

The Sabbath: An Inquiry

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Questions about the seventh day...

Introduction.

It is good to be free. I highly recommend it for all God's people. Free from sin. Free in conscience. Free from a denominational stance that demands a "proper" explanation of all things Scriptural. Though I serve one local church and attend another, I am not bound by either of those groups to pursue any man's agenda. I am free.

It is especially helpful to be un-attached in regards to the subject at hand. When one begins speaking of the "Sabbath" it is assumed that the speaker is headed to the Seventh-Day Adventists, or some cult. In less generous days, Mother Church would have sniffed out this heretic as a "Judaizer", that is, one bowing to the ways of Judaism and thus fit for severest of persecution. At the very least, a sincere seeker along this trail will be branded as a legalist for whom Christ's death is meaningless, since he is now seeking to place himself squarely under the law that cursed him.

May I quickly rid myself of these accusations and fears that may be in the minds of my readers. Those who know of my aversion to female leadership, something I picked up from a fellow from Tarsus, will be assured that I am not about to join a group which is in slavish servitude to the teachings of a self-styled prophetess. As to other groups, they may exist in Chicagoland, but I have never contacted them or been contacted by them. The Jews do enter favorably into this discussion, because Messianic, that is, Jesus-believing, Jews, do tend to stay with their own and keep the Sabbath as revealed in Scripture. But never have any of them suggested to me that Gentiles must join them in this practice. As to questions of the law, it will be my purpose in this study to deal carefully with that very matter.

No, this is a sincere desire of a still-growing believer to be and have all God is and has for His own. I have noted some inconsistencies in Christian teaching and practice when it comes to things we have considered "Jewish", and I have been forced to grapple with these issues, as one who feels called to teach the people of God the whole counsel of God. It seems to me that what the Hebrew calls a "repose" a "desisting from exertion", an "intermission" weekly for God's people must be a valuable gift, if indeed it still exists for us. If it is for me, I want it!

My examination falls broadly into three categories, three basic *questions* actually. I trust that I will be able to keep the attitude of a *questioner* throughout, yet at the same time affirming *without question* that which God has specifically stated through an apostle or prophet, that is, in His Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Covenant.

First I will search those Scriptures from beginning to end looking for clues as to God's meaning in giving a Sabbath. I will make comments along the way, but will also quote entire passages of the Word, for the convenience and edification of the reader. Next I will examine the testimony of Church History for the first three centuries. After that, Sunday observance was codified into Church Law, so I will quote those laws from Roman Catholic

sources. But finally, and I believe most importantly, I will lead my readers into a discussion of the status of the law of God.

For, as I did research on this matter, it became clear early on that Sabbath vs. Sunday was not the issue. In the minds of many godly believers the issue is rather law vs. grace. The observance of a Sabbath, “Jewish” as it is, seems to fly in the face of an unmerited salvation. After all, was not the law of God “nailed to His cross”? This is the thorniest issue of all, and will demand a close look at yet other Scriptural principles.

May God answer these questions and give us grace to abide by His answers.

PART ONE: What says the Scripture?

One can read the Bible as history or as a living Word with ramifications for his own life, here and now. While not ignoring valid historical methods of communication, I prefer to see this history as ongoing. I want to know, God, does this have anything to do with me, today? Let’s walk through the Sabbath Scriptures with that mentality.

1. Following the account of creation are these words in **Genesis 2:2-3**.

“On the seventh day, God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

a. Who wrote this? Our longest tradition is that it came from the pen of Moses. Since Moses wrote it, some say that perhaps he had in mind the people of Israel before him in the wilderness. Perhaps, they speculate, adding the command just here was a motivation for them to keep this new invention called “Sabbath”, a gift to the *Jewish* people. When we take the maybes out, we’re left with a statement spoken by God 2500 years before the man Moses lived! I do not doubt his authorship, but I do doubt modern scholarship that speculates about human motivations, and questions authentic words from the Lord, trying desperately to confirm their own theological notions.

b. God had just finished his beautiful work of creation, which included one man and one woman. These humans were neither Jew nor Gentile. The need for calling out a special people to bring in a Messiah for sin did not exist, for at this moment, sin was nowhere to be found. There was only one class of humans, and during their existence He spoke these words.

God made holy this day for His own purposes, to declare to all ages that His work is completed and worthy of praise. This seventh day was to be a time of rest and rejoicing in the work of God. This is not speculation. God said it. Did He say it in the hearing of Adam? I would think it strange that humans never heard such a thing until Moses, but here the text is silent. We speculate that what would later be a “10-commandment” practice, along with practices regarding respect for elders (later the 3rd commandment), keeping from adultery (7th) and murder (6th), and stealing (8th), were somehow written in to the minds of men before being written down at Sinai. How it was written we shall not know for awhile. But that some communication was out there becomes obvious when the notion of the *tithe* suddenly “appears” in Genesis, and later this same tithe is incorporated into the legal system of Israel. Something is being said somehow. The point that is important to make here is that the day was set aside, that it was sanctified, long before the law that made it “official.”

The question that must follow then is, if God blesses a day and sets it apart from the other days, can any man say that this blessing and sanctification is null and void? Can man either say, there is *no day* to be so revered, or, there *is* such a day, but it is not the seventh day? I do not answer this question, at least now, but it seems important that we take the time to try.

2. We must now skip those 2,500 years of history and come to the second book of the Bible, in the days of Moses. For this is the next mention of a special seventh day. Allow me to quote portions of **Exodus 16:5**, and **22-30**.

“And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily... And it was so, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread... Then [Moses] said to them, This is what the Lord has said: Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord... [the next day] Moses said, Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field... The Lord said...See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath... Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day [to gather manna]. So the people rested on the seventh day [from gathering manna].”

a. Here is the historic moment when the Sabbath, for 2,500 years special to God, if not to his created beings, is handed over to the Jewish people. For some, the case is closed here. The Sabbath is Jewish. Next question, please. But first, is this the only spiritual benefit given the Jews? Are we willing to say that everything given the Jews is, therefore, Jewish, and not to be tasted by other people groups? The Jewish Apostle to the Gentiles is not so willing:

Romans 3:2, **“Unto them [the Jews] were committed the oracles of God.”** *Oracles* are sayings. We’re talking about *the Scriptures*. Not only the works of Moses, but also the histories, the Psalms, the prophets. All of these were first given to Israel. Later in Romans, Paul adds a few more items:

Romans 9:4-5, **“...Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom according to the flesh, Christ came...”**

We need to re-open the case. It is clear that things given to Israel are not only Israel’s. Why, the very idea of *one God* vs. the multitude of gods in Moses’ day and in Abraham’s day, was a truth entrusted to Israel, but meant for any who will receive it. Preserved *by* Jews, but not *for* Jews alone.

b. Another point to be suggested here is that even at this point in the wilderness, the “law” had not been officially pronounced from the mountain-top. Here are simply the people of God being told of the ways of God, one of which ways included a seventh day rest. This was a teaching that had fallen into oblivion, for sure, but so also was the very idea of one God and only one. The world had gone into madness in its definition and worship of deities. Israel is now raised up to be the guardian of truth.

3. The Sabbath, already in the world, already introduced to the people of God, now becomes a part of the revealed will of God, the Law.

Exodus 20:8-11. **“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it**

you shall do no work: you , nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”

a. Note how the Lord connects this command to His original introduction of the Sabbath in Genesis. The motivation for keeping the Sabbath in any generation is simply the fact that God rested from His creative works. He establishes this practice then, not as a local custom, but as a universal way to relate to God as Creator and finisher of works. He who is saved from the dead works of sin which only cursed him understands that his works are finished in Christ’s great work, thus giving the Sabbath even more meaning :

Hebrews 4:10. “For he who has entered His rest [in the Spirit] has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.”

b. From the Exodus 20 accounting we glean that God expected “strangers” to keep this day holy also. Foreigners. Non-Jews traveling with Israel. Gentiles. No word is given to the Gentile after he leaves the “gates” of the Jew, but while he is with them, he is not exempt from so special a time.

c. Note that this commandment is the longest of the ten, yet it would seem, the most mis-understood of all.

d. Especially of importance to those who sincerely wish to know God’s will in this matter is the placement of Sabbath-breaking alongside murder, adultery, theft, lying, covetousness, idol worship, pantheism, disrespect to parents, and blasphemy . Whatever we are led to think about Sabbath observance for our day, there is no question about the seriousness of this practice for the people of God in the wilderness.

e. In keeping with the last point, does it not seem strange that even men of the world and especially great majorities of the Church honor nine of the ten commandments, but this “seventh day” thing is set aside in most minds?

f. By stating in clear words “...the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God” there is forever laid to rest the idea of a “first-day” Sabbath. If the day is to be changed for some given reason down the road, let it not wear the name of God’s original day. To speak of “the Sabbath” is to speak of the seventh day, by God’s definition.

Many have therefore resorted to a New Testament phrase to differentiate between Saturday and Sunday: “The Lord’s Day.” It may not be totally clear what is meant by this title, but the first clue is in the passage we now study, where the Sabbath is referred to as “the Sabbath [day] of the Lord ...” That is, the Lord’s Day. Surely every Jew through the apostles at least would have understood it that way, does it not seem probable? So when John, a Jew, says in Revelation, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” is it likely that he spoke of Sunday? (See page 20-21 for more on this point.)

h. No mention is made in this text regarding exactly how to keep the Sabbath holy. Later we will develop the point that it is not the seventh day as a *meeting* day, but the seventh day as a day of *rest* that is being advanced here.

4. Later in the book of Exodus we meet this re-enforcement of the command:

Exodus 31:12-17. “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak also to the children of Israel, saying, Surely my sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you

throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord Who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death. For whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done in six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.”

It doesn't get a lot clearer than that. This Sabbath is forever. But some new elements are added that we should look at:

a. First there is the element of time. Not only is the Sabbath from the beginning of creation, but now it is to stretch *forever*. God sees no time here when Sabbath-keeping is not to be in vogue.

b. Nevertheless, some will say, and this is another point that seems new to this passage, there must be a people called Israel “forever” in order for there to be an eternal Sabbath, for this practice is to be *a sign* between God and this special people. Correct indeed. Let us hear once more from the apostle to the Gentiles talking about something oh so Jewish:

Romans 11:12-26 [portions]. **“If their [Israel’s] fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness... if the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches... hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in... and so all Israel will be saved.”**

What are you saying, Paul? He's saying Israel is forever. He's saying God bypassed the Jewish nation temporarily to open the door to other nations, but when all is said and done there is only one tree, one nation, and it is called Israel! The program of God is for Israel His chosen, but I am a part of Israel if I continue on in faith. Israel is forever. Not Israel according to the flesh, that is, all those born as Jews, but the Israel of God, His blood-covenant people, people of the New and Better Covenant established by and in Messiah. We will speak more of this later, but for now we understand, that if Israel can be forever, so can her Sabbaths.

c. There is also added in our text the notion of *refreshment*. The spirit is revived and made to prosper again on that seventh day. Fleshly entertainment cannot bring this about, but rather the coming together of God's people for prayer, worship, and Word. Thus is suggested the means by which the Commandment is to be kept.

d. Once more note the death penalty for Sabbath-breakers. God wants His people blessed. He will be severe in His enforcement.

5. One final mention in the book of Exodus:

Exodus 35:2-3. **“Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day.”**

a. Is this latter regulation because of the work involved in creating a fire? Or is cooking of all sorts here forbidden?

b. Notice in all of the passages that this is more than just “a day off.” It is a holy time, an opportunity to draw near to God on a weekly basis, with no hindrances. The rich and the poor and all other class divisions are here given an equal fifty-two days a year to draw near to God and refresh their spirits.

6. The third book of the Bible adds yet another aspect or two to our subject.

Leviticus 23:3. “Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it. It is the Sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings.”

a. Here is the connection between rest, holiness, and meeting together stated plainly. Trying to “keep a holy day” by one’s self is not envisioned here, but a communal effort.

b. However, the Sabbath is not just to be observed “at Church,” but in all the homes.

c. The context of Leviticus 23 is likewise significant. Sabbath is listed here as one of the feasts of the Lord, alongside Passover, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. All of these feasts, and Sabbath itself have a fulfillment in Christ and the life of His people, it is true. They are pictures of the true as were the furnishings of the Temple. But we are left with the question: Are all pictures to be abolished because they are pictures?

- Certainly the Lord’s Supper is a *picture* of a greater reality, a mere reminder, yet enjoined upon us by no less than Jesus Himself.
- Marriage of two humans is a *picture* of our marriage to Christ. Should we abandon our mates because marriage is a picture?
- Water Baptism is a *picture*, but a commanded one. Who will tell Jesus it is not important?

But some will say, there are certainly “pictures” which are no more. Yes, the animal sacrifices are gone for believers in Messiah. The Temple seems to be history. Yet before one says a final good-bye to all these Jewish “pictures” it is well to visit Brother Zechariah and his future vision of our world:

Zechariah 14:16. “And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.”

The prophet here sees a worldwide opposition to Israel, followed by a Messianic victory over that world, and then the instituting of Jewish feasts *for the Gentiles*. Could it be that the Lord would have been pleased had we never stopped celebrating these things, just as he desired for those first 2,500 years to be filled with more obedient servants? He is longsuffering, and eventually He will have His way.

With “Jewishness” in our past and future, why not more of it in our present?

7. Would God truly enforce this Sabbath rule on His people? He *threatens* with death. But will a merciful God ever allow this to happen? Move to the next Bible Book.

Numbers 15:32-36. “Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. Then the Lord said to Moses, The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with

stones outside the camp. So, as the Lord commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.”

There is no comment on this story, no attempt at justification. God is not to be toyed with. The soul that sins shall die. Let no one talk of “little sins” but rather of rebellious hearts daring to lift themselves above the law of God.

Not every Sabbath breaker was executed. As in our day not every church gossip, not every angry man, not every lustful heart is brought before the congregation. But Christ died for all these sins, and it is just as essential that they be dealt with in our day as in the days of the wilderness. Forgiveness is full and free, but the holiness of God has never changed.

Still, we have yet to establish that Sabbath-keeping in our day is part of the plan of God *for us*. We have only heard from the Lord through Moses thus far. There is much more.

8. But one last Mosaic statement, the “second giving” of the law in Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15. “Observe the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm: Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

a. Note again that this commandment is the longest of the ten.

b. Here is added the reasoning behind allowing servants to rest. In this passage is anticipated what Jesus would say 1,400 years later, that “the Sabbath was made for man,” and not the other way around. It is humane and loving of God to demand from us a cessation of labor. Here we meet the One Who told us He would give *our very souls* rest. This literal Sabbath truly prefigures the ultimate rest in Him.

More specifically, God reminds His people of the fact that they too were slaves. They should therefore be merciful to the slaves that will continue among them. This is a much fuller description of the seventh day than in Exodus. Even richer ones will follow. So far Israel has two strong reasons to keep the Sabbath, aside from the death penalty: 1. God rested on that day. 2. God delivered Israel from bondage, and Israel needs to rest to remember that horrible time.

The ongoing question is still, “Does this all apply to me today?” Since I have entered into His rest, and was myself delivered from bondage, should I not also desire earnestly that weekly reminder?

9. Let us leave our friend Moses behind, and journey ahead some 1,000 years to Brother Nehemiah. During this time the kingdoms of Israel and Judah rise and fall. The Babylonian captors give place to the Persians, who send Jews back to their land. Nehemiah is one of these returnees, and in the land again, he renews the covenant with God’s people. By the time of his arrival however, many Jews are already falling away. A remnant separate themselves (9:2), read the Book (9:3), and confess their sins. In the next chapter is recorded their new commitment.

Nehemiah 10:29-31 [portions]. “[the people] entered into a curse and an oath to

walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our God... that if the peoples of the land bring wares or any grain to sell on the Sabbath day we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath."

Many of Israel thus attempted to restore God's will to the land. However there were others...

Nehemiah 13:15-22 [portions]. "In those days I saw in Judah some people treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions... Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. So...I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath... And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day."

We have now come about 3,500 years into the Bible story, and the Sabbath strain is intact. Nehemiah goes so far as to blame Sabbath-breakers for the downfall of their nation. I say again, how serious this matter must be. Notice that no anger is given to the ignorant Gentiles who are simply doing what they know to do, make money. But the people of God are here chastised, for the oracles of God are clear about this holy day.

10. According to the uninspired but probably trustworthy inscription above Psalm 92, we have a song written especially for the Sabbath. Here are significant portions:

Psalm 92. (1) It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to your name, O Most High. By this section we understand that Sabbath is to be a day of praise. **(4-5) For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands. O Lord, how great are your works!** Here is the heart of Sabbath: rejoicing in the creation, recognizing the Creator, resting in *His* work, the only work that matters.

11. Rounding out the "Old Testament" books are three major prophets who have insights about Sabbath. First, Isaiah. This prophet lived before Nehemiah, whom we last quoted, prophesying during the times when Israel was undergoing her judgment for idolatry (before and after 721 B.C.). Notice how little the externals matter when the heart is corrupt, and that the Sabbath can be cut out of *Jewish* tradition, too. Anyone keeping a holy day as a religious exercise as opposed to an expression of a holy commitment to God is not part of the covenant:

Isaiah 1:13-18 [portions]. "Bring no more futile sacrifices. Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies. I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feast days my soul hates... your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good. Seek justice, reprove the oppressor; defend the fatherless. Plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

First the heart, says Isaiah, then the outward signs. Later Nehemiah will turn the people of God *to* these observances, after their hearts are proper. Even Isaiah, looking into Israel's future, sees a restored Sabbath...

Isaiah 56:1-2. "Keep justice and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this and the son of man who lays hold on it; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil..."

...and, dare I share it? This promise too from the prophet, shattering any notion that somehow "Gentile" ways are going to dominate the Kingdom of God. No, even though Gentiles will be present, it is the ways of the God of *Israel* that will be our daily fare in that glorious day:

Isaiah 56:6-8 . "Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord, to serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant, even them I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar. For My House shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. The Lord God who gathers the outcasts of Israel says, Yet I will gather to him besides those who are gathered to him."

The Gentiles are coming. They will be added to the Jews. And together these people will experience burnt offerings, a "House" of God, and a Sabbath. Isaiah previews nothing less here than the Millennial Kingdom, a favorite theme of apostles, prophets, and Jesus Himself. More of that in other studies. For now it is important to see that Sabbath is in the past *and* the future of the people of God. We are still to determine whether it is in our present.

In Isaiah 58 is a description of a fast that truly pleases God. Here is how it ends:

Isaiah 58:13-14. "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then shall you delight yourself in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father- The mouth of the Lord has spoken!"

a. Note here the Sabbath is called the holy "day of the Lord". This is the only Biblical time period called the "Lord's Day." Every apostle knew these passages. When they spoke of the Lord's Day, they spoke of the Sabbath. This is how they thought. (Again, see page 20-21.)

b. Here are yet more insights that Israel is given to help her understand just how profitable this weekly time can be. The idea is that the people of God are to give that Day to recreation of the Spirit of God, not *RE*Creation in the form of food and play. They are to cease from taking care of earthly business, their own concerns, altogether, and seek the business of Heaven.

Isaiah's final Sabbath word is in his final chapter, once more envisioning what the Millennial Day will look like:

Isaiah 66:23. "And it shall come to pass that from one...Sabbath to another all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord."

In my mind there is no question that Sabbath worship was enjoined on the people of God from creation to Christ, and will be the fare of both Jew and Gentile for the duration of the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth. That's *5,000 years* of Biblical Sabbath-keeping! What about

these last 2,000?

Let's see what insights the other prophets have.

12. There is one lengthy but revealing passage from Jeremiah, the prophet who did for Judah what Isaiah was doing in Israel, during the days when that tiny Kingdom likewise was about to fall (586 B.C.) The words remind us of Nehemiah (above) who would come in the next century and deal with this very issue again.

Jeremiah 17:19-27. "This the Lord said to me: Go and stand in the gate of the children of the people, by which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem, and say to them: Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who enter by these gates, thus says the Lord: Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem, nor carry a burden out of your house on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they did not obey nor incline their ear, but made their neck stiff that they might not hear nor receive instruction. And it shall be if you diligently heed Me, says the Lord, to bring no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it, then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the Throne of David... and this city shall remain forever... But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, such as not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."

Now we understand what Governor Nehemiah was talking about in his 13th chapter (quoted above). An improper attitude concerning the Sabbath was God's signal that Israel was beyond repair and needed to be shocked out of her slumber.

13. Ezekiel, a captive prophet in Babylonia looks back on the sins of Israel and explains to them thoughts similar to Jeremiah and Nehemiah:

Ezekiel 20:12-24 [portions]. "I also gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. Yet the House of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments which if a man does he shall live by them; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths... I am the Lord your God... hallow My Sabbaths and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God... I lifted My hand in an oath to those in the wilderness, that I would scatter them among the Gentiles and disperse them throughout the countries, because they had not executed My judgments, but had... profaned My Sabbaths..."

Whether in the wilderness or in the Kingdom, Sabbath breaking was fatal to the people of God. It was a sure sign that the heart was not right, and that the nation needed to be judged. And judged they were. It is easy to see why, now, orthodox Jews and many others take this seventh day so seriously. It seems to them that they are now restoring Kingdom principles. But for the Jew without a Messiah, Sabbath is like fine decorations on a tomb. Sabbath was meant to bring honor to the Creator for His creation, both old and new. But if the Creator Himself is rejected as a fraud, what good will it do to honor Him in this way?

Nevertheless, "All Israel shall one day be saved." The natural and grafted branches

forming the True Tree will wave together in praise to the One Who planted them and grew them and caused them to flourish. Ezekiel sees the city of that final reign:

Ezekiel 46:1-4 [portions]. “Thus says the Lord God, The gateway of the inner court that faces toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath it shall be opened... Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the entrance to this gateway before the Lord on the Sabbaths...”

No mercenary Gentiles bringing their wares into the city on the seventh day! Now they bring praise and glory to the One Who saved them and made them a people.

From the prophets we move several hundred years to King Jesus. How does the teaching about Sabbath fare at the hands of Him Who established it? Does He once and for all do away with Sabbath-keeping, letting His “new” people know that such external baggage need not come into the Kingdom of God? Well, not exactly...

14. In the first three Gospels is told the story of how the disciples of Jesus satisfied their hunger one Sabbath:

Matthew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, Luke 6:1-5 [using the Matthew account]. “At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. Then He said to them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? But I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

a. Here Jesus does not abolish the Sabbath, but attempts to abolish wrong thinking about it. He lets His people know that there are good reasons for not keeping the “letter” of the law, and that God is interested in the heart of man, and his motivations for doing things. He does much the same thing in the sermon on the mount for other of God’s commands. It is not only murder, but the hatred that brings the murder, that is “against the law”. It is not only the adultery, but the lust that leads to the adultery that is expressly forbidden of God. Here, it is not the slavish obedience to a Day, but a desire to honor the Lord, that is most concerning Jesus.

But having said all that, the “law” still stands. Murder, adultery, Sabbath-breaking are three ways to be outside the will of God.

b. Instead of hinting that the Sabbath is about to fade away, He declares that He is Lord over it!

c. In the Mark account of the same story, Jesus makes another startling statement:

Mark 2:27. “And He said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

a. That throws an entirely different light on things. So far we have seen a holy God demanding a holy day. Now we understand that all of that demanding is because He wants to give us a gift. A day lived in holiness before God with the saints of God can only bring a man greater

appreciation of God and love for life. It is not meant to be a chore, this Sabbath-keeping, but a piece of Heaven on earth!

b. Jesus suggests here that common sense and mercy combined are more important than ritual observances. The Pharisees would deny the disciples a meal in the name of keeping the Sabbath! They would deny David a piece of bread because it was holy! They would accuse priests, whose very job is to be *active* on the Sabbath, of Sabbath-breaking! Jesus says that He makes rules *for* people, not *against* them.

c. Man came before the Sabbath came. Jesus came before both. All three are important to be in the perfect will of God, but in their proper order.

15. The next encounter Jesus has on a Sabbath is likewise recorded in the “Synoptic” Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is the story of the man whose withered hand was healed on that day.

Matthew 12:9-12, Mark 3:2-6, Luke 6:6-11 [using the Matthew account]. **“Now when He...went into their synagogues... there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? that they might accuse Him. Then he said to them, What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”**

Mark adds the counter-question of Jesus: **“... Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”** and that Jesus was **“grieved by the hardness of their hearts.”** He also notes how Jesus’ life was suddenly at risk because of His Sabbath interpretation.

Slowly, slowly, the full picture of Sabbath emerges. Once more the heart is unveiled, and the Spirit of Christ is set up before the evil hearts of men. But far from abolishing the Sabbath command, Jesus shares with His people the *heart* of the command. Their violent reaction to His teaching shows us that these men had caught the “letter” of the law which kills; Jesus was showing them what the law was for.

It is fair to add here as we trek with Jesus through the many Sabbath upheavals of His ministry, that Jesus *lived and died a Jew*. The followers surrounding Him are Jewish. The “Old” Covenant will not officially die until Jesus is nailed to His cross. Let no one feel at this stage of the report that my readers, especially Gentiles, are being led to an unavoidable conclusion. Nevertheless, the facts of the case so far do point to a very holy day having been in existence for over 4,000 years, being observed by God’s special people every week, and that that day is not the first day of the week, but the seventh.

Let us keep examining Jesus’ life and work, and see if there is even a clue that something ought to be changing in this custom.

16. As to *Jesus’* custom, it is clear from this Luke passage:

Luke 4:16. **“So He came to Nazareth where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.**

17. Later in his book, Brother Luke reports this telling tale:

Luke 13:10-17. **“Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.**

And behold there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity 18 years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity! And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and He said to the crowd, There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath Day! The Lord answered him and said, Hypocrites! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his donkey from the stall and lead it away to water? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound— think of it - for 18 years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?”

a. Talk of oxen and donkeys and such brings us back to Deuteronomy, where the original call to rest is extended even to the beasts of the field! But even these dumb animals trip up on the Sabbath and need some attention, and most sane people give it to them. And when they are so extricated from their difficulty, they can truly enjoy a needed rest! So it is with the hurting people of earth who come across our pathway on the seventh day. Surely they are of more value and in need of greater rest than any animal. We are to be instant to give it to them, that they might enjoy not only the day, but eternal rest with Christ. What could be plainer, except to a hardened heart?

b. This hardness of heart did not take place overnight. The Pharisees were originally a people who wanted merely to be separated unto God from the unholy culture which developed in Israel during the years between the Testaments. Greek ways were becoming more and more appealing to Jews who wanted to go with the flow of history. The Gymnasium, for example, was thrust upon them, and the required nakedness that accompanied the exercising within. Some devout believers said of this and other innovations, Enough! We are God's people, we are holy unto Him alone! They separated. The word *Pharisee* comes from a word that means just that: separation. It was not a bad start. A return to holier days and righteous ways was pleasing to the heart of God. But soon pride crept in to the holiness movement, as it does in every generation when people move too far in this direction. Pride, and forms, and certain ways of doing everything, and rules upon rules, and the very presence of a holy God is forgotten, along with the mercy of that God on those who have yet to experience these realities.

Jesus' response? "Think not that I am come to destroy the law... I came not to destroy, but to fulfill." He comes to light a torch within the man that shows him his evil and God's grace. He comes to fulfill within us all that God requires of us. He comes to write the very law of God on our hearts since we are unable to keep the law written on stones and parchment. He is not a law-breaker, as the lawless antichrist will show us about *Satan's* character. No, he is the one who *establishes* the law, within us. More of this later.

18. Here is yet another Sabbath healing in Luke:

Luke 14:1-6. "Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold there was a certain man before him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? But they kept silent. And He took him and healed him and let him go. Then he answered them, saying, Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him

out on the Sabbath day? And they could not answer Him...”

Here was a great answer to a hard question. “Is this legal?” they want to know. “Let’s see,” says Jesus, and then... *healed!* There’s your answer! Next question? I am still struck in all these accounts at what an incredible thing has happened from the time of the prophets until now. In those days the sin was *profaning* the Sabbath, the utter disregard for God’s Word in the Commandments, doing my own thing on God’s Holy Day. Then come the “separated ones” and the pendulum swings the other way. Not only is secular pleasure forbidden by them. Not only do they forbid worrying over income and the cares of life. No, for them, *everything is forbidden!* A tangle of laws and rules confuses the command and blurs the image of a God who cares about earthlings who really *do need* to stop once a week, or burn out. In the Pharisaical view, God is willing to allow the sick to die and the possessed to be tormented, if deliverance on the seventh day is the only option.

Let’s say it again. There is nothing wrong with the Sabbath! Never does Jesus lose sight of Genesis and Exodus when he is wringing out the Pharisees and hanging them up to dry! The day is still holy, whether man hallows it or not.

19. Now let the apostle John tell us a few things. First, the healing at the pool of Bethesda:

John 5:8-18 [portions]. “Jesus said to [the man], Rise, take up your bed and walk. And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed... the man [departed and] told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, My Father has been working until now, and I have been working. Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.”

Here is added yet another reason for “exceptions” to the Sabbath rule: The eternal work of God never stops. The creation was an isolated six-day event after which came the lasting Sabbath picture. His work of creation is over, the material world was completed in a mere six days. The worlds are held together by the word He spoke. But His work of sustaining and caring for what He made never stops. So it is always proper to do on the Sabbath those things that are reflections of the eternal mercy of God.

20. In John 7 is another Sabbath principle espoused.

John 7:22-23. “...you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to the appearance but judge with righteous judgment.”

So here is Moses vs. Moses. This is an actual deed to be performed, a work. Yet in the hypocritical eyes of the Pharisees, its performance was Sabbath-friendly . There is no way to get around the fact that some children’s births are exactly eight days before the Sabbath. And eight days was the required time to wait to circumcise a new-born. They do not want to break one of Moses’ laws, so in their thinking, *Moses* must have approved the bending of one of

Moses' laws. To yield to *Moses* was an okay thing, but to yield to the pain and suffering of a fellow human could wait until the next day. This was garbage thinking to Jesus and He told them so without doing damage to the law which He came *not* to destroy.

21. John's final Sabbath entry concerns the healing of the man born blind.

John 9:14-16. "Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see. Therefore some of the Pharisees said, This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath. Others said, How can a man who is a sinner do such signs? And there was a division among them."

You say, For a man who believed in Sabbath, Jesus certainly was active on that day! Oh, He believed in it, all right. He is the Creator Who spent the very first Sabbath rejoicing over the work he had made, and in the plan for the man who would rule that creation. But His plan from the beginning was simply that there be a weekly remembrance of Who God is, and what God did. The entrance of sin clouded that purpose. Busy men forgot the Day altogether. Religious men later remembered the day but still obscured the meaning. Jesus brought by example the teaching of the Sabbath back to where it began, just as He did with marriage, adultery, murder. He cut the tree of false teaching to its roots. He weeded the garden. It is for us to keep the garden clean of these wicked plants, the thorns that choke the life from God's People.

22. Now, what do you think Jesus believed about any *future* use of the Sabbath. Surely, if the Sabbath was to pass into history and be forgotten, He would not mention it as a future possibility. Here again we must look at the facts before we speak too loudly:

Matthew 24:20-21. "And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath, for then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."

The conjunction "for" at the beginning of verse 21 links that verse to the former one. The standard teaching about this passage is that Jesus had in mind the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. But by linking the flight time to the incomparable world devastation Jesus is telling us that His people will be having to deal with Sabbath issues even at the *very end* of this age. Verse 15 even sends a note to *readers* of this text as a clue that even though Jesus is addressing the twelve, a much later time period is being discussed.

Now why would Jesus ask end-time believers to pray that their flight from a Holocaust not be on a Sabbath? Where is the tender-hearted teaching we have heard throughout the Gospels about a God who understands human need, and expects even donkeys to get a break on the seventh day? Would it matter to Him that we were running for our lives on that day? Would we be "breaking" the Sabbath to flee from the forces of the antichrist? Matthew Henry suggests that just as traveling in winter would be stressful to the body, so traveling on Sabbath would injure the soul. He is talking to a people who know of and have experienced the sweetness of that holy day. For them it is unthinkable that a full six days can be faced without that 24-hour breath from Heaven. If after a long work week their world suddenly falls apart and they are forced to run for the hills on that day, then how can they face the morrow?

Our mindset is so foreign to thinking such as they had, that it is perhaps difficult to imagine why there is such fuss over one single day. But the point here is that the Sabbath *will* be around in the days leading to the transition to the coming Kingdom, albeit it is fair to say that

this warning message is addressed to unbelieving Jews in the main.

The only other Gospel mentioning of Sabbath is in the story of Jesus' death and resurrection [Matthew 28:1, Mark 15:42, Mark 16:1, Luke 23:54-56, John 19:31]. From these passages we learn that it was the day before Sabbath when Jesus died, and the day after Sabbath when the women came and found an empty tomb. In between death and resurrection, a Sabbath, a rest. Nothing we can do. It's all done! Jesus has conquered death. Now rest and wait...

23. Where are we now? 4000 years in the Old Covenant, Sabbath. A strong Sabbath example and doctrine in the life of Jesus. A Sabbath just before the Millennium, and a Sabbath during the Millennium. Only the Gentile church is in question. Now the history of the beginnings of the church, both Jewish and Gentile, is found in the next book of the Bible, Acts. Just what happens to the Sabbath after the resurrection of Jesus? Do the Jews change? Do the Gentiles demand a change? Above all, what does God say, if anything, about this day?

There is essentially no mention of a Sabbath day until the 13th chapter. I consider this passage quite interesting in our search for the truth.

Acts 13:14. "But when they [the apostles] departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down."

It was Paul's custom, as it was Jesus', to attend synagogue services and to teach at them. He was a Jewish rabbi. Following this introductory word, Luke relates the very lesson Paul taught, after which the Jews filed out. But...

Acts 13:42, 44. "...when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath... and the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God."

I find it interesting that Gentiles cared not one whit that they were entering into some "Jewish" practice. They had heard about this Jesus phenomenon and wanted in. So the first totally Gentile meeting of saints recorded in Scripture is on the Sabbath. This so angered the Jews that they became jealous and opposed Paul. So Paul says he will from now on go to the Gentiles. Do you think that Paul then told these Gentiles that they should *change the rest day* now? They were not worried about a seventh day rest. Why should Paul have been? And I ask humbly and carefully now, why should we be?

24. Though this history is sound and exemplary, most persons looking for light on the subject in the book of Acts want to go to Acts 15. Sabbath is not mentioned in that chapter, but perhaps it is important we stop there for awhile.

A conflict arises over circumcision. This practice, like the Sabbath, and the tithe, was linked to Judaism. It seems to Paul and later the whole church that such a thing as the cutting of the flesh ought not to be bound onto Gentile believers as a requirement *for salvation* or even as a necessity for growth in the Lord. It seemed to them that this sign is purely a part of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. A list of "basics" is then drawn up and distributed, and is accepted by us today as the bare minimum of the law of Moses that we should enjoin on new believers in Messiah. The list is as follows:

1. abstain from things polluted by idols
2. abstain from sexual immorality

3. abstain from things strangled, and blood

All else, conclude the leaders of the day, would be considered “troubling” to Gentiles now turning to God. The emphasis is to be on the grace of God, not the law of God, from this day on.

Well now. What a shocking statement to men who as children memorized whole books filled with laws, every one of which was required for acceptability before a holy God!

So Jewish believers will continue on with the Sabbath and other laws of Moses, but Gentiles... Is that truly what is being said here? A double standard? Or are the Jews likewise to be totally free from their tradition and from Moses? We must look seriously at this whole legal matter later.

25. Acts 16:13, 17:2, and 18:4 tell of several more Sabbath meetings, where Paul meets with Jews on their “turf” and explains to them the way of salvation, with a variety of results. There seems to be little light in this book about what to do with Sabbath. There is even a mention of a first-day meeting, in the evening, but no reason is given why. Does “the day” not matter any longer? Why, Acts 2 records *daily* meetings, house to house, and *daily* additions in membership. The church was a constant *every-day* thing. Was not one day above another any longer? What of the beautiful pattern established by Moses and all the prophets, and Jesus Himself? Can any other New Testament writer help us out?

26. Here’s something from Paul in Romans 14:5. There was a sizeable element of both Jews and Gentiles in this church, and Paul addressed that issue partly by this word:

Romans 14:5. “One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.”

Is Paul talking about the fact that in Christ, *every* day is to be holy to the Lord? Is he talking about feast days? How about *pagan* holidays since this is a largely Gentile bunch? Or is he speaking of *first day vs. seventh day*? Didn’t Paul have a preference? Was he not convinced in his own mind? And if a man is convinced, must he not be convinced of God? And if by God, is there any room for another opinion on the matter? A fair group of questions, I think.

27. Now ponder this: The following word from Paul seems to imply that the whole set of laws we have been discussing is simply *nailed to the cross* to be forgotten. Read it for yourself:

Colossians 2:14, 16. “[God] wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross... therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths...”

Hmmm. That seems pretty clear. And that *seems* to be where Scripture ends its talk about the seventh day!

So by using Scripture alone, what have we learned about the seventh Day?

1. The Sabbath *is* the *seventh day*. It is never the *first day* in Scripture.
2. There is no Scriptural basis, so far, for “keeping” in a rigid sense, any other day.
3. Sabbath is a picture of our rest in Christ.

4. The Sabbath is equal in every respect to all the other of the 10 commandments.
5. Sabbath started soon after creation and never officially ended.
6. Not only Old Testament characters but Jesus and the apostles all kept the Sabbath while correcting its abuses.
7. There will be a Sabbath in the Millennium, excitedly foretold by the prophets.
8. The Sabbath was given as a gift to man, to bless him.
9. The first Gentile meeting was on the Sabbath.
10. But, and very importantly, there is no *clearly expressed* command to Gentile believers to keep the seventh day (unless of course they are fellowshiping with Jews).

With all we have learned, something is still missing. What seems to be strong and important to God loses its significance as the Bible story continues on. Let's take a look at how the church of later generations understood their "Sabbath" responsibility before God. But because the church is *always* fallible, we must reserve the right to come back to the Scriptures, and see if we can discern what grace has done to the law of God. When it is all said and done, will the Sabbath go the route of circumcision and burnt offerings? Will it be at the level of the "tithe"? Will it be changed into a different day altogether likewise labeled "Sabbath"? Or will it be written on our hearts like the other of the ten commandments? We're far from finished!

PART TWO: What says History?

It certainly is a long way from "Do this or die!" as the Old Testament speaks of Sabbath-keeping to , "Do this *wrongly* and you might as well not do it at all!" as Jesus had to teach the leaders of His day. It's even further to , "Choose whatever you want or even nothing at all," as Paul *seems* to be saying later in Church history. What did we miss along the way? Why the radical change? Can God's heart desires really be that different? What did the early and later church do with all of this?

To begin, consider the following two quotes and see if you agree:

1. T. Enright, C.S.S.R., February 18, 1844 lecture: "I have repeatedly offered \$1000.00 to anyone who can prove to me from the Bible alone that I am bound to keep Sunday holy. There is no such law in the Bible. It is a law of the holy Catholic Church alone. The Bible says, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' The Catholic Church says: 'No. By my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day and command you to keep holy the first day of the week.' And lo! the entire civilized world bows down in a reverent obedience to the command of the holy Catholic Church.' "

2. D.B. Ray, *The Papal Controversy*, 1892, p. 179: "From this same Catholic Church you have accepted your Sunday, and that Sunday, as the Lord's day, she has handed down as a tradition; and the entire Protestant world has accepted it as tradition, for you have not one iota of Scripture to establish it. Therefore that which you have accepted as your rule of faith, inadequate as it of course is, as well as your Sunday, you have accepted on the authority of the Roman Catholic Church."

What say you? Is there any "iota" of truth about a "Sunday" holy day in Scripture?

Well, we cannot say that those who built this doctrine started from *nothing*. Let's admit to the *iota* anyway, maybe even a few *iotas*, but nothing more. Let's look quickly at these particles of Scripture and then see how history built from there:

1. We can't forget that Jesus rose from the dead on the *first day* of the week. There is no official Scriptural union made between His resurrection and our weekly observance of 24 hours of celebration, but the resurrection does figure into why people believe the first day is now holier than the others.

2. Pentecost, the very birthday of the Church of Jesus, when the Spirit of God fell and empowered the apostles, is likewise on the *first day* of the week. Still there is no commandment given to continue this observance every week until the end of the Church age. But a strong "silent" case certainly seems to be made by what God sovereignly did.

3. **Acts 20:7** is perhaps an even stronger argument for "something" happening on the first day, but certainly not for an all day rest. I quote: **"Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."**

So did the disciples meet *every* first day either before or after Troas? Even if this could be proved, the only message being given in this passage is that the first day was becoming a *meeting* time, and that the actual clock hour was *after sun-down*. Could this in fact have been *Saturday* evening, following Sabbath observance? Or was it Sunday night? Whichever, there is no reason to jump from first-day celebration to first-day holy Sabbath of rest. But church history is clear that this jump was made anyway.

4. Finally there is that command of Paul about a certain offering, **I Corinthians 16:2**. **"On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come."** This could well stop the mouths of those who say there was *nothing* special about that first day. Not only in Asia Minor, but now here in Greece there seems to be a growing practice of meeting on this day to *celebrate the resurrection*, fellowship in the Spirit, hear the Word of God, even minister to the material needs of the saints. In short, "church." I think it important to say again here that from the beginning of the church, there was a *daily* fellowship of believers and a *daily* intake of souls into Christ, Acts 2:46-47, but it is hard to avoid the rising up of this first day as a clear pattern developing in those early days.

Questions immediately follow: Did this pattern arise by order of the Lord? And just how widespread was it to be? As you read the historical progression of the first day and see it supplant the Sabbath altogether in the minds of most believers, we must ask, "Is this from God?" Has God changed somehow? Or rather, does the Gentile part of the church need to back down a bit and remember its roots in the God of Israel? Or, again... does it really matter?

Before we plunge into church history, it is perhaps important to look again at the last Scripture that is used to point to a first day rest. My belief is that it does not point there at all except in the minds of those who have conditioned themselves to believing such a thing already. The verse itself is neutral. It is

Revelation 1:10. "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day..." Since we use "Lord's Day" today to refer to the first day, most people assume that this is what is being said. Please consider that every other time in Scripture when "Lord" is used in connection with a particular day, it is the Sabbath. For example,

1. Exodus 20:10, Leviticus 23:3, Deuteronomy 5:14, all talk of the sabbath *of the Lord* that is, “The Lord’s Sabbath” or, “The Lord’s Day.”

2. Isaiah 58:13, “...My holy day...the Sabbath...the holy day of the Lord.” That is, again, “The Lord’s [holy] day.”

3. Matthew 12:8, “For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath...” Therefore it is the Lord’s day.

It would seem that a Jew versed in the Scriptures as was John would think automatically in these terms.

Now let us leave the New Testament and see what the church was teaching just afterwards.

1. 90 A.D. From *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol 7, pg 449*: “...every Lord’s day, hold your solemn assemblies, and rejoice: for he will be guilty of sin who fasts on the Lord’s day, being the day of the resurrection...”

See how certainly statements are made about the “Lord’s Day”, when there is absolutely no Scripture which connects that phrase with the first day of the week. I have shown you the Scriptures which connect it to the Sabbath. Notice also now the connecting of guilt and sin to the non-observance of the first day, when in Scripture only the seventh day violations carried this weight. In my opinion, here is a departure from the faith.

2. 100 A.D. , “**Barnabas**” proposes this curious doctrine: “Moreover God says to the Jews, ‘Your new moons and Sabbaths I cannot endure.’ You see how He says, ‘The present Sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but the Sabbath which I have made in which, when I have rested from all things, I will make the beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world.’ Wherefore we Christians keep the eighth day for joy...” (*The Epistle of Barnabas*)

Here is a grievous error. “Barnabas” suggests that we are to exchange one 24-hour period for another 24-hour period, and that keeping *this* feast will be more pleasing to God than the Jewish observance of their own. He takes a passage which we have already seen (in Isaiah) that expresses refers to Hebrews 4, which speaks of our eternal rest, as his justification. It is this indiscriminate toying with words that the great majority of Christendom bought into, early and long. Even Charles Spurgeon, mighty in the word if ever there was a man, speaks of a “Christian Sabbath”, a hybrid I believe cannot be found by suggestion or command in all of God’s writings or in the pattern of His universe. More on this “eighth day” later, when we discuss Rome’s justification for Sunday observance.

3. **Ignatius** in 110 AD similarly enjoins, “no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day.” (*Epistle to the Magnesians*)

Who made such a distinction? Why do promoters of such a division never give Biblical proof of it?

4. In 150 A.D., **Justin** spoke in his *Dialogue* of the “first day after the Sabbath, remaining the first of all the days [which] is called, however, the eighth, according to the number of all the days of the cycle, and yet remains the first.”

In a dialogue with Trypho, a Jew, Justin states, “...if there was no need of circumcision before Abraham, or of the observance of Sabbaths, of feasts and sacrifices, before Moses, no more need is there of them now...” True, for salvation all we need is Christ. But in classifying the Sabbath with circumcision instead of with the moral code of God as it is in Exodus, Justin does a disservice to the truth. Certainly the law of God is written on the heart, but not abolished from the mind of God .

Also speaking to Trypho, Justin proclaims that all these pre-Abrahamic men were pleasing to God without the Sabbath. Yet if the Sabbath was established by God after creation, is it not possible that these men did indeed know of it and observe it? Again we are not talking about works making us pleasing to God, but rather works being a pleasure for godly men to perform unto God, because of their saved status.

In his first *Apology* , Justin says, “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles...are read...Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly.”

5. **Clement of Alexandria**, 190 A.D., gives us an insight as to where the “eighth day” concept may have come from in *Miscellanies V.xiv.106.2*: “Plato prophetically speaks of the Lord’s Day in the tenth book of the *Republic* , in these words, ‘And when seven days have passed to each of them in the meadow, on the eighth they must go on.’ ” If indeed it was a Greek philosopher that gave rise to a side-track for the Christian faith, it would not be the first time that such a thing occurred.

6. In 200 A.D. wrote **Tertullian** in his *Apology*, “We solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath.” In his *Answer to the Jews* , “...the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary.” See here how Christian thought begins to reflect the growing tradition as opposed to the expressly revealed Word of God, as quoted in section one of this paper.

7. Twenty years later **Origen** was saying, “On Sunday none of the actions of the world should be done...” (*Homil. 23*). And in a commentary on John, “...it is not possible that the day of rest after the Sabbath should have come into existence from the seventh day of our God. On the contrary, it is our Saviour who, after the pattern of his own rest, caused us to be made in the likeness of his death, and hence also of his resurrection.”

But if we are to be consistent with patterns, on the seventh day Christ was fully at rest, whereas His *work* of resurrection and later His *work* of establishing of the Church for the furtherance of the work of the Gospel, are all *first day* activities. As the light was called into existence on day one of creation, so the new creation begins on day one. The patterns still point to a Sabbath rest and a first day celebration of Light. Where is the logical or Scriptural proof that a change is in order?

8. In 250 **Ignatius** also calls for observance of the Lord’s Day as opposed to a Sabbath Day, but offers no valid proof. His suggestion is that we are to “keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner” not after the physical manner of the Jews, for the one who does not work should not eat! (as says Paul).

Now we have truly come full circle. From a strict command to rest on the seventh day, to a strict command to *work*, supposedly backed up by apostolic decree. Ignatius goes so far as to say that anyone who fasts on “the Lord’s Day” OR the Sabbath, is a murderer of Christ! (*Epistle of Ignatius to the Philippians*).

The evidence continues to mount in years to come that the official church was certainly favoring not only a Sunday “feast” to be held on a weekly basis, but a replacement of the seventh day with the first day as *a day of rest*. If you will, a “Christian Sabbath” had evolved, with absolutely no Scriptural support, but with approval in the various church headquarters and eventually in Rome. This brings us back to the quotes that opened this section. It is easy to see now why Rome, with its loose playing with facts regarding church history, makes the claim that it is *on Roman authority alone* that this strange practice was created. In matter of fact, the Roman church did not gain ascendancy overnight, and the Sunday tradition, growing in a number of places before Rome’s rise, was later rubber-stamped by Rome when she was the ruling church. Either way, we have the *church* to thank for Sabbath-Sunday, not the apostolic foundations recorded in Scripture.

And we do not want to leave out Constantine when looking for persons to applaud for this observance. Constantine was the professing Christian Emperor of Rome at the beginning of the fourth century. It is clear from the above quotes that Sunday-Sabbath was in full swing when he came along in 321 to make it a Roman law, but one cannot overlook the historical impact that his edict had for establishing patterns that would be passed on for centuries unquestioned by the masses of Christians. His law was worded thus in English:

“On the venerable Day of the Sun [long a pagan holiday, and a special favorite of this part-Christian, part-sun-worshiper] let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest and let all workshops be closed. In the country however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or for vineplanting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost.”

His sensitivity to those for whom an exception might be needed was certainly not akin to later Popes and Councils who would consign persons to eternal damnation for the new “Sabbath-breaking”, while still religiously claiming that “our” day was better than “their” day.

I find this observation of columnist Christine Tatum in the April 20, 2003 *Chicago Tribune* to be most insightful:

Early Christians— the first ones being Jewish of course - were careful to celebrate both holidays [Passover/ “Easter”]. They took their lead from Jesus, whose Last Supper was a Passover celebration like the ones Jews have held for more than 3,500 years to observe God’s redemptive power and his protection of their nation.

The unified teaching was fleeting. As the church attracted more Gentiles, it also started to look more Roman than Jewish. Constantine, the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity, widened the rift between the two factions. Often motivated more by politics than by his faith, he helped usher anti-Semitism into the church after declaring in 325 A.D. at the Council of Nicaea “a desire, dearest brethren, to separate ourselves from the detestable company of the Jews.”

That meant no more celebrations of Jesus with a Jewish twist, including seders.

Is this what made the Jewish Sabbath disappear from the church scene? Anti-Semitism? The Sunday observance was making some inroads, with even a bit of Scripture to back it up, but without the political backing of a Roman Emperor who even posed as a Christian, it seems

unlikely to me that the practice would have been ingrained in the hearts of so many. And when he played the anti-Jew card, he struck another chord that had been developing through those years. The earliest Church was Jewish, and its Jews reached to other Jews with the message of salvation. Their message was at times harsh, but always inviting. Never would those early Jews take it upon themselves to punish their fellows for not accepting the message. They left this in the hands of God for another time. The growing Gentile “church”, centered in Rome and the evolving Romanist doctrines, was of a different ilk. Separation from, hatred of, killing of Jews and Judaism would be their trademark for many a century.

So, what began on a large scale partly as a pagan ordinance from an anti-Semitic Emperor was used by the church to support its own practices, and to this day “Christian” nations, “Christian” communities, “Christian” organizations all tend to back off activities on the first day of the week. America has certainly changed in its attitude toward the first day in the last 50 years, but there is no question that Sunday is a much slower time here, whether in the Christian or purely secular world. The habit is with us.

But we must always ask, “Did it come from God? Does it glorify God? Is it done in direct obedience to a command of God?” Or perhaps Rome can continue to say, “This is ours”?

Where does all of this bring us? Let’s review what we know:

1. Nearly the entire Bible and Judaeo-Christian history recorded there point to a seventh-day observance.

2. Though there is no expressed command to change from one day to another, the early church assumed that Jesus’ resurrection, Pentecost, and a statement of Paul pointed to a “new” day of rest as well as a new day of celebration.

3. Ignoring the ages-old tradition of the Jewish prophets and apostles, the post-apostolic church allowed a hybrid day to develop, a day in almost every respect patterned after the Jewish Sabbath, but in animosity against the Jews not allowed to be on “their” day. The new Sabbath would be better. It would be on the day of the Sun.

4. Fed by many Imperial and Papal decrees over the centuries, first-day observance was cemented into the minds of believers for all times as having been established by God when in fact it was established by the official church. See how it is worded in Roman Catholic canon law for the “faithful” of that group: (1985 , Paulist Press, p. 853)

“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...” This *tradition* is further explained thus: “By a tradition handed down from the apostles [by which here they mean a *practice*, not a *statement*] , which took its origin from the very day of Christ’s resurrection, the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day, which day is appropriately called the Lord’s Day or Sunday [but by whom? and by what authority except its own?] For on this day Christ’s faithful are bound to come together into one place... The Lord’s Day is the original feast day, and it should be proposed to the faithful and taught to them so that it may become in fact a day of joy and of freedom from work.”

Allow me also to paraphrase from Sadlier’s *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, #347-349 : “The Sabbath is at the heart of Israel’s law... but for us a new day has dawned: the

day of Christ's resurrection... the "eighth day" begins the new creation..." The argument is made that the creation is less important than redemption. With this we agree, while seeing the same pattern in both events, namely, rest following and preceding a great work of God.

And in the same work, #2168-2190, there is a quotation from Justin, *I, Apol 67*, "We all gather on the day of the sun, for it is the first day when God, separating matter from darkness, made the world, and in this same day Jesus Christ our Saviour, rose from the dead." Over and over, proof of a day of *rest* is offered by citing monumental *work*! The Sabbath is to celebrate the end of work, yea, no work at all, *not* the beginning of work.

Again on 2175, "In Christ's Passover, Sunday fulfills the spiritual truth of the Jewish Sabbath." There you have it. Rome speaketh. But on what authority? Her own.

More statements of justification in #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 fulfills 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."

Here the switch is actually made from seventh to first day. The first day becomes the new Sabbath, the new holy day. To this we must object. Worship can take place at any time of any day by the Spirit, just as Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4 of the absence of geographical boundaries for a true worshiper. I know of no day of worship given us by New testament writers. Worship is in the Spirit. But as to the day of rest, there is no reason to believe that the original command to His people has been changed by any event of the first century. Surely the "rhythm" of the weekly celebration cannot be changed by an edict from man. God blessed the seventh day, and it is blessed until God "un-blesses" it.

In 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."

Now it is more than rest. It is enforced rest. Soon, it will be "Rest or die!" Yet somehow this is supposed to be different than and better than the Jewish Sabbath?

Finally, in 2190, a summary: "The Sabbath, which represented the completion of the first creation, has been replaced by Sunday which recalls the new creation inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ." And most Protestants agree!

So we are to believe all that Rome has created because Paul said to take an offering on the first day of the week? All of this because the Christians in Troas were meeting on the first day of the week? Are the things that believers do *en masse* therefore dictated by the Holy Spirit for all? It is through this philosophy of listening to "the piety of the people", that is, God speaking doctrines and practices through what the majority of the professing Church believes, that Rome has come up with other teachings, some of which are quite blasphemous. How far to go with such a philosophy? For me, no farther than what is written *for* all believers for all time, the Holy Scriptures that concluded with the apostle John in the first century A.D. If the people in their piety believe that, it is because there is light in them from Heaven. If they believe something *beyond* the word, it is fiction pure and simple.

This much we know, then. But the question comes, what do we do with knowledge thus gained? Does God care if we continue on as we are? Is there an eternal significance to the Sabbath that true followers will eventually be drawn to? Is God more concerned with the picture or the reality of our rest in Jesus Christ and the coming rest of the planet during the Millennium? Are we under any laws of any kind in Christ Jesus, or are we truly free from law when in Christ? These issues we will examine in part three, by God's grace.

PART THREE: What is the State of the Law of God?

Most of us are probably not aware of all the "Old Covenant" things we do in connection with our church life. Think of all the Psalms we sing, the prophecies we read and believe, the great histories of God's men and women. All of this is before Calvary and Pentecost, yet somehow we think of it as part of the will of God for us.

Let me ask you this: What common practice in the New testament Church was first practiced in the Old Testament times, but without a recorded command from God? It began in Genesis spontaneously, or so it seems, and was later a part of the Law of Moses. It was never specifically commanded in a New Testament book although it is implied in several. Since the New Testament church was first Jewish, we expect it is probably for today. Pastors swear by it, but it is much less a New Covenant idea than the seventh day Sabbath which is nearly written off as cultic. Answer? The *tithe*.

We are literally steeped in Jewish ways. Why do we want to exclude the Sabbath rest? Did God?

The question of the Sabbath, only one of ten commandments, and those commandments only one component of a comprehensive legal system, must be considered in a broader context if the hint of a solution is to be found. The much more difficult question concerns the law itself. What is the law's place in the believer's life? Did the law pass away? Are we totally lawless now?

For the answers, we return to the only written Source of Truth available, and call upon the Truth Himself to guide us through this maize. Let's begin in Jeremiah:

1. Jeremiah 31:31-34 [portions]. "Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers... My covenant which they broke... But this is the covenant that I will make...: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

a. First note that this covenant is not suddenly "Gentile". It is to be a new covenant for the old people. We know that Gentiles were admitted in, but it is originally offered to Israel and Judah. And originally, it was those Jews who responded.

b. Its newness has as much to do with *method* as with *message*. In fact, no change to the message is mentioned. But the way of communicating this covenant, we discover later, is the Spirit of God and His filling of the believer in Jesus. This will bring the obedience so long sought for by God.

c. But not to be overlooked here is the word "law" itself. "My" law, says God, the things *I have always wanted them to do*, not some new law, will be inside them. The destruction of all

law is not envisioned here, only a way for God's people to keep that law holy.

2. The next logical place to visit is Hebrews, where this very passage is quoted in 8:8-11. Just before quoting Jeremiah, the author writes:

Hebrews 8:6-7 . "But now [Jesus] has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second."

So the law is part of a bigger concept called the covenant. The covenant involves promises from God, and reciprocal action from men, as well as the will of God for man (law). The author of Hebrews here shows that the old covenant must give way to the new, for the new is better. He even says in verse 13: **"In that He says, 'A new covenant,' He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away."**

From here he goes into a discussion of the sanctuary and the sacrifices. Earlier he had talked of the priesthood. In place of all of these Old Covenant ways, he demands that Christ is better. Christ has *fulfilled all*.

Now when speaking of **"fulfillment"**, there is something that Jesus said that lights the way here:

3. Matthew 5:17-18. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

a. Note the time frame for fulfillment We have until the new heaven and new earth before everything written in the Old Covenant is fulfilled.

b. Note that Jesus includes the writings of the Prophets in this broad sweep.

c. It remains for us to examine the various portions of the writings given before Christ to determine what has been fulfilled and what has yet to be fulfilled. None of it is to be written off as meaningless or even forgotten. Some of it is fulfilled in the Man Christ Jesus. Some of it is being fulfilled in Spirit-filled believers today. Some of it will be fulfilled in our future.

The book of Hebrews lets us know that animal sacrifices, the Aaronic priesthood to make those sacrifices, the sanctuary with its furniture, and all such connected items are gone, fulfilled in what Jesus did. That is not to say that natural Israel will not try to resurrect them in order to reclaim their Jewishness in the last days, but from God's perspective they are not any longer of service, because every piece of that program is fulfilled in the death and High-priestly ministry of Jesus Christ.

The prophets' vision of a world-wide reign of a son of David is yet in our future. **It is not being fulfilled now!** It *will* all come to pass, but those who try to "spiritualize" the Hebrew prophetic texts with their fanciful and *oh! so bad* interpretations are doing no one a service. What is written is written. It shall come to pass. It is a constant thrill to dig into these prophecies and see what lies ahead for the House of Israel, which House is also the property of called Gentiles.

Priesthood past, Kingdom prophecies future. Is there anything "present"? Oh yes! God said He would write *His law* on the hearts of His people. *His law* still exists! Not only Jesus mentions this principle of fulfillment, but Brother Paul also. First, Jesus.

4. Matthew 22:36-40. “Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

The signal here is given that it is God who numbers and prioritizes. They expected His answer to come from among the “Ten”. His surprise response lets us know that although God’s eternal law will be written on our hearts it may not look exactly like it did on the tablets of stone. There will be extensions and new depths expressed, but still it will be an expression of *what God has always wanted*. The “want” or the “will” of God, *that* is what law is.

This concept is even further brought out in Jesus’ famous comparisons of Moses and Himself in Matthew 5:21-43. In this passage He quotes Old Covenant laws and principles, then proceeds to deepen them. Far from abolishing law, He lets us all know that in the New Covenant the perfect ways of God will be instilled in us, not a surface memory-work sort of business by which we can impress others that we are “moral.” He presents a law so much more difficult than Moses that it will take miraculous intervention for us to keep it. And that intervention is exactly what is promised, as by Paul in Romans and Galatians:

5. Romans 8:3-4. “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Notice the law is not condemned here or anywhere. As Paul says in Romans 7:12, “**The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.**” It is our flesh that is the problem, because the law is too holy for us to keep. So He gives us His Spirit, and tells us to pursue the life of the Spirit. When we do that, *we keep the law* as a matter of course.

Galatians 5:14. “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

There’s that “fulfilled” idea again. Not abolished. Fulfilled. Paul goes on to urge us, therefore, to “Walk in the Spirit”, Galatians 5:16ff. He says that if we do this we will not *fulfill* the lusts of the flesh, that is, *we will not break God’s law!* So the Covenant change is one of perspective, one of life-style. Rather than fearful slavish obedience to a code of conduct, we seek God Himself. God puts His own desires in us, and *we keep His law* because we are new creations. God is not a distant Monarch before whom we are in constant doubt and dread, but a living presence who writes messages to us in places we can understand, in our heart.

It was men full of the Spirit of God who wrote the will of God for God’s New Covenant People. Following is a partial list of how the “Ten Commandments” left the stone tablets of Moses and found their way into New Covenant thinking and into our hearts through the Spirit. God’s law, you will see, has not changed, only gotten deeper, better, richer.

- **Commandments 1 and 2:** Exodus 20:1-6, “...have no other gods before Me... do not make images...” is repeated in I John 5:21, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Acts 15:20 tells us, “...abstain from things polluted by [offered to] idols.” Like-

wise I Corinthians 10:28, **“If anyone says to you, This was offered to idols, do not eat it...”** II Corinthians 6:14, 16, **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers... what agreement has the temple of God with idols...?”** The New Covenant, written in our hearts, keeps us not only from other gods but also from fellowship with idolaters.

- **Commandment 3:** Exodus 20:7, **“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain”** is suggested by Jesus in Matthew 6:7, explaining to the disciples how to pray, **“...do not use vain repetitions, as the heathen do.”** Also, **“Hallowed be Thy Name,”** from the Model prayer in Matthew 6:9. We are taught to ask in His Name anything we want, call on His Name for salvation, and that there is no other way to be saved but by that Name. We are taught that only the evil people **“blaspheme the Name by which you are called,”** James 2:27. Truly no Spirit-filled believer will lightly use the Name of the Lord.
- **Commandment 4:** Exodus 20:8, **“Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy...”** Since the fourth commandment is the topic of this report, allow me to discuss it last.
- **Commandment 5:** Exodus 20:12, **“Honor your father and your mother.”** This one is quoted verbatim by Paul in Ephesians 6:1-3. In addition the Spirit-filled apostles command the people of God to honor widows, honor the king, honor all men! Spirit-filled living is respectful living. Disrespect is a sure sign that the enemy is present.
- **Commandment 6:** Exodus 20:13, **“You shall not murder.”** James put it this way in 2:11, **“...if...you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.”** Romans 13:9 has Paul summing up the last 5 commandments in the one concept of love. Rather than destroy the law, Paul says, we live it out by loving. The sentence of death is destroyed, but the righteous requirement of the law lives on and prospers in us.
- **Commandment 7:** Exodus 20:14, **“You shall not commit adultery.”** In Galatians 5:19, adultery is listed as one of the works of the flesh. Those who practice these works will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- **Commandment 8:** Exodus 20:15, **“You shall not steal.”** And in Ephesians 4:28, **“Let him that stole steal no more.”**
- **Commandment 9:** Exodus 20:16, **“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,”** becomes **“Do not lie one to another...”** in Colossians 3:9.
- **Commandment 10:** Exodus 20:17, **“You shall not covet.”** Paul says, **“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you as is fitting for saints... no... covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God.”** (Ephesians 5:3, 5)

And so the commandments come full circle. Worshiping false gods to worshiping the works of man’s hands and every evil practice in between was forbidden by Moses and is forbidden by Jesus and the apostles. That is to say, the same Spirit has directed all His messengers to give the same message, even though intensified, to God’s people. And now that message is to be *fulfilled in God’s people* by the Author Himself.

- Now what about that fourth commandment? There is *no specific command by any apostle* to keep the seventh day holy. There is also no specific *repeal* of the Sabbath command of 4,100 years. There is likewise *no command to rest on the first day of the week*. If all other commands are in evidence in the New Covenant’s Spirit-filled life, what are we to assume about this one? That is indeed the question of this research. If indeed every man is to be

convinced in his own heart of the truth (Romans 14:5) then it seems to me that he will be convinced only by a word from God. A Gentile who has been taught first-day Sabbath may, like myself, eventually be called upon to seek out the truth. It seems, though, that if he does not, he is under no condemnation. Eventually all this will be made right, when Jesus comes. And there is no question in my mind about “which day” will be the Kingdom standard (see part one above).

Law lives. But it can harm us no more. The original law came by Moses (John 1:17) and because of the weakness of our flesh condemned us, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, who promised us He did not intend to destroy the law, but to be sure it is fulfilled (in us!).

Law lives. How do I know? Because sin lives, and sin is the transgression of law. Every man who confesses his sin admits to the broken law of God. The difference between “now” and “then” or if you will, “us” and “them” is not *lawlessness* but forgiveness.

Law, a major part of Scripture, lives, but now we dread not its pages. Rather we can be enriched by the “encouragement of the Scripture” (Romans 15:4).

For the unconvinced we will look at some of Paul’s heaviest teachings about the law, in paraphrases of Romans, Galatians and Colossians.

Romans 2: Law is everywhere, whether handed down from Sinai or built in to Gentile thinking by the passing down of truths from the creation. We are told that we cannot boast in the law, because we are all lawbreakers. Circumcision is added as a seal of the Old Covenant if the covenant-maker is perfectly obedient in every way. Since that never happened, and all are lawbreakers, circumcision is a meaningless sign now, and the New Covenant is sealed by a circumcision of the Spirit.

Romans 3: We can never be justified by law, but we cannot with our sin make void law either. In fact, our constant breaking of the law establishes that holy piece of work!

Romans 4: Where there is no law, there is no transgression, for sin is the transgression of the law.

Romans 5: Sin was in the world before the law was given, but not imputed to man, not clearly defined. When it did come to us, it was to expose sin for what it is. This is still its purpose. It teaches us our need and brings us to Jesus.

Romans 6: Now we are not *under* the law. But law lives. Sin shall not have *dominion* over us. But sin is a possibility. Sin lives.

Romans 7: We are dead to the law (which lives) through the Body of Christ. We are delivered from the law, this fearful taskmaster that kept us in bondage. But now, as prophesied by Jeremiah we serve in the newness of the Spirit, who does God’s law in us. The law is not sin! But we know sin through the law. We are “alive” without the law. But when the law comes, we are exposed, we “die”. The law is holy and we delight in it with our mind. No one should hate the law of God and consider it a thing to be destroyed! Jesus never did. No one should pray to be delivered from the law of God, but from the *curse* connected to it. One who is without law is lawless, and there is nothing but contempt in Scripture for the spirit of lawlessness, II Thessalonians 2. What we want is freedom from its curse, not its righteousness! Though I do delight in it, there is another “law” inside me against the original law: sin.

Romans 8: My flesh makes the law seem weak. But Jesus condemned sin in the flesh.

Now the requirement of the law is fulfilled in those who walk by the Spirit, just as Jeremiah and Jesus both taught.

Galatians: Galatians 2. No flesh will ever be justified by the works of the law, through the law we died to the law, and there is no righteousness to be gained through trying to keep law, whether Sinai's or the expanded revelations of Jesus and the apostles.

Galatians 3. One cannot receive the Spirit or any of His gifts by keeping the law. To be "under" the law is to be under a curse, for, as he quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26, **"...cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things written in the book of the law."** But Jesus became the curse for us and sets us free to keep the law's requirements.

Galatians 5. We are to maintain our liberty by not being entangled with the curse again. Yet he says in the same chapter that all the law is fulfilled in the love of neighbor that flows from the Spirit-filled believer. He tells us to walk in the Spirit and we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, to be led by the Spirit since we are not now under the law.

We know now that Paul had a high opinion of the holy law of God, but also a realistic understanding of human capacity to keep that law. He sees the law as holy, but carrying a curse because of our weakness. It is in that light that we understand Colossians 2:14 where the apostle states that the "handwriting of ordinances" was *nailed to His cross*. Some want to put the whole law of Moses up there, but as we have said, the moral law of God is repeated by the Spirit-filled believers. We live the ten commandments when we are filled with God's Spirit. Why would something so holy be "nailed to a cross" to die with Jesus?

What was nailed was the part of the law *that was against us*. Some translations have it "the certificate of debt". The Old Covenant says, "Do it *all* or die!" "The soul that sins shall die!" Those statements that cursed us are nailed to the cross. The curse is itself cursed.

But Jesus still maintains, "I did not come to destroy the law!" In fact, at the present hour the law is in its fullest exposition ever, since Jesus Himself expanded it during His stay here, and the apostles have had it re-spoken through them, and God's Spirit-filled believers for 2,000 years have demonstrated the *righteousness* of the law *in their holy lives*. The will of God for His people never changed!

Another possible or even complementary explanation for those who want to see the entire law of Moses on that cross, is to remember that Jesus was nailed to that same cross. The curses connected with sin and law were certainly dealt a death blow. But there was a resurrection. Both Jesus and His Law live, and are identifiable in our day, though they also look quite different. Both have been glorified. And both the resurrected Jesus and the resurrected law of God work inside of the born again believer to bring about the holy life of God intended for us when God "predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). We are called to lives of obedience. Obedience implies listening to the law of God working deep within us.

As I personally listen, I *believe* that the Spirit of God is trying to get my attention, and perhaps that of others, not with threats of curses and loss, but with promises of a fuller expression of my Christian experience, by calling me back to that which was the norm for those 4,100 years, and will *be* the norm when Jesus comes, and which both natural Israel and a goodly number of saints through the ages have claimed as their own: a day of rest that actually reflects the

original reasoning behind such an institution, that God “rested” from His creative works.

Yes, God rested from His creation of the things of the world. I believe He calls His people to disengage from worldly pursuits and to come apart to Him.

God allowed His Son to rest in a tomb on the Sabbath so that my sins could be forever erased. He calls me to rest in that same assurance that “all is finished.” No more struggle. The debt is paid.

God had the apostles resting on that final Sabbath before the Spirit-filled Church appeared. And on the first day of the week, the work of the church began.

There’s a pattern there that is so compelling as to be unavoidable for me. My weekly rest time then becomes a picture of what God did in the creation, what He did in me, and what He is doing for the world by having a church here. It is a picture of the *ultimate rest* that awaits for His people, when the whole earth will repose under the rule of Messiah, after 6 “days” of mis-rule and chaos and weeping.

Some questions remain in my thinking, and I leave them with you...

1. Those who favor a “Christian” Sabbath, what would they say to sons of Israel who come to Christ in our day? Gentiles seem to be quite content when Messianic believers observe their “old” Sabbath. But upon what basis are we admitting the presence of 2 days of rest? Is this where Paul’s “be convinced” argument works?

2. But what if Gentiles like me look a little farther, and want what the Jews have, since they (Gentiles) are “grafted in” branches of the same tree?

3. When the Scripture says in Colossians 2, “Let no man judge you in regard to sabbaths,” is it saying, “Don’t let anyone tell you you have to keep the Sabbath *to be saved*,” or “Don’t let anyone suggest to you that the Sabbath is to be a part of New Covenant practice *at all*”? Or is it saying, “Don’t let anyone try to make you keep the Sabbath *in a certain way*”? After all they judged Jesus about His method of keeping the Sabbath, but He did keep it! Could the passage even include in our day, “Don’t let anyone keep you from identifying with the ancient Jews by keeping the Sabbath if you want to”?

4. Why did Jewish believers surrender their Sabbath to the Gentile observance of a first day? Were there just too many Gentiles after awhile, and too much power being concentrated in the Gentile church, connected to the growing affiliation with the pagan practices of the day? Was the later “official” church anti-semitic, and trying to distance itself from Judaism?

5. Has God allowed these questions to remain because He wants His people to be holy *every day* and not just once a week?

6. Will more and more believers start coming back to Sabbath, as more and more Jewish people are saved, and in preparation for the Kingdom that could so very soon be here?

Conclusions

I certainly will not settle this age-old problem by writing a paper. The church has been divided on this issue from the beginning. Today there are still a number of ways people keep or don't keep a certain day::

Serious Sunday-Sabbath people treat this day as though it truly were the Jewish Sabbath moved to Sunday. They feel they are keeping the fourth commandment by resting on Sunday. They assemble for a holy time at church, sometimes twice on that day. For the rest of the day they engage in only wholesome activity if any at all. Some rest completely, some partially. There is no question in those homes that this day is special.

Sunday morning Sabbatarians are those who assemble, but at about 12 noon, their "holy" time is finished. Usually the rest of the day is spent in diversion and recreation having little to do with Jesus Christ. Yet if asked, they too would indicate that they believe they are "keeping" the first day of the week.

The "spiritually-minded" Sabbath keepers are those who believe there is *no day* that is special. They rest in Christ who has forgiven them from their sins. They trust Him to take care of them and keep blessing them. They stop working when they are tired. There is no structure to their observance. Consistent with a stance like this, they may also *give* when it feels good, but definitely not the same percentage in the same place week after week. The church attendance, Bible reading, and prayer of these people is just as erratic. In their thinking, they "walk in the Spirit." Who knows? Maybe some of them do.

Then there are those of us who have seen **the seventh day** as an inviting possibility. But they too can be divided up into "all day" or "part day", "serious" or "secular". And some of these folks beat others over the head with their new knowledge.

Where are you? As for me, most of my life I've been anywhere from a serious to a lukewarm "Sunday" person. After having completed this study there are some unavoidable facts I must ponder (and try not to beat others with!):

- Scripture says that from the beginning, and in the future, even "forever", the seventh day is the norm.
- The Sabbath is a perfect picture, not only of creation's end, but of the rest before Jesus' resurrection and before His work on Pentecost. The First Day of creation, the resurrection itself, and Pentecost were all days of *serious work*, far from rest!
- The Scriptures up until the Book of Acts reveal a God who blessed and loved the Sabbath and a people, who, when they were being obedient, kept it holy unto Him.
- There is no command anywhere to end the Sabbath, or any of the ten commandments. But of course the only true obedience to God in our day must come from the Spirit within us.
- Sunday observance and the related rest day came into the possession of God's people only after Gentiles flooded the Church.
- Though there are indications that meetings were to follow the Sabbath in the life of the new Church, there is never a hint that the first day was to become a *day of rest* replacing the seventh day rest.
- God's law, in the form of the ten commandments, is still being lived out through the Spirit, fulfilled in true believers. Will not the fourth commandment also be lived in this way?

Many of the papers I have prepared over the past years point people to a solid argument and a conclusion that is obvious. I'm afraid I may have disappointed my readers a bit in this one. There is still that question stirred by the apostle's comments regarding persons being "convinced" in their own mind. I am as convinced as I can be that there is something for the Sabbath for present day believers, and that it is more than a picture. Nevertheless I have not come to the conclusion that I dare to bind anyone else's conscience in this matter. If I have merely stirred up someone's holy thinking processes, so that they investigate this matter with me, I will feel I have done my job. Meanwhile we pray for the day when we all come to the unity of the faith, drawn there by that one Spirit Who has filled and led us this far, and will surely lead us Home complete in Him.

Sabbath, January 17, 2004