



Lord of the Sabbath

1 From Sabbath to the Lord's Day

Readings from Catechism of the Catholic Church

2 Jesus Our Messiah Rescues the Sabbath

St. Matthew's Gospel 11: 25 to 12: 14.

3 Celebrating the Eternal Sabbath In Jesus Messiah

Points for reflection

Lord of the Sabbath

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Introduction

The Biblical understanding of Shabbat — the Sabbath — is one of the most beautiful themes to explore. It is certainly one of the most important for Hebrew Catholics and fellow Christians to reflect on together, if we are to live the Lord's Day in all its spiritual splendour and impart this to an impoverished, often anti-theistic society in which we live. As Hebrew Catholics we invite your participation as we "**unpack**" this often neglected and much misunderstood element in the unfolding of God's Plan in Salvation History.

Association of Hebrew Catholics

New Zealand Branch

Unit 1

From Sabbath into the Lord's Day

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Article 3.1 — The Sabbath Day

Article 3.2 — The Lord's Day

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

Unit 1

From Sabbath into the Lord's Day

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

Introduction

If we wish to understand the real and full message in Scripture about anything (including the Sabbath) it is to the teaching of the Church we must first turn. The authority for the interpretation of Sacred Scriptures is vested in the Church — not in the supposed rights of individuals who choose instead to take Scriptural passages and apply their own definitive interpretation. This principle alone, exemplifies a distinction between Hebrew Catholics and almost all other Messianic groups. The basic definition of Catholic teaching is contained in the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" (CCC for short). The material there is expanded and explained by a large number of other documents emanating from the Holy See. We call this the Sacred Magisterium of the Church. It grew from our Lord's appointment of St. Peter (and his successors) to make decisions about doctrine: faith and morals, which took place about 350 years before the Church accepted universally the contents of the New Testament in the second half of the 4th Century C.E.

It is for this reason we commence our "exploration" by reading about 21 short paragraphs which comprise two "articles" of the Catechism (CCC) namely:

3.1 The Sabbath See: http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0015/_P7N.HTM

3.2 The Lord's Day See: http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0015/_P7O.HTM

Brief notes associated with each of these follow.

Article 3.1. The Sabbath Day

CCC 2168 to 2173

(Part 3, Section 2. Chapter 1. Article 3. 1)

A book could be written about each of the six points made: 2168 to 2173. It is sufficient for us to say that they render a power-packed summary of the very special role the Sabbath played in the period leading to the advent of the Messiah. The spiritual aspects of the Sabbath we look at in our Unit 3 of this collection of articles: "Celebrating the Eternal Sabbath in Jesus Messiah".

(Click on the link above for CCC which also provides cross-references and sources for quotations included in the text.)

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)

I. The Sabbath Day

2168 The third commandment of the Decalogue recalls the holiness of the sabbath: "The seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD."

2169 In speaking of the sabbath Scripture recalls creation: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it."

2170 Scripture also reveals in the Lord's day a memorial of Israel's liberation from bondage in Egypt: "You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out thence with mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day."

2171 God entrusted the sabbath to Israel to keep as a sign of the irrevocable covenant. The sabbath is for the Lord, holy and set apart for the praise of God, his work of creation, and his saving actions on behalf of Israel.

2172 God's action is the model for human action. If God "rested and was refreshed" on the seventh day, man too ought to "rest" and should let others, especially the poor, "be refreshed." The sabbath brings everyday work to a halt and provides a respite. It is a day of protest against the servitude of work and the worship of money.

2173 The Gospel reports many incidents when Jesus was accused of violating the sabbath law. But Jesus never fails to respect the holiness of this day. He gives this law its authentic and authoritative interpretation: "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." With compassion, Christ declares the sabbath for doing good rather than harm, for saving life rather than killing. The sabbath is the day of the Lord of mercies and a day to honor God. "The Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath."

Article 3.2. The Lord's Day

CCC 2174 to 2188

(Part 3, Section 2. Chapter 1. Article 3. 2)

This is a masterpiece of ultra-concise theological explanation. We also offer some brief annotations to clauses in paragraph 2175/6 hoping they will guide the reader.

(Click on the link above for CCC which also provides cross-references and sources for quotations included in the text).

Catechism of the Catholic Church

II. The Lord's Day

This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

The day of the Resurrection: the new creation

2174 Jesus rose from the dead "on the first day of the week. Because it is the "first day," the day of Christ's Resurrection recalls the first creation. Because it is the "eighth day" following the sabbath, it symbolizes the new creation ushered in by Christ's Resurrection. For Christians it has become the first of all days, the first of all feasts, the Lord's Day (he kuriake hemera, dies dominica) Sunday:

We all gather on the day of the sun, for it is the first day [after the Jewish sabbath, but also the first day] when God, separating matter from darkness, made the world; and on this same day Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead

Sunday - fulfilment of the sabbath

2175 Sunday is expressly distinguished from the sabbath which it follows chronologically every week; for Christians its ceremonial observance replaces that of the sabbath. In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish sabbath and announces man's eternal rest in God. For worship under the Law prepared for the mystery of Christ, and what was done there prefigured some aspects of Christ

Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death

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2176 The celebration of Sunday observes the moral commandment inscribed by nature in the human heart to render to God an outward, visible, public, and regular worship "as a sign of his universal beneficence to all". Sunday worship fulfils the moral command of the Old Covenant, taking up its rhythm and spirit in the weekly celebration of the Creator and Redeemer of his People.

The Sunday Eucharist

2177 The Sunday celebration of the Lord's Day and his Eucharist is at the heart of the Church's life.

"Sunday is the day on which the paschal mystery is celebrated in light of the apostolic tradition and is to be observed as the foremost holy day of obligation in the universal Church."

The Lord's Day

- **This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.** (Psalm 118: 24)

This verse is from a strongly Messianic prophetic Psalm. It originally referred to a victorious celebration on the laying of the foundation stone of the new Temple, rather than to a particular day — Sabbath or Lord's Day, Sunday, at least directly. However it is a well-established custom for Christians to apply it to the Lord's Day since ultimately all things are created or renewed through Jesus Messiah.

- **"The day of the Resurrection: the new creation"**

The relationship between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day (as we apply the term) is very special and meaningful. God created the Sabbath "in the beginning" for all humanity. It was not a "Jewish" creation — for it preceded Judaism.

The Lord's Day is named as such because of what the Lord did on that day. For us it symbolises **the new creation** through Jesus Christ.

- **"Sunday is expressly distinguished from the Sabbath"**

The passing of light at the close of the Sabbath could hardly be a clearer termination of one day and the commencement of the next. Even while the first Christians, who saw themselves as devoted, practising Jews, continued to attend the synagogue, they recognised the "8th Day" as the day of the Eucharist.

- **"Sunday — fulfilment of the Sabbath"**

All that the Sabbath embodied and stood for is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It is **not terminated**, but **fulfilled**. All of the Temple sacrifices and ceremonial are fulfilled in Jesus.

- **"..... its ceremonial observance replaces that of the Sabbath."**

Many devout Jews saw that all the ordinances of the Jewish ceremonial observance commanded in detail by God, were now subsumed in and fulfilled by the sacrificial death of their Rabbi, Yeshua HaMashiach, Jesus the Messiah.

- **"In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and announces man's eternal rest in God."**

Thus, for these Jewish Christians, all the spiritual significance of the Sabbath's blessings were taken by the Lord Jesus unto Himself: He is the embodiment of everything they pointed towards. It was these Jewish Christians who first gave recognition of Jesus Messiah as "Lord also of the Sabbath". As John 1: 3 tells us, "All things came to be through Him". Yes, even the Sabbath, which was made for man in man's presence! (Genesis 2: 30). How was it made? It was made by God resting with man, whom he had created on the 6th day of creation. The Lord of the Sabbath in His teaching ministry, began His restoration of what Sabbath was meant to convey even before His Passover.

- **"For worship under the Law prepared for the mystery of Christ"**

For Hebrew Catholics, the role performed by Judaism in carrying out the worship commanded by God has always been held as a special privilege and honour. The Passover of Jesus, the Anointed of God, was therefore not seen as terminating what God commanded. Rather it was perceived as transforming the whole of Jewish worship in a course of action which honoured all that God the Father required, raising it now to a new level of fulfilment in Christ, our Lord. The Lord's Day together with its celebration of the Eucharist of the week, proclaims this great truth to the whole world. The concept of Torah — Law as **PREPARATION** for Christ's work of salvation is especially significant to a Hebrew Christian culture.

- **"As a sign of his universal beneficence to all"**

The Lord's Day is thus a well-spring of the outpouring of God's love to the world. It is a **visible** demonstration to all humanity of what it prefigures — our life of restored union and peace with God in His Kingdom in all its glory. It cannot be effective unless it is portrayed to the world for what it is meant to convey! Thus we have a responsibility to uphold the Lord's Day in all its fullness and teach our young, and all who wish to learn, about the treasures it contains.

- **"Sunday worship fulfils the moral command of the Old Covenant".**

This forthright statement is spoken by the Church with power, clarity and certitude. It is a truth bestowing great joy, confidence and peace upon the hearts of those who hear it, and who know what the "moral command of the Old Covenant" signifies and has bequeathed to the Church.

Unit 2

Jesus Our Messiah Rescues The Sabbath

St. Matthew 11: 25 to 12: 14

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

Unit 2

Jesus Our Messiah Rescues The Sabbath

St. Matthew 11: 25 to 12: 14

(Text at rear of Unit)

Introduction

Jesus was a devout orthodox practising Jew for the whole of his life on earth. Among the many things Jesus loved about His spiritual heritage as a Jew, there is one blessing He treasured above all others. Nothing surpassed its importance for Him. In it He saw the embodiment of all He taught.

He upheld it and focused on it probably more than any other aspect of His faith.

We are talking about the **Sabbath**. It is a pity that so many Christian writers seem to interpret His relationship with the Sabbath in a negative way. Unless we abandon such bias and look carefully at how it figures in His teaching, we could miss the valuable revelation He offers to those prepared to listen honestly and openly to Him.

Matthew 11: 25 to 27— Jesus' Prayer and First Declaration

At that time Jesus said in reply, "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.

Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will."

All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.

Jesus has experienced increasingly, rejection by certain authorities who saw **themselves** as the fount of wisdom on the Holy Scriptures. His message in the main, has been taken to heart by a few disciples drawn from the peasant and working classes.

So, we open with a valuable glimpse of Jesus at prayer — Verse 25 to 26. Here He affirms God's choice to reveal spiritual truth to "little children." He is not referring to the young as distinct from the old. Rather He is distinguishing between those who think they know enough and those who see themselves always seeking and benefiting from more understanding.

Then in verse 27 Jesus reveals His unity with the Father. We can sense the cosmic vastness. There are no secrets between them. The Father has handed **all gifts** to His Son to dispense.

A Little More Detail — 1

Our Lord is not praising the Father for **hiding** the understanding of His teaching from the learned and scholarly. This is a very Semitic manner of writing (See Isaiah 12: 1) which emphasises the **revealing** of His message to the humble (which includes His chosen disciples). Our Lord has proclaimed the reign of God and its unfolding in the lives of His listeners. We would surely all agree that the Good News of Yeshua HaMashiach — Jesus Messiah — is not grasped by human wisdom and intellectual pursuits alone, but rather by revelation: and by those humble enough to be open to receiving it. Among those "humble" are both highly educated as well as lowly people with little rabbinic training. The charge that Jewish learning and scholarship hindered educated Jews from understanding our Lord and His message, is misapplied frequently and indiscriminately. Such critics focus especially on the Torah — which they almost always label, "the Law".

The Torah, the first five books of the Bible (term actually referring often to the whole Old Testament), is the Hebrew term for the "Teaching" of God. It does include His **Laws**, or **Commandments**, but is more than these two terms convey. It is God's chosen and expressed description of His love for His people, and in fact, for His Creation. Some of the most brilliant rabbis in our Lord's time gave His teaching their full attention — and in fact became His most ardent followers. Thus knowledge of Torah was not, in itself, in **any** way, an obstacle to hearing and understanding the Teaching of our Lord, and His unfolding of the Kingdom of God. Some even go so far as to talk of the Messiah's Teaching "**superceding**" the Law. Sadly they use the term crudely and miss the point the Lord is making.

Just as it is not human knowledge which brings understanding of Rabbi Yeshua's Teaching, so it is not human wisdom which necessarily gets in the way. Our Lord is clear, concise and utterly emphatic: He is talking, not about facts and intellectual knowledge, but about humility, openness of heart, a strong desire to learn from Him, and a desire for a close, loving and personal relationship with God. These are what allow understanding of His message. It is the absence of these — in our Lord's days on earth as well as in our times — which result in our becoming spiritually distant, dull and dead. We are well aware, of course, that many senior Scribes and Pharisees in our Lord's time were totally deaf and blind to His message: not because of their knowledge of Torah, but as Jesus later pointed out, their lack of **true knowledge** and **love** of God's Teaching revealed in His Sacred Scriptures! They revelled in the false opinion that **their** chosen manner of observing of God's Commandments was all they needed to worry about! That 'mindset' is alive and well in the world today, and will always be a danger for religious people of any culture.

Our Lord proclaimed Himself the Way, the Truth and the Life. The example above is one aspect of what He meant by "**I am the Truth**".

Verses 28 — 30 — Jesus' Second Declaration

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Here Jesus openly repeats the promise of God to His disciple Moses. (Exodus 33: 14). Strap yourself to the Living Word, says Our Lord; bind yourself to me. Enrol as my disciples. Learn from me as Isaiah prophesied (Isaiah 55: 2 and 3).

Then, as Jeremiah prophesied, **you will find rest for your soul**. (Jeremiah 6: 16)
Here Jesus is clearly, and forthrightly claiming his full role as dispenser of God's gifts of love and mercy.

In Psalm 62 we read: "In God **alone** is my soul at rest."

Our Lord is preparing His listeners for an even bolder declaration, the build-up to which follows this text.

A Little More Detail — 2

These three verses are sometimes referred to as, "The Great Appeal". A correct understanding of this passage will help us understand better what St. John wrote in (John 1: 14), "..... and the Word became flesh" . Our Lord is, indeed, appealing to His listeners to listen to Him, to learn from and about Him, and find rest in Him. He is laying the foundation of a new understanding of Torah — God's Teaching, and how His followers are to relate to it. They will eventually come to see that God's Teaching, His Law, is literally embodied in His Son. Jesus Messiah is the Law, the Torah to which they should be attached. This passage is therefore an extremely important one to understand and teach correctly.

The leading Scribes and Pharisees had so encrusted the Torah with legal application and sub-rules, it had become an impossible burden for the average person. Much of the old rabbinic interpretation had been genuine and well-intended. Our Lord did not so much react against this Oral Law as **against those** who used all the minute conditions to exert power over people. He had come to give the people a new "Halakhah", a new, living and loving moral code of teaching. It would exist, in the **first** instance, in Him as Messiah and all whom He commissioned to pass on His Teaching; and only then in written records. So, when people bound themselves to His Halakhah, i.e. took up His yoke, they became, in fact, bound to Him in a loving, life-giving union.

Discipleship, being yoked to Yeshua Messiah, does not dispense with meticulous discipline. On the contrary, He will demand far more than anyone had before Him. But it would result from a bonding of love and would radiate His living presence and be manifest in gentleness, humble service, and reflect a sense of completeness and deep restfulness.

This is a fulfilment of the Prophet Jeremiah's words (in Jeremiah 6:16.) where He teaches that the rabbis should be upholding by word and example the paths of the Patriarchs and Moses, avoiding novelty and unnecessary complication in religious practice.

Matthew 12: 1 — 8 — Jesus' Third Declaration

At that time Jesus was going through a field of grain on the sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat them.

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath."

He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry,

how he went into the house of God and ate the bread of offering, which neither he nor his companions but only the priests could lawfully eat?

Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests serving in the temple violate the sabbath and are innocent?

I say to you, something greater than the temple is here.

If you knew what this meant, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned these innocent men.

For the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath."

Let's check that we have taken in the full impact of this event. To begin with here is a brief overview.

One Sabbath day, when Jesus was teaching, no one invited Him or his friends to a Sabbath meal. So they went for a walk through a cornfield. The disciples were hungry and picked some corn. Jesus didn't but the disciples did. Some authorities, who quoted Scripture endlessly but never actually listened to what it said, protested:

"That is against the Torah!" (Law)

Jesus replies, in effect, "Well, if that's what you think, then you haven't read the Torah properly! If you had, you would know that God wants to be known above all else, as the one who dispenses Mercy!"

Having sorted out his critics on this matter, Jesus then goes on in verse 8 to make a most amazing statement. He declares, in effect, "I am Lord of the Sabbath". In other words:

"I dispense the blessings of God's Sabbath rest."

A Little More Detail — 3

Although this particular incident may have occurred sometime after the previous account in chapter 11, St Matthew shows our Lord to be building up to a major proclamation. However, it is preceded by His effective handling of pitiful opposition from a band of self-righteous (so-called) teachers of Torah. We will look at this in a little bit more detail as it concerns the heart of our Hebrew Catholic culture and apostolate.

In verses 1 and 2, we can summarise the situation by saying that in Jewish Halakhah (Law) the disciples definitely did not contravene any of God's Laws in the Torah. The Pharisees present (one wonders why they were there, of all places) represented a school of thought which defined every little movement one makes on the Sabbath. According to this "oral law", the disciples had offended. Our Lord refuses to get enmeshed in their endless counter-arguments but nevertheless uses their petty frame of mind to advantage in the following phase of the unfolding drama.

In verses 3 and 4, Our Lord, in true rabbinic, i.e. Biblical style, confronts His critics with the incident in 1 Kings 21: 1— 6; (1 Samuel 21: 1 — 6). In the account, David had fled from Saul to where the Tabernacle then stood. David and those who accompanied him, were extremely hungry and exhausted. There was nothing close at hand for them to eat and he asked the High-Priest Abimelech if they could eat the 12 loaves of 'show-bread before the Lord' — so named as they lay in God's presence in the sanctuary.

For those who do not know the religious significance of what was occurring we give the excellent summary from the Haydock Commentary:

These loaves were twelve, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. They were set six plus six, one upon another, at each end of the table. Upon the uppermost loaf of each heap, stood a vessel, smoking with the sweetest incense. These loaves, at the week's end were, according to God's order, eaten by the priests only, when they were replaced by twelve fresh ones, made like them, with the finest flour, tempered with oil. The offering of the 'show-bread before the Lord' was a continual sacrifice, as the holy Fathers observe and a figure of a more excellent kind of show-bread, namely Jesus Christ Himself in the Holy Eucharist.

When confronted by David and his famished company, after making a few appropriate enquiries regarding personal purity, the High Priest permitted God's regulation to be waived on the grounds of sheer necessity. To state the matter formally, "In the concurrence of two incompatible precepts, we must give the preference to that which is the end (purpose) and object of the other. In this case, we must prefer the preservation of life to the observance of the Sabbath.

Our Lord, having stated the example, does not enter into debate or discussion. It was a step towards His goal.

In verses 5 and 6, Jesus adds more weight to the force of His argument dealing with this absolutely crucial factor of Sabbath in Judaism. Take the example of the Temple Priests serving God on the Sabbath. Their actions are physical work and, in themselves, violate the Sabbath. However, says our Lord, we all know they are innocent — but on what grounds? The Presence of God (and therefore the honours and service this entails) is greater even than the Sabbath.

Our Lord then immediately applies the same principle. By implication, something greater than the Temple is here and now present before you. And this presence, therefore, provides grounds for moving beyond the Sabbath restrictions: it is a presence of fulfilment of all that the Torah, the Temple and the Sabbath have so beautifully pointed towards.

In verse 7, Jesus momentarily sums up His case against those who can quote Scripture to their advantage but refuse to understand what it really means. The Pharisees stand indicted; the disciples are declared innocent.

Then comes the crowning declaration"

"The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Lord of the Sabbath

We have taken a fairly close look at twenty verses in St. Matthew's Gospel (11: 25 to 12: 14). This passage is of exquisite beauty. It opens with our Lord in prayer (verses 25 and 26) which in the company of His close disciples merges naturally into conversation with them (verses 27 to 30). He reinforces His teaching by dwelling on the spiritual intimacy shared by members of God's Household in which they are included. It is one of the priceless treasures of the New Testament.

Then, some time later (if not the same occasion) He goes for a walk after Sabbath morning service only to have the relaxed and peaceful occasion shattered by accusations of some Pharisees against His disciples (chapter 12: 1 — 8). The official teachers of Israel had (verse 2) laid a serious charge against the disciples: breach of Sabbath Law in the Torah. Jesus demonstrated in classic and impressive Rabbinic style that they were being petty, self-righteous, and spiritually, in serious error.

Our Lord rounded off this debate with the glorious proclamation that He is Lord of the Sabbath, Sadly, the importance of this truth is usually overlaid by brief explanations that He is simply declaring He has power over even the Sabbath and can redefine people's responsibilities as He wishes.

But Yeshua HaMashiach — Jesus our Messiah, is Lord of the Sabbath because it was created through Him as God the Son! Like so many of His intimations recorded in the Gospels, the Church came to understand what they conveyed only after Pentecost. Having received the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Church has the privilege and authority to study the texts and "unpack" their rich, spiritual content. For now, we will just pause for a moment to register what Jesus intended to do here in this passage and in other similar circumstances.

As we will restate frequently, Jesus Messiah paid special attention to rescuing the Sabbath from being weighed down by endless, detailed and oppressive rules. **Trying to obey those rules became harder than the work they were meant to prevent!** They obscured the true meaning of Sabbath and became an effective tool of some unscrupulous Pharisees to give them power over humble, working class Jews. **Our Lord liberated the Sabbath** from these pedlars of man-made religious obligations, **as well as the people** who were in effect, enslaved by them.

Matthew 12: 9 — 13 — Jesus' Fourth Declaration

But the story is unfinished. They stop their lunch and go into the local synagogue where Jesus is met by a man with a shrivelled hand. He heals it amidst cold, merciless debate.

Moving on from there, he went into their synagogue.

And behold, there was a man there who had a withered hand. They questioned him, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him.

He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep that falls into a pit on the sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out?"

How much more valuable a person is than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath."

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored as sound as the other.

In the mind of our Lord, it is indeed Torah, God's holy will, to do good, to reveal God's mercy and love, and to restore life on the Sabbath. He therefore boldly declared:

"It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath".

Verse 14 follows showing us the tragic response of our Lord's Accusers.

But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him to put him to death.

A Little More Detail — 4

There is little more to add. Our Lord felt moved to do something good on the Sabbath —to heal a man's withered hand. His critics seized the opportunity when He entered the synagogue — it was a chance to confront Jesus with a tough question. But they had the nerve to ask Him if it were lawful to heal this unfortunate man on the Sabbath (i.e. to do good) when they were **planning to do evil.**

In a way this showed how much venerable Jewish Torah instruction had been despoiled in our Lord's day. It was time to expose it and restore what God had set in place as a thing of great beauty — and to cleanse it from corruption. Just as God had created Sabbath by resting on the seventh day, so Jesus Messiah cleansed the Sabbath, i.e. healed it, by healing someone on Sabbath. The Lord of the Sabbath had indeed rescued it from the rigid enforcement of unworthy opportunists.

Conclusion

Many Christians will be more accustomed to a negative interpretation of our Lord claim to be "Lord of the Sabbath". Many have grown up thinking that by these words He annulled the Sabbath, or claimed that He superseded it. A careful examination of the texts in the light of historic and modern studies shows in fact **a beautiful continuity of God's creation blessing to us** through Jesus Messiah and His ministry. So let us respond warmly to the Lord of Sabbath who has commended us:

"Come to Me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11: 28)

Exodus 33: 14

"I myself," the LORD answered, "will go along, to give you rest."

Isaiah 55: 2 — 3

Why spend your money for what is not bread;
your wages for what fails to satisfy?
Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.

Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life.
I will renew with you the everlasting covenant, the benefits assured to David.

Jeremiah 6: 16

Thus says the LORD:
Stand beside the earliest roads, ask the pathways of old
Which is the way to good, and walk it; thus you will find rest for your souls.

New American Bible

Matthew 11: 25 — 12: 14

- 25** At that time Jesus said in reply, "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike.
- 26** Yes, Father, such has been your gracious will.
- 27** All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him.
- 28** "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.
- 29** Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves.
- 30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

Chapter 12

- 1** At that time Jesus was going through a field of grain on the sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat them.
- 2** When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "See, your disciples are doing what is unlawful to do on the sabbath."
- 3** He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry,
- 4** how he went into the house of God and ate the bread of offering, which neither he nor his companions but only the priests could lawfully eat?
- 5** Or have you not read in the law that on the sabbath the priests serving in the temple violate the sabbath and are innocent?
- 6** I say to you, something greater than the temple is here.
- 7** If you knew what this meant, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned these innocent men.
- 8** For the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath."
- 9** Moving on from there, he went into their synagogue.

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- 10 And behold, there was a man there who had a withered hand. They questioned him, "Is it lawful to cure on the sabbath?" so that they might accuse him.**
- 11 He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep that falls into a pit on the sabbath will not take hold of it and lift it out?"**
- 12 How much more valuable a person is than a sheep. So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath."**
- 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and it was restored as sound as the other.**
- 14 But the Pharisees went out and took counsel against him to put him to death.**

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Association of Hebrew Catholics

New Zealand Branch

Unit 3

Lord of the Sabbath

Celebrating the Eternal Sabbath In Jesus Messiah

Points for reflection

A Hebrew Catholic Perspective

3. Celebrating the Eternal Sabbath In Jesus Messiah

3.1 An Introductory Comment

There are countless well-crafted publications, books, journals, academic papers and so on, which present a vast range of perceptions relating to the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. This short treatise makes no pretence to be one of them. This is a mere loose collection of brief statements, with a Hebrew Catholic perspective, hoping to offer a starting point for one's own study and practice.

Hebrew Catholic culture and practice is **Messianic**, but is quite unlike any other movement using this description. For Hebrew Catholics, Messianic means, especially:

- **Biblical;**
- **Eucharistic;**
- **Evangelistic.**

Hebrew Catholics believe in the total and perfect fulfillment in Yeshua HaMashiach — Jesus Messiah, of all that is pre-figured and prophesied in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures. They are thus an integral part of the whole Mystical Body of Christ, and join their fellow members each week on the Lord's Day to worship God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. They retain many traditional Jewish customs transformed in the Light of Christ, and share these openly within Catholic culture and ceremony.

We begin our enquiry into this growing reality in the Church by starting at the very beginning.

3.2 Something About Origins

Most of us are familiar with the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, but it is worth re-reading them from time to time. It is helpful to understand that two accounts of the creation of man (one termed "Priestly" and the other "Yahwist") have been blended to encapsulate for us the grandeur of the gift of life by God, together with all that supports it.

As we move through the six days of creation, each one depicts a higher level of creation. On the sixth day, God chooses to make man and woman in His own image. Genesis 2: 7 states: "From the clay of the ground, the Lord formed man, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and made man a living person." (Knox)

On the next day, God does not produce something higher: instead He rests. Our Jewish friends would then say, (as recorded in a midrash, story of explanation) that God thereby created Sabbath. Whether we call it the Seventh Day or the Sabbath, what is significant is that **God rested together with man and woman**. He thus established a setting to which it was therefore ordained they were to return on a weekly basis.

Writers often discuss the original words used to describe this seventh day rest, and talk of them conveying a sense of both **dwelling** with God, and catching one's **breath** in the presence of the Breath-Giver; being **rested** and this **restored**. And further, man is to **return** to this practice on a regular basis.

3.3 A Little About Sabbath and Sinai.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) recalls for us Exodus 20: 11 just as the Israelites were reminded of God's creation and rest on the Sabbath.

- "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord, blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." (2169)

The Catechism goes on to state:

- Scripture also reveals in the Lord's Day a memorial of Israel's liberation from bondage in Egypt. "You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out thence with mighty hand and outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." (2170)
- God entrusted the Sabbath to Israel to keep as a sign of the irrevocable covenant. The Sabbath is for the Lord, holy and set apart for the praise of God, His work of Creation and His saving actions on behalf of Israel. (2171)

In our Hebrew Catholic apostolate we use lots of written material which explains the importance of the Sabbath in Judaism. It was a beautiful gift to humanity at Creation, preceding Judaism, and raised to greater status in the sealing of the Covenant at Sinai. Everything that the Sabbath has always stood for remains God's beautiful gift to us — the more so, having been given even greater status and significance in its fulfillment in the Covenant sealed in the Blood of Yeshua MaMashiach — Jesus Messiah!

3.4 Something About Fulfillment

In Unit 2, "**Jesus Our Messiah Rescues the Sabbath**" we unpacked in some detail what was really going on in that scenario when Jesus proclaimed Himself, "**Lord of the Sabbath**". One could ask, why would our Lord bother about "**rescuing the Sabbath**" from religious hijackers when everything was about to change anyway? Jesus did **not** take on every battle that needed fighting. He was cautious and selective. But one aspect of Judaism He would not allow to go unpurged was the Sabbath. It had been pushed and pulled and punched into something almost unrecognisable from the original! It was a critical item on His agenda to receive all the attention it needed whilst His ministry was unfolding.

Our Lord could easily have avoided confrontations on the Sabbath. He could have healed on any other day of the week. He didn't have to bait the sharks who were always lingering in the shadows. But He chose to! But why?

One of the saddest aspects of contemporary Christianity is the popular belief that with the coming of Jesus: His life, death and resurrection — all of the old religious culture was to drain away to nothing leaving only a whole, brand new way of doing things. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus, at great personal cost, cleansed the Sabbath and, in His teaching, restored it to its original purpose, true status, and rightful place in the religion of Israel. This was essential since He was soon to fulfill all of the Old Testament prophecies and teaching which pointed towards His entire mission. This of course, included the place of the Sabbath in God's plan of creation and redemption. Jesus had come and found the Sabbath, among other elements of Judaism, essentially desecrated and destroyed. He restored it during His ministry and gave it total fulfillment in His sacrifice on the Cross.

This is stated for us in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

- Jesus rose from the dead "on the first day of the week". Because it is the "first day," the day of Christ's Resurrection recalls the first creation. Because it is the "eighth day" following the Sabbath, it symbolises the new creation ushered in by Christ's Resurrection. (2174)
- In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath and announces man's eternal rest in God. (2175)

Hebrew Catholics proclaim this beautiful truth "loud and clear" to all. Far from the great treasure of the Sabbath being abrogated or demeaned, our Lord assumed its whole meaning and purpose into Himself. There can be no doubt that in Him, all the blessings and spiritual gifts of the Sabbath reside. By Him, alone, are they dispensed to those whom it pleases Him to bless. And who is thus so blessed? Those who respond to His call:

- **"Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest.**
- **Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves.**
- **For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."**

(Matthew 11: 28 — 30)

This whole idea of "fulfilment" requires us to meditate on the teaching of the Church. In so doing, we will learn what it means to receive our Lord's rest, and to grow spiritually as a result. This will give us depth of perception and understanding of our Lord's Gospel teaching. It will also increase our confidence to share His teaching with others and give resilience and robustness to our faith while living in the contemporary world.

3.5 Contemplation and Evangelisation

Hebrew Catholics encourage fellow Christians to meditate on the fulfilment of the Sabbath in Christ Jesus and expressed in our devotion to the Lord's Day. Sunday is a day of contemplation in the Lord, and an ever-fresh source of joy, hope and love: all to be shared with others everywhere. Meditation on aspects of the Sabbath in this light will always bring us into spiritual communion with Christ — Word of God, Word made Flesh. It will also help us to hear the teaching Our Lord wishes to bring to our attention.

St. Benedict opened his great Rule with the emphatic command: "**Listen**"! In this way he echoes God's command given at the Transfiguration of Jesus (St. Luke 9: 35) "**Listen to Him**"! Always in the Sacred Scriptures the use of this word connects with its close companion meaning: to **obey**. This means "**to follow as faithfully as possible**". **That is the Biblical meaning of "obey"**. We certainly do not mean the modern concept of obedience as fulfilled by minimum compliance with any law. So, we are to listen in order to carry out. In our Sunday worship we are called to worship God and to go forth and put into practice what we have learnt. If we sincerely try to do this, the Holy Spirit will equip us with all the inner-seeing and inner-learning we need to understand and to be effective. The famous Trappist, Thomas Merton, said it so well in an old unpublished paper:

"This age (which by its very nature is a time of crisis, of revolution, and struggle) calls for a special searching and questioning which is the work of the Christian in silence, in meditation, and in prayer. Those who pray, search not only their own hearts, but plunge deep into the heart of the whole world in order to listen more intently to the deepest and most neglected voices that proceed from its inner depths."

Meditation and contemplation associated with what the Church presents to us each Lord's Day in the Scriptures and Eucharist will prepare us spiritually for effective evangelisation: the sharing of Christ's love with all humanity. For assistance in understanding the Gospels visit: [Scriptures For Reflection](#).

3.6 Sabbath and the Sacred Heart

Hebrew Catholics are often asked why they have such a marked devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Yes — we acknowledge that this devotion encapsulates so much of the sense of love and fulfilment Hebrew Catholics find in their new-found treasure: the Holy Catholic Faith.

Christians, generally, seldom think about what it means to have everything one has believed and stood for, incorporated into and fulfilled by a devoted Jewish Messiah, in His Life, Death and Resurrection and Reign in Heaven. The joy, love, peace and sense of personal fulfilment experienced in the Hebrew Catholic apostolate are features which simply cannot be hidden from view, no matter how discreet, moderate or prudent one wishes to be. Images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are just one such outward manifestation.

Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus encourages every human being to respond to His call:

There are other ways

"Come to Me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will give you rest."

(Matthew 11: 28)

In Yeshua HaMashiach — Jesus Messiah — alone, do we find our rest. Our Rabbi Yeshua is our Sabbath. All are welcome to find their true home in His Sacred Heart. There, all will find spiritual refreshment, understanding and personal affirmation. All who respond to His call, find rest for their souls.

No wonder His image features so prominently in our homes, oratories, places of worship and study. We commend this devotion to all who take Jesus at His word:

"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves."

(Matthew 11: 29)

"O Sacred Heart of Jesus:

May I dwell in the Most Holy Tabernacle of Your Loving Heart,
for love of You.

Amen.

3.7 Looking Back and Moving Forward

Some Christian writers have imperiously declared that the locus of all the spirituality and blessings associated with the ancient Sabbath is now to be found transferred from Saturday to Sunday. Such a simplistic proposition bypasses the **real change** which is the transformation of the whole institution of Shabbat **in Jesus Christ** and His Life, Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension to glory at the Father's right Hand. There lies the fulfilment Hebrew Catholics celebrate so vehemently each week in the Sacred Eucharist: **not just in a "day", but in the Person of Jesus Christ and His Sacrifice.**

Some Hebrew Catholics choose to mark this transformation in Yeshua by preceding the Lord's Day with a day of spiritual preparation. This, in Hebrew Biblical tradition, begins Friday evening and continues through to the beginning of the Lord's Day as evening descends on Saturday. Traditional Sabbath prayers can be recited as they have been for many centuries. When done so with the full knowledge of their fulfilment in our Blessed Messiah, they take on a new and beautiful lustre. They enhance dramatically, our understanding of the power of the Sunday Eucharistic gathering.

There are other ways of linking Hebrew and Christian culture with regards to the Sabbath and its role as preparation for the coming of the Divine Word in the person of Jesus Christ. The venerable tradition of the Church marking Saturday as Our Lady Miriam's Day, also provides a beautiful backdrop and context for a Hebrew Catholic entry into the sacred celebration of the Lord's Day, about which King David declared (using words from the priest, Ezra):

"This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it."

(Psalm 118: 24)

The question arises both for Jews who have been baptised into the Church, as well as for Catholics of Gentile origin who choose to be part of the Hebrew Catholic apostolate: to what extent it is appropriate to include traditional Jewish emblems, customs, music, dance and ceremonies in their Hebrew Catholic celebrations? Our Jewish and Gentile members are profoundly confident that when any of these are selected and presented in the Light of Yeshua MaHashiach, and employed to express the joy of our people (Jewish and Gentile members) and their love for our Blessed Saviour, then these traditional elements of Jewish culture do indeed honour Him. We believe He loves to receive our gifts which He in fact so nobly purified, restored, transformed and — in fulfilling them — took unto Himself.

We opened this booklet with a brief introduction of the relationship between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. Nothing in the Sacred Scriptures, nor in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) denies the value of Sabbath celebrations or prohibits them. The CCC articles are intended to state clearly that the life-giving power of all Christian religious celebrations is centred in Jesus Christ. Whilst Christians celebrate His Death and Resurrection every day of the week, Sunday is the central focus as the Day of Resurrection: the Lord's Day. Hebrew Catholics rejoice in this truth, and find in it the most powerful affirmation of everything traditional Hebrew culture embodies. Rather than a suppression of Hebrew culture, the declarations of the Church regarding Sabbath and Divine Worship recognise a nobility and wealth of spiritual blessings associated with it.

We therefore consider the whole of Jewish culture relevant and beneficial for Christians when viewed as fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and imbued with His Blessed Light.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

"Sunday worship fulfils the moral command of the Old Covenant, taking up its rhythm and spirit in the weekly celebration of the Creator and Redeemer of His people."
(CCC 2176)

If we wish to offer elements of Hebrew culture in worship performed on the Sabbath, with the full knowledge and recognition of fulfilment in Jesus Messiah, then they can form the most beautiful preparation for the Lord's Day. All who participate with this attitude, bless God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and enrich their own spiritual preparation for the greatest of all privileges: to offer the Most Holy Eucharist, in union with Jesus Messiah on the Lord's Day.

Far from conflicting with our Hebrew Catholic vocation, this approach to worship can draw us ever closer to Our Saviour, to His whole Body, the Church, and point us to His Glorious Return at the end of time for which we prepare daily. Thus we join our fellow members in praying:

Amen.

Maranatha.
Come Lord Jesus"
(Revelation 22: 20)

Shalom!