
The First of the Sabbaths, and Work

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A quick conversion to Orthodox Judaism appears to be the order of the day for Christians or Messianics, when they are confronted with the chronological facts of the First of the Sabbaths.

We are informed that women cannot perform a final anointing out of respect for the dead on the Sabbath.

We learn that Cleopas and the other disciple were forbidden to escape persecution on the Sabbath.

We are further taught that Yeshua could not ride a donkey on the Sabbath and that the crowds could not cut branches to lay in the path of the King!

None of this can happen, it is claimed, because of Orthodox Judaism's notions of Sabbath observance as written in the Talmud, or just assumed.

We need to think about it Scripturally, and not from the point of view of the Jews whom Yeshua himself criticised time and again for making human laws into Yahweh's Law.

Nisan 10 was the day on which the Passover lambs were examined, chosen and set aside. There is an obvious parallel with Yeshua, who was himself the Passover. The things that happened on 10 Nisan 34 A.D. had to do with examining the Passover lamb for imperfections. Yeshua was found without blemish.

Where in Scripture does it say that the Passover lamb cannot be examined on the Sabbath because this is work? There is no such place. On the contrary, Scripture positively commands this work to be done, even on the Sabbath.

Yeshua, as King of Israel, rode a donkey on Sabbath 10 Nisan 34 A.D. This is not forbidden by Torah. Riding a donkey or horse on any Sabbath by any person is not forbidden by Torah. The commandment says that animals are not to work, but does not define work. Now, obviously ploughing fields is work, turning a grinding mill is work, or pulling a carriage.

How about a man riding a donkey down a street? This is not work. Even the Talmud admits riding in and of itself is not forbidden. The Talmudic regulation against riding was only a so-called "fence" against an eventual actual violation of the Law.

So, what about cutting branches to lay in front of the Messiah King? Torah does not forbid worship on the Sabbath, which could even have been a response to promptings of the Holy Spirit, and probably was. If you were to ask a Rabbi, "If Messiah is coming, and the Spirit of God prompts one to cut a branch and throw it before the king, then is it permissible to do so even on a Sabbath?" then what do you think his answer will be?

A good deal of the Gospel material is devoted to freeing the Sabbath from the legalistic *man-made* burdens of the various Jewish sects. These artificial regulations were overbearing and oppressive. The Sabbath was made for the benefit of man, and not so that man could be a slave of artificial man-made Sabbath regulations.

One such overbearing man-made regulation I will mention here is the so-called “Sabbath limit,” which was a rule that the Pharisees obviously had about how far could be travelled on the Sabbath.

There is no evidence that this rule was uniformly enforced, or even that it was widely followed. Third, it is an arbitrary limit and not an exact measurement like a cubit. It’s like how in English I might say, “My friend lives only a stone’s throw away,” whereas, the real fact may be that he lives 700 metres away, no doubt considerably further than most could throw a stone!

When the seventy went up Mt Sinai, they traveled further than this limit on the Sabbath, so the Rabbis even contradict themselves on this point!

Why were Cleopas and the other disciple walking some distance on the Sabbath? It seems fairly obvious that they must have been escaping from the real danger of being detained by the authorities and executed too. The preservation of life always overrules the Sabbath commandment. This is a Scriptural teaching which Yeshua expounded to the Pharisees, to their great humiliation at being found ignorant of the Law.

To finish, it must also be noted that simply saying what certain people would or wouldn’t have done in some extraordinary circumstance is an extremely weak argument which cannot overturn the clear implication in Scripture that these things actually did happen, whether or not they seem entirely “kosher” from our necessarily distant point of view.

- Reference: These ideas were inspired by Daniel Gregg, *It Isn’t Possible On Sabbath*, in *The Resurrection Day of Messiah Yeshua*, pp. 313–315.