ⁹ Revelation 19:7-8; Ephesians 5:27 ¹⁰ Hebrews 12:2 ¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:15 ¹² Acts 26:7 ¹³ Romans 12:1-2 ¹⁴ 1 John 3:14,16 ¹⁵ 1 John 3:2

Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says Yahweh, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me, says Yahweh Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

To be “sanctified in Messiah” means to separate yourself from fellowship with the world and be immersed into the fellowship of His people through baptism into His Body, which is a people who dwell together in unity as a light to the surrounding world.¹⁶ That is where you receive the Spirit of adoption as a son or daughter that enables you to truly cry, “Abba!” (that is, *Father*),¹⁷ being truly “born again” into Yahweh’s family, where you can be *fathered* by Him through His people. As Yahshua promised His first disciples who left everything and followed Him:

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time — houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands — with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. (Mark 10:29-30)

Yahshua’s radical gospel of forsaking everything is the means by which we are *sanctified* (set apart) from all that is common and brought into one of the holy *clusters* where our new brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers abide together in the Vine. Yahshua told His apostles that He was the Vine and they were the branches,¹⁸ and if they would abide in Him, they would bear abundant fruit. To abide in Him meant to keep His commandments,¹⁹ and He commanded them to make disciples, teaching them to obey everything He had commanded them.²⁰ And that is what they did.

The fruit of the Vine is the *clusters* that come forth from the vitally connected branches — and what rich clusters came forth on the day of Pentecost! Three thousand people were saved, forming many clusters throughout the city of Jerusalem as everyone left behind their old lives and clung together, drinking in the nourishment that came from the branches, that is, the apostles:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. (Acts 2:41-45)

¹⁶ They dwell where Yahweh has commanded the blessing of eternal life: “where brothers dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:3). ¹⁷ Romans 8:15,23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5 ¹⁸ John 15:5 ¹⁹ John 15:10 ²⁰ Matthew 28:19-20

A grape in a cluster that is vitally connected to the vine through a branch becomes juicy and sweet, while a grape by itself shrivels up and dies. In the same way, it is impossible for a person to become *holy* unless he is grafted into the fellowship of Yahshua's people. You cannot become a *saint* — a pure, sweet grape — while living alone in the world. It is impossible.

IN EVERY PLACE

As Paul said, we are "called to be saints *together* with all those *in every place* who call upon our Sovereign Yahshua, the Messiah..." It does *not* say "all those *everywhere*" as the *New International Version* and some other modern versions incorrectly translate the verse, as if it were speaking of individual believers scattered *everywhere* in the world. The word *place* means a particular *locality* in a township. It speaking of a *cluster* of true believers living together in unity (having "the *same Lord*," Paul stipulated in 1 Corinthians 1:2) in several households in a particular neighborhood²¹ — a *community*.



To be "sanctified in the Messiah, Yahshua" means to be *where* He is,²² which is not the slightest bit mystical, but instead very real and practical. He is where "all who believe live *together*"²³ because they hated their lonely, futile lives in this world:

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him. (John 12:25-26)

In that place where Yahshua's Spirit dwells in His people, where His people dwell together in a cluster, where they give themselves to the purifying fire of living together in unity, *there* the Father honors them with the glory of His Son.²⁴ That glory is the inner worth that demands the respect of others. There they learn to walk in a manner worthy of Him,²⁵ doing the deeds prepared for them to build up the Body.²⁶ And in the process, they are purified as their wrong ways are revealed through their constant interactions with each other.²⁷ The purifying process that happens

²¹ Acts 2:46 — "...breaking bread from house to house..." suggests households in close proximity. ²² John 12:25-26 ²³ Acts 2:44 ²⁴ John 17:22-23 ²⁵ Ephesians 4:1-3

²⁶ Ephesians 2:10; 4:16 ²⁷ Community life is the way so many proverbs and verses "come to life" in the lives of disciples. "Iron sharpening iron" (Proverbs 27:17) will not accomplish the complete sanctification Paul spoke of in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 if it only happens once a week at the men's Bible study!

in the set-apart place where disciples live and work together is expressed in the metaphor of the Bride's wedding garment:

It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (Revelation 19:8)

What a vivid picture of those "sanctified in the Messiah Yahshua, called to be saints," and even more vivid is this prophetic vision of the Bride:



And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Revelation 12:1)

Here is the fully-formed holy nation of twelve tribes, having the radiance of the sun because she has put underfoot all the spiritual enemies that plague the souls of men. The term *lunatic* is derived from *luna*, the Latin word for the moon, recognizing that men's souls are influenced by lunar cycles, being more troubled when the moon is full. That is why having "the moon under her feet" depicts the Bride fully prepared for her King, for it is written that He cannot return "until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet."²⁸

THE SIGN OF SANCTIFICATION

So the Bride being ready for her King will be a "great sign"²⁹ that a people have been *sanctified* (set apart), and that sanctification has achieved the desired objective of their becoming *saints* — holy ones who are worthy of reigning with their King. This miracle will be able to happen because there are *places* where disciples can be insulated from the defilement and distractions of the world and nurtured in the pure, life-giving fellowship of the community.

They are not isolated in compounds, however. Rather, they live together in the midst of the watching world, reaching out in every way they can, and welcoming guests, for how else can they be a light to the world?³⁰

There is another very significant sign spoken of in the Scriptures that has everything to do with sanctification. In fact, it is actually the *same* sign expressed in different terms:

You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, "Above all you shall keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, Yahweh, sanctify you." (Exodus 31:13)

²⁸ Hebrews 10:13 ²⁹ Revelation 12:1 ³⁰ Isaiah 49:5-6

The most profound sign that there is a people who are truly being sanctified is that we are able to have true rest in our souls and keep the Sabbath together in all our dwelling places.³¹ This does not mean merely ceasing from the regular work we do on the other six days. The Sabbath is not a day off on which to pursue our own pleasure,³² like a “relief valve” from the pressures of living and working together all week long. No, the Sabbath is the culmination of laboring all week long to put our spiritual enemies under our feet — the selfishness and iniquity that hinder our fellowship with one another and our Elohim. It is a day to enjoy the sweet fruit of repentance and forgiveness — the unstrained relationships with our brothers and sisters as we share our hearts with one another — celebrating, eating together, recalling what our Father spoke to us throughout the week, walking and talking together, writing letters, and yes, perhaps taking a nap!

The Sabbath is a time to be refreshed, even as our Creator was refreshed by enjoying the fruits of His six-days’ labor in Creation.³³ And as the Sabbath draws to a close, we gather together with one heart to celebrate the resurrection of our Master Yahshua, and to break bread with thankful hearts³⁴ — a fitting way to begin a new week.

Such is the abundant life of the set-apart people of Yahweh, who are called to be saints together with all those in every such place who call on the name of our Sovereign Yahshua, the Messiah — their Sovereign and ours! ❀

³¹ Leviticus 23:3 ³² Isaiah 58:13 ³³ Exodus 31:17 ³⁴ Acts 20:7-8 — It was after sunset, on the eve of the first day of the week — Saturday night!

“Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [Sabbath], but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s Day, they shall especially honor, and as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be cut off from Christ.”
Council of Laodicea, c. 364 AD

(The fact that this edict had to be issued from a church council as late as 364 AD makes it clear that many Christians were still observing the Sabbath on Saturday well into the fourth century.)

THE BEST DAY FOR BUSINESS

Each person's life reveals his beliefs — sometimes uncomfortably so... when what he does contradicts what he claims to believe. One outstanding belief that should affect people's lives in a noticeable and outward way is Sabbath-keeping. Both Jews and an increasing number of Christians say that the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath. And they know the seventh day has the common name of *Saturday*, not *Sunday*. Shouldn't Saturday be a much different kind of day for them, given the Sabbath's great importance in the Scriptures?

Sabbath-keeping results from believing that the fourth commandment, to keep the Sabbath, is still a command to be obeyed, just as honoring parents, not stealing, and the rest of the commandments. Further, it is a sign to be held up to the world of who Yahweh's people are. Therefore, in the case of Sabbath-keeping, obeying and believing are the same.

Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies you." (Exodus 31:13)

Surely Jews and "Sabbath-keeping" Christians own many businesses, so you should see "Closed on Saturday" or "Closed on the Sabbath" signs in many places. Even though it's the best day for doing business and making money (since everyone takes this day off to go shopping, go out to eat, and have a good time), all those who honor their Creator rest on this day. Interestingly, according to the words of the commandment in Exodus 20, they give their servants (employees) rest, too. Yes, that is what the Torah says quite clearly.¹ Therefore, you can't use hired hands to "work around" the prohibition of laboring on the Sabbath!



Look around. There aren't many closed-on-the-Sabbath signs, are there? We have hardly seen *any* in our lifetime, let alone *anything near* the number of businesses that should be closed if all the "Sabbath-keepers" actually *kept* the Sabbath. Remember, real faith is revealed by one's life — the deeds he does. Pretended faith needs no visible or tangible expression.

¹ Exodus 20:8-11 includes the words, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of Yahweh your Elohim. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger within your gates."

What of the virtually innumerable² Christians who have an ancient tradition (at least 17 centuries old) that Sunday is “the Lord’s Day”? By this they mean that for Christians Sunday is the new Sabbath. For them, the first day of the week has replaced the seventh day as the holy, set-apart day. In that case, shouldn’t Christian businesses be closed on Sunday? Or maybe there is no rest for Christians, since the Savior did *everything* for them, including rest.

There have been times when businesses were closed *by law* in predominantly Christian nations.³ But what of grace — the desire and the power (from Yahweh) to do His will, to honor His day simply because you love Him? It seems, then, that most Christians and Jews share at least this one thing in common: business takes precedence over beliefs.

Or is the Sabbath vs. Sunday controversy only about which day to go to church (or synagogue or mosque)? After all, each religion has its day — the Jews have the Sabbath, the Muslims have Friday, and the Christians have the day of the Sun god (Sunday). And what does it matter if it’s just a religious observance, and not the sign of who Yahweh’s obedient people are?

On our businesses you will see a cheerful sign that says something like, “Closed for the Sabbath,” and right below it, the words, “Shabbat Shalom — Welcome.”

Yes, our doors (and hearts) are open for guests and visitors on this most special of days, but we are resting. This is what believers do on the Sabbath: they close shop, come in from the field, and put down their hammers. They do so because He has given them rest from the relentless cares and worries of life that drive this world and all of its inhabitants. This is the salvation that comes to those who seek first His kingdom:

Therefore do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” (Matthew 6:31-33)

This is possible for us just as it was for the first believers in the Book of Acts because we share all things in common.⁴ And our rest is based on and maintained by the forgiveness we’ve received and that we extend to one another. Apart from the active flow of forgiveness, just like the lifeblood of a human body, our rest, indeed our life together as a people, would end. We would find “better” things to do than celebrate the Sabbath. ✨

*So then, there remains a Sabbath-keeping⁵ for the people of God...
(Hebrews 4:9)*

² Some say *two billion!* ³ Such as the “Blue Laws” of Puritan New England. ⁴ Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37. This is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 15:4, too. ⁵ The Hebrew word usually translated as “Sabbath rest” in this verse literally means *Sabbath-keeping*.

THE NAME ABOVE

ALL NAMES

In the days of John the Baptist and the Son of God, the preserved language of the devout Jews was Hebrew. So, when the angel Gabriel brought the good news to the Hebrew virgin, Miriam (or *Mary* in English), that she would give birth to the Savior of the world, and told her what His name would be, what language do you suppose he spoke? Hebrew, of course! And certainly Miriam and Yoceph (or *Joseph* in English) named the child just as the angel had commanded them — *Yahshua*.

In Matthew 1:21, your Bible probably reads, "...and you shall call His name *Jesus*, for He will save His people from their sins." But the name *Jesus* is a modern English adaptation of the Greek name, *Iesous*, which is itself a corruption of the original Hebrew name *Yahshua*. The name *Jesus* or *Iesous* has no meaning of its own, but the Hebrew name *Yahshua* literally means *Yahweh's Salvation*,¹ which makes sense out of what the angel said in Matthew 1:21, "...you shall call His name *Yahshua* [*Yahweh's Salvation*], for He shall save His people from their sins."

יהושע

If you look in a pre-1769 King James Bible, you will find the name

Jesus in these two passages:

*Which also our fathers that came after brought in with **Jesus** into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David... (Acts 7:45, 1611 KJV)*

*For if **Jesus** had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. (Hebrews 4:8, 1611 KJV)*

However, if you look in any modern translation of the Bible, including the New King James, you will find that in place of the name *Jesus* they use the name *Joshua*, for in the context it is clear that it is speaking there of Moses' successor and not the Son of God. But in the Greek manuscript the name in both of these verses is *Iesous*.

You see, *Joshua* is the popular English transliteration of the Hebrew name of Moses' successor, which meant, "He will save." This name looks forward to the name of the Son of God, for *Joshua* was the prophetic forerunner of the Messiah, bringing

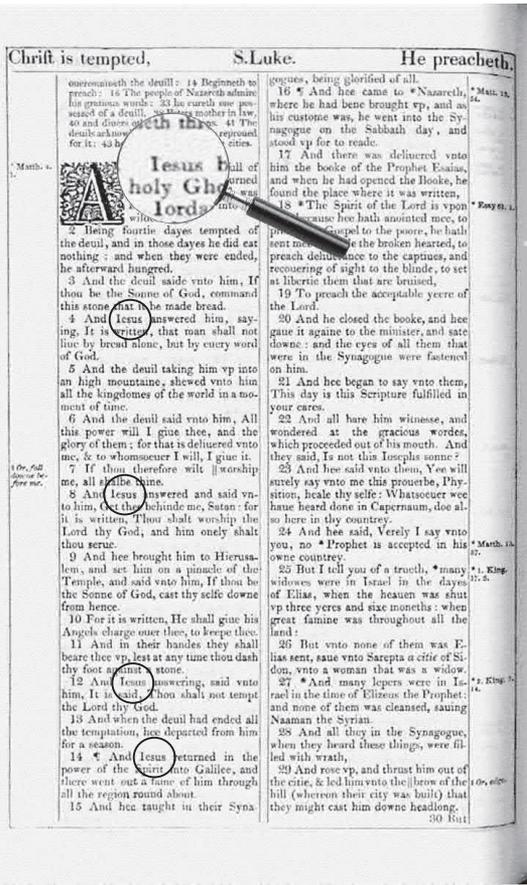
¹ *Yah* is the personal name of God, and *shua* is from a Hebrew root word that means "to save." God identified Himself to Moses as *YAH* (meaning "I AM") in Exodus 3:14, as in Psalm 68:4 ("whose name is *Yah*"), and as most familiar in the word Halleluyah ("Praise *Yah*"). And in John 5:43 and 17:11, *Yahshua* says that He came in His Father's name, "the name which You have given Me" (NASB), so it is not surprising that the Father's name would be incorporated into the Son's name, *Yahshua*.

Israel into the Promised Land and leading them to victory over their enemies. But since the translators obviously know this fact, why do they only translate *lesous* as *Joshua* in these two verses, and as *Jesus* everywhere else?

The NIV New Testament even has a footnote supporting this fact under Matthew 1:21: "*Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*."

But the fact is, the name of God's Son was not even written or pronounced as "*Jesus*" in English until the 1600s, simply because there was no "J" sound or letter in English before then.² The modern letter "J" evolved from the letter "I" which began to be written with a "tail" when it appeared as the first letter in a word. So in old English the name now written as *Jesus* was actually written and pronounced much like the original Greek *lesous*. Eventually the hard "J" sound crept into the English language to accompany the different way of writing the initial "I" in the name.

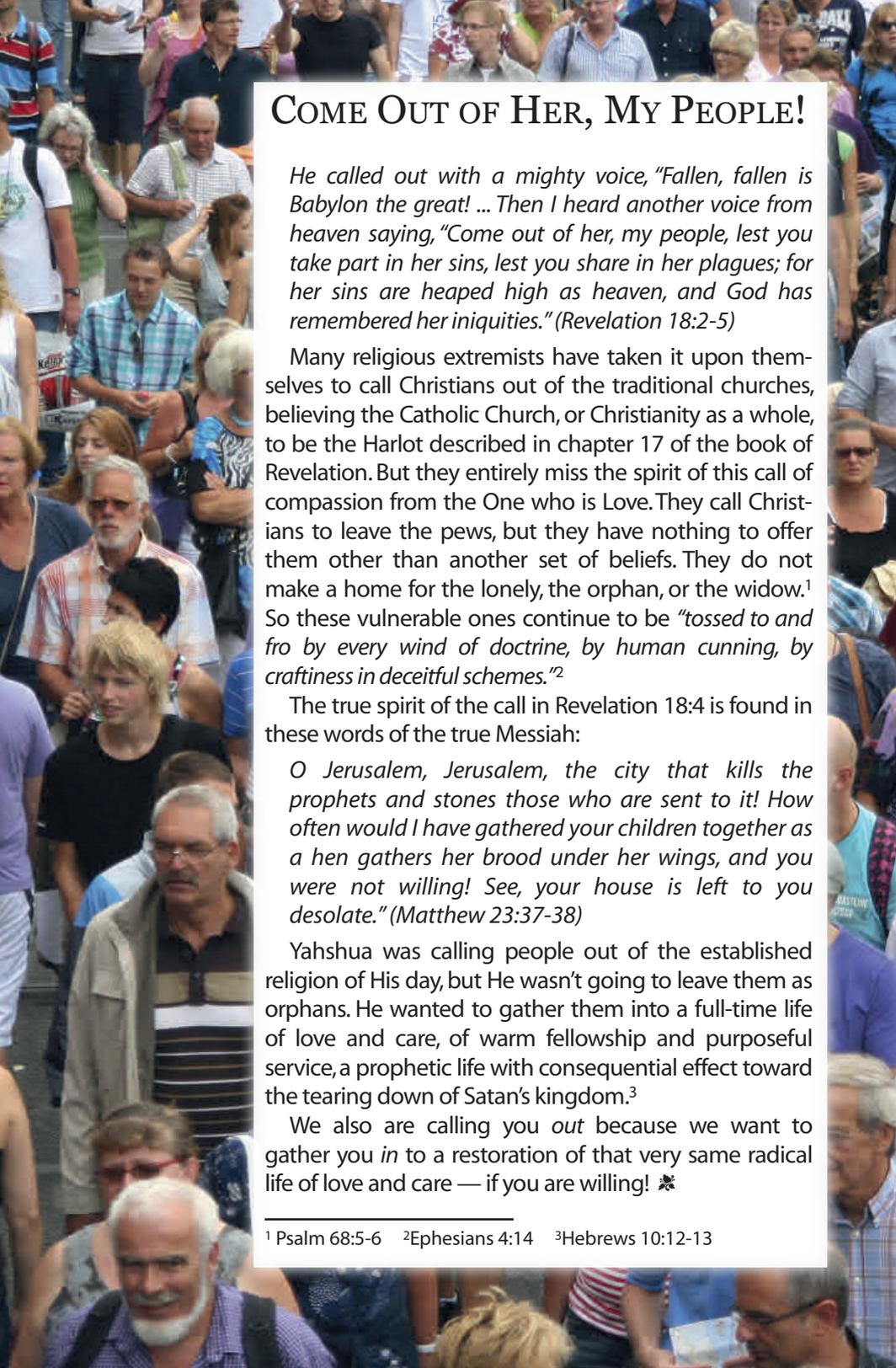
You may also find it interesting that in Acts 26:14-15, it says that the



A page from the 1611 Authorized Version (King James Bible). Note the lack of a "J" in the Savior's name.

apostle Paul heard the name of the Son of God pronounced "in the Hebrew tongue" by the Son of God Himself, so he certainly didn't hear the Greek name *lesous* or the English name *Jesus*, but rather the Hebrew name, the name above all names, *Yahshua*.³✱

² Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 1496,1507 ³ Philippians 2:9; Acts 4:12



COME OUT OF HER, MY PEOPLE!

He called out with a mighty voice, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! ... Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities." (Revelation 18:2-5)

Many religious extremists have taken it upon themselves to call Christians out of the traditional churches, believing the Catholic Church, or Christianity as a whole, to be the Harlot described in chapter 17 of the book of Revelation. But they entirely miss the spirit of this call of compassion from the One who is Love. They call Christians to leave the pews, but they have nothing to offer them other than another set of beliefs. They do not make a home for the lonely, the orphan, or the widow.¹ So these vulnerable ones continue to be *"tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes."*²

The true spirit of the call in Revelation 18:4 is found in these words of the true Messiah:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you desolate." (Matthew 23:37-38)

Yahshua was calling people out of the established religion of His day, but He wasn't going to leave them as orphans. He wanted to gather them into a full-time life of love and care, of warm fellowship and purposeful service, a prophetic life with consequential effect toward the tearing down of Satan's kingdom.³

We also are calling you *out* because we want to gather you *in* to a restoration of that very same radical life of love and care — if you are willing! ✨

¹ Psalm 68:5-6 ² Ephesians 4:14 ³ Hebrews 10:12-13

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THERE IS A PEOPLE who woke up this morning with one thing on their minds: to love their Creator with all their heart, soul, and strength, and to love one another just as He loved them. Being ordinary human beings, we are far from perfect in our love, yet, in hope, we persevere. Our goal? That the Kingdom of God would come on earth as it is in heaven, so that love and justice can rule on the earth. Sound impossible? It would be, were it not that Yahshua, the Messiah, came to redeem mankind, to set us free from the curse of sin, and to enable us to love. Because we have come to see His worth and our own desperate need, we have surrendered everything in order to follow Him. Our hearts and our homes are open night and day to any who are interested in our life or are weary of their sin and want to know the purpose for which they were created. ✨