



# GATES OF EDEN

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## GALATIANS 4 AND THE SABBATH

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*"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid for you...." (Galatians 4:9-11)*

Shortly after I began keeping the seventh day Sabbath, a good Christian friend wrote to me and expressed his concern for me by quoting the above verses, and adding, "I am afraid for you, Dan!"

Do these verses teach that Christians should not keep the seventh day Sabbath? Did Paul regard the Sabbath as nothing more than one of the "weak and beggarly elements" that can ensnare and enslave God's people? To answer this question, we must not ignore these facts:

1. Paul said to the Jews of Jerusalem, "I have committed *no offense against the law of the Jews*" (Acts 25:8).
2. Paul said to the Jews of Rome, "I had done *nothing against the customs of the fathers*" (Acts 28:17).
3. The Sabbath was a very important part of "the law of the Jews" and one of "the customs of the fathers." Paul could not have made the above statements if he had not kept the Sabbath.

The above facts (and other verses that could be quoted) prove beyond any doubt that Paul was a Sabbath keeper. How, then, could Paul condemn Sabbath keeping? Obviously these verses in Galatians are referring to some kind of "observing of days and times" other than the Sabbath and the appointed times of YHWH.

In my study of the Scriptures, I have always tried to let the Bible interpret the Bible. In other words, let the Bible define its own terms so it does not contradict itself. When the exact meaning of a phrase or term is uncertain, see if the subject is mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. The simple use of a concordance will often clear things up.

Is there any place else in the Bible that speaks of "observing of times," and if so, does it give a clue to help us understand what Paul was talking about in Galatians? Two times the Torah mentions "observing of times," and in both cases it is in the context of occult activities and heathen superstition: "...neither shall ye use enchantment or observe times" (Lev.19:26); "There shall not be found among you anyone—that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a con-suiter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necroman-



cer" (Deut.18:10f).

Obviously, God is not talking about His appointed times in these passages, nor was Paul talking about God's appointed times in Galatians. The Bible condemns the observing of *pagan* times, not the observing of God's appointed times.

History tells us that the pagans had many superstitions about which days and times were lucky or unlucky for certain activities. Like many of today's modern pagans, they were in bondage to their horoscope. In ancient times this was known as being subject to "the elements of the cosmos (world)." Tertullian (2nd Century) described it as "the errors of physical, or natural, superstition which put the elements in the place of God" (*Against Marcion*, V.4).

When we look at the context of the verses in Galatians 4, we see that it was the superstitious observing of *pagan times* that Paul was condemning, and not the observing of God's appointed times, which Paul himself observed:

vs. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the *elements of the world*.

vs. 8-10, NIV Formerly, when you did not know God [when you were still a Gentile pagan], you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God - or rather are known of God - how is it that you are turning back to *those weak and miserable principles* [KJV, "elements," i.e., your former pagan superstitions]? Do you wish to be enslaved to them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!

It is clear that Galatians 4 cannot be used to condemn Sabbath keeping nor to justify Sabbath breaking. Next issue: Colossians 2:16