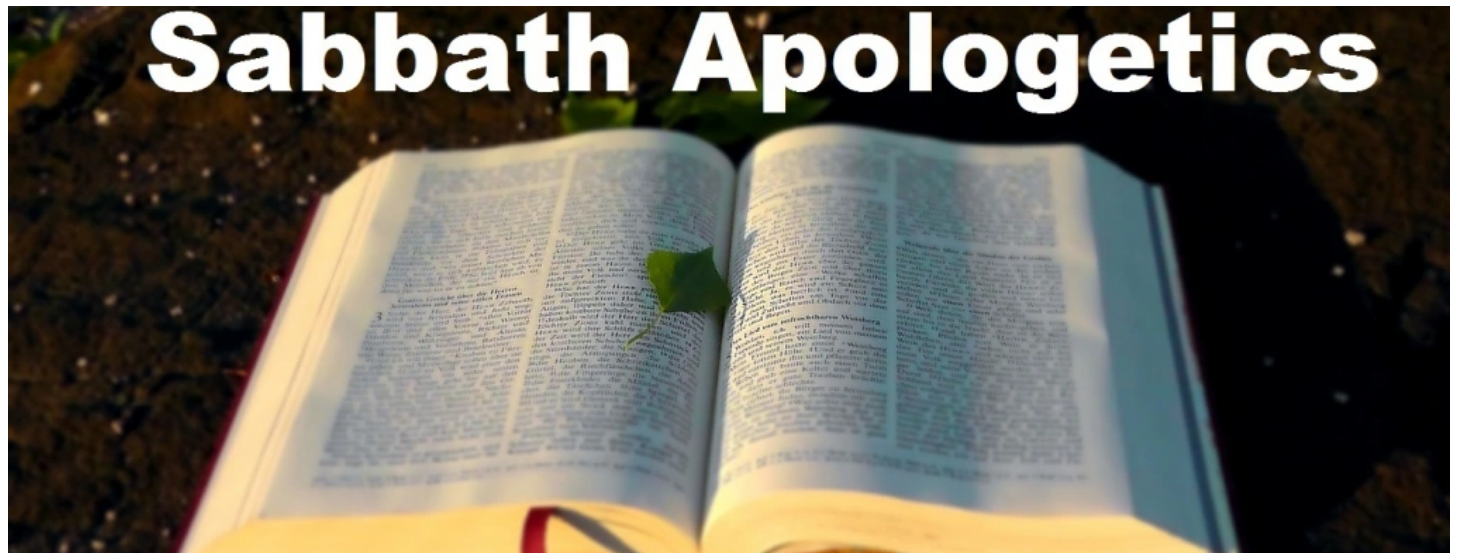


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What is the meaning of Galatians 4:8-11?

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What is the meaning of Galatians 4:8-11?

By Kelly McDonald, Jr.

In Galatians 4:8-11, Paul wrote: "8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature (by the order of things) are not gods. 9 But now that you know God – or rather are known by (under) God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable (lacking) principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you."

Some have used this passage to suggest that Paul is condemning the celebration of the Sabbaths. Many people assume that Paul's letter to the Galatians is written to a group of Jews who are 'going back' to law keeping. What is the truth?

First of all, Paul affirmed that he was the Apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-16). A second detail of importance is that one of the main issues in Galatia was adult circumcision. If he was speaking solely to a group of Jews 'going back' to law-keeping, then the issue of circumcision would not have arisen because they would have already been circumcised.

Third, Paul begins this passage in verse 8 by saying, "Formerly, when you did not know God, you served those **gods** (plural) who were by nature not gods." Paul is addressing a group of people who at one time worshiped other gods. The Sabbaths were given for us to worship the one and only True

God (not more than one). This fact alone disqualifies any application to any practice in the Torah – but there is even more evidence to affirm this fact.

Lastly, the language used in the passage does not support any claim that Paul is preaching against the Sabbath. The phrase Paul uses – “days and months and seasons and years” – **does not contain any** of the Greek words used in the New Testament for the Sabbath (*sabbaton*), New Moon celebrations (*neumene*), or Feast Days (*heorte*). The Galatian churches had a group of Gentiles going back to paganism and the worship of other gods.

What are the “days and months and seasons and years” to which Paul refers? To understand this phrase, one must understand some of the history of this region. Galatia was located in what is now called modern-day Turkey. Below, we have a map highlighting this area:



For hundreds of years, the peoples of Galatia were influenced by their own traditions of pagan worship as well as Greek mythology. The region was first subdued by the Romans around 189 B.C. By the time Paul wrote to these churches in approximately 53 A.D., this region was dominated culturally and politically by the Roman Empire. The days, months, seasons, and years to which Paul refers are the Greek and Roman worship practices that permeated Galatian culture hundreds of years before Paul’s visit to Galatia (see Acts 14:8-20).

For an illustration of this, take into consideration the “days” that Paul mentions. In the first century AD, every day was dedicated to a specific god or goddess in Roman culture. The practice of naming every day of the week comes from this custom. The day we call the first day of the week (Sunday) was dedicated to the sun god (Solis or Apollo); the second day of the week (Monday) was dedicated to the moon god (Selenas or Lunas) (**days**).

In addition to these days, the Romans also dedicated each month to a specific god or goddess. They held ceremonies during the month to commemorate that particular deity. Here are two examples. The month we call January was dedicated to the god Janus, who was said to have two faces. The month of March derives its name from the Roman god Mars (**months**).

The Romans also kept certain seasons or times of celebrations to their gods that coincided with events in nature. The Saturnalia was a seasonal festival held in December to commemorate the god Saturn just before the Winter Solstice (**seasons**). The combination of observing all these events makes up years; sometimes years were dedicated to certain deities (**years** – Colson, pp 47-49). These ancient celebrations involved worship practices such as making sacrifices, prayers, vows, and/or superstitions to these gods, which are the “weak and miserable principles” Paul mentions in Galatians 4:9.

Paul links these days, months, seasons, and years to a time when the Galatians served or worshiped **other gods**. The Sabbaths were set apart and ordained by the one True God, which is why it is called holy. God gave everything to show mankind how to serve and worship Him. Paul kept the Sabbath with Galatian churches in Acts chapter 13:13-48 (**[CLICK HERE to read about his Sabbath keeping in this region \(https://sabbathsentinel.org/2017/08/08/paul-keeps-the-sabbath-with-the-galatians/\)](https://sabbathsentinel.org/2017/08/08/paul-keeps-the-sabbath-with-the-galatians/)**). Therefore, he would never condemn observances of them.

In these verses, Paul is clearly warning Gentiles in the region of Galatia not to return to pagan practices they engaged in prior to conversion.

Kelly McDonald, Jr.

BSA President www.biblesabbath.org (<http://www.biblesabbath.org>)

Works Cited:

Colson, F. H. The Week. Cambridge, 1926. pp 47-49.

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