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# The Power of Christ Over the Sabbath

**The Sabbath** had become highly personified in pharisaic Judaism and it had become an extreme point of observance. They personified **the Sabbath** as the bride of Isra'el, and **ADONAI's** queen. At a certain point in the Friday night synagogue service, they would welcome in **the Sabbath** by singing a song called, "Welcome, my beloved, queen **Sabbath**." **To the commandment: Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy** (see my commentary on **Exodus. to see link click Dn – Remember the Sabbath by Keeping It Holy**)**, the Pharisees added about 1,500 additional Sabbath rules and regulations. Consequently, while Jesus and the Pharisees would debate the authority of the Oral Law in general** (see **Ei – The Oral Law**)**, one specific area of emphasis was the proper observance of the Sabbath.**



In the TaNaKh itself we are simply told that we must **remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy**, and on that day no work must be done, either by a man or his servants or his animals. Not content with that, the Jews spent hour after hour and generation after generation defining what work was and listing the things that could or could not be done on the Sabbath day. About AD 200 the Oral Law was written down and today it is called the Mishnah. The scribes worked out these regulations and the Pharisees dedicated their lives to keeping them. In *the Mishnah* the section on the Sabbath extends for no fewer than twenty-four chapters. *The Talmud* is the commentary on *the Mishnah*, and in the Jerusalem *Talmud* the section explaining the Sabbath law runs to sixty-four and a half columns; and in the Babylonian *Talmud* it runs to one hundred and fifty-six double folio pages. And we are told about a rabbi who spent two and a half years in studying one of the twenty-four

chapters in *the Mishnah*.

What kind of work did they do? To tie a knot on **the Sabbath** was considered work; but a knot had to be defined! “The following are the knots the making of which renders a man guilty of breaking **Shabbat** – the knot of camel drivers and that of sailors, and as one is guilty by reason of tying them, so also of untying them.” On the other hand knots that could be tied or untied with one hand were quite legal. Further, “a woman may tie up a slit in her shift and the strings of her cap and those of her girdle, the straps of shoes or sandals, of skins of wine and oil.” Now see what a tangled mess it caused. Suppose a man wished to let down a bucket into a well to draw water on **the Sabbath day**. He could not tie a rope to it, for a knot on a rope was illegal on **Shabbat**; but he could tie it to a woman’s girdle and let it down, for a knot in a girdle was quite legal. That kind of thing to the scribes and Pharisees was a matter of life and death – that was religion. And as far as they were concerned, they were pleasing **God** in doing so.

Take the case of taking a trip on **Shabbat**. **Exodus 16:29** says: **Everyone is to stay where they are on the seventh day; no one is to go out. So the people rested on the seventh day.** A **Sabbath** day’s journey was therefore limited to one thousand yards. But, if a rope was tied across the end of a street, the whole street became one house and a man could go a thousand yards beyond the end of the street. Or, if a man deposited enough food for one meal on Friday evening at any given place, that place technically became his house and he could go a thousand yards beyond it on the Sabbath day. The rules and regulations and the evasions piled up by the hundreds and thousands.

Take the case of carrying a burden on **the Sabbath**. **Jeremiah 17:21-24** says: Be **careful to obey Me, declares ADONAI, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath.** So, the **load** had to be defined. It was defined as “food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, oil enough to anoint a finger, water enough to moisten an eye-salve,” and on and on at *ad nauseam*. It had then to be settled whether or not on **the Sabbath** a woman could wear a brooch, a man could use a wooden leg or wear dentures; or would it be carrying a **load** to do so? Could a chair or even a child be lifted? And so on, and on the discussions and the regulations went.

**What was the essence of Sabbath worship? What did it mean to keep it holy? Jesus** clarifies the answer to these questions by using three examples: First,

the healing of a paralytic on **the Sabbath** (see **Cs – Jesus Heals a Man at the Poll of Bethesda**); second, eating from the grain fields on **the Sabbath** (see **Cv – The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**); and third, healing a man with a shriveled hand on **the Sabbath** (**Cw – Jesus Heals a Man With a Shriveled Hand**). The context of these confrontations between **Jesus**, the Pharisees and the Torah-teachers was the question of **Yeshua's** messiahship. Was **He**, or was **He** not **the Messiah**. The Sanhedrin was still in **the second stage of interrogation** and they were pressing for answers.