

What of
the
Sabbath



Bert Esselink

Preface

This study began with a seemingly simple question posed by my wife, Ericka, as she pondered the Ten Commandments: Why is it that we do not keep the seventh-day as the Lord instructed in Commandment Four? This question soon led to a few more: How and when was it changed – or, was it changed? Did the Lord modify His requirement, or do we have it wrong today? These are simple questions, but the answers, at times, proved to be difficult to ferret out.

As I worked through the history of where we are today on this matter, it became very apparent that the opinions expressed about the Fourth Commandment are varied and numerous, not only today but, seemingly, from the time of the Apostles. The task became how to evaluate these various opinions for credibility, and then to determine the unalterable truth of God's Word regarding the Sabbath. It has been my purpose to remain true to the Scriptures above all else; man's views are of little value in light of eternity, and most of man's polished theologies miss the mark. Therefore, my focus has been to permit the Word of God to interpret itself, and, as much as possible, to minimize the influence from my Evangelical training.

Man is a master at rationalizing and justifying his actions; Adam pointed to Eve, the help-meet whom the Lord had provided for him, as the "justification" for his failure. Our ability to rationalize our position on almost any subject has only become more skillful with the passing millennia. However, self-justification and well-honed rationalizations do not impress God, and that should be our reason for holding everything that we read and hear up to the light of God's Word (among which I readily include what follows). It is my prayer that all who read this study will do so with an open heart to the Word of God.

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Introduction

The reality of God's holiness, and our failure to properly understand it, has been the cause of much heresy within the history of God's people. Despite this, we must accept that Christ is sanctifying and cleansing His people so that they will be pure and holy for Him (Ephesians 5:25). On the one hand, Jesus is surely building His *ekklesia* as He promised (Matthew 16:18) and, on the other hand, we recognize that we live in a day of tremendous compromise, accommodation and apostasy. My goal is to provide a balanced presentation of this subject, with a strong Biblical basis for the conclusions reached.

As I have conducted research into the areas of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, in an endeavor to establish with finality (at least in my own mind) the will of the Lord in this matter, it became increasingly evident that there is disparity of thinking even on how the Sabbath came into being. Before I began my investigation, this was one thing that I thought would contain no variance of opinion, but it wasn't long before I realized that I had been badly mistaken. And, even more surprising to me, I found that this is not just a modern-day area of confusion – it actually began with the writings of those who are commonly referred to as the “early Church fathers.” Yet, this should not have been entirely surprising, for the Apostles, who penned the Scriptures, warned that there would be those who would bring error into the assembly: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as **there shall be false teachers among you**, who privily [secretly or craftily] shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).¹ After the ascension of Christ, error did not hesitate to make itself known; Satan was immediately at work introducing his perversion of the Truth. We see this evidenced in the lies that the Jewish leadership spread concerning Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28:12-13), and Paul's letters to the Corinthian and Galatian believers show that error grew where Truth had been planted. So, as we embark on this study, it is important to keep in mind that propagators of error have been a reality throughout all of time, and every believer has been called to guard against these foes – these servants of Satan. Jesus declared, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening [destructive] wolves” (Matthew 7:15).²

¹ Strong's Online, <http://onlinebible.net/>.

² Friberg Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

There is something else that is essential to keep in mind as we consider the question raised – something that I frequently brought to mind as I have progressed through this study. When the Lord Jehovah led Israel into the Promised Land to possess it, one of the many exhortations that He had for them was this: “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deuteronomy 12:32). The context of this warning to Israel was that they were not to retain the traditions of the Egyptians whom they had left, nor were they to take on the customs of the people whom they were replacing in Canaan; rather, they were to walk in obedience to the Lord’s commands. Yet, as we read the history of Israel immediately following this, we recognize that they failed to heed this exhortation. Not only did they incorporate many of the heathen practices into their “worship” of God, they often forsook the Lord’s ways completely and simply practiced paganism – only to reap the oppression of the Lord for doing so. However, the Lord’s warning is very simple: what I have commanded you, do; do not add to My commands, and do not take away from them.

Lest we regard the warning given by God as something that was for Israel of old and not for us today, we would do well to very carefully consider 1 Corinthians 10:1-12:

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Now **these things were our examples**, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. **Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition**, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

We cannot ignore the Lord's dealings with Israel through the centuries; the "Old Testament"³ is God's Word, and He has preserved it down through the years for our admonition. It is critical that we understand the example that God has kept for us, for we are just as prone to sinfulness today as was Israel of old; we are still more likely to fall into sinfulness than into holiness. The warning of God to Israel, as they entered the Promised Land, was that they were to walk in obedience, and they were to neither add to, nor take away from, the words of the Lord – a warning that is just as relevant for us today.

Solomon, in his wisdom, wrote of this matter as well: "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6). This is an additional warning that we are not to add to God's words, lest we are found to be a liar. To understand the significance of this warning ("thou be found a liar"), consider the following:

[Jesus said to the Pharisees] Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

He that saith, I know him [i.e., God], and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:4).

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and **all liars**, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Revelation 21:8).

The Word of God is to be our Standard, our Guide; we are to heed God's admonition to us through example and direct word. If we add to His Word, we are in danger of eternal damnation in the Lake of Fire! Oh, that the Spirit of God would burn this into our hearts and minds; the Word of God is pure – why would we presume to add to it, or take away from it? We are quick to criticize the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day for their violation of the Scriptures, yet we are so accepting of modern translations that add to and subtract from the Word of God with abandon!⁴ Many

³ The terms "Old Testament" and "New Testament" are really misnomers. They are names assigned to the Word of God that was written before the incarnation of Christ and after His resurrection; they are, in fact, artificial divisions created by man, not God. Unfortunately, too often they have come to express something that we can ignore, or set aside, as of lesser importance (the "Old"), and something that is more relevant for today (the "New"). This has been done to our own peril, for the whole of the Scriptures are the eternal, unchangeable Word of God, and we would do well to endeavor to accept it and understand it as God's one message for us today.

⁴ Through careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that the King James translation of the Scriptures is the most accurate in the English language, not because the translation work is necessarily superior, but because the texts

modern translations are more accurately termed as paraphrases, for they have not only departed from the original texts but have become the medium for spreading man's philosophies.

All of this is to lay the groundwork for what will follow. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). As we extensively consider the writings of man on the subject at hand, we would do well to keep this warning close by, for there will be many occasions when a way expounded may seem right, yet we must first, and foremost, carefully hold to the pure Word of God.

upon which it is based are superior. This is not the setting for a lengthy discussion on this subject, but suffice it to say that the concepts of Textual Criticism have infiltrated the texts underlying all modern English translations of the Scriptures – concepts that call into question God's promised preservation of His Word that, in turn, results in the words of God being handled like any other piece of literature, and, such thinking even won the approval of the Unitarians. To further exacerbate the matter, many modern translations use the "dynamic equivalency" method of translation, which simply means that thoughts and ideas are translated rather than words. The essence of this is that Satan has wreaked havoc with the Word of God – a most fortuitous tactic and one that most today fail to recognize, to the point that you can practically find a translation or paraphrase to meet anyone's taste.

Chapter 1 ~ In the Beginning

To understand the Sabbath, it is necessary to go back to the beginning of time itself. The pure Word of God says:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made (Genesis 2:1-3).

Here we read that God *blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it*. Clearly, God intended the seventh day to be special – a day specifically set apart as holy (*sanctified*). The Hebrew word used for *blessed* describes an *intensive* action, and the imperfect tense means that this action is incomplete in itself – the Lord’s blessing was not just for that first seventh-day.⁵ In other words, it is not that God blessed that first seventh-day at the end of His creative activity, and that was it; rather, there is a permanency to the blessing that He placed upon that day. This was not an action that was intended only for the seventh day that God created; the thought is that this day will carry God’s specific blessing from that day forward. God not only *blessed* this day, but He also *sanctified* it; He set it apart as holy – and, yes, this word, too (Hebrew imperfect tense), carries the thought of timelessness.⁶ This demonstrates that God’s desire for this day was established on that first seventh day, and, like the rest of creation, would continue for as long as time remained. Incredibly, we may well accept the six days of creation without question, and all that God established during those eventful days, yet draw back when it comes to what God created on that final day.

The Scriptures declare that God “rested from all his work”; the Hebrew word *shabath* is used, and is translated as *rested*. Although *Sabbath* does not appear in Scripture until Exodus 16, the concept is inextricably linked to the institution of the seventh-day of rest in Genesis 2; there is simply no way to separate them. God did not set this day aside because He was exhausted; the rest that He enjoyed on that first seventh day was a cessation from His acts of creation. He ceased His creative actions in making and filling the earth (He rested); yet even as He ceased creating

⁵ https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Gesenius%27_Hebrew_Grammar/52._Pi'el_and_Pu'al;
[https://www.blueletterbible.org/resources/grammars/hebrew/simplified-hebrew/imperfect-tense.cfm.](https://www.blueletterbible.org/resources/grammars/hebrew/simplified-hebrew/imperfect-tense.cfm)

⁶ Strong’s Online.

the physical stuff of this world, He created one more day – a holy day of rest that carries His particular blessing. Therefore, if God did not *shabath* (rest) on this seventh day for Himself, then He must have created this seventh-day for the good of man, who had been created in His image. Jesus' own words confirm this, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). God set an example for us: He rested (*shabath*); He created for six days, and then did not create (but rested or *shabath*) on this day that He declared to be special. The previous six days of creation all received God's pronouncement of being *good*, and His work in all six days was declared to be *very good* (Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31); however, this seventh day was particularly blessed and sanctified by Him! There is so much fuss today about being environmentally conscientious, to the point where some miniscule gastropod can subvert the best laid plans of corporate giants all in a valiant effort to "preserve the balance of nature" – the physical evidence of the six days of creation. Yet here is a day that God took special care to bless and sanctify (above and beyond any other day), and it seems that we either ignore or change it to meet our needs.

Just as surely as this day was set aside for man (according to Jesus), we must note that God's special blessing and sanctification of this day took place before man had sinned. God's example of resting on the seventh-day was laid down while man was still living in the Garden of Eden, before the serpent had worked his craft on the woman and before man had chosen to sin. This would indicate that the principle of the seventh-day rest is far greater than we might first realize – it preceded sin!

It is noteworthy to realize that the day is the **seventh** one; it is not the first, nor the third, nor whatever day you like – it is the seventh day! There is a progression throughout God's creative acts, and the culmination is this seventh day! God had already declared that everything that He had created during the first six days was "very good" (Genesis 1:31); there was a natural sequence throughout this time – not confusion, but order. On this seventh day, God rested from, or ceased, His work of creating – it was finished. The God Who neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:4) demonstrated, by example, that He desired the seventh day to be a day of rest, a day when the work of the previous six days will cease; the pattern was established.

It is true that there is no further mention of this special day until the book of Exodus. However, that does not mean that the day was never kept as God had established it. Consider a comparable principle. It is commonly accepted that from the beginning it was understood that animal sacrifice (the shedding of blood) was required in order to demonstrate a right attitude toward God (namely, faith in His

promise of a Redeemer). After all, God made coats of skins to clothe Adam and Eve, thereby establishing the shedding of blood to cover sin (the animals shed their blood to provide the skins). This proved to be an acceptable covering for their nakedness, replacing their unacceptable fig-leaf coverings (Genesis 3:7, 21). “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12); this principle was immediately at work after the fall. Adam and Eve made themselves coverings of fig leaves, but these proved to be inadequate before God. When Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices to God, Cain of the produce of the ground and Abel of the choicest first-born of his flock (Genesis 4:4), God demonstrated His acceptance of Abel’s offering (which was after the manner of God providing skin coverings for Adam and Eve) and His disdain for what Cain presented (which followed the pattern of the fig-leaf coverings). We consider a passage like, “... without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22), and feel quite comfortable condemning Cain for his offering because he should have known better. Where do we read prior to Genesis 4:5 (where we see God’s disregard for Cain’s offering) of God telling mankind that unless innocent blood was shed, their sacrifice would not be accepted? We will contend that God set the example by slaying animals to clothe Adam and Eve after their sin. What we do not read about, but what is evident if we consider the whole of God’s dealing with Cain, is that Adam and Eve clearly provided instruction to their children. God’s question to Cain was, “if thou doest well [or right], shalt thou not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:7); the clear understanding is that Cain knew that he had missed the mark.

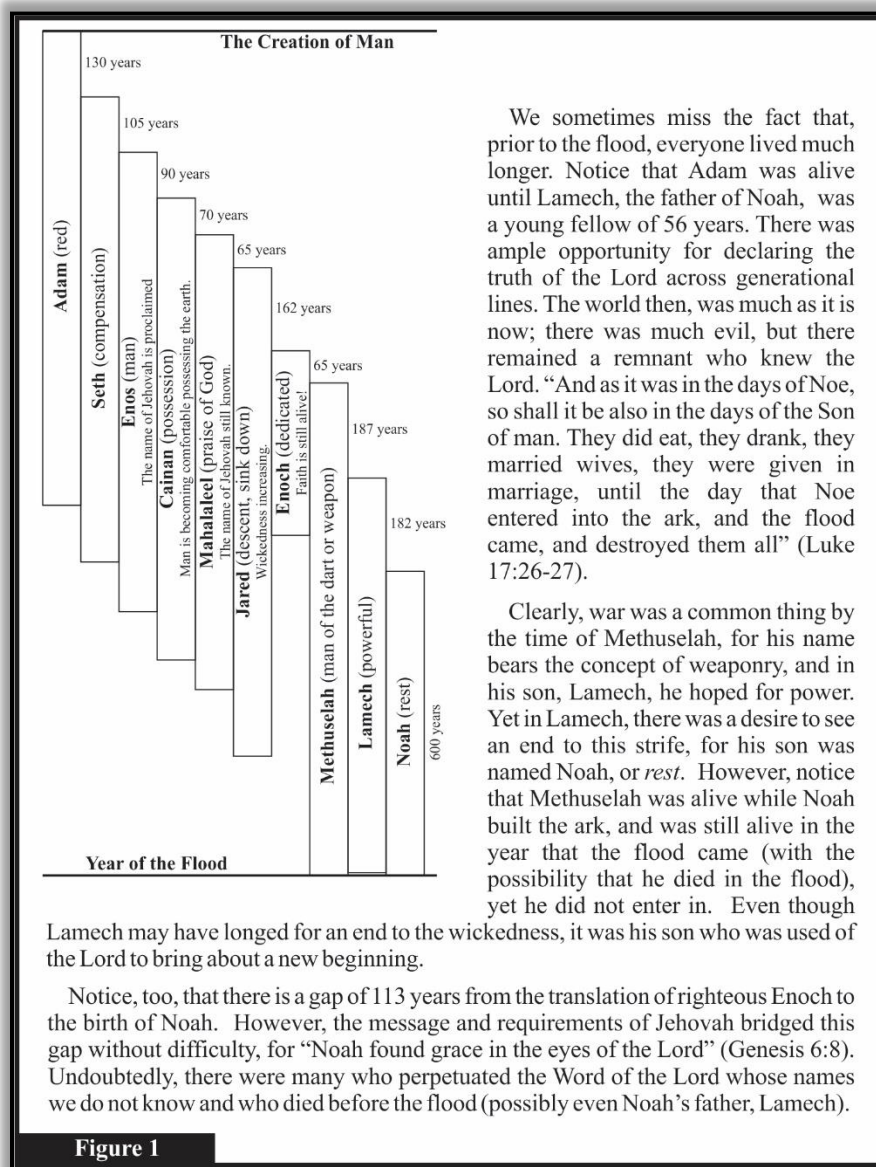
Cain suffered with the same sin-nature that we have today; we like to do things our way rather than giving attention to what God requires. God’s question to Cain tells us that Cain knew the prescribed method of sacrifice that was acceptable to Him, yet he chose his own way – a way that ultimately led to the murder of Abel. We understand that Cain was without excuse even though we read nothing of him being instructed in the proper way of making a sacrifice to God. Yet when we read of God’s special attention to the seventh day in Genesis 2 and then of the Sabbath in Exodus 16, we assume that it wasn’t kept as a day of rest during the intervening years because we don’t read anything about it. Each generation received instruction; we accept this unquestioningly for Cain and the proper sacrifice, yet show disdain for this reality when it comes to the day of rest. The principle is the same in both cases. God established the example by providing the skins for coverings, and He created the seventh day as a day of rest in precisely the same manner. In the latter case, God not only demonstrated what He expected, but also declared it to be a blessed and sanctified day, a day ordained for a specific purpose – rest (*shabbath*)!

There was to be a cessation of labor on the day that God had ordained for that purpose; there was to be a pause in the routine of grueling labor in order to reflect on the God Who had sanctified this seventh day.

We read in Genesis 4:26, “And to Seth [which means

compensation, Eve considered Seth to be a replacement for Abel, whom Cain had killed], to him also there was born a son; and he called [or *named*] his name Enos [*man*]: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.”⁷ The same Hebrew word is used for “he *called* his name Enos” and “*call upon* the name of the Lord” – the word is *qara*, but its applications are quite different: in the former, it means to give a name to

someone, and in the latter it means to call upon or to invoke the name of.⁸ This passage could very well be translated as: *men began to call upon the name of Jehovah*.⁹ God was not hidden from these first generations, nor were they without those who knew the name of God. God has never been without His witness, and this



⁷ Strong’s Online.

⁸ Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

⁹ Ibid.

would be no less true of the first descendants of Adam. Unlike today, the names given in Bible times carried significance and would often reflect the desires and aspirations that the parents had for their children. With this in mind, a careful consideration of the names mentioned in Scripture prior to God's judgment of the world by the flood during Noah's time, would indicate that there were those who looked for relief from the wickedness of the day (see Figure 1 for details). It was just prior to Noah's birth that Enoch was translated that he should not see death (Hebrews 11:5); just as the true worship of God is waning today, so it was during the times before the flood. Yet, through all of this, God retained a remnant who were true to Him and would proclaim His name. When Noah was born, his father, Lamech, declared concerning him, "This *same* shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed" (Genesis 5:29); even though the relief sought was physical rather than spiritual, it is clear that Lamech looked for a redeemer and hoped that it would be his son. All during the time of the construction of the ark, Noah proclaimed the name of the Lord (2 Peter 2:5); despite it being a generation of desperate wickedness, God's Message was not lost.

There are those among the scholarly who seek to find proof of the concept of a Sabbath day within the Babylonian traditions; for years it was assumed that the Hebrew Sabbath was borrowed from Babylonia. The confusion is based upon the discovery of the unknown word *sabattu* or *shabattu* in some Babylonian writings. "The word *shabattu*, for which there is no etymology in Semitic Babylonian, was said to have been derived by the native lexicographers from the Sumerian *sa* 'heart,' and *bat* 'to cease' or 'rest'; it was literally translated 'heart rest.'"¹⁰ In other words, it was a guess on the part of some early lexicographers that this was a proper translation of this unknown and unidentifiable word. However, a similar word, *shabatu*, had already been identified as meaning "full or complete," but because it didn't fit the mold, it was set aside. Somewhat later it was discovered that the 15th day of the month was called *shappati*, and that the rendering of *shabatu* as "full" was apparently a reference to the full moon at the middle of the month.¹¹ Nevertheless, these same scholars still upheld the idea that the Genesis account of creation (with God establishing the seventh day as a day of rest) was a new twist on an old tale derived from civilizations that are more ancient than Israel. What they could not bring themselves to acknowledge is that it is God Who brought all of life into being. They would rather be preoccupied with the myths of gods and goddesses

¹⁰ Albert T. Clay, *The Origin of Biblical Traditions*, p. 117.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 119.

as the source of truth than the account preserved for us in the Scriptures. In their “wisdom,” they laid this premise as a foundation for their arguments: all ancient accounts of the origin of man (including his creation and destruction in the flood) have borrowed from one another, hence their similarity in many ways. What they refuse to permit, and, indeed, cannot permit without acknowledging the God of the Scriptures, is that the account that we have received in the Word of God is true in all respects. To do so would place them under the authority of the God of the Bible, and they utterly refuse that option. The vagueness of the similarity only exposes the work of Satan from the very beginning to distort and destroy the true account of God’s dealings with mankind.

What these scholars failed to realize is that, even if their shaky hypothesis were true (i.e., Babylonians showed evidence of the seventh day of rest long before the Sabbath was spoken of by Moses within Israel’s economy), this simply provides additional evidence that God established and sanctioned a holy day at the time of creation – a day of cessation of labor that was not only demonstrated by our creator God, but was required of created mankind. With Abraham (coming out of the Babylonian culture, from Ur of the Chaldees – Genesis 15:7) being the father of the people of Israel, it is self-evident that there were many other civilizations in existence at the time. If similar accounts appear in other civilizations, then that only provides support for the premise that everyone from Adam onward knew about the Sabbath rest, and everyone from Noah onward knew about the flood. Rather than bringing into question the record in Scripture of God establishing the seventh-day, their arguments only serve to support the concept that the Sabbath did not begin with Moses – it began in the heart of God, and was included as an essential part of creation.

Yet, despite all of this, it is still held by many today that the Sabbath was instituted by Moses; apparent silence being used as the “proof” for this understanding. However, we have seen the fallacy of using the argument of silence; it is clear from Scripture that, in the midst of the wickedness of the pre-flood world, there was a continual proclamation of the name of Jehovah. Many years later when the Lord met with Abraham, as He was on His way to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, He made this observation: “For I know him [Abraham], that **he will command his children and his household after him**, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment ...” (Genesis 18:19). Instruction was practiced by the patriarch Abraham, and we have already seen that the same was the case during the time of Adam and Cain. When the Lord reiterated to Isaac the promise that He had made to Abraham, it was because “Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge,

my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Genesis 26:5). Two things are immediately evident: 1) God had made known to Abraham what He called *commandments, statutes* and *laws*, and 2) God stated that Abraham had faithfully kept these, and the understanding is that Isaac, therefore, also knew of them and would bear the responsibility for keeping them. The God Who cannot change (Malachi 3:6) made Abraham aware of what He required of him. We read of Abraham that he “believed God [something that would only be possible if God revealed Himself to Abraham], and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3); like Abel, Enoch, and Noah before him, Abraham had faith in God, and thereby found favor with Him. “Faith is the substance [*foundation*] of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1),¹² and faith does not appear in a vacuum, or for no reason. God revealed Himself to these early faithful ones; their faith was not based on an unknown – they knew God, and they knew what He required of them. How could Abraham be declared righteous unless he walked in obedience to the Lord’s commands? Even though we do not read of how Abraham was taught, careful consideration of the Scriptures makes it abundantly evident that such instruction took place.

Some like to use Nehemiah 9:13-14 as evidence that the laws given by God at Mt. Sinai were the beginning of the seventh-day Sabbath. Nehemiah declared of God: “Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant” Give careful consideration to the verbs used here. It says that God *gavest them right judgments, and true laws*, etc.; included in the laws that God **gave** to Moses is the Fourth Commandment that deals with the Sabbath. However, Nehemiah then gives the Sabbath special attention, and a different verb is used to describe what took place concerning this particular law: it says that God *madest known* to them His holy Sabbath, or He declared this unto them.¹³ The reality is that the Fourth Commandment calls on Israel to “remember the Sabbath day”; *remember* (*zakar*) means not only to recall but also to observe: they were to both bring to mind and make the seventh day holy unto the Lord.¹⁴ When God made known to them His Sabbath day at Mt. Sinai, He was not telling them something new (the children of Israel had, in fact, been keeping the Sabbath day for some time already), rather, He

¹² Friberg Lexicon.

¹³ Strong’s Online.

¹⁴ Theological Wordbook of the OT, #551.

elaborated on His requirements for the seventh-day Sabbath, and underscored, in very definite terms, what He expected of the children of Israel in regard to this matter. Nehemiah's words to the Israelites returning to their homeland can in no way be construed to mean that the Sabbath began at Mt. Sinai – particularly when other Scriptures are very clear that it didn't.

When Moses was explaining his activities as the leader of Israel to his father-in-law, Jethro, he said, "I do make *them* know the statutes of God, and his laws" (Exodus 18:16). This is at least two weeks before God gave Moses the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. What could Moses have possibly been teaching the Israelites? Based on much of today's thinking, there would have been nothing to teach them – the Law hadn't been given yet! However, here again we have evidence that God did not leave His people in ignorance. The Ten Commandments and the many ceremonial laws that Moses received at Mt. Sinai, were given to establish the Lord's requirements and the example that He wanted Israel to be to the nations. It cannot be assumed that God's requirements were unknown, or non-existent, before this; we have already established that the Lord's ways were understood through the intervening years from Adam to Moses – these people did not live in a spiritual vacuum. For our purposes, the Fourth, of all of the Commandments, was clearly nothing new, for it is the one Commandment that begins with the word "remember."

It is not until the children of Israel were out of Egypt that Scripture makes its first reference to the Sabbath. God delivered Israel from a life of slavery and brought them out at great cost to their Egyptian lords. However, Egypt was not far from their thoughts when they were faced with the demands of wilderness living:

And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin [which means *thorn* or *clay*], which is between Elim [*palms*] and Sinai [*thorny*], on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt.¹⁵ And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, *and* when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. And it shall come to pass, that on

¹⁵ TWOT, #551.

the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily....

And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness *there lay* a small round thing, *as small as the hoar frost on the ground*. And when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said one to another, *It is manna* [literally, *what is it?*¹⁶]: for they wist not what *it was*. And Moses said unto them, *This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat. This is the thing which the LORD hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons; take ye every man for them which are in his tents. And the children of Israel did so, and gathered, some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. And Moses said, Let no man leave of it till the morning. Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto Moses; but some of them left of it until the morning, and it bred worms, and stank: and Moses was wroth with them. And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted.*

And it came to pass, *that* on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one *man*: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. And he said unto them, *This is that* which the LORD hath said, **To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath** [observing holy Sabbath (singular)] **unto the LORD**: bake *that* which ye will bake *to day*, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for **to day is a sabbath** [that Sabbath (singular)] **unto the LORD**: to day ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on **the seventh day, which is the sabbath** (singular), in it there shall be none. And it came to pass, *that* there went out *some* of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said unto Moses, **How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?** See, for that **the LORD hath given you the sabbath** (singular), therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day. (Exodus 16:1-30)¹⁷

Consider first of all, that this dramatic provision by the Lord took place in the Wilderness of Sin. The people of Israel were one month out of Egypt (the plagues inflicted upon them and the Egyptians, as well as their miraculous deliverance from

¹⁶ Strong's Online.

¹⁷ Leningrad Hebrew OT, *Bibleworks* 8.

Pharaoh, would have been very fresh in their minds), and they were still one month away from Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Law. Having just left a life of slavery to the Egyptians, during which time they would not have been permitted to practice a day of rest, the children of Israel had to re-learn the custom of the seventh-day rest. The institution of the Passover celebration (Exodus 12; Leviticus 23:5-7) brought to the Israelites the necessity of keeping days of rest, for the day following the Passover celebration was the first day of the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread where both the first and last days were to be holy assemblies (*convocations*) and the people were to do no *servile* (laborious or occupational) work in them.¹⁸ Yet these are only two days out of the year, and they were specific days of the month, which would not necessarily fall on the seventh day of the week; however, the passage above goes well beyond the description laid out regarding the Passover, and specifically draws the weekly seventh-day and the holy Sabbath together. This was not the Passover, but had to do with God's provision of Manna and His desire to have the children of Israel honor the seventh-day of rest (*shabbath*) in this regard. There were six days with Manna every morning, but the seventh day, the day of rest, or the Sabbath, there was no provision from God. It seems quite evident that this was not a new concept to Moses; "if the sabbath had now been first instituted, how could Moses have understood what God said to him (v. 5), concerning a double portion to be gathered on the sixth day, without making any express mention of the sabbath?"¹⁹ Moreover, it seemed to be familiar to the Israelites as well, for they complied without great explanations; there were a few who looked for a fresh supply of Manna on the Sabbath morning, but there were also those who tried to keep Manna overnight during the first six days. Having come out of generations of slavery, God was enforcing upon the Israelite's minds the necessity of abiding by His call to keep the Sabbath-day holy – in essence, returning to what He had established at the time of creation.

Exodus 16:23 refers to the *holy* Sabbath; the Hebrew word used is *qodesh* and means *holiness* or *separateness*.²⁰ The Hebrew word used in Genesis 2:3 for *sanctified* ("And God blessed the seventh day, and *sanctified* it") is the verb form of *qodesh* (*qadash*). The descriptions that are made of the Sabbath to Israel in Exodus 16, and of the seventh day by God in Genesis 2, are exactly the same. Coincidence? I think not! Not only is the rest (*shabbath*) of the seventh day tied specifically to the Sabbath day (*shabbath*), but God's designation of the day as holy is the same in both

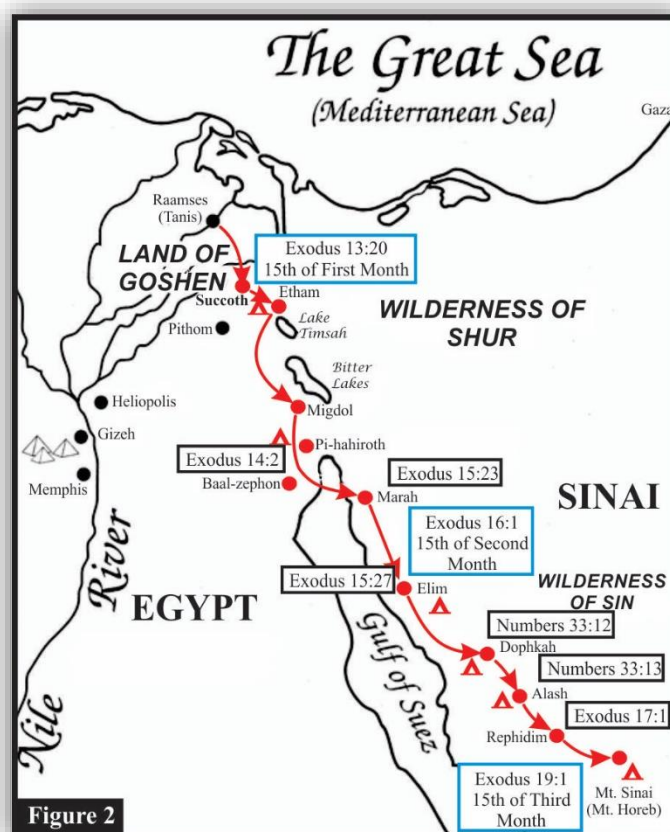
¹⁸ BDB.

¹⁹ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Volume 1, p. 343.

²⁰ Strong's Online.

cases. God does not change (Malachi 3:6), and this only serves to illustrate God's consistency: from the time of creation to the leading of Israel out of Egypt, God's sanctification (*qadash*) of the seventh-day rest (*shabbath*) had not changed.

In verse 29 of the passage quoted above, God declares to Moses: "the Lord hath given you the sabbath" The Hebrew verb translated as "hath given" is in the perfect tense, which expresses a completed action: the Lord had given the seventh-day rest at the time of creation.²¹ Despite this being the occasion of the first mention of *Sabbath* in Scripture, the evidence is that the Israelites were not unfamiliar with the concept, even though they might not have observed the day of rest prior to this occasion. After leaving the Wilderness of Sin, the Israelites



moved on to Rephidim (*resting places*) where they again made camp (see Figure 2).²² Here they grumbled because there was no water, and God provided them with water from the rock; here they fought with the Amalekites, and prevailed as Moses' hands were held up by Aaron and Hur; here Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, visited and offered counsel to Moses for the establishment of judges to assist him in the task of hearing the concerns of the people. Much took place between the Wilderness of Sin, where they first received the Manna and began to practice God's requirement of keeping the Sabbath holy, and arriving at Mt. Sinai.

One other thing that is worthy of note from the above passage is God's question to Moses, "How long refuse ye to keep my commandments (*mitsvah*) and my laws (*torah*)?" (verse 28). Clearly, there had been instruction given even prior to this moment or God's question would have been unfair. Even earlier, at the water of Marah, Moses' words to the Israelites from the Lord were: "If thou wilt diligently

²¹ Strong's Online.

²² Ibid.

hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt **give ear to his commandments** (*mitsvah*), **and keep all his statutes** (*choq*, which is a prescribed task), I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee” (Exodus 15:26).²³ Once again, unless there had been prior instructions given, this would have been an unfair obligation – yet Moses spoke to the people in a manner suggesting that they knew exactly what this meant. What this shows is that the people of Israel knew what God expected of them. The Decalogue did not arrive as a radical new way of life for them; God’s instructions had already taken place in another form. The Sinai experience simply reinforced the holiness of God in the minds of the people, and provided them with a written copy of what they already knew.

It was during their stay in the Wilderness of Sinai that Moses received the Ten Commandments from God. Several things have become evident to this point: 1) God established the seventh day at the end of the days of creation as a specially blessed and holy day of rest, 2) the message of God to mankind was not lost during the time before the flood, 3) the seventh-day of rest was re-affirmed by God well before the giving of the Ten Commandments, and 4) the seventh-day of rest was called the Sabbath before the children of Israel reached Mt. Sinai.

²³ Strong’s Online.

Chapter 2 – Under the Mosaic Law

On Mt. Sinai, Moses received the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God upon tables of stone (Exodus 34:1; Deuteronomy 4:13), and contained therein is reference to the seventh day and the Sabbath, namely the Fourth Commandment:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11).

Consider this passage carefully. This is the only one of the Commandments to begin with the Hebrew word *zakar*, which means *to remember* along with being mindful.²⁴ Were the Israelites to remember the instruction that they had received in the Wilderness of Sin, or were they to call to mind the seventh day as God sanctified it at the time of creation? The answer is both because this is to be a *mindful* recall that includes contemplating the full extent of the Sabbath. We have already established that the Hebrew word used by God at the Wilderness of Sin is exactly the same as He used to describe the seventh day in Genesis 2, and now, in the presentation of the Commandments to Moses, God has, with finality, confirmed the relationship in writing.

Lest the Israelites, or anyone else for that matter, should fail to correlate the principle that was established at the time of providing the Manna with God's creative acts, this firmly and completely confirms the relationship. There is no question that the Sabbath rest was instituted at the time of creation; the principle of the seventh-day rest was sanctified by God before sin ever entered the world.

This is one of the Ten Commandments! There is something quite interesting about these Ten: only one of them (the Fifth Commandment) appears in the imperative mood, which we typically identify as being a command. However, that in no way reduces their significance. When Jesus was approached about how to “have eternal life,” He said, “... if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments [*entole* – commands]” (Matthew 19:17).²⁵ When queried as to which ones, Jesus

²⁴ Strong's Online; Wilhelm Gesenius, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the OT, p. 278.

²⁵ Strong's Online.

responded by listing off the six Commandments (from Exodus 20) that deal with our relationship with our fellow man (Matthew 19:18-19). The fact that only one of these six appears in the imperative mood does nothing to diminish from the reality that these are God's standards for our conduct. These Ten Commandments are not presented by God as suggestions, recommendations, or even what He really wishes that we would do – they are, according to Jesus, commands! It is clear from the language used that this is something that we are to be doing; since this includes the Fourth Commandment, of necessity we must remember to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy.

After God gave Moses the instructions for the construction and operation of the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-30), He had some additional directives for him:

Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed (Exodus 31:13-17).

After assigning the mammoth task of building the Tabernacle with all of the minute details for its construction and operation, God draws specific attention to His days of rest. First of all, it is in order to clarify that the reference in verse 13 to “Sabbaths” (plural in the Hebrew) broadens the application to more than just the weekly Sabbath. “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have **a sabbath** [a Sabbath observance], a memorial of blowing of trumpets, **an holy convocation** [assembly]” (Leviticus 23:24).²⁶ What we see here is **a Sabbath observance** that is to take place at the time of a **holy assembly**, a day when the people of Israel were to do no *servile work* (Leviticus 23:25). The Lord explained this to Israel before they ever left Egypt: “And in the first day [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread] *there shall be* an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work

²⁶ BDB.

shall be done in them, save *that* which every man must eat, that only may be done of you” (Exodus 12:16). On this day of *holy convocation* they were permitted to prepare their food, but all other work was forbidden; *servile* describes a work of labor or business.²⁷ However, the *Sabbath observance* noted was on the first day of the seventh month, which would not necessarily fall on the seventh day of the week; from this we can conclude that the application of the term *Sabbath*, for Israel, moved beyond the seventh day to include other specifically identified days of celebration to the Lord. Leviticus 23 identifies the feast days that were to be kept as *holy convocations*, and many specifically included the prohibition of any occupational labor on those days (*no servile work* [23:7] – somewhat less restrictive than the weekly Sabbath (and the Day of Atonement²⁸), which forbade all work – *no work* [23:3]).²⁹ The holy convocations, which were part of the many feast celebrations of Israel, were days of rest; even though the weekly Sabbath is called a *holy convocation*, it was much more restrictive than the feast-day Sabbaths. Therefore, when we see “Sabbaths” (plural), we must examine the context in order to determine if this is an inclusive term that includes the feast day Sabbaths (holy convocations) as well as the weekly Sabbath. We noticed this when we looked at the institution of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; the first day (the fifteenth day of the first month) and the last day were kept as days of rest from labor (Leviticus 23:5-7). In the passage quoted, God calls Israel’s attention to the need to keep all of His *Sabbaths*, although it is noteworthy that *the Sabbath* (the weekly seventh day) gets far greater emphasis. After receiving the monumental task of building a dwelling place for the Most High, the people of Israel are reminded to keep the Sabbath; even such a holy work did not set aside the Lord’s desire for the seventh-day Sabbath. Matthew Henry makes this observation concerning the centrality of the Sabbath:

The law of the sabbath had been given them [the Israelites] before any other law, by way of preparation (*ch.* [Exodus]xvi. 23); it had been inserted in the body of the moral law, in the fourth commandment; it had been annexed to the judicial law (*ch.* [Exodus] xxiii. 12); and here it is added to the first part of the ceremonial law, because **the observance of the sabbath is indeed the hem and hedge of the whole law**; where no conscience is made of that, farewell both godliness and honesty ... (emphasis added).³⁰

²⁷ Strong’s Online; Gesenius, Hebrew Lexicon, p. 570.

²⁸ The Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month was to be kept exactly as the seventh-day Sabbath (Leviticus 23:27-28).

²⁹ Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament (K&D), *ESword*.

³⁰ Matthew Henry, Exodus 31:12-18, p. 405.

And therein is the purpose for the Sabbath – that the Israelites might be holy unto the Lord. Consider the Mosaic penalty for breaking the Fourth Commandment: death (Exodus 31:15)! The Lord was serious about Israel keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy before Him. We may well recall the fitting words: “...I *am* the LORD, I change not ...” (Malachi 3:6).

In the passage quoted from Exodus 31, God’s words to the children of Israel were that His Sabbaths (plural) were to be kept in the prescribed manner, and this was to be “a sign between me and you throughout your generations” (vs. 13). God laid out specific criteria that the Israelites were to follow while they kept both the weekly Sabbath and the feast-day Sabbaths. When God established the seventh day as a day of rest, sanctifying and blessing it, there were no restrictions on the day – it was simply that God rested, or ceased His labor of creation; it was a day set apart. Matthew Henry, in commenting on this passage, says:

The Jews, by observing one day in seven, after six days’ labour, testified and declared that they worshipped the God who made the world in six days, and rested the seventh; and so **distinguished themselves from other nations, who, having first lost the sabbath, which was instituted to be a memorial of the creation**, by degrees lost the knowledge of the Creator, and gave the honour to the creature which was due to him alone (emphasis added).³¹

Unlike most Evangelicals today, Matthew Henry recognized that the foundation for the seventh-day Sabbath is the memorial of what God set into place at creation. The pattern that God established through creation was that there were to be six days when work was to be done, but the seventh was to be a day of rest, a day in which there was to be no work.³²

As we have already indicated, the Israelites, before Moses received the Ten Commandments, were not without God’s instruction; as a matter of fact, it has been made clear that right from Cain onwards, they were without excuse; God had established a way of atonement for sins, and He also implemented a pattern of work and rest that was to be followed. However, just as the sacrificial demands and restrictions were greatly multiplied with the decrees that Moses received from the hand of God, so the requirements of the Sabbath were also increased. Within the book of Exodus, we find some very specific instructions regarding how the Israelites were to keep the Sabbath:

³¹ Matthew Henry, Exodus 31:12-18, p. 405.

³² It is interesting to realize that, although there is much debate about how the seven-day week began, the ancient civilizations of China, India, Babylonia, and Egypt all had a seven-day week.

1. They were not to go out of their place, thereby restricting travel or movement on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:29). From this came the “Sabbath day’s journey,” the distance that was deemed to be acceptable to travel on the Sabbath.

2. They were to keep the day holy (Exodus 20:8; 31:14) – a day set apart unto the Lord, sanctified after the pattern that God set down at creation. This would be a day to remember the Creator, and cultivate a personal relationship with Him. Isaiah 58:13 clarifies this by indicating that there was to be no indulgence of personal pleasures on the Sabbath; the focus was to be on the things that God desires of us.

3. They were not to do any work, nor permit anyone else to work (Exodus 20:10; 31:14); as a sanctified day, it was to have a heavenly focus. Nehemiah 10:31 declares that there was to be no buying, selling or debt recovery done on the Sabbath, and Jeremiah 17:21 adds that there was to be no burden borne.

4. If anyone defiled the day by not keeping it appropriately, the penalty was death (Exodus 31:14-15) – a penalty that the children of Israel were required to carry out.

The instructions that Moses received regarding the Sabbath were very specific, and, consequently, the children of Israel clearly understood what was expected of them. Were they unaware of God’s requirements prior to this? Evidence would indicate that they knew of the seventh day of rest, and God removed any doubt as to what His desire was for them. In the same way that the sacrificial system became much more involved and demanding, so now the requirements and penalties associated with the observance of the Sabbath were much more rigorous.

Because of the explicit instructions given, there are those who would argue that this demonstrates that the Sabbath day is something that God established specifically with the children of Israel, and therefore it does not apply to us today. They mistakenly assume that God’s increased demands, and the penalty for the defilement of the Sabbath, constituted the beginning of the Sabbath altogether. It has been adequately proven that this was not the case at all.

However, the passage from Exodus 31 quoted above includes these words: “Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations ...” (verse 13); “Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath It *is* a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever ...” (verses 16-17). Would this not seem to indicate that the Sabbath is something that was designed specifically for the children of Israel, and support the position of the Sabbath beginning with Moses? In the two quoted passages, notice that it is the

keeping of the prescribed Sabbaths (plural) that was the sign, and not specifically the seventh-day Sabbath. What God laid down for the Israelites through Moses in regard to how the Sabbath was to be kept, was unique to Israel. The Israelites were God's chosen people and, as such, to the world-at-large they were to reflect His holiness, justice, mercy, and grace; they were to be a beacon, shining forth His glory in order to draw the peoples of the world to Him for salvation and cleansing. God spoke these words to Moses for the children of Israel: "... if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:5-6). This was God's desire for Israel, but it was contingent upon their obedience; their history tells us that it never saw fruition. The sacrificial system of Israel exemplified the demands of a holy God on sinful mankind (not just Israel) in a new and more specific way; in turn, the new restrictions for keeping the Sabbath days (not just the seventh day) reflected His desire to have the people turn to Him for fellowship. Exodus 31:13 provides the reason for the sign: "that ye may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you." The Hebrew word *qadash* (*sanctify*) within this context means: *to set apart as sacred*, or *to observe as holy*;³³ we have already seen this word used in relation to God sanctifying that first seventh day at creation! This is the all-holy God of the universe Who declares to Israel that He wants them to know that He has set them apart as holy; this is one indication of the spiritual relationship that God sought to have with this people – a people who were to be a holy testimony to the nations around them. God's sanctification of the children of Israel was not a one-time act, but an ever continuing process of sanctification; the keeping of the Sabbaths (plural) was to be a perpetual reminder of this process of sanctification that God was working into the individual lives of the Israelites. The seventh-day Sabbath took on a new significance for the Israelites, and their various feasts introduced new days that were to be kept like unto the weekly Sabbath; however, we must not forget that the weekly Sabbath did not begin with Israel.

Isaiah, the prophet of salvation, made it clear that the salvation that Jehovah offered was not limited to Israel; it was a salvation that was meant for all of mankind. The plan of redemption did not begin with Israel – it was implemented with Adam and Eve before they were expelled from the garden, and it was prepared before creation took place (Revelation 13:8). The promise of a coming Redeemer was made to the serpent within the hearing of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:15); God was not caught off guard by man's decision to sin. The redemption of mankind was in place

³³ Strong's Online.

before the foundation of the world was spoken into existence (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:18-20). Yet in the midst of declaring that the salvation of the Lord is to be for all people, the Lord, through Isaiah, included the necessity of keeping the Sabbath day holy:

Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; **that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it**, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil. ...

Also the sons of the stranger [a foreigner, not of the heritage of Israel], that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, **every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it**, and taketh hold of my covenant; even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people (Isaiah 56:1-2, 6-7).

The only named condition placed upon the foreigner being accepted by God was to not profane or defile **the** Sabbath (singular). When the Jews first heard of the Gentiles coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they sought to impose circumcision and adherence to the ordinances of Moses upon them (Acts 15:5), yet Paul made it very clear to the Galatians, who were falling prey to this error, that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature” (Galatians 6:15). There is a greater significance to honoring the Sabbath day than we might imagine; it is not just a law that was imposed upon the Israelites, but was also part of the essential criteria for the non-Israelite in finding acceptance before a God Who had called him just as surely as He called the Israelites. These are those who “join themselves to the Lord” (not necessarily to the nation of Israel), who seek to serve the Lord and love His name; the Psalmist David had already made it clear that the sacrifices in which the Lord took delight were not the animal sacrifices of ceremonial Judaism: “The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psalm 51:17). God’s call to mankind has always been universal; Israel was simply to be a vehicle to demonstrate the reality of God’s holiness in a tangible way to the rest of the world, and to provide them with an opportunity to find salvation through faith in the Lord by submitting to the Law of Moses – the sacrifices administered by the Levitical priesthood and the numerous other statutes and ordinances.

Chapter 3 – Through Jesus' Ministry

Before we become too involved in looking at the Sabbath during Jesus' days of ministry, we need to consider His words: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). The Law of Moses was to see fulfillment through the life of Jesus; it was not to be set aside but to find its ultimate completion in the Lord. The ceremonial celebrations and sacrifices all looked forward to their final fulfillment through the perfect, sinless life of Jesus. He kept all of the Biblical mandates relating to the keeping of the Sabbath days and, more specifically for our consideration, the weekly Sabbath.³⁴ It is interesting to note that on at least six occasions, the Pharisees and Jewish leaders found fault with Jesus as to how He kept the seventh-day Sabbath. Nevertheless, because He was the sinless Son of God, we must acknowledge that Jesus kept the seventh-day Sabbath perfectly; therefore, it is important that we look at these occasions carefully with this in mind. Let us see what it was that Jesus sought to teach the religious rulers about this special day.

Consider the context of the first two recorded instances of the Pharisees calling Jesus to task for His observance of the Sabbath:

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. **For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.** And when he was departed thence, he went into their synagogue: and, behold, there was a man which had his hand

³⁴ Before we venture too far into this section of our study, it is important to note that, within the Greek, the word *sabbaton* can mean the seventh-day Sabbath, the designated feast days (sabbaths), or a week, and this is applicable to both its singular and plural forms (Strong's Dictionary). Consequently, understanding and carefully considering the context becomes the primary means of determining whether the word refers to the Sabbath, the feast sabbaths, or to a week.

withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him. And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other.

Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him (Matthew 12:1-14; parallel passages in Mark 2:23-3:6 and Luke 6:1-11).

Before we examine this passage, notice that Jesus and His disciples “went on the sabbath day”; the Greek reads *went on the sabbaths* (plural), and, therefore, we must consider the context to understand exactly what is meant here. Is this referring to the Sabbath, a feast-day sabbath, or to a week of time? Jesus and His disciples were going through the fields on a particular day (therefore, a *week* is not applicable), and based upon Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees in both of these situations, it is clear that He is trying to get them to apply justice and mercy on the Sabbath day, and not just their rigid zeal for conformity to their interpretation of the weekly Sabbath laws. It seems that the obvious understanding is that this is the seventh-day Sabbath.

This passage contains two cases of the Pharisees’ testing of Jesus’ understanding of the Sabbath day and how it was to be observed. In the first, Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees because His disciples were “harvesting” grain on the Sabbath; in the latter, the Pharisees initiated a confrontation with Jesus over healing on the Sabbath. In the first scenario, Jesus brought two passages of Scripture to their attention. The first is from 1 Samuel 21:1-6, where David and his men were fleeing from Saul, and Ahimilech, the priest, gave them the replaced showbread, which was still considered to be holy and, therefore, to be eaten only by the priests within the holy place (Leviticus 24:5-9). In the second reference, Jesus reminds them that the priests themselves profaned, or desecrated, the Sabbath, and yet they were without blame: they were required to kill two lambs as a sacrifice on the Sabbath, in addition to the regular sacrifices, and to burn them (Numbers 28:9-10) even though work was expressly forbidden, and they were not to kindle a fire on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10; 31:14; 35:3). However, Jesus went on to give them an even greater reason for defending His disciples’ actions: Someone greater than the temple was in their midst, and He makes this important statement: “For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.” The Pharisees and Scribes of the Jews had created a litany of limitations to activities on the Sabbath day, yet they failed to recognize God’s

purpose for setting the day aside. Jesus, as a member of the Triune Godhead, was active in the creation of the world (Colossians 1:16), and, therefore, He created the Sabbath rest as well. Truly, Jesus IS Lord of the Sabbath.

From the fields, Jesus entered the synagogue, and the Pharisees took the opportunity to bait Him further. It seems that they made sure that there was a man with a withered hand (an obvious handicap) right where Jesus could not miss seeing him; then, to make sure that Jesus was forced to deal with the matter, they asked Him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Before responding to the evident need of the man, Jesus turned His attention to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in asking the question; even though they would rescue an animal in distress on the Sabbath, they were seeking to find fault with Jesus for healing on that day. Jesus then turned to the man and asked him to stretch forth his hand (something that he would not have been able to do) and he was healed. The apparent physical effort involved in healing this man was incredibly less than the Pharisees would expend in rescuing one of their sheep, yet that simple act of compassion sent the Pharisees into a huddle as to how they might destroy Jesus.

Out of these first two encounters with the Pharisees, two things come to the fore regarding the Sabbath: 1) Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, and 2) it is lawful to carry out acts of kindness on that day. As incredible as it may seem, all of the other instances where the Pharisees took Jesus to task about how He kept the Sabbath had to do with situations where He performed healing. Luke relates the case of the woman who had been bent over for 18 years; when Jesus went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, she was right there. Could this be another time when the religious leaders were seeking to find fault with Him? It would certainly seem so. Jesus addressed the leaders very pointedly, "*Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?*" (Luke 13:15-16). The lesson is the same: it is lawful to do good for others on the Sabbath. Had word not reached this synagogue that Jesus had healed the man with the withered hand? Or, perhaps the religious leaders thought to test Jesus further by presenting Him with a woman who had a problem, to see if that would make a difference.

The next recording in Luke is of Jesus attending a meal on the Sabbath day at a Pharisee's house; this time the challenge did not take place in a synagogue:

And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took *him*, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer him again to these things" (Luke 14:1-6).

It seems that the Pharisees sought to catch Jesus in holding a double standard; for, once again, they have a man with an evident problem front and center – a man who probably had a severe case of dropsy (edema, or fluid retention) so that it was obvious to everyone who saw him. However, this time Jesus initiated the confrontation with the Pharisees by asking them if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Even though they did not answer Him, it is obvious that they still held stubbornly to their rules and regulations.

The final two situations where Jesus faced the Jewish leadership about the keeping of the Sabbath are recorded for us in the Gospel of John, and these, too, are centered on healing. In the first occasion, the man had been plagued with his crippling infirmity for 38 years and sat at the Pool of Bethesda hoping for a miracle from the waters. On the Sabbath day, Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk" (John 5:8). This time Jesus challenged the Jews on two fronts: healing on the Sabbath, and instructing the man to carry his bed (something that the religious Jews had on their list of forbidden activities). The result was that the Jews did "persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day" (John 5:16).

The second case is of a blind man whom Jesus healed on the Sabbath by spitting on the ground, making clay, anointing the man's eyes, and then telling him to wash. The Pharisees claimed, "this man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day" (John 9:16); evidently, making clay (no matter how much or little) was also forbidden. What they failed to add to their observation was that Jesus did not keep the Sabbath according to what they had determined as appropriate; they were blind to the miracle, and could only see the violation of their own Sabbath laws.

Incredibly, the Pharisees and other Jewish leaders held tenaciously to their interpretation of the laws; really, their righteousness depended upon keeping with careful integrity those minute, carefully delineated, man-imposed laws. Jesus came

rubbing their noses in the fact that they were stubbornly holding to their interpretation of the Law, but they had long since lost sight of the spirit of the Law. Even though Jesus declared Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath, they refused to acknowledge His position of authority, for then they would have had to embrace Him as the Messiah. Perhaps if He had come confronting the Roman authority, rather than the Jewish religious authority, He might then have had a much different response from the Jewish leaders; they sought a political Messiah, and not a spiritual One.

As we consider these illustrations of Jesus keeping the Sabbath day, we must note, first of all, that Jesus **did** keep it. There is no instance where Jesus did not keep the Sabbath, and being the eternal, sinless Son of God come in the flesh, He kept it in all purity and holiness. He did not keep it in harmony with the rules of the Pharisees, but according to its original institution at creation and in complete agreement with the requirements given to Moses.

In Matthew 24, Jesus spoke to His disciples about the end days and about the destruction of Jerusalem. In His discourse, He warned of a time when they would need to flee from Jerusalem, and, within that context, He declared: "... pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day ..." (Matthew 24:20). His specific teaching regarding their flight from Jerusalem was that they should pray that it would not take place on the Sabbath. If the Lord had no concern for the keeping of the Sabbath day, then this would not have been a part of His instructions. Jesus declared Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), but He did not use that as license to violate God's intended purpose for the day. Even as He prophesied about things that would transpire later, it was still important that the Sabbath be kept as it was intended.

Chapter 4 – During Jesus’ Death and Resurrection

The confrontations that Jesus had with the Pharisees over the Sabbath do not form the basis of contention within the minds of most Evangelicals today. What becomes far more controversial is the observance of the Sabbath after the time of Jesus’ resurrection. After all, they reason, the Laws of Moses were in full effect at the time of Jesus’ tenure on earth; therefore, it only follows that He would have kept them sinlessly. However, they contend, Jesus’ resurrection forms a pivotal point in how we understand the subject of the Sabbath, even as it is in so many other things. Since these events are central to so much of history, it is vitally important for our discussion that we have a proper grasp of the time-line of the events from Jesus’ crucifixion through to His resurrection. We must ensure that there are no misconceptions and errors in our understanding of how these events unfolded. For our discussion, it is critical that we observe where the Sabbath fell and the reality of the seventh-day Sabbath observance through this time.

There is perhaps no greater example of how we have capitulated to tradition and fail to exercise our minds in spiritual matters than in the consideration of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which we blasphemously call *Easter*. Although the word does appear in Acts 12:4 in the King James Version (KJV), it is an inaccurate translation of the Greek word, *pascha*, which refers to the Passover (as it was correctly translated everywhere else), and, interestingly enough, it is not translated as *Easter* in any other modern translation.³⁵ The translators of the KJV, instructed to follow the pattern of the Bishop’s Bible in carrying out their translation work, brought this term over from the Bishop’s Bible,³⁶ an earlier English translation that showed Acts 12:4 as: “And when he had caught hym, he put hym in pryson also, and delyuered hym to foure quaternions of souldiers to be kept, intendency after Easter to bryng hym foorth to the people.”³⁷

The pagan roots of the word *Easter* have been called into question in recent scholarship, to the point that some etymology dictionaries have changed their word histories in order to downplay any such connection.³⁸ Nevertheless, there is some

³⁵ A check through thirty other translations, including the *New King James Version* and the notoriously loose *The Message*, turned up no instances of the use of *Easter* in Acts 12:4.

³⁶ Interestingly, the Bishop’s Bible uses the word *Easter* in John 11:55 as well, yet, in this case, the KJV translators chose to use the word *Passover* in both instances within this verse.

³⁷ The Bishop’s Bible, *ESword*.

³⁸ For example: <https://www.etymonline.com/> used to show this for *Easter*: [Proto Germanic] *Austron*, a goddess of fertility and sunrise whose feast was celebrated at the spring equinox,” but now shows: “Proto-Germanic *austron-

archeological and linguistic evidence that links *Easter* with pagan celebrations among Germanic peoples in the spring of the year.³⁹ Older dictionaries were willing to make the link: “fr. OE. [Old English] *Ēastre* ... a Teutonic goddess of spring”⁴⁰ Interestingly, only the English and German refer to the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection as Easter and Ostern (respectively); all other European languages use some form of the Hebrew *pesach*, or Greek *pascha* (Passover).⁴¹ Evangelicals like to add their weight to distancing it from any pagan connections: the late Gretchen Passantino, writer for Christian Research Institute, declared in her article, “Ash Wednesday, Lent and Easter,” that the root of *Easter* is the “proto-Germanic root word meaning ‘to rise,’” which she then related to Christ rising from the dead,⁴² whereas etymology shows it as “from Proto-Germanic *austron-, ‘dawn.’”⁴³ Even though there has been a diluting of the history of the word *Easter*, it is evident that Passantino (who used no supporting references) doesn’t have her information in order. The pagans, however, have little difficulty with its history: “Eostre was the Goddess of the Spring and ... worshiped by the Germanic people of Europe before the rise of the Church.”⁴⁴ All of the ancient civilizations had their version of the goddess of fertility or spring: Egypt had Isis, Greece – Aphrodite, Rome – Venus, Babylon – Ishtar, and the inhabitants of Canaan had Ashtoreth (1 Kings 11:33).⁴⁵ As we have seen, some will dispute that *Easter* has any pagan connections, but it also noted that modern-day pagans see it as being their holy day; the Roman Catholics emphasize that there are no substantial records of the goddess Eostre, and erroneously cite the Greek *pascha* as being the root for the word *Easter*.⁴⁶ The Catholic leadership, undoubtedly because of the sacrilege that they have committed around the events of the Lord’s sacrifice, diligently seek to provide a semblance of justification for following paganism.

Returning to the daily order of Jesus’ death and resurrection, it is important to base our understanding of the timing of events on reality, and not on what has been passed down to us. For example, our modern calendar shows a day called “Good Friday” followed by “Easter Sunday” (with Saturday coming in between, of course).

, ‘dawn,’ also possibly the name of a goddess whose feast was celebrated in Eastermonað (the Anglo-Saxon month corresponding with April).”

³⁹ Richard Sermon, “From Easter to Ostara,” *Time and Mind*, Vol. 1, Issue 3, November 2008.

⁴⁰ <https://archive.org/details/a-comprehensive-etymological-dictionary-of-the-english-language-by-ernest-klein/page/492/mode/2up>.

⁴¹ Strong’s Dictionary, *ESword*.

⁴² <https://www.equip.org/articles/ash-wednesday-lent-and-easter/>.

⁴³ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=easter>.

⁴⁴ <https://otherworldlyoracle.com/eostre-goddess/>.

⁴⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fertility_deities.

⁴⁶ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05224d.htm>.

Typically, the modern understanding is that Jesus died on Friday, and was raised to life on Sunday; this fits nicely with our calendar and the way that *Easter* has come to be celebrated. To quote from Hank Hanegraaff, director of the Christian Research Institute and host of the *Bible Answer Man* radio program: "In Matthew 12:40 Jesus prophesies that He would be dead 'three days and three nights.' The fact of the matter is he was dead for only two nights and one full day."⁴⁷ Hank justifies this blatant contradiction of Jesus' own words by saying that the Jews counted any portion of a day as a whole day. However, Jesus openly declared to the Pharisees: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40). Why would Jesus, the eternal Word Who framed the first evening and morning (Genesis 1:5), say "three days and three nights" if He only meant one day and two nights? Counting from Friday to Sunday will not permit the fulfillment of these words of Jesus (even using the part-day-as-a-whole-day argument only results in three days and two nights), yet this is carelessly rationalized away, and the average Evangelical today, including the so-called "Bible Answer Man," carries on without giving the matter another thought.

Let us give careful consideration to the timing of the events of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, keeping in mind that the Jewish method of marking time is not the same as what we practice in our culture today. The Jewish day begins at about six o'clock in the evening, and is in keeping with the creation account of Genesis where God declared the "evening and the morning" to be the day (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). We need to keep this firmly in mind when viewing the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection lest we arrive at conclusions based on modern-day time-keeping, rather than those used within the Jewish context. It is important, for our study, to understand the timing of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Leviticus 23:5 says: "in the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even *is* the Lord's passover." The first month in the Jewish calendar is called Abib or Nisan (the latter was primarily used after the Babylonian captivity, and seems to spring from the Assyrian word *nisannu*, meaning "beginning."⁴⁸). This is in the spring of the year and the month in which the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt. For ease of looking at the details of the days around the Passover as they unfolded at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection, it is of value to plot them into a chart format so that they can be observed clearly and chronologically.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ <https://www.equip.org/perspectives/three-days-three-nights/>.

⁴⁸ Easton's Revised Bible Dictionary, "Nisan," Online Bible edition.

⁴⁹ This chart has been created through personal research, and affirmed by A. J. Dager's research in "Facts and Fallacies of the Resurrection," <http://www.mediaspotlight.org/>

The Timing of Events Surrounding Jesus' Death and Resurrection		
JEWISH CALENDAR/TIME	EVENT	MODERN DAY OF WEEK/TIME
13 th of Nisan	Peter and John prepared the room for the Passover meal (Luke 22:8). This is traditionally the time when the dwelling is searched to ensure that all leaven has been removed, ⁵⁰ not only for the day of the Passover but also for the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the 15 th of Nisan, a holy day).	Tuesday before 6:00 PM
14 th of Nisan (Day of Passover)	Jesus and His disciples ate the "Last Supper," which was not the Passover meal. He desired to eat the Passover with His disciples (because He knew what lay ahead) but openly declared that He would absolutely not eat (this is a strong negative in the Greek) of the Passover <i>until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God</i> (Luke 22:14-16; John 18:28). ⁵¹ During this meal, Jesus identified Judas as the betrayer and spoke of the New Covenant to be established in His shed blood.	Tuesday after 6:00 PM
14 th of Nisan (Day of Passover)	Jesus and the eleven went to Gethsemane where Jesus prayed three times for relief from the trial ahead; three times the disciples slept while He prayed – it was obviously very late. It is here that Judas and his crowd arrested Jesus for the <i>chief priests and elders</i> (Matthew 26:47).	Very late Tuesday or early Wednesday

⁵⁰ <https://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5917-eve-of-holidays>.

⁵¹ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-negation.htm.

14 th of Nisan (Day of Passover)	Jesus is taken to stand before Caiaphas and the scribes and elders of Israel (Matthew 26:57); Peter followed, denied three times that he knew Jesus, and the cock crowed (as Jesus had said); the third watch of the night was called the <i>cockcrowing</i> (Mark 13:35).	Wednesday about 3:00 AM
14 th of Nisan (1 st Hour) ⁵² (Passover)	Matthew 27:1-2 indicates that the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to Pilate <i>when morning was come</i> , which would have been the beginning of the business day, or about 6:00 AM. ⁵³ This was a very intense time for the Romans because of the millions of Jews who came to Jerusalem for the Passover. ⁵⁴	Wednesday 6:00AM
14 th of Nisan (after 3 rd Hour) (Passover)	Jesus is crucified. Mark 15:25 ⁵⁵	After Wednesday 9:00 AM
14 th of Nisan (6 th to 9 th Hour) (Passover)	Darkness came over the land from the 6 th until the 9 th hour; as Jesus bears the sins of the world, the sun withdraws its shining. Matthew 27:45 ⁵⁶	Wednesday 12:00 – 3:00 PM

⁵² The Jews, at the time of the Lord's ministry, used the Roman method of counting the hours of the **daytime** – there were 12 hours in the daytime (which varied in length depending upon the time of year: in summer they were longer than one hour, and in winter, shorter); https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/526872/jewish/Hours.htm.

⁵³ John records the religious Jews' intrusion into a time that would have already been stressful for Pilate – Jerusalem was filled with Jews from everywhere, and now these men were trying to get him to execute Someone out of envy (Matthew 27:18). This was the *preparation of the Passover*, the Roman army was on high alert, and it was *about the sixth hour* for Pilate – the day had barely begun and it was already proving to be troublesome (John 19:14). John is revealing specifically what Pilate was facing this early in the day (about 6:00 AM as we know it); Mark notes that Jesus was crucified at the third hour, which has proven to be a problem for many. Matthew, Mark and Luke were written within the range of AD 50-60, Jerusalem was still standing and the Jewish traditions continued unabated, so they followed the Jewish method of tracking time; John was written about AD 90, Jerusalem was no more, and he wrote it from Ephesus – the Roman method prevailed. Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p. 364; <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2016/02/when-was-each-book-of-the-bible-written/>.

⁵⁴ It is commonly understood that during the time of the Passover, Jews from many surrounding areas came and Jerusalem's population would swell into the millions; it required constant vigilance on the part of the Romans in order to prevent an insurrection, and great diplomacy so as to not inadvertently cause one; Flavius Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, Book V, Chapter 9, Section 3.

⁵⁵ Mark notes that it was the *third hour* when the crucifixion was completed; he uses the Jewish time in identifying that it was during the third hour (between 9:00 and 10:00 AM) that Jesus was crucified. See footnote #53 above.

⁵⁶ This period of darkness is referred to by the secular writers of the day. For example, Phlegon, whose writings have disappeared, is quoted by other historians as stating: "...during the reign of Tiberius Caesar there was a **complete solar eclipse at full moon** from the sixth to the ninth hour; it is clear that this is the one. But what have eclipses to do with an earthquake, rocks breaking apart, resurrection of the dead, and a universal disturbance of this nature" (emphasis added) (http://www.textexcavation.com/phlegon_testimonium.html). Note: it is impossible to have a

14 th of Nisan (9 th Hour) (Passover)	Jesus cries out: "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34); God, Who cannot look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13), turned away from His sinless Son Who had taken upon Himself the sins of the world – Jesus experienced separation from God for our sins. ⁵⁷	Wednesday 3:00 PM
14 th of Nisan (9 th Hour) (Passover)	Jesus relinquished His breath (spirit) to the Father ⁵⁸ and died as the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice – at the time prescribed for killing the Passover lamb. ⁵⁹ Matthew 27:50	Wednesday 3:00 PM
14 th of Nisan (11 th Hour or so) (Passover)	Jesus was buried before the end of the 14 th of Nisan; sunset brought the beginning of the 15 th of Nisan, a holy day, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 19:31; Leviticus 23:5-7). ⁶⁰	Wednesday before 6:00 PM
15 th of Nisan Sunset to Sunrise – this is a holy day , the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, no "servile work"	Jesus in the tomb – night one	Wednesday 6:00 PM to Thursday 6:00 AM

solar eclipse at full moon, nor does a solar eclipse last for three hours, which simply confirms that this darkness was a supernatural act of God as Jesus bore the sins of the world.

⁵⁷ Under the Mosaic Law, the one who brought an offering for their sins to the tabernacle would lay their hands upon the head of the animal, thereby symbolically placing their sins upon it for their cleansing; the sins of all of mankind (past, present and future) were placed upon the perfect Sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ, and He bore them during this 3-hour period of blackness until He died as the Promised Redeemer for our eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12).

⁵⁸ It is important to understand that Jesus did not die from the crucifixion, but He willingly died as the Lamb of God Who was deemed to be sacrificed from before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8); because He committed His *pneuma* (spirit) to the Father, He broke the power of Satan, which is death (Hebrews 2:14) – Satan did not kill Him; He died willingly for the sins of all of mankind (1 John 2:2).

⁵⁹ The Passover lamb was slain after the evening sacrifice was performed, typically 3:00 in the afternoon (http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view_page.jsp?artid=99&letter=P&pid=0). Josephus marks the time of the killing of the lambs as being from the ninth to the eleventh hour, *The War of the Jews*, 6.9.3 <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/josephus/war-6.htm>

⁶⁰ Here is the error that plagues modern calculations (which are really a capitulation to the Roman Catholic tradition). The day following Jesus' crucifixion was a holy day, but not the seventh-day Sabbath.

15 th of Nisan Sunrise to Sunset – still a holy day , no “servile work”	Jesus in the tomb – day one	Thursday 6:00 AM to Thursday 6:00 PM
16 th of Nisan, Sunset to Sunrise, this was a day like unto any other day	Jesus in the tomb – night two	Thursday 6:00 PM to Friday 6:00 AM
16 th of Nisan, Sunrise to Sunset. ⁶¹	Jesus in the tomb – day two	Friday 6:00 AM to Friday 6:00 PM
17 th of Nisan, Sunset to Sunrise – this is a holy day , the regular seventh-day Sabbath	Jesus in the tomb – night three	Friday 6:00 PM to Saturday 6:00 AM
17 th of Nisan, Sunrise to Sunset – the regular Sabbath	Jesus in the tomb – day three	Saturday 6:00 AM to Saturday 6:00 PM
18 th of Nisan Sunset – after the end of the Sabbath day	Jesus rose from the dead “early the first day of the week” (Mark 16:9). ⁶²	Saturday after 6:00 PM

⁶¹ This is likely the day when the women purchased spices for the final burial processes (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:55-56), since they arrived at the tomb to apply the spices at the rising of the sun on the first of the week (Mark 16:2), which would have been the time when businesses were just beginning to open.

⁶² Notice the difference between Mark 16:2 – the women arrived early “at the rising of the sun,” and Mark 16:9 where Jesus rose “early the first *day* of the week.” In the former case the *early* is qualified to indicate a specific application of the term; in the latter case it simply marks the beginning of the first day, which starts at 6:00 PM Saturday within our time context.

18 th of Nisan – the day following the seventh-day Sabbath within the Feast of Unleavened Bread	Jesus rose from the dead, the <i>Firstfruit</i> of those who have died and risen again (Leviticus 23:11; 1 Corinthians 15:20); the OT saints rose (Matthew 27:52-53), and are the Wave Offering (<i>firstfruit</i>) to God and Jesus (Revelation 14:4).	Saturday after 6:00PM to Sunday before 6:00AM
18 th of Nisan Sunrise	Women go to the tomb on the “first day of the week ... at the rising of the sun” (Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1).	Sunday 6:00 AM
18 th of Nisan	Jesus appears to two disciples on their way to Emmaus (7½ miles from Jerusalem) – Luke 24:13, 29-33.	Sunday 3:00 PM or so
18 th of Nisan evening (toward sunset – the end of the day)	Jesus appears to the disciples who are locked away behind closed doors (Luke 24:36; John 20:19). Thomas was not with them (John 20:24).	Sunday 3:00 – 6:00 PM
26 th of Nisan, probably toward evening again.	Jesus appears again to the disciples who are locked away behind closed doors, this time Thomas was with them (John 20:26). ⁶³	Monday 3:00 – 6:00 PM

Not surprisingly, by taking the time to read the Scriptures carefully, it is not difficult to determine that Jesus fulfilled His statement to the Scribes and Pharisees that He would be in the earth three days and three nights, just like Jonah was in the belly of the fish (Matthew 12:40), and His instruction to His disciples that He would rise again after three days (Mark 8:31). It is not necessary to manipulate the application in an effort to realize the exact fulfillment of the Lord's words. For the purposes of our study, there are two truths that become very apparent: 1) the Lord rose from the grave early on the first day of the week – our Saturday evening, and 2) even in His sacrifice for the sins of mankind, the Lord kept the regular Sabbath day of rest. What is evident in the Scriptures is that our modern concept of “Good

⁶³ It is important to note the timing of this appearance by the Lord, and it is very interesting that the Spirit of God has included this detail that so many today seem to miss, or do not want to see. Those who would seek to shift the Sabbath from the seventh day to Sunday (or call Sunday the “Christian Sabbath,” or whatever similar rationale may be propounded) like to use the fact that, after His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples on Sunday (John 20:19), but what they will always choose to ignore is the fact that Jesus did exactly the same thing on a Monday (“eight days later”). This reveals their flawed argument and undermines one of their primary defenses for seeking to justify the change from Sabbath to Sunday, and their total disregard for the seventh-day Sabbath (contrary to the Fourth Commandment).

Friday” and “Easter Sunday” is completely unbiblical; it is a product of the zealous, early Roman Catholic leadership to massage pagan festivals into “Christian” celebrations.⁶⁴ As we can see with the present use of the term *Easter*, they were not above applying a pagan name to God’s provision of His Son to fulfill the promises of the Scriptures in providing redemption for fallen mankind. We would do well to ask, along with the Apostle Paul: “... what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14) – the answer is still “None!” It would be appropriate for us to take the Lord’s words to Israel to heart: “... in all *things* that I have said unto you be circumspect: and make no mention of the name of other gods, neither let it be heard out of thy mouth” (Exodus 23:13). However, we have unwittingly bought into the Roman Catholic lie, and unthinkingly refer to the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord by the name of a pagan goddess of fertility. What blasphemy against God!

⁶⁴ This is the subject of other studies (*The Reason for the Season* and *The Realities of Easter*), but suffice it to say that the early Roman Catholic leaders took every opportunity to substitute “Christian” terms for pagan deities – *Christmas* and *Easter* are two glowing examples of this desecration.

Chapter 5 – The Early “Church”

Rather than proceed into how the Sabbath was handled by the Apostles, for now we will skip over the teachings of Paul and the evidences that we find in the Book of Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament (NT) writings. We will deal with these Scriptures very thoroughly as we look at the modern positions that are being put forward on this subject; it is from these that all of today’s advocates of a change in the seventh-day Sabbath seek to support their position. Therefore, we will move on to the early church,⁶⁵ basically the time after the Apostles, and consider those who exercised influence during this time. As we read through the epistles, which make up the bulk of our NT Scriptures, we realize that much of the teaching contained therein was directed against error that was flooding into the lives of the new Christians. Satan was not absent during this time, nor was he sitting idly by wondering what to do; he was actively distorting and perverting the Gospel in an effort to make it into something that it was not (Galatians 1:7). There is a strong emphasis in the epistles for us to remain true to the teaching from the Apostles, and not to be taken in by what someone else should present as the truth.

“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man ...” (Proverbs 14:12). It is important to keep this in mind when reading the writings of those who lived in the first few centuries AD, lest there be an unwarranted acceptance of their writings as being of great value and significance since they walked in the times of the Apostles or shortly thereafter. Our logic would lead us to believe that these writings should be more reliable, but even our preserved text of Scripture provides evidence of Satan’s attempts to corrupt and destroy the message of the Gospel. Galatians, one of the earliest letters written, leaves no doubt that Satan’s determination to corrupt the message of truth was very active even before Paul had completed his missionary journeys. We are tempted to view the oldest preserved manuscripts as being more acceptable than later documents (one of the errors that the higher critics apply to the Bible manuscripts), yet quite the opposite would be closer to the truth. Typically, the older, approved manuscripts would wear out through much use, therefore the continued existence of the oldest manuscripts is an indication that they were not accepted and survived the passage of time because they were not used. Keeping in mind the error against which the writers of the Scriptures wrote through the

⁶⁵ The word for *church* is not found in the Greek text of our Scriptures; the Greek word *ekklesia* has been translated as church, but it really means “called-out ones,” and speaks of what Jesus said that He would build – a pure Body to which He is the Head. However, I have no difficulty using the term *church* as it applies to those who departed from the teachings of the Apostles.

inspiration of the Spirit of God, it would be folly to think that any early writings that have surfaced would be acceptable without careful scrutiny.

Justin Martyr: This is a name that is significant among the early church writers; he is often called the first writer of theology and is highly acclaimed by some. Born in Flavia Neapolis in Samaria (there is some dispute as to the date, but probably between AD100 and 114), he was a Gentile of some means and studied much of the various philosophers' teachings, becoming a disciple of Socrates and Plato.⁶⁶ Schaff, in his introduction to Justin Martyr's writings, provides subtle evidence of our need to read Martyr's writings with discernment:

After trying all other systems [of philosophy], his elevated tastes and refined perceptions made him a disciple of Socrates and Plato. So **he climbed towards Christ**. ... The sub-apostolic age begins with the first Christian author,—the founder of theological literature. It introduced to mankind, as the **mother of true philosophy**, the despised teaching of those Galileans ...

He wore his philosopher's gown after his conversion, as a token that he had attained the **only true philosophy**.

At last he became acquainted with Christianity, being at once impressed with the extraordinary fearlessness which the Christians displayed in the presence of death, and with the grandeur, stability, and truth of the teachings of the Old Testament. From this time he acted as an Evangelist, taking every opportunity to proclaim **the gospel as the only safe and certain philosophy**, the only way to salvation (emphasis added).⁶⁷

Justin Martyr was a philosopher, first of all, and was only a Christian to the extent that he could meld Christianity with his philosophers' manner of thinking; despite this, he is upheld by many as a Christian apologist of some renown. As we have seen from Schaff's comments on Justin Martyr, he viewed the Christian faith as simply another philosophy, albeit superior to the other philosophies that he had encountered. Paul, in warning the Colossian believers, stated that they were to "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). It is evident that Martyr did not heed this warning.

⁶⁶ Philip Schaff, *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, (pdf version) pp. 250-251.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Justin Martyr wrote his *Dialogue with Trypho* (a document that unfolds a lengthy "conversation" between Martyr and Trypho [whether a real Jew or a pseudo-Jew is not agreed upon] about the validity of Christian teaching as contrasted with the failure of Jewish beliefs), and goes on at great length (as any good philosopher would); included in his ramblings is the following to Trypho:

But if we do not admit this [the case has just been made that the temple, sacrifices, etc., were there for the Jews, not for God], we shall be liable to fall into foolish opinions, as if it were not the same God who existed in the times of Enoch and all the rest, who neither were circumcised after the flesh, nor observed Sabbaths, nor any other rites, seeing that Moses enjoined such observances⁶⁸

The case that Martyr is seeking to make is that the observances and rites of the Jews were instituted because of their sinfulness, and that all of these began with Moses. It is true that the rituals, sacrifices, and other observances were instituted because of sinfulness, but it is not true that they began with Moses. As Paul sought to correct the error of the Galatian Christians, he wrote: "Wherefore then *serveth* the law? It was **added** because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made ... Wherefore **the law was our schoolmaster** to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:19-24). What God instituted through Moses was added to that which mankind already knew; this was not something entirely new, but was set in place so that mankind would be without excuse. Paul declares: "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20), and further: "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7).

What becomes clear, by reading a passage like Romans 4, is that Abraham was justified before God through faith, even before the rite of circumcision was instituted, and that he is the father of all those who believe (verses 3, 11-13). From the beginning of time, man has been accepted by God through faith, not by works, rites, or the keeping of the law. Enoch was translated out of this life because "he pleased God," but the clarification of what that means quickly follows, "but without faith *it is* impossible to please *him* [God]" (Hebrews 11:5, 6). It was faith that brought salvation for these saints of old, and it is faith that brings salvation today – nothing has changed except the clarity of God's revelation to mankind. The saints of old had faith in God, that He was going to send the One Who would redeem mankind; the

⁶⁸ Schaff, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 322.

saints of today have faith in the finished work of the One Who came and fulfilled the law by becoming the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5).

Returning to the case that Martyr sought to make with Trypho, it becomes apparent, as we have considered the above Scriptures, that God's dealings with mankind did not undergo dramatic changes throughout time, but, rather, there was a progressive revelation of what His requirements were – a revelation that culminated in the arrival of the Messiah, Jesus. Martyr overstates his case by declaring that the observances of Sabbaths began with Moses, and this particular quote is provided to demonstrate that he held this belief. However, he does not stand alone in coming to this conclusion. James Borland, in his article "Should We Keep the Sabbath?," adamantly affirms that "not one verse of Scripture shows Adam, Enoch, Methuselah, or Noah keeping the Sabbath and passing it down to others."⁶⁹ Christian Research Institute (CRI) has this article on their website, and therefore, as a "Christian" research organization, they promote this concept. However, lest we misjudge the position of CRI on this matter, Hank Hanegraaff, their president, has openly declared that the "Sabbath command in the Old Testament never specified a 'Saturday' observance; rather, it was simply a command that we should observe a cycle of six days of work and then rest for one day."⁷⁰ In seeking to drive his point home, he goes on to declare:

Christians are no more required to make Sunday their day of rest than they are to make Saturday their day of rest. ... In fact, to criticize Sunday observance and then to separate from the rest of the church over something like this, is both legalistic and divisive.⁷¹

To say the least, Hanegraaff has dealt rather carelessly with the subject of the Sabbath and the day of rest. Here is the leader of an organization whose primary mission is to research such matters in order to provide a Biblical perspective for today's Christian, and we are told that the observance of a day of rest (one day out of seven) is something that we *should* do, thereby nullifying the thrust of God's Fourth Commandment. Hanegraaff would have us believe that it is a matter of personal preference; whatever your lifestyle demands is okay; the important thing is to not disrupt unity over the matter.

⁶⁹ <https://www.equip.org/articles/should-we-keep-the-sabbath/>.

⁷⁰ <https://www.equip.org/perspectives/sunday-sabbath-does-sunday-observance-violate-the-sabbath/>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

However, Justin Martyr goes even further and sees the end of the Sabbath observance with Christ; in other words, it was instituted with Moses and done away with in Christ:

As, then, circumcision began with Abraham, and the Sabbath and sacrifices and offerings and feasts with Moses, and it has been proved they were enjoined on account of the hardness of your people's heart, so it was necessary, in accordance with the Father's will, that they should **have an end in Him** who was born of a virgin, of the family of Abraham and tribe of Judah, and of David; in Christ the Son of God (emphasis added).⁷²

In essence, what Martyr really advocated is a "no-Sabbathism," declaring the Sabbath to have been done away with altogether. From the time of Justin Martyr (early second century AD) through to the modern day Borlands and Hanegraaffs, you will find support for the disregard of the Sabbath, and you don't have to look very hard, or far, to find it.

Ignatius (about AD 30-107): Here is someone who lived as a contemporary of the Apostles, so we would think that this would be someone who could shed some light on this subject. However, we need to, once again, remind ourselves of the error that was so prevalent even while the Scriptures were being written. Simply reading through the messages that were given to the Apostle John for the messengers of the seven assemblies in Asia (Revelation 2-3) provides us with a very good commentary on the condition of the *ekklesia* at the very time of Ignatius. Satan did not hesitate for one moment to begin his attack on the *ekklesia* that Jesus said He would build (Matthew 16:18).

In his letter to the Philippians, Ignatius states: "If any one celebrates the passover along with the Jews, or receives the emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those that killed the Lord and His apostles."⁷³ What is evidently absent from this statement is the concept that Christ died for the sins of all mankind, including Ignatius. To that extent, we are all partakers with those who saw to the death of the Lord Jesus; in this case, Ignatius has evidently slanted his venom specifically against the Jews. He is not alone in this, for anti-Semitism has reared its head many times throughout history. Later in the same letter, Ignatius declares: "After the week of the passion, do not neglect to fast on the fourth and sixth days, distributing at the same time of thine abundance to the poor. If any one fasts on the Lord's Day or on the

⁷² Schaff, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 297.

⁷³ Ignatius to the Philippians, Chapter XIV, <http://www.pseudepigrapha.com/LostBooks/ignatius2philippians.htm>.

Sabbath, except on the paschal Sabbath only, he is a murderer of Christ.”⁷⁴ Again, what is evident is his anathema on anything Jewish; during the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Jews were instructed to eat only unleavened bread, and the first day and the seventh day were to be holy days, kept somewhat similar to the weekly Sabbath (Leviticus 23:5-8). As Ignatius advocates a particular formulation for fasting, he also curses anyone who would fast on a day that **he** doesn’t condone. That is strong language, and, again, betrays a lack of careful understanding of the purpose for the Lord dying on the cross. Christ was not murdered; in His own words, He came to “**give** his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). Inasmuch as Christ is the “propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2), it would seem evident that the Lord died because of a world of sinners. It is clear from 1 Peter 1:18-20 that Christ’s sacrifice was established before the foundation of the world; the religious leaders, blinded by their own spiritual pride, were used of God to bring about Jesus’ death, and Judas was used to betray Him into their hands, but our focus must not be so narrow as to condemn these people for “murdering” Jesus. It was our tremendous load of sin, and the sins of all of mankind from Adam onward, that required Jesus’ sinless sacrifice – and, as difficult as it may be for us to understand this, it was in God’s eternal plan. However, we must also remember Jesus’ words: “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born” (Matthew 26:24). There is a “woe” pronounced against Judas for making his choice, but there is no venomous attack against the Jews – after all, Jesus, Himself, was a Jew.

Elsewhere Ignatius declares,

Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner ... But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week].⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ignatius to the Philippians, Chapter XIII.

⁷⁵ Ignatius to the Magnesians, Chapter IX;

https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius_antioch/epistles_of_ignatius/anf01.v.iii.ix.html.

We might presume to accept this early understanding as somewhat authoritarian, if we were not aware that Satan was also desperately working to dislodge the truth from the minds of early believers by any means possible.

Ignatius made it abundantly clear that he believed that the Sabbath was to be kept spiritually (or, at least not after the manner of the Jews), and the first day of the week (which he chose to call the Lord's Day) was to be a day of celebration for the resurrection of the Lord. Before you say, "Aha!," it is important to look deeper. This is the same man who advocated remaining aloof from those who "confess not the Eucharist to be the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ";⁷⁶ the departure into the Roman Catholic error of transubstantiation is already evident. Furthermore, in the same letter, he says:

See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons, as being the institution [or command (as shown in a footnote)] of God. Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it" (supplied text in the original).⁷⁷

Here we have the heresies of the Eucharist and the elevation of the clergy over the laity strongly advocated (this is the Nicolaitan heresy that Jesus condemned in Revelation 2:6 and 15) – both of which have been fully developed within the confines of the Roman Catholic Church. Despite the warnings by Jesus and the Apostles against lording it over others (i.e., the superiority of the bishop), it seems that Ignatius felt that he had a better idea, and chose to ignore the teachings of the Lord and the Apostles in this matter.

Here is a man who lived from about AD 30 to 107, virtually within the time frame of the Apostles, and yet he has several of the key doctrines of the present Roman Catholic Church, which are contrary to the teachings of Scripture, solidly in hand. Nevertheless, you will find a quote from this heretic in the article on the Sabbath by the self-proclaimed Fundamental Baptist, David Cloud, proudly acclaiming Ignatius as an early Christian who supported keeping the first day of the week – with no warning against the many heresies that also came from this man!⁷⁸ For someone who is quick to point out the heresies being promoted today from the pulpits of many widely acclaimed Evangelicals, Cloud somehow chooses to turn a blind eye to the

⁷⁶ Ignatius to the Smyrnæans, Chapter VII;

https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius_antioch/epistles_of_ignatius/anf01.v.vii.vii.html.

⁷⁷ Ibid, Chapter VIII; https://ccel.org/ccel/ignatius_antioch/epistles_of_ignatius/anf01.v.vii.viii.html.

⁷⁸ <https://www.wayoflife.org/database/sabbathtoday.html>.

equally damnable heresies of Ignatius, and quotes from him as if he was a dependable source. That is a strangely hypocritical use of history to support what you want, while you choose to ignore what you don't want (and, perhaps, hope that no one checks it out). If we would apply the principle of testing the spirits in order to determine whether they are of God (1 John 4:1), I fear that Ignatius fails the test on far too many counts, and must not be considered as a useful source for truth; however, he does show how soon the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church began to be formulated among the leaders of the early church (**not** the *ekklesia*).

Socrates Scholasticus: In discussing the celebration of the Passover, Socrates Scholasticus (born c. AD 379) makes this observation of the day:

Nor is there less variation [having just delineated the various methods of fasting that were in use at this time] in regard to religious assemblies. For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this.⁷⁹

This is an interesting observation. The "sacred mysteries" are what we would refer to as ordinances (particularly the Lord's supper), and Socrates declares that at this time they were observed by the greatest number of churches on the Sabbath (the seventh day), while in Rome and Alexandria (two hotbeds for early heresy) this was no longer the case. For clarification, a note in the translation of this ancient document makes this observation: the Sabbath refers to "Saturday. Sunday is never called 'the Sabbath' by the ancient Fathers and historians."⁸⁰ Rome and Alexandria had dispensed with observing the ordinances on the Sabbath due to "some ancient tradition." In as much as these cities were heathen, the only ancient traditions that they would have had to offer would have been pagan. Therein is the crux of many of the errors that were perpetuated by the Roman Catholic Church, which grew out of the early church in Rome. In their enthusiasm to be culturally relevant, they embraced heathenism – despite the Lord's warning: "... Learn not the way of the heathen ..." (Jeremiah 10:2).

Constantine: With the passage of time, the persecution from Rome slowed, and finally there came a ruler, Constantius, who not only stopped the persecution,

⁷⁹ The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus, Book V, Chapter XXII;
<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202/npnf202.ii.viii.xxiii.html?highlight=sabbath&queryID=32118225&resultID=168813#highlight>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

but actually had a positive attitude toward Christians. The son of this man was none other than Constantine the Great, a pivotal leader in the ongoing development of the church (using the term within the full context of the organized church, more specifically, the Roman Catholic Church). Keep in mind that heresy was rampant by this time, as we have seen from the writings that we have looked at so far.

Eusebius was one who recorded much about Constantine and may have been one of his biggest fans. In his writings, we find a couple of entries that tell us just a little bit about this man. "... in his [Constantine's] sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign [the cross] which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies."⁸¹ This is mere superstition – a precursor to the numerous errors that the Catholics have perpetuated and multiplied through subsequent years; the cross is not a talisman that can be used for protection. The Psalmist had a very different perspective: "Through thee [God] will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us. For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me," and, he would certainly add, neither would the likeness of a cross on our shields (Psalm 44:5-6).

Furthermore, it is written of Constantine:

The emperor also personally inviting the society of God's ministers, distinguished them with the highest possible respect and honor, showing them favor in deed and word as persons consecrated to the service of his God. Accordingly, they were admitted to his table, though mean in their attire and outward appearance; yet not so in his estimation, since he thought he saw not the man as seen by the vulgar eye, but the God in him. He made them also his companions in travel, believing that He whose servants they were would thus help him.⁸²

Once again, we see evidence of superstition, namely that God will grant him (Constantine) safety as long as he travels with priests. However, we also catch a glimpse of the heresy of the god within all men; Constantine didn't look at the outward attire of the priests with whom he surrounded himself, but at the god in them. The priests were there to garner his favor, and Constantine accepted them as

⁸¹ Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Life of Constantine*, Book I, Chapter XXIX;
[https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.i.xxix.html?highlight="the christ of god appeared"&queryID=32128323&resultID=168328#highlight](https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.i.xxix.html?highlight=).

⁸² Ibid, Chapter XLII;
<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.i.xlii.html?queryID=32128462&resultID=168311>.

being godly men who could give him what he wanted. Neither Constantine nor the priests knew the God of the Bible. If we consider that the truth of God's Word was severely compromised by this time, and particularly the teachings being drawn together by Constantine and the bishops, it would be safe to assume that these priests were not born again and did not hold to the true Gospel once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It is New Age, Emergent Church, and Mormon philosophy that speaks of the spark of divinity within all men; and, like most heresies, this philosophy is wending its way into Evangelical thinking as well.

There can be no doubt of Constantine's benevolence to the Christians of his day. Lands, which had been confiscated during the earlier times of persecution, were to be restored to the nearest kinsman of those who had been put to death for their faith. However, he also, at this time, began building the fortunes of the local churches, for if no heir could be found, the lands would then become the property of the nearest church. Constantine deemed this to be fair, for "it will be no wrong to the departed that that church should be their heir, for whose sake they have endured every extremity of suffering."⁸³ Notice the subtle shift in focus here that provides him with the justification for assigning the properties to a local church. It would be safe to say that the greater portion of the martyrs to this time became such through their faith and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, and not to a "church" that was rapidly departing from what the Lord intended. There is evidence here of a shift of focus from the Lord, Who promised to build His *ekklesia*, to the "church," an organization under the guidance and control of men (at this time, Constantine and the bishops within his acquaintance). Once again, we recognize a precursor to the Roman Catholic Church's self-exaltation that salvation is only possible through the Church. Shortly thereafter, Constantine issued two statutes to those in charge of the various provinces. The first was to restrain pagan idolatry, and the second commended the "enlargement in length and breadth of the churches of God," using the "imperial treasury" to accomplish the task.⁸⁴ The "church," as a political force with which to be reckoned, was rapidly taking shape; today the Roman Catholic Church is the only religion that controls a recognized world state, the Vatican City.

In AD 325, Constantine convened a gathering of some 250 bishops from the various churches scattered throughout his kingdom to the palace in Nicæa, Bithynia. According to Eusebius, several issues of division among the churches caused

⁸³ Eusebius, Book II, Chapter XXXVI;

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.ii.xxxvi.html?queryID=32128642&resultID=168413>.

⁸⁴ Constantine, Chapter XLV;

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.ii.xlv.html?queryID=32128706&resultID=168388>.

Constantine to gather the bishops: the celebration of Easter was inconsistent – some followed the Passover date, while others avoided anything that was Jewish, and there was disagreement as to whether the nature of Jesus was the same as, or different from, God the Father.⁸⁵ With regard to the former, Eusebius submits this quote from the circular sent out by Constantine after the Council was completed:

At this meeting the question concerning the most holy day of Easter was discussed, and it was resolved ... that this feast ought to be kept by all ... on one and the same day. ... And first of all, it appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. ... Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd; for we have received from our Saviour a different way. A course at once legitimate and honorable lies open to our most holy religion. Beloved brethren, let us with one consent adopt this course, and withdraw ourselves from all participation in their baseness.⁸⁶

What is evident in this circular is an anti-Jewish sentiment that would flourish in the years ahead. However, what is difficult to determine is whether the celebration on a common day was the primary driving force for this injunction, or if it was really about separating from anything that had the appearance of being Jewish. Given the comments made by other church leaders up to this time, I would suggest that it was the latter argument that brought this gathering of bishops together. In concluding his letter to the provincial rulers, Constantine declared: "Receive, then, with all willingness this truly Divine injunction, and regard it as in truth the gift of God. For whatever is determined in the holy assemblies of the bishops is to be regarded as indicative of the Divine will."⁸⁷ This injunction, arrived at by the bishops under the leadership of Constantine, was to be considered as a word from God, and the expression of God's perfect will in this matter – yet the document is filled with invectives against the Jews, whom the Lord had chosen to carry the Promise forward from Abraham. When the Lord called Abraham, the father of the Jews, He promised him: "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Even though the latter

⁸⁵ *Constantine*, Book III, Chapter V; <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.iii.v.html>.

⁸⁶ *Constantine*, Book III, Chapter XVIII; <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.iii.xviii.html?queryID=32128932&resultID=168461>. A footnote at this point in the text explains that Constantine "carried out his reprobation of the Jews in his actions in discriminating laws at least, and perhaps in actual persecution."

⁸⁷ *Constantine*, Chapter XX; <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.iii.xx.html?queryID=32141481&resultID=168462>.

promise was fulfilled specifically in the Lord Jesus Christ, a Jew of the tribe of Judah, Constantine still felt justified in heaping caustic comments on the Jews as a people.

It was accepted, up to the time of Constantine, that the Roman emperor was the heart of the religion of the people since they were considered to be divine. This is what led to the severe persecution of the Christians, for they would acknowledge only the Lord as their God and would not extend their worship to the emperor as it was required. Out of this, it was natural for Constantine to be heavily involved in the chosen religion of the day – Christianity. He is quoted by Eusebius as saying: "You are bishops whose jurisdiction is within the Church: I also am a bishop, ordained by God to overlook [we would say *oversee*] whatever is external to the Church."⁸⁸ If you pause to consider the big picture of what was taking place in the years from the Apostles to this time, you can see a rather rapid movement toward the organized structure that we recognize as being alive and unchanged today – the Roman Catholic Church. What is clearly evident from within Scripture is that, very early on, there was a departure from the Gospel as proclaimed by the Lord's Apostles, and there would be no reason to think that it would slow down in the subsequent years leading up to Constantine.

"Constantine in 321 forbade the sitting of courts and all secular labor in towns on 'the venerable day of the sun,' as he expresses himself, perhaps with reference at once to the sun-god, Apollo, and to Christ, the true Sun of righteousness; to his pagan and his Christian subjects."⁸⁹ Several things are noteworthy here. First of all, Constantine did not identify the day as *Sabbatum* (Sabbath) or *Dies Domini* (Lord's Day), but *Dies Solis* (the day of the sun, Sunday), the astrological and heathen name.⁹⁰ This was familiar to the pagans of the day and provided them with civil support for their otherwise strictly religious observances. Secondly, nowhere in his declaration did Constantine make any reference to Christ's resurrection; there was nothing to indicate that this was to be a benefit for Christians, or that it was even related to Christianity (Eusebius added the "Christian" twist). It proved to be a bridge between the pagan religions and Christianity – both now kept the *Dies Solis*, and good for the unity of the nation. And, lastly, even in this there is no reference to the Fourth Commandment, nor any indication of shifting the Sabbath to the first day of the week. He did not use the term *Sabbatum*, which means that he did not intend to

⁸⁸ Constantine, Chapter XXIV;

<https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf201/npnf201.iv.vi.iv.xxiv.html?queryID=32142356&resultID=168541>.

⁸⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume III, Chapter III, p. 75 (pdf version).

⁹⁰ Ibid, Chapter VII, p. 264.

shift the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day; he retained the pagan phrase *Dies Solis*, confirming that this was not the Lord's Day in his mind – this is simply a pagan ruler seeking to draw his subjects together.

There are many other "church fathers" and early church documents from which I could quote, but I will leave those presented as sufficient. What is evident is that there was a growing level of apostasy throughout this time, which is readily apparent in the few writings referred to here. By the end of Constantine's rule, the fledgling church and the state were working on the same page, which resulted more in the defilement of the church than the betterment of the state. The church was now an institution governed by men wielding the power of the state; it was no longer an organism guided by the Spirit of God through elders appointed to watch over the spiritual health and welfare of the flock of God (1 Peter 1:1-3). It is safe to say that most of the writings that come from this period simply substantiate the departure from the truths of the Scriptures in many ways. William Jones, in writing the history of this era, summed it up this way:

From the days of Constantine, the corruption of the Christian profession proceeded with rapid progress. Many evils, probably, existed before this period ... but when the influence of the secular power became an engine of the clergy ... it need not be a matter of surprise that the progress became exceedingly rapid in converting the religion of Christ into a system of spiritual tyranny, idolatry, superstition, and hypocrisy, until it arrived at its full height in the Roman hierarchy, when, what is called THE CHURCH became the sink of iniquity.⁹¹

When the bishops from the various churches gathered for their synod in the city of Laodicea in AD 363, the matter of Sabbath observance was included in their topics for discussion. The product of this became Canon XXIX of the Council of Laodicea, which reads: "Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ."⁹² What is striking from this canon is that, from very early on, the Catholic Church absolutely opposed keeping the seventh-day Sabbath – to the point of declaring that anyone who did keep it was *anathema*, or accursed, from Christ! The Roman Catholic Church was not a friend of the Jews, and this is very evident from their earliest decrees.

⁹¹ William Jones, *The History of the Christian Church*, Volume I, Chapter II, Section IV, p. 245;
<https://archive.org/details/historyofchrist01jone/page/n5/mode/2up>.

⁹² <https://www.cephers.net/blog.aspx?post=3268>.

What is unmistakable is that the organized church of the day, the forerunner of the modern Roman Catholic Church, sought to effect ultimate control, endeavored to inject the pagan celebrations of the people with more "Christian" themes, and made every effort to remove from their practices and beliefs anything that might be construed as being Jewish. However, even as these religionists set out to organize themselves and close ranks against anything that they determined to be detrimental to their wellbeing, the Lord was also at work building His *ekklesia*, His *called-out ones*, into His desired holy, spotless Bride (Ephesians 5:25-27). Jesus said that it was **His** project (Matthew 16:18); even while the church of Rome was establishing its control and practices in an effort to protect and exalt itself, Jesus was still building His *ekklesia* in quietness and obscurity.

Chapter 6 – The *Ekklesia* in Obscurity

As the organized church grew through the influence of men like Constantine, it did not become more Biblical in its practices. Through their practice of the separation of clergy from laity, the leadership grew increasingly more powerful and dominating, and, at the same time, the laity became increasingly suppressed and ignorant about matters of faith; the clergy were the enlightened ones and the laity were deemed to be ignorant and unworthy of handling the Word of God.

However, even during these spiritually dark ages, God was not without His people, the *ekklesia* that He was building – those few who retained His Word and endeavored to live according to its principles. Some of these were hidden away in the Alpine valleys of northern Italy and southern France: “congregations of believers calling themselves brethren.”⁹³ To their enemies, they were known by many names, and they typically lived in obscurity in the virtually inaccessible valleys of the region; to our modern ears, the name *Waldenses* may sound familiar. The historian, Robinson, comments: “it would be endless to make a detail of accidental names” (i.e., names by which they became known).⁹⁴ However, having made that observation, he goes on to make reference to some of the names by which they were tagged:

Some of these christians were called SABBATI, SABBATATI, INSABBATATI, and more frequently INZABBATATI. Led astray by sound without attending to facts, one says they were so named from the hebrew word sabbath, because they kept the saturday for the Lord's day. Another says, they were so called because they rejected all the festivals or sabbaths in the low latin sense of the word, which the catholick church religiously observed. A third says, and many with various alterations and additions have said after him, they were called so from sabot or zabot, a shoe, because they distinguished themselves from other people by wearing shoes marked on the upper part with some peculiarity. Is it likely, that people who could not descend from their mountains without hazarding their lives through the furious zeal of the inquisitors, should tempt danger by affixing a visible mark on their shoes? Beside, the shoe of the peasants happens to be famous in this country; it was of a different fashion, and was called Abarca.⁹⁵

⁹³ E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, p. 111.

⁹⁴ Robert Robinson, *Ecclesiastical Researches*, p.303; https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_ecclesiastical-researche_robinson-robert_1792/page/n323/mode/2up.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 303-304.

Although the author goes on to reject all three of these reasons in favor of his own fanciful rationalization, what seems completely obvious is that both of the first two proposed explanations not only appear to be acceptable, but would seem to hold a greater veracity than any other explanation. To further support this position, Robinson remarkably includes a footnote in which he quotes from the 16th century Jesuit, Jacob Gretser, who in turn quotes from the historian Goldastus: “Insabbatati [they were called] not because they were circumcised, but because they kept the Jewish Sabbath” (the explanatory note is part of the quotation).⁹⁶ This is a quote from the writings of an enemy of the Waldenses, a Jesuit, who identifies these people as attending to the seventh-day Sabbath. William Jones, in his *The History of the Christian Church*, concurs with Robinson’s second reason for these names, and states: “Because they would not observe saints’ days, they were **falsely** supposed to neglect the Sabbath also, and called “Inzabbatati or Insabbatheists” (emphasis added).⁹⁷ The essence of all of this is that these various clans of believers, tucked away behind the natural barriers formed by the Alps, kept a form of Christianity that had been lost ages before through the corruptions that began with the earliest days of the formation of the Roman Catholic Church, even before Constantine exercised his influence. The observation is that “the Church of the Alps ... may be held to have been a reflection of the church of the first centuries.”⁹⁸

Lest we dismiss these brethren, by whatever name they were called, as Judaizers (which, incidentally, would have been one of the charges laid against them by the Catholic Church), let us consider a typical confession of faith that they kept. This one is cited as being from the twelfth century:

In articles of faith the authority of the Holy Scriptures is the highest; and for that reason it is the standard of judging; so that whatsoever doth not agree with the word of God, is deservedly to be rejected and avoided.

The decrees of Fathers and Councils are [only] so far to be approved as they agree with the word of God.

The reading and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is open to, and is necessary for all men, the laity as well as the clergy; and moreover the writings of the prophets and apostles are to be read rather than the comments of men.

⁹⁶ J. N. Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week*, p. 235 (pdf edition); translation of the original Latin found in Robinson, *Ecclesiastical*, p. 303.

⁹⁷ Jones, *History*, Volume II, Chapter V, Section I, p. 11;
<https://archive.org/details/thehistoryofthec02joneuoft/page/n111/mode/2up>.

⁹⁸ J. A. Wylie, *History of the Waldenses*, p. 19.

The sacraments of the church of Christ are two, baptism and the Lord's supper: and in the latter, Christ has instituted the receiving in both kinds, both for priests and people.

Masses are impious; and it is madness to say masses for the dead.

Purgatory is the invention of men; for they who believe go into eternal life; they who believe not, into eternal damnation.

The invoking and worshipping of dead saints is idolatry.

The church of Rome is the whore of Babylon.

We must not obey the pope and bishops, because they are the wolves of the church of Christ.

The pope hath not the primacy over all the churches of Christ; neither hath he the power of both swords.

That is the church of Christ, which hears the pure doctrine of Christ, and observes the ordinances instituted by him, in whatsoever place it exists.

Vows of celibacy are the inventions of men, and productive of uncleanness.

So many orders [of the clergy,] so many marks of the beast.

Monkery is a filthy carcass.

So many superstitious dedications of churches, commemorations of the dead, benedictions of creatures, pilgrimages, so many forced fastings, so many superfluous festivals, those perpetual bellowing, [alluding to the practice of chanting] and the observations of various other ceremonies, manifestly obstructing the teaching and learning of the word, are DIABOLICAL INVENTIONS.

The marriage of priests is both lawful and necessary.⁹⁹

They begin by establishing the basis for their doctrines (the Word of God, and only the Word of God), and then proceed to affirm that they are definitely not of the Church of Rome. In another statement of faith, they declared: "Christ is our life, and truth, and peace, and righteousness – our shepherd and advocate, our sacrifice and priest, who died for the salvation of all who should believe, and rose again for their justification."¹⁰⁰ The canon of their Scriptures is exactly "conformable to our received canon"; they held in their hands the true Scriptures, not a damaged or skewed manuscript.¹⁰¹ What is clearly evident from this is that the Waldenses were not an aberrant sect that was immersed in grotesque heresies; rather, they were a thoroughly Bible-based people who sought to live according to the standards laid

⁹⁹ Jones, *History*, Volume II, Chapter V, Section III, p. 56-57.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54; from a statement of faith dated about 1120 AD.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

out in the Word of God – one of which, as already documented, is the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Their articles of faith upheld the Word of God, and confirmed that the Church of Rome was not their friend.

A worthy observation is to realize that God has always worked with a remnant. At the time of the flood, all of mankind was destroyed except for eight members of Noah's family – a very small remnant of what had been. Out of all of Israel, at the time of Elijah, there was only a small remnant who remained committed to the Lord, and who refused to bow to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). It was a remnant of Israel who would return to the land after their time of captivity (Isaiah 10:21). Out of all of the multitudes of Israel, only a remnant will be saved (Romans 9:27). The words of Scripture confirm the concept of the remnant: "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Romans 11:5); even today, there are many who are religious, and many who profess to be Christian, but those who are *in Christ* are only a remnant.

Through severe persecution, which became their lot, much of the Waldenses' history has been lost to us. The Roman Catholic Church saw to the destruction of their books and writings; however, despite their best efforts, much of what has survived comes from the observations of those who oppressed them (the Roman Catholics, themselves). Even as the leadership of the Catholic Church purposed to destroy these people, dragging them into unspeakable torture (men, women and children alike), burning their villages to eradicate any memory of them, the irony is that much of what we have learned of these godly brethren comes from the writings of those who persecuted them and sought to purge them from the earth. For the purposes of our study, what has become evident is that they kept the Sabbath unto the Lord – the seventh-day of the week. What is equally evident is that there are many today who adamantly deny that the Waldenses kept the seventh-day Sabbath, yet without quoting credible sources; the opposition to this proven historical fact demonstrates how difficult it is for many to accept the truth of this matter.

Chapter 7 – In the “Church” Today

The transition from the days when the Waldenses faced martyrdom at the hands of their Roman Catholic oppressors, to a day of tolerance, has been gradual. Peace did not come overnight, but, as governments became increasingly powerful (powers that were not necessarily supportive of the Catholic ways), the tone of oppression changed. Although there are still Christian martyrs today, you will no longer find the Catholic Church involved in the wholesale torture and massacre of peoples simply because they do not accept the Catholic faith. The oppression has become much more diplomatic and tactful, and probably more effective in turning hearts away from the truth of God’s Word – a primary agenda of the devil. The result has been a massive capitulation to many of the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, whether realized or not, to the extent that today the Lutherans and the Anglicans are signing agreements with Rome, and overtures are being made to undo the Reformation – after all, they reason, it was all a big mistake. Today, Ecumenism is the acceptable position – simply broaden the definition of terms of reference and all is well.

As we consider the subject of the Sabbath today, we must proceed carefully lest we fall into muddled waters and lose our way. The case has been made for the roots of the seventh-day Sabbath as being an integral part of creation, and we have followed it through to the Middle Ages of our era, and seen the preservation of the day and its meaning. However, as we enter the modern age, we enter a time of self-aggrandizing intelligence and the resulting development of many theologies that serve to tickle the ears of the hearers, too often declaring fables for truth, which the undiscerning fail to recognize (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

Probably one of the most significant changes in theology that has supported today’s understanding of the Sabbath and the first day of the week, is the introduction of a dispensational view of the Scriptures. Some dispensationalists will argue that their perspective on the Word of God was held by the Apostles and the early church writers, yet it is futile to look into their writings for anything that looks remotely like today’s teachings on the subject. David Cloud, a strong dispensationalist, says this: “The early Christians after the apostles taught a form of dispensationalism. Justin Martyr (A.D. 100-165) believed in four phases of history in God’s plan: From Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to the

eternal state.”¹⁰² However, he includes no reference to Martyr’s writings to indicate where he might have come to this understanding. If you examine Martyr’s ramblings, then you will find this: “... God demanded ... that those who lived between the times of Abraham and of Moses be justified by circumcision, and that those who lived after Moses be justified by circumcision and the other ordinances—to wit, the Sabbath, and sacrifices, and libations, and offerings.”¹⁰³ He goes on to say that we are now justified by the circumcision of the heart in Christ; those prior to Abraham, he’s not sure how they pleased God since they “neither were circumcised nor kept the Sabbath.”¹⁰⁴ Cloud is so happy that Justin Martyr held to something that he could interpret as being a form of dispensationalism, that he seems eager to overlook his heresies. Absolutely no one from Abraham to Moses was *justified by circumcision* – Abraham was justified by faith (Genesis 15:6). Hebrews was written about AD 67-69¹⁰⁵ and would have been in circulation for almost 100 years by the time Martyr reached the end of his life; this book makes it very clear that no one is ever justified before God by anything but faith – whether before Abraham or after him.

Dispensationalism is man’s attempt to divide the history of humanity into different periods of time, based entirely upon the supposition that God has dealt with man differently and progressively through these various times. For example, the first dispensation is often called “Innocence,” and deals with man in the Garden of Eden before the fall; the second may be called “Conscience,” and deals with man from the fall to the flood, and so on. Although Cloud likes to see dispensationalism active among the heretics of the early centuries AD, it is generally accepted that the systematic development of this view came into being largely through the work of John Nelson Darby in the latter 1800s. It was popularized by Dwight L. Moody and Moody Bible Institute, but undoubtedly the work of C. I. Scofield was responsible for spreading the teaching far and wide; he incorporated dispensational thinking into his notes of what became a very popular reference Bible bearing his name. Today, many Christians hold dispensational views of Scripture without even being aware of it; in many ways, dispensationalism has become the foundation for most of the Baptist and Evangelical theologies. There are four basic doctrines that form the foundation for dispensational theology: 1) a clear distinction between Israel and the

¹⁰² https://www.wayoflife.org/database/study_bible_dispensationally.html.

¹⁰³ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, Chapter XCII:

https://ccel.org/ccel/justin_martyr/dialog_with_trypho/anf01.viii.iv.xcii.html?highlight=abraham&queryID=32329365&resultID=211145#highlight.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2016/02/when-was-each-book-of-the-bible-written/>.

Church, 2) a distinction between Law and Grace, 3) the NT Church is a parenthesis in God's plan and was not in view in the OT, and 4) a distinction between the rapture (Christ coming in the air) and His second coming to the earth.¹⁰⁶ These have served to influence theology, and, more specifically for our study, the interpretation of Scripture. Dispensationalists study the Word of God through the lens of their particular dispensationalism, rather than weighing their dispensationalism by the Scriptures – the difference is phenomenal! Too frequently, it is the understanding of God's Word that suffers as Scriptures are either isolated unnecessarily, or spun in such a way so as to fit into their dispensational grid.

For example, consider this definition of the Lord's Day: "This, the first day of the week in the Christian order, commemorates the new creation with Christ Himself as its resurrect Head. It is not a mere changeover from the Sabbath, but a new day **marking a new dispensation**" (emphasis added).¹⁰⁷ This is a definition that fits with today's practice of venerating Sunday, dovetails nicely with most dispensational views, and comes from a standard Evangelical source. However, if you consider this definition carefully, it is easily seen that it flows out of a dispensational view of the Scriptures; it is not supported by the Scriptures, but has risen from within the confines of man-made, dispensational theology. This is the error that we face on a continual basis today: theologies too often determine our view of the Word of God, rather than the other way around – a proverbial case of the tail wagging the dog. Consider M.G. Easton's admission: "Originally at creation the seventh day of the week was set apart and consecrated as the Sabbath. ... If any change of the day has been made, it must have been by Christ or by his authority. ... A work vastly greater than that of creation has now been accomplished by him, the work of redemption. We would **naturally expect** just such a change as would make the Sabbath a memorial of that greater work. ... True, **we can give no text authorizing the change** in so many words. We have no express law declaring the change."¹⁰⁸ Rather than leaving that as his conclusion (that there was no change), he takes what he would *naturally expect* and declares as "a fact that the first day of the week has been observed from apostolic times."¹⁰⁹ The one *fact* that shines forth from the writings of those from apostolic times, is that heresy was rampant among them; Paul wrote several corrective letters (evidence of a departure from the truth during his days), and Jesus' words to the leaders of the seven "churches" in Asia, tell us that all was not well very early on. As Easton admits, we have no evidence for the change from

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.theopedia.com/dispensationalism>.

¹⁰⁷ Unger's Bible Dictionary, "The Lord's Day."

¹⁰⁸ Easton's Bible Dictionary, "Sabbath."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

the seventh-day Sabbath to a first-day observance, but there is ample evidence to show that departure from God's truth began almost immediately after Jesus ascended to heaven. Scripture must be our only foundation for all that we hold as being God's truth.

It is now time to consider the arguments that are used by modern theologians to support the shift from the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week. Before we do that, we need to remind ourselves as to why the seventh-day of rest was established by God. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Genesis 2:1-3). The seventh day was *sanctified* by God, i.e., it was set apart from the other six days as holy.¹¹⁰ It is important to keep this clearly in mind as we consider the following arguments for the status quo in this matter.

Argument 1: The Silence of Scripture

The first argument that is presented is that of the silence of Scripture before Exodus. "There is no record in Genesis that God gave the sabbath to man, and there is no record of men keeping the sabbath before [the time of] Israel in the wilderness. The saints in Genesis built altars, prayed, offered sacrifices, and tithed; but the Scripture is silent in regard to sabbath keeping."¹¹¹ Indeed, we have already seen that Cain and Abel offered sacrifices to God and we noted that God accepted Abel's and rejected Cain's sacrifice – yet we do not read of instruction being given to these two as to what constituted an acceptable sacrifice. We might argue that God demonstrated this by example when He shed blood to make coats for Adam and Eve; yet the same argument must of necessity hold true for God's demonstrated sanctification of the seventh day as being holy, as a day of rest (*shabbath*). We recognize that God did not keep the seventh day because He needed to rest, therefore it can only be to provide us with an example that we are to follow. We have already dealt with the "silence" at some length, and it is always a very poor foundation on which to build anything, so there must be more.

Argument 2: Created for the Children of Israel

¹¹⁰ Strong's Online.

¹¹¹ David Cloud, "The Sabbath Yesterday and Today," <https://www.wayoflife.org/database/sabbathtoday.html>.

Perhaps the greatest argument used today is that the Sabbath was created for the children of Israel. Nehemiah 9:13-14 is cited as proof that the Sabbath began at Mt. Sinai: "Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven ... And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath" Two things need to be considered at this point: 1) the words *madest known* mean to "make known" or "declare";¹¹² and 2) Exodus 20:8 declares, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy." The inevitable question remains – how can you *remember* something that you never knew before – you can't; of the ten commands that God wrote at Mt. Sinai, this is the only one that calls on the Israelites to *remember*. Not only were the children of Israel told to recall the Sabbath day (what they had been specifically practicing with the collection of manna, for a couple of weeks now), but the reason for the Sabbath is plainly cited as going back to the creation of the world (Exodus 20:11). If this was a new commandment given for the first time, why specifically establish its foundation as God's sanctification of the seventh day at the time of creation? If we consider that the Ten Commandments were written on stone tablets by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18), then we have everlasting proof that the seventh-day Sabbath began at creation. The silence of the intervening years is nullified by the resounding declaration by God that His creation-day Sabbath and the day that the children of Israel were to recall are one and the same.

Argument 3: A Sign between Israel and God

The next argument used is that the Sabbath is a sign between God and Israel, using Exodus 31:12-18 as the supporting text. However, we have already looked at this very carefully and determined that the **keeping** of the Sabbath as prescribed through the laws given to Moses was the sign, and not the Sabbath itself. We have already seen that the Sabbath is inextricably tied to the seventh day, which was sanctified by God at creation, so how can it be a sign now for only one particular group of people? It can't! What came through the laws and decrees that were given to Moses were very specific requirements for the keeping of the Sabbath, with equally clear and specific penalties for disobedience. The way that Israel was to keep the Sabbath was new, and **this** was the sign between God and Israel.

Argument 4: Only Mentioned Three Times to the Christian

It is maintained by some that the Sabbath is only spoken of three times as it relates to the **New Testament** Christian (do you recognize the dispensational thinking behind this argument?). This would be the Christian who has been grafted into the

¹¹² BDB.

Spiritual Root, Jesus (Romans 11), the Christian who is to look to the example of the Old Testament saints like Abel, Enoch and Noah to learn of saving faith (Hebrews 11), the Christian who has been made a fellow citizen with the saints of old by the blood of Christ: "to make in himself [Christ] **of twain one new man** ... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone* ..." (Ephesians 2:12-15, 20). There is only one household of God, and we would do well to look past the labels of "Old" and "New" as it relates to God's Word to us.

However, it is held by some that there are only three instances of the Sabbath as it relates to the Christian;¹¹³ let us consider them individually:

1. "The sabbath is a symbol of salvation rest in Christ (Heb. 4)."¹¹⁴ What better way to diffuse the impact of something than to relegate it to the shelf of symbolism, and then leave it there. This same author is critical of another man for spiritualizing the book of Revelation,¹¹⁵ yet when defending his own doctrine, he is prepared to spiritualize something that provides no basis for doing so. There is nothing in the Genesis record that would indicate that God's sanctification of the seventh day is mere symbolism, and not reality.

2. "The New Testament believer is not bound to keep the sabbath (Col. 2:9-17)."¹¹⁶ The specific verses from this passage that lead some to this conclusion are: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17). If you give no consideration to the context of this passage, it might appear that Cloud is correct. However, context is very important in all cases of Biblical interpretation, and I think that Cloud would agree with that in principle. If he would begin his reference one verse earlier, he would have set the proper context for the quoted passage, and would have shed a whole new light on it. His reference passage is preceded by: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). After elaborating on the salvation that we have through Christ, Paul (in verse 16) delineates meats (eating), drinks (drinking), holydays or feasts, new moons, and sabbaths, which all pertain to the traditions of men – these all flowed out of the Jewish traditions that

¹¹³ Cloud, "Sabbath"; Cloud is not alone in this: <https://www.biblicalresources.org/resources/the-sabbath/>.

¹¹⁴ Cloud, "Sabbath."

¹¹⁵ Even while posting William Jones' "The History of the Christian Church," David Cloud inserts a note exposing this failure on the part of Jones - <http://www.wayoflife.org/articles/jones17.htm> . It would seem, based upon this article, that the pot is calling the kettle black.

¹¹⁶ Cloud, "Sabbath."

were so familiar within the assembly of believers at this time. Reference is made to *sabbath* days, and the Jews had been given seven feast-days that were to be kept in similar fashion to the Sabbath (the seventh day); six of these required reduced labor, and the seventh (the Day of Atonement) was to be kept exactly like the seventh-day Sabbath. The context for Paul's words here is dealing with the Jewish practices that had been removed by Christ at the cross (v. 14); therefore, we must understand this to be in reference to the feast-day sabbaths, and not to the seventh-day Sabbath (since it has already been established that the seventh-day Sabbath did not begin with Israel). There is nothing here to suggest that God has removed or changed the Fourth Commandment; in keeping with the *eating, drinking, holyday* and *new moon* festivities, this is speaking of the *holy convocation* times that were part of the Mosaic traditions. What Paul is making abundantly clear to the Colossian believers is that all of the ceremonial ordinances of the Jewish traditions were but shadows of things to come – a foreshadowing that was fulfilled in Christ. All of these things have been done away with; the body of believers is of Christ – none of these things will build upon the foundation of the Lord (Ephesians 2:20). So, within the context of this passage, the believer is not bound to keep the festival sabbaths of the Jewish traditions, and that simply cannot be extended to the seventh-day Sabbath rest that was instituted and sanctified by God at creation.

3. "The New Testament believer has liberty in the matter of holy days (Rom. 14:1-23)."¹¹⁷ The focus of this passage, regarding the matter at hand, would have to be verse five: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day *alike*. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." However, the context deals with whether the Gentile Christians were required to keep the Jewish feasts and eating practices. As already noted, the Jews had several feast days that were to be kept like unto the Sabbath, and others that required special diets. The thrust of this passage is that we are not to judge someone who keeps the feast days, or to place a stumbling block before anyone because of our practices. There is a Jew-Gentile admonition here: the Jew is not to despise the Gentile for not keeping the festival days, nor is the Gentile to despise the Jew for keeping the festivals in accordance with their customs (even though they no longer hold any significance for the Christian). The determination is that "the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Romans 14:17). The Jewish festivals all foreshadowed the coming of Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and, with His birth, death and resurrection, all of these festivals have been fulfilled – their significance is gone. The admonition for us is that we are to be "fully persuaded" in

¹¹⁷ Cloud, "Sabbath."

our own minds; we are to give these matters careful consideration and thorough investigation so that the evidence leaves us fully convinced.¹¹⁸ Clearly this has no bearing on the seventh-day Sabbath, for, as we have already established, it did not begin with the Jews.

In addition to the arguments just presented, today's theologians will call on several Scriptures that they claim make it clear that we are to keep the first day of the week, and not the seventh-day Sabbath. There are some who will refer to Sunday as being the new *Sabbath*; therefore, it is important that we understand why Sunday has not replaced the seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest. I will again use David Cloud's article, *The Sabbath, Yesterday and Today*, as a basis for looking at the Scriptures that he uses to "justify" this shift, and, thereby, seeks to "defend" his neglect of the seventh-day Sabbath, as it was ordained by God at creation, in favor of the first day of the week. As we look around today, we can understand that Cloud is not alone in his position – it has simply been accepted without thought by most. Even though Cloud has chosen not to call Sunday the Sabbath, his promotion of the first day to be kept as unto the Lord clearly demonstrates that he is trying to shift God's requirement for the Sabbath to the first day. As someone who is a self-proclaimed Fundamental Baptist, Cloud's position on these matters should display a high level of Biblical support and, therefore, provide the best arguments for the change. He presents numerous "reasons" with corresponding Scriptures to justify his position, and it is important to consider each one carefully so as to determine their individual strength or weakness; as we come to understand the flaws in the contentions for keeping the first day, we will better see the necessity of retaining what God has specified regarding the Sabbath that He established at creation.

***1. "Jesus rose from the dead on the first day (Mk. 16:9)."*¹¹⁹**

Mark 16:9 says: "Now when *Jesus* was risen early the first *day* of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils." Once again, we need to take the time to examine this carefully, for the Greek reads: *He rose early the first day of the Sabbath.*¹²⁰ The reason that the word *day* is supplied is because *first*, as an adjective, is in the feminine gender, and, as such, it must modify a feminine noun. *Sabbath* is a neuter noun, and, therefore, *day* (feminine) is understood in the Greek even though it's not stated. Moreover, the Sabbath was just ended, so this could not refer to the beginning of the seventh-day Sabbath, and this

¹¹⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹⁹ Cloud, "Sabbath"; at the end of which he notes D.M. Canright's article "Seventh-day Adventism Renounced" as a source.

¹²⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

day was not one of the feast days (sabbaths), therefore, it must be translated as *week* (as it is). We understand from this that Jesus rose from the dead early on the first day of the week, after the Sabbath was ended; keeping in mind that the Jewish day began in the evening, the first day of the week ran from about 6:00 PM on our Saturday to 6:00 PM on our Sunday, which places Jesus' resurrection on our Saturday evening after 6:00 PM.

We have already dealt, in some detail, with the matter of the time line for Jesus' death and resurrection (see the Chart presented earlier). Today we consider Sunday (from midnight on) to be the first day of the week without giving this matter any further consideration, when in reality it includes only the latter part of the first day of the week, as it was known at the time of the Lord. So, even though Jesus rose from the grave early on the first day of the week, it was our Saturday evening, and not our Sunday morning.

2. "Jesus first appeared to his disciples on the first day (Mk. 16:9)."¹²¹

The same verse is used to show that Jesus appeared to his disciples on the first day, more specifically, according to the text, first to Mary Magdalene. Let us bring in the two other accounts of this time: 1) John 20:1 "The first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre" We have the same "first of the week" as used in Mark 16:9, but this time it is qualified – it was "when it was yet dark." This would set the time at the dawning of the day, before it was fully light. 2) Matthew 28:1 says: "In the end of the sabbath [sabbaths], as it began to dawn toward the first [feminine] *day* of the week [sabbaths (neuter)], came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre."¹²² The Greek word translated as *end* means *late*, or, in this case, *after* the Sabbath, indicating that some time had passed since the closing of the Sabbath.¹²³ A simple examination of the context shows that the first use of *Sabbaths* must be translated as the seventh-day Sabbath (since it was just ended), and the second must be *week*, since the day after the Sabbath was the first *day* of the week. Here too, we have a qualification as to the time of day: "as it began to dawn toward the first of the week." This was the time when it began to get light on the first day of the week, the same as indicated in John. They came to the sepulcher when it was light enough to see, not during the first twelve hours of the first day while it was still dark; they came to the sepulcher on what would be our Sunday morning.

¹²¹ Cloud, "Sabbath."

¹²² Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹²³ Friberg Lexicon.

Why is this so significant in the eyes of those who would declare our Sunday as today's Sabbath (or the day that we are to keep like unto the Sabbath)? "The fact that each Gospel writer mentions that [sic] the resurrection on the first day of the week shows the importance of that day."¹²⁴ That seems to be the most substantial reason circulating for citing this as a support for holding to Sunday as being the day that we are to keep sacred, yet they have to admit that there is no declaration of the shift from the seventh day to the first day: "... New Testament writings give no direct evidence that Sunday worship originated in the primitive Palestinian church"¹²⁵ The fact that all four Gospel writers speak of Jesus' resurrection, which took place on the first day of the week, shows that it was a significant event, but that's it. Furthermore, Jesus first appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week because that was the day when He was raised from the dead; we must not read more into this than is required. Hanson, in his article, *A Study of the Origins of Sunday Worship in the Early Church*, admits that it works better to go into early church history **after** the time of the disciples and then work backward. Considering the early entrance of heresy into the church, this suggestion sounds like you need to look at early church history, get the error firmly established in your mind, and then go back to the Scriptures and apply the error of what you have just learned. A more spiritually healthy approach would be to take Scripture for what it says, and not try to read into it that which is not there.

3. "Jesus repeatedly met with the disciples at different places on the first day after the resurrection (Mk. 16:9-11; Mt 28:8-10; Lk. 24:34; Mk. 16:12-13; Jn. 20:19-23)."¹²⁶

This is simply a reiteration of the previous point with which we have already dealt. What is noteworthy in this quotation is that only the references included are those telling when Jesus met with His followers on the first day. After John recorded Jesus meeting with the disciples on the first day, he goes on to write, "And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: *then* came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst ..." (John 20:26). This is only three verses after the text referred to, but this was a time when Jesus met with the disciples eight days after the first day of the week, or the **second day** of the week. Perhaps, rather than straining to create a significance that is not there, we should simply read the text of Scripture for what it says. You do not hear of any of these men making a

¹²⁴ Thomas C. Hanson, Sr., "A Study of the Origins of Sunday Worship in the Early Church,"

<http://www.wcg.org/lit/law/sabbath/hanson.htm>

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Cloud, "Sabbath."

big deal of Jesus meeting with His disciples on the second day of the week – our Monday.

4. *"Jesus blessed the disciples on the first day (Jn. 20:19)."*¹²⁷

This "reason" is almost too poorly formulated to give it any consideration at all. Jesus gave the same "blessing" eight days later (John 20:26), but that is not mentioned because it is not important to their theory. Not only is this poor Bible exegesis but also a not-too-subtle attempt at being deceptive!

5. *"Jesus imparted to the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit on the first day (Jn. 20:22)."*¹²⁸

The text referenced says: "And when he [Jesus] had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost [a command]" Again this is a sham, an argument based on a false premise. Jesus said, "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ..." (John 16:7). He said that the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, would not come until He had gone away; yet Cloud would have the Holy Spirit imparted while Jesus was still with the disciples. Luke records Jesus' words this way: "...but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49), and then Jesus led them outside of the city and was taken from them into heaven (Luke 24:50-51). Why would Jesus tell them to stay in Jerusalem until they received power from on high if they had already received power from on high? Again, in Acts 1:5, just before His ascension, Jesus told them that they would be "baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence," which could not be the case if, in fact, they had already received the Holy Ghost (as Cloud argues). It would seem that John 20:22 is part of the Lord's instructional preparation of the disciples during this time between His resurrection and His ascension, otherwise Thomas would not have received the Holy Spirit since he was not present on this occasion.

6. *"On the first day Jesus commissioned the disciples to preach the gospel to all the world (Jn. 20:21; with Mk. 16:9-15)."*¹²⁹

There were several commissionings, and Acts 1:3-8 records one that was given to the disciples just moments before Jesus was taken from them. Verse three of this passage says that Jesus appeared to the disciples for 40 days after His resurrection; if you add 40 days to the first day of the week when He rose from the grave, then

¹²⁷ Cloud, "Sabbath."

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

you will find that the day of His ascension was **not** the first day of the week. Therefore, the final commissioning was not done on the first day of the week; once again, evidence is taken piece-meal so as to support the doctrine that is being promoted, rather than looking at the whole picture and realizing that this argument does not hold any credence in this case.

7. *"On the first day Jesus ascended to Heaven, was seated at the right hand of the Father and was made Head of all (Jn. 20:17; Eph. 1:20)."*¹³⁰

This cannot be. Jesus rose on the first day of the week – we all agree on that (even though some contend that it was our Sunday, when it was actually Saturday evening), and Acts 1:3 specifies for us that Jesus appeared to His disciples for 40 days after His resurrection. If you add forty days to the first day of the week, you will not end up on the first day of the week, but more likely the fifth. Clearly, Jesus' ascension did not take place on the first day of the week. Neither of the references noted provide any indication of the day of the week that the Lord ascended to Heaven; therefore, they offer no support for this empty argument.

8. *"On the first day many of the dead saints arose from the grave (Mt. 27:52-53)."*¹³¹

This has no bearing on the subject at hand. What we are told is that these saints arose after Jesus was resurrected – undoubtedly, the first day of the week, since that is the day when Jesus rose.

9. *"The first day became the day of joy and rejoicing to the disciples (Jn. 20:20; Lk. 24:41)."*¹³²

Again, we are faced with the simple question – so what? These are supposed to be reasons for holding the first day of the week as sanctified unto the Lord (as opposed to the Sabbath). Philippians 4:4 says that we are to "rejoice in the Lord always"; the joy that the disciples felt in the references noted was due to their beholding the risen Lord on the occasion of Him showing Himself to them in the upper room. It would be inconceivable to think that when Jesus met with the disciples eight days later, on a Monday, that there was no joy or rejoicing.

10. *"On the first day the gospel of the risen Christ was first preached (Lk. 24:34)."*¹³³

¹³⁰ Cloud, "Sabbath."

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

This goes without saying, for the reality of this resurrection was first made evident to the disciples on that first day – again, this provides no support for ignoring the seventh-day Sabbath.

11. *"On the first day Jesus explained the Scriptures to the disciples (Lk. 24:27, 45)."*¹³⁴

So, were the disciples wrong when they continued "daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house ..." (Acts 2:46)? It is very evident that Paul regularly explained the Scriptures on the seventh-day Sabbath as he met with the Jews in their synagogues (Acts 13:14-15, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4). Of course Jesus explained the Scriptures on the first day of the week – it was the first day after His resurrection!

12. *"On the first day the purchase of our redemption was completed (Rom. 4:25)."*¹³⁵

This may be true, for Jesus "... was raised again for our justification," but that really has no bearing on shifting the sanctity of the Sabbath to the first day of the week. A far greater argument could be made that Jesus observed the Sabbath day of rest even in His redemption of mankind: His resurrection to life took place after the seventh-day Sabbath was ended. In reality, our *redemption* was then completed on our Saturday, not Sunday – so does that change this argument?

13. *"On the first day the Holy Spirit descended (Acts 2:1). Pentecost was on the 50th day after the sabbath following the wave offering (Lev. 23:15-16). Thus Pentecost was always on a Sunday."*¹³⁶

Again, if you pause to consider that the day of Pentecost (the Feast of Harvest) was established with Israel and was kept by Israel at the same time that they were keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, you realize that the feigned significance of this argument is lost. The coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (meaning the *fiftieth day*) became the ultimate fulfillment of that feast day, which was established by God fifty days after the waving of the barley sheaf during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:15-21). God is a God of order, and even the coming of the promised Comforter was within a set timetable; does this impact the seventh-day Sabbath? – no more than the Feast of Harvest celebration affected the seventh-day Sabbath for the children of Israel. It would seem that there is an effort

¹³⁴ Cloud, "Sabbath."

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

to inundate the reader with events that took place on the "first day," regardless of whether they actually have any bearing on the subject at hand or not.

14. "The Christians met to worship on the first day (Acts 20:6-7; 1 Cor. 16:2)"¹³⁷

As you consider this point, you might be tempted to say, "Ah-ha! They've finally come to the real basis for the change." Acts 20:7 – "And upon the first *day* of the week [sabbaths], when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."¹³⁸ Each day has only one midnight, so if the disciples met on the first of the week, they would have met on Saturday evening, and Paul spoke until midnight, at which time Eutychus fell from the window, thereby interrupting his message. After this, it says that Paul spoke a long while, "even till the break of day, so he departed." Without straining at the meaning of this passage, it seems clear that Paul met with the disciples Saturday evening (after the Sabbath was ended), they conversed and fellowshiped until day break, and then Paul left. What seems evident is that the disciples and Paul, and the other disciples of Jesus, kept the seventh-day Sabbath and then met together for fellowship at the end of the Sabbath; rather than demonstrating a neglect of the Sabbath day, it provides support for the significance of the Sabbath within the lives of the early Christians.

First Corinthians 16:2 says, "Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." Paul is asking that the Corinthians set aside their gift for the Jerusalem believers on the first of the week; this could be likened to giving the Lord of the first fruits of our labors. The first portion of what we have to live on for the week ahead is set aside for the Lord. Those who desire to neglect the Sabbath in favor of the first day of the week read into this that, during their "church service," they were to take up an offering for the Jerusalem Christians; that is our modern mindset reading into the text of Scripture that which is not there. We would do well to heed the warnings of adding to God's Word: "Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6).

A quick reflection of the study just completed will show that none of the evidences given for turning away from the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week could withstand even a very basic testing. What must continually be guarded against is taking an existing practice or theology, and then going to the

¹³⁷ Cloud, "Sabbath."

¹³⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

Scriptures to find support for it. This is the age-old error of viewing Scripture through our doctrines and practices, rather than holding our doctrines and practices up to the light of Scripture to determine if they are right or wrong (the Berean way, Acts 17:11). Therefore, it can only follow that the Biblical foundation for moving the sanctity of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day is non-existent.

Chapter 8 ~ The *Lord's Day*

There are those who do not advocate any shift from the Sabbath to the first day of the week, instead they speak of the first day as being the Lord's Day (a new day for a new dispensation). Their position is that the Sabbath day is Jewish and has no bearing for Christians today. Although they would use all of the same arguments that we have just looked at to support their understanding for adhering to *the Lord's Day*, they would never say that it is to support the idea of a "Christian Sabbath" on the first day. Among Evangelicals and Fundamentalists alike, calling Sunday the Lord's Day is rarely given a second thought; it is simply accepted as being correct (even among those who think that the Sabbath has been shifted to the first day). Do the Scriptures speak to this?

The phrase, *Lord's day*, appears only once in our King James' translation of the Bible. When John was on the isle of Patmos, it says that he was in the Spirit on the *Lord's day*; quite literally, it is the day that belongs to the Lord (Revelation 1:10).¹³⁹ There is nothing within the text of Revelation 1 that could lead anyone to the conclusion that this was Sunday; that it was the day that belonged to the Lord is clear, but that is all.

We have already looked at the occasions when the Pharisees called Jesus to task for His keeping of the Sabbath, and, on one of these occasions, Jesus confronted the Pharisees with this statement: "the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). If one is prepared to take Scripture for what it says, would it not be in keeping with this text to assume that John was in the Spirit on the Sabbath day? This is the only day of the week of which Jesus specifically declared Himself to be the Lord.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3). We have no difficulty identifying Jesus as the eternal Word, the Creator of all things, and rightly so. Therefore, as the Creator, Jesus blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [set it apart as holy], and rested from all of His work (Genesis 2:3). There were six days of creating activity, and the seventh day was the Lord's Day, for in it He rested.

¹³⁹ Strong's Online; the possessive form of the word *Lord* is used only one other time in the whole of the NT, and that is in 1 Corinthians 11:20 where it speaks of the "Lord's supper."

It seems obvious that *Lord's Day* has come to be used inappropriately. There is nothing within Scripture that would remotely suggest that this is referring to the first day of the week. The weight of evidence, if considered without influence from our historical and theological baggage, would conclude that the Lord's Day is the seventh day. Any of the Scriptures used to support keeping the first day of the week as "the Lord's Day," like unto the Sabbath, have already been dealt with. Once again, we are faced with a ploy to weigh Scripture in light of our well-crafted theologies, rather than permitting the truth of God's Word to reveal the flaws in our religious thinking. If we would simply set our theologies aside and permit the Word of God to speak to us through the enablement of the promised Spirit of God, we would discover a freedom and a light that will not come while being bound by the chains of man's philosophies. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, **after the tradition of men**, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (Colossians 2:8). "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). What could be clearer? We are to test the spirits; we are to weigh the theologies to determine whether they are of God. We have been given the Word of God, but have failed miserably at knowing how to use it effectively. We are mesmerized by worldly credentials, and are blind to the Truth.

Chapter 9 – The Sabbath Rest

There are those today who advocate that every day is to be a spiritual rest in the Lord, and they use Hebrews 4, a difficult passage, to support their position. “As God rested on the seventh day from His work of creation, the believer today rests in the completed work of Christ.”¹⁴⁰ We look at the passage referred to in Hebrews and turn away, because we are not prepared to deal with anything so seemingly complex. Surely this portion of Scripture would not negate all that we have discovered to this point; therefore, it bears our consideration lest anyone should derail the Sabbath reality through intimidation. To provide a thorough and complete context for our look into Hebrews 4, let us begin in chapter 3. In Hebrews 3:1-6, a foundation is laid upon which much of what follows will be built. This passage comes immediately after the author identifying Christ as the One Who understands our situation; Jesus took on the form of man so that He will obtain the victory over Satan (Hebrews 2:14), and that He will be a high priest Who can identify with our humanity (2:18). Because of these things (“wherefore”) there is a call to consider what comes in chapter three.

Lest there be any misunderstanding as to whom the author is addressing, they are identified now: “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1). There can be no mistaking that this section of the letter is addressed to believers – those who have been made participants in the heavenly calling that we have in Christ Jesus. Don’t forget this as we continue on in this foundational passage! Some would suggest that the book of Hebrews is addressed to the Jews, and, therefore, the writer is speaking to the Jews only, and what follows applies to those Jews who only appear to be Christians.¹⁴¹ There are several difficulties with this position. Professors of faith are never accepted as truly born again (Matthew 7:21-23 makes it abundantly clear that saying the right words will never make anyone a partaker of the heavenly calling); therefore, unbelieving Jews, or pseudo-Christians, would never be

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.dangerousopinions.com/mustreadarticles/sda.html>

¹⁴¹ I have personally faced this suggestion. John MacArthur, on the other hand, suggests that the book of Hebrews is addressed to three groups of Jews: those who were Christians, non-Christians who were intellectually convinced of the truth of Jesus Christ, and non-Christians who were unconvinced. Just to set the final nail into place in the coffin for the absolute complexity of Hebrews, MacArthur says, “The key to interpreting any part of Hebrews is to understand which group is being addressed” (Hebrews Commentary, p. xv.). This provides the theologian with license to interpret the book however he would determine. Although MacArthur “determines” that the passage in question was written to Christian Jews, he still undermines any application to our present situation by discounting the words and their intensity in the Greek. Ultimately we are faced with the reality that man will always skew the Word of God to support his agenda, unless he is prepared to set his agenda and pet theologies aside in order to permit God to speak clearly and openly through His Word.

addressed as “holy brethren.” Additionally, we must not forget that Ephesians 2:11-22 shows that in Christ there is no longer a middle wall of separation between the Jew and the Gentile – they are one.¹⁴² The reality that this passage from Hebrews is addressed to all believers becomes increasingly significant as we look further into it. As *holy brethren*, we are called to consider Jesus, to look unto Jesus, the “author and finisher of *our* faith” (Hebrews 12:2). The focus is on Jesus – the Savior of us all!

As our eyes are turned to Jesus, we are reminded of His faithfulness as High Priest, which is underscored and compared with the faithfulness of Moses. Moses is cited as an example, yet we are told that his faithfulness was as a servant (Hebrews 3:5); he lived as part of the house, but the Builder of that house is Christ (v.3). Christ is greater than Moses even as the builder is understandably greater than the project that he builds; He is faithful over His own house, which He is building (Matthew 16:18) – an assembly made up of true believers only, both Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:19-20). He is not a servant to the household (i.e., to do our bidding), but is the Lord of His house (yet even as Lord, He came to earth to minister and to give His life as a ransom – Matthew 20:28). As the Head of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 5:23), Jesus fills a position that is infinitely greater than Moses’ servant role, for it is through Christ that the Body has life (Ephesians 4:15-16).

However, the inspired Word of God does not stop here (we might like it to, but it does not). A condition is placed on being a part of Christ’s house, namely, we are that house only IF we hold fast, or retain, our hope unto the end (Hebrews 3:6). Pivotal to the argument here is the condition of holding fast; being part of Christ’s house is not a confirmed, blind surety, but rather a possibility *if we hold fast*. Surely, at this point, the words of Jesus must echo through our hearts: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Do you see it? Obedience to the will of God is prerequisite to entering heaven! Also, Jesus called Himself the true Vine and likened us to branches; yet if we do not abide in Him, we will be cast forth and burned (John 15:1-6). Profession of faith in Christ is **nothing**; not everyone who calls himself a “Christian” is one, yet, within Evangelicalism, this is too often all of the evidence that is required. Even confession is not enough; it must be followed by a persevering life of obedience. Hence, we find the many admonitions in Scripture to remain faithful unto the end (Hebrews 3:6, 14), to remain steadfast (1

¹⁴² Despite MacArthur’s lengthy commentary on Hebrews, he never deals with this pivotal passage from Ephesians. He pre-determined that Hebrews was only for the Jews, and so anything that would undermine this imposed position was duly ignored.

Corinthians 15:58), to stand, or persevere¹⁴³ (1 Corinthians 16:13; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 4:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). In light of all of this, the conditional statement made in Hebrews 3:6 takes on an even greater significance! Once again, we see that the standard for our acceptance is much greater than we have been led to believe within the comfort zone of Evangelical theology. We must realize that it is not mere outward profession that is acceptable, but a change of heart that leads to an indisputable commitment to the Lord – a commitment based on an understanding that the way will be difficult and that the Lord is faithful to see us through. We must count the cost of following the Lord (Luke 14:25-33, seldom heard within Evangelicalism), and make the commitment to not turn back (Luke 9:62). This is **not** a salvation of works; nevertheless, we are commanded to “work out [present tense – an ever occurring action] your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). As James so ably details for us, faith, unless it finds expression through works, is dead (James 2:20-26); works are not the means to our salvation (it is a gift, Ephesians 2:8-9), but must be the expression of our salvation (living out the works that have been prepared by God for us, Ephesians 2:10). It is at this point that Evangelicals have failed most miserably. Our faith in the Lord Jesus must result in works that reflect the righteousness and holiness of God (Ephesians 4:24); as we live according to the leading of the Spirit of God, the righteousness of the Law of God (now written upon our minds, Hebrews 10:16) will be expressed through us (Romans 8:1-4). When we place our faith in Christ, God does not give us a list of things to do, but He does require us to do all things as unto Him (Colossians 3:23) as a reflection of His holy character and our holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9).

In His wisdom, God has placed this conditional qualification (“if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” - Hebrews 3:6) on the threshold of expounding on the rest (*sabbatismos*) that remains for us (Hebrews 4:9). When we think of *rest*, we think of idleness, of doing nothing. Nothing could be further from the reality of the purchased life in Christ. We are called to fight (make every effort, 1 Timothy 6:12), to strive (Romans 15:30), to run with endurance (Hebrews 12:1) – all of these are commands that require us to expend great effort and energy in our Christian walk. Even declaring: “The rest God promises is spiritual, not physical”¹⁴⁴ does nothing to remove the admonitions that God has given to us. Evangelicals would have you believe that if you simply pray a prayer “asking Jesus into your heart,” it then matters little what happens after that, for your eternal destiny has been secured, and you will someday arrive in the eternal rest that God

¹⁴³ Strong’s Dictionary.

¹⁴⁴ John MacArthur, *Commentary on Hebrews*, p. 104.

has promised (Hebrews 4:9). If this was the case, the Spirit of God, through Paul, would have indicated that the only armor that the Christian needs is the helmet of salvation; yet we are charged to put on the whole armor of God, including wrapping ourselves in truth, wearing the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the Gospel, and we must bear the shield of faith, and wield the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:13-17). The Lord has called us to a battle that requires more than just a helmet. From the author of Hebrews, the message is clear: there is a need to hold fast, to cling to the hope that we have in Jesus Christ; surely we would not be commanded to hold onto something that we could not lose. The Spirit of God, through the pen of the writer of Hebrews, is preparing us to learn more about the rest to which God has called us.

Just as the Law of God (the Ten Commandments) demands much more than merely outward obedience, as the Lord made abundantly clear, so, too, we must understand that our acceptance before God is dependent upon much more than simply praying a prayer and carrying on with life. Unless there is a change of heart resulting in a change of life (repentance), not just for today and then business as usual tomorrow, but a change that lasts and yields spiritual fruit (Galatians 5:22-23), there can be no assurance that the Spirit of God is in residence (1 John 4:13). Since this has been placed here for our learning, it is fitting that we take a moment to ponder the critical truths that God would have us to understand.

Remember, this conditional statement (“if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end” - Hebrews 3:6) is made to the “holy brethren,” to those who are “partakers of the heavenly calling.” If our salvation is really eternally secured, how can such a statement be made to those who have been specifically identified as “partakers of the heavenly calling”? Peter declared that we are to “give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things [the things that Peter has just outlined], ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10 – this is written to believers, with the understanding that if we don’t do those things, then we might very well fall). From everything that we hear within Evangelicalism (and even much of Fundamentalism), this seems impossible. Yet the Spirit of God, through the author of Hebrews, uses the personal plural pronoun “we” to identify those who must meet the condition identified in order to be included as part of the house of Christ (“... whose house are **we**, if **we** hold fast ...” Hebrews 3:6). Yes, we are “kept [guarded] by the power of God,” yet it is through faith that this keeping is operative (1 Peter 1:5).¹⁴⁵ We must resist the temptation to read Scripture through the glasses

¹⁴⁵ Gingrich Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

of man's theological systems, and simply permit the Spirit of God to speak through the Word of God.

In the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23), Jesus spoke of four different soil samples that illustrate man's heart-response to the Word of God (the Seed):

1. **Wayside** – this is someone who hears the Word of God, does not understand it, and Satan snatches it away before they have time to think about it; there is neither response nor any change in the life.

2. **Rocky soil** – it states clearly that this one received the Word with joy, yet did not permit the Word to take root within him, and, consequently, the life did not last. The life was there, the joy was there, and he did abide for a while; however, when the Word of God brought pressures and persecutions, he fell away – the life was gone.

3. **Weedy ground** – here is someone who heard, as well, yet there is no indication as to the kind of reception that the Word got (no joy as with the rocky soil), but clearly there was life and growth (they receive the Word and begin their journey with the Lord; *go forth* – Luke 8:14). The Word was received and took root; however, when the anxieties and wealth of this world grew alongside, they utterly choked the life out. Once again, the evidence of life is gone.

4. **Good soil** – here the Word is permitted to root, and the weeds have been removed so that the Word is able to mature in the heart and bring forth a harvest through endurance (Luke 8:15).

The rocky and thorny soils pose a problem for many, for it is evident in both cases that the Word of God produced life, and it is equally apparent, in both cases, that that life ceased to exist.

If we are open to understanding the words of Scripture, then we have to realize that spiritual life, produced by the Word of God, can be lost. One of the planks of Evangelicalism is eternal security – once saved, always saved.¹⁴⁶ Yet, if we are diligent in our reading of Scripture, we have to admit that this is not what God says. Why are there so many admonitions to abide in the Vine, to remain faithful unto the end, and to persevere, if our eternal destiny was locked-in once we prayed a simple prayer? Even a careful reading of John 3:16 (the “Gospel in a nutshell”) shows that eternal security is not present there. Consider a literal translation of the KJV: *for thus God did love the world so that He gave His only, begotten Son in order that everyone*

¹⁴⁶ Although a thorough study of this error of Evangelicalism is not undertaken here, there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate the fallacy of this doctrine.

*who is believing in Him will not perish but is having life everlasting.*¹⁴⁷ *Will not perish and is having life everlasting* is only for the one who is *believing in Him*; *believing* is in the present tense (a continuous action) and active voice (*everyone* must be continually carrying out the action of believing).¹⁴⁸ What is evident is that if the *believing* should cease, then the “not perishing” and “having life” also end. A flicker of life is not enough, there must be evidence of obedience to the Lord (Matthew 7:21; John 14:15), and we must endure to the end (Matthew 24:13).

The author of Hebrews takes a moment now to quote from Psalm 95:7-11, to call to mind the example of Israel. It is a call to not harden our hearts as the Israelites did after leaving Egypt; even though they went on to see the works of the Lord for 40 years, their hardened hearts denied them entrance to the “resting place” that God had prepared for them. In His anger over their disobedience and failure to trust Him to keep His promises, the Lord declared that that generation would not discover the rest that He desired for them. How many of that generation would have sought the Lord with great pleading to enter the promised rest, yet He did not hear their pleas. It is clear from Scripture that the Lord will not always strive with mankind (Isaiah 63:10; Jeremiah 11:11); there comes a time when the heart condition will cause the Lord to turn away.

After citing the example of the Israelites, the author now calls the reader to be warned. Because of what came in Hebrews 3:1-6 (prior to the parenthetical quote from Psalm 95), and with a reemphasis that believers (“brethren”) are being addressed, in verse 12 we are called to discern (*take heed*, present tense, imperative mood – a command) lest we have a heart of unbelief, or unfaithfulness, that would cause us to fall away from God – a heart that would cause us to withdraw ourselves from God (“... in departing from the living God”). The Greek verb translated as “in departing” (*aphistemi*, which means to fall away or become faithless) is in the active voice,¹⁴⁹ which simply means that the subject (in this case, *you, the brethren*) is the one carrying out the action (*departing*). This is not a hypothetical situation, but rather a warning against the very real possibility of becoming apostate! We are enjoined to have hearts of faith so that we will not depart from the God Who has saved us through our High Priest, Jesus Christ. Indeed, we are guarded “by the power of God through faith” (1 Peter 1:5), yet we are also assured that “if we deny Him [a clear absence of faith], He also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:12). We often quote Romans 8:37-39 as evidence of our security in God, and as assurance that we cannot fall:

¹⁴⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁴⁸ Strong’s Online.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What is outlined here is a list of powerful external forces that can come against us, but none of these will be able to separate us from God’s love. What a promise! What security! However, the author of Hebrews is warning us in 3:12 of **our departing from God** through a heart of unfaithfulness; nothing can force us out of the hand of God, as we have just seen, but clearly we can apostatize through our own unfaithfulness! Nothing but our own unfaithful hearts can separate us from God’s love.

We are to exhort one another to remain faithful, for we share in Christ if we remain firm until the end (Hebrews 3:14 is a reiteration of the emphasis of verse 6) – again, a conditional statement! Unless we remain faithful unto the end, we will not be partakers of Christ; we will have no part with Him. Unbelief is the obstacle that may prevent us (*brethren*) from entering into the rest that God has prepared for us; yet unbelief can enter into our (the brethren’s) hearts at any time through the deceitfulness of sin (v. 13): hence the warning to be on guard, to exercise discernment regarding the condition of our hearts. It was the faithlessness of a generation of Israelites that prevented their entrance into what God had promised to them; it was their heart of unbelief that saw them lose their confidence in the God Who brought them through the Red Sea. The result: they never came to know the rest that God had promised them! God had assured them of a land flowing with milk and honey, yet they never saw it because of their unbelief!

Because of these things, and the possibility (through our own faithlessness and unbelief) of not entering the rest that God has promised, we are to fear. Again, the conditional reality of entering the rest of God is proclaimed, lest “any of you should seem to come short of it [to fail or suffer want]” (Hebrews 4:1).¹⁵⁰ So we must fear that despite God’s promise of a resting place, we fail to realize it through a lack of faith – through unbelief. Israel heard the good news, even as we have, yet a whole generation perished because they did not believe it with tenacity; the good news was not mixed with faith in order to bring life (Hebrews 4:2).

We who believe, are entering (present tense) a resting place that God has promised (Hebrews 4:3); but what is that resting place into which we are entering?

¹⁵⁰ Strong’s Online.

Is it the fulfillment of the seventh-day Sabbath? Does it render the keeping of the Sabbath obsolete?

Hebrews 4:4-9 tells us how God rested from His creative work on the seventh day (v.4); but those of Israel who first heard the Law of God, did not enter into His rest (the Promised Land) because of the hardness of their hearts – unbelief. David, many generations later, declared that “to-day” (or, at this time, now), if you hear the Lord’s voice, do not harden your heart like Israel of old, when they came out of Egypt (Psalm 95:7-11; Hebrews 4:7).¹⁵¹ Clearly, entrance into the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership did not bring the *rest* that God had prepared for His people from eternity past (Hebrews 4:3). So there is yet reserved, for the people of God, a rest (a Sabbath rest) that has not yet been fully realized (v.9): namely, eternity with Him. Yet, as partakers with Christ, there is an initial entering into a resting place (v.3) that will one day find ultimate fulfillment in glory. What is that resting? Is it simply experiencing the rest that Jesus promised when He said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)? That’s it, but we must understand fully what that means! In Ephesians 2:14-16 Paul stated:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us]; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby ...

When Jesus died in fulfillment of the Mosaic sacrifices and ordinances, they were replaced (*abolished*) by the New Covenant in His shed blood, and so, being fulfilled, they were done away with (Hebrews 8:13); however you want to put it, they were completed and are not to be carried forward. In essence, by faith we have found a place of rest in Christ from the heavy yoke of the Mosaic Law; that which confirmed death in us has been done away with in Christ. However, the rest is only **in Christ**; Jesus said, “Come unto **me** ... and I will give you rest.”

Nevertheless, this place of rest that we find only in the Lord Jesus Christ is not a place of idleness; we might be freed from the bondage of the Mosaic traditions, but we are not lawless. When Jeremiah spoke of the New Covenant, he said that God would write His Law upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), and He has given us His Spirit so that we will live out the righteousness of His Law to His glory (Romans 8:4). The Scriptures are filled with commands that we are to obey; there are

¹⁵¹ Friberg Lexicon.

precautions to take, and there is an evil heart of unbelief to guard against. Jesus' words in John 15:5 clarify that we cannot do His works without Him (for that is not abiding in the Vine); however, through Him we are to be strengthened (Philippians 4:13), we are to stand in His protection (Ephesians 6:14-17), and we are to walk in His Spirit (Galatians 5:16). It is not our works, or efforts, that justify us before God – that is accomplished only through our faith in the finished work of Christ; our works of holiness and righteousness spring from our living faith in the Lord! We must diligently guard against turning from faith in the Lord lest we follow in the footsteps of Israel, newly freed from Egypt, and lose all (Hebrews 6:4-6).

Now we come to the culmination of this passage on the rest that God holds out to us in Hebrews 4:10-16. Since we, as believers, have entered that promised resting place of God (albeit not the “keeping Sabbath” that we may one day enjoy), we have also rested, or ceased, from our own works even as God did rest (to make quiet¹⁵²) from His works of creation. Through faith, we have entered into that rest (Hebrews 4:3), yet we are also called to labor, or to make every effort, to enter into that rest, lest we fall from it through *disobedience* (*apeitheias*, the result of *unbelief*; Hebrews 4:11). The word *labor* carries with it the sense of possibility or potentiality, not certainty (it is in the subjunctive mood); therefore, we are urged to exert every effort so as to avoid that heart of disobedience that Israel exemplified. The reason for our labor is that God knows the very intents of our deceitful hearts, and can discern a germ of unbelief in its earliest form. So we are urged to “hold fast our profession” (Hebrews 4:14) because Jesus is our High Priest in heaven, Who understands our frame and intercedes for us (Romans 8:34). How do we “hold fast” to the faith that we have declared? – by coming with freedom and confidence to the throne of grace, where we will receive mercy from God and find grace to help us to abide faithfully in Christ.

Therefore, if the end of the rest, into which we have entered, is life with God for eternity, then to fall from the resting place that God has provided in this life can only mean that we have fallen from that which will permit us to enjoy His eternal rest. This is in keeping with the analogy of the branches: as long as each individual branch remains in the vine, it has life and will bear fruit, but if it no longer abides in the vine, then it is lifeless and worthless, and is cast out and burned with fire (John 15:6).

The reality of the *rest* spoken of in Hebrews 4 is that it has no direct bearing at all on our understanding of the seventh-day Sabbath. As we have seen, the urgency of this passage of Hebrews is calling us to remain faithful in our commitment to

¹⁵² Strong's Online.

Christ so that we do not lose the promised eternal rest that God has for those who remain faithful to the end (Matthew 24:13). As a matter of fact, as we begin to understand the truth of God as it relates to the Sabbath day, a proper keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath is, in fact, a part of our demonstrated faithfulness to His calling and His Word. Evangelicals have caused great confusion, and have ensured the apostasy of many through their propagation of the heresy of eternal security, which has led to careless living, gross compromise with the world, and little regard for the exhortations of Scripture that we are to walk carefully in the Spirit. If we take the urgency of the words of Hebrews 3:12-13 to heart, then our view of Scripture will change, as well as our attention as to how we live for Him (Ephesians 4:1).

Chapter 10 – Keeping the Sabbath

The question that may well arise is, “Since we are, then, to remember the seventh-day Sabbath, how are we to keep it?” Are we to follow the pattern laid out by God for the children of Israel? Do we simply shift back one day what we have established as a common pattern for Sunday? It is at this point that the average Evangelical likens keeping the Sabbath to being under the Law, by which they mean that you have to keep a ritualistic form of the Sabbath.

For this consideration we must return to the beginning: “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3). To learn how we are to observe this very special day, we must consider the example that God has laid out for us.

1. An End of Work

The seventh day was when God “ended his work.” In six days God had spoken, or formed, all of creation into being, “and God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good” (Genesis 1:31); “thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them” (Genesis 2:1). God created for six consecutive days, and then His work was complete except for the creation of the seventh day of rest. God deliberately included in His creative efforts a day when He did not create; the creative acts of God were now complete. This is significant for those who would seek to embrace the concept of evolution, which necessitates the continued propagation of new life forms; this is more specifically poignant for those who endeavor to meld evolution and God’s Word. God FINISHED His creative work – there will be no new life forms; anything that looks different after this will be the product of cross breeding or man’s influence through manipulated genetics.

For those of us who desire to walk in obedience to the commandments of God, this identifies the seventh day as the one that includes no work like unto the previous six days. Even within the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam responsibilities and things to do – work is a part of our lives, and it was always meant to be so. However, the example of God has been established that the seventh day is to be a day when this work is to be set aside. With sin came an increased effort for man to sustain life, yet the day of rest was still in place when there was to be an end of work. Both the Hebrew word *kalah* (God *ended* his work – Genesis 2:2) and

shabath (he *rested*, or *ceased* to work – Genesis 2:2) are in the imperfect tense (the actions are incomplete, or ongoing), which means that the ended work and the resting are perpetuated.¹⁵³ God did not create on that first seventh-day – His work was ended; however, He did rest on that day, and thereby, the seventh day was marked for rest, and not work. God set the example to be followed: work for days one to six, and rest, with no work, on the seventh day. Therefore, man must demonstrate the same end to his work on a weekly basis as God did in that first creation week – an end of work, followed by a day of rest.

When Jesus' disciples plucked, threshed and ate some grain on the Sabbath, the Pharisees rebuked Jesus for allowing this; there are those who see Jesus' response to the Pharisees as ending the necessity of setting aside the work of the previous six days. However, the disciples did not harvest the whole field; they simply shelled out enough grain in their hands to satisfy their immediate hunger (Matthew 12:1). Although contrary to the Pharisees' understanding of the Law of Moses, this did not violate God's design for the Sabbath day.

2. A Time of Rest

The seventh day was when God rested from His work. "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, *that* the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" (Isaiah 40:28). When God rested (*shabath*) from His work, it was not because He was exhausted from the effort of creating the universe. The word *shabath* carries the imperfect tense (Genesis 2:2), which means that it is an incomplete action – in other words, when God rested on that first seventh-day, that did not mark the end of the seventh-day rest. In reality, that day of rest was the pattern that God put into place for all of time.

Although many modern scholars would like to attribute the concept of a Sabbath to the ancient Babylonians, and have the Israelites copy it from them, the truth is much more basic than that. Man has been instilled with the measurement of time in groups of seven days, or a week. All civilizations function on a seven-day week, yet why would the concept of a week come into being at all? The answer is simply that God created the model of a seven-day week, and man has followed that pattern everywhere that he has gone. Included within the pattern that God established is the seventh day, a day when rest (*shabath*) follows six days of labor.

3. A Time to focus on the Lord

¹⁵³ Strong's Online.

The seventh day was blessed by God. Within the creative acts of God, only three things received His particular blessing: 1) the fish and the fowl (Genesis 1:22), 2) Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28), and 3) the seventh day (Genesis 2:3). As we consider that God specifically set the seventh day aside and blessed it, perhaps a more appropriate question that we need to ask is, why would anyone depart from that to which God gave such special attention? Why would we seek to unravel what God has so specifically blessed?

As the day that God sanctified (set apart as holy), and a day of rest from our regular work, it would only follow that the day be kept unto the Lord. In a time when the average professing Christian is very ignorant of the Word of God, it would seem appropriate that this day, at the very least, should include time spent learning about the God Who set the day apart as holy. What could be more fitting?

4. Doing good

From the life of Jesus, we learn that it is acceptable to do good for others on the Sabbath. Although the religious rulers of His day took exception to His healing on the Sabbath, it is clear that Jesus, eternal God, had no problem with doing acts of kindness for others. His question for His accusers was, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” (Mark 3:4). They had no answer for Him.

5. Avoid personal pleasures

Isaiah wrote, “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*” (Isaiah 58:13-14). The call is to not trample the Sabbath under foot as if it was like any other day, but to turn away from doing our own pleasure in it. This is the day that the Lord God set aside as holy, sanctified at the time of creation for our example. If we take pleasure in the Sabbath and call the day, which has been made holy by the Lord, a day to be honored, then we will find our delight in the Lord. This is not to be a day when we go our own way, when we satisfy our own desires, when we speak of things that pertain to our own wellbeing – this is a day to be focused on the things of the Lord. What a promise to those who are careful to set the seventh day apart, that one day in seven that has been specifically sanctified by God! What could be better than to find the Lord to be our delight!

This is perhaps one area that will cause many to reflect on their commitment to the Sabbath. This has become the day to catch up on all of those chores that have been neglected throughout the week; that one day when we can do things for ourselves without restraint. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). Yes, this is one of God’s Ten Commandments, and despite the best efforts of theologians today, it is still there. However, the Apostle John reminds us that if we keep His commandments, then they will not be grievous to us, i.e., they will not be burdensome, or difficult to obey.¹⁵⁴ Through living faith in Christ, God provides us with His Spirit to work in us and through us to His glory – the righteousness of the Law of God will be exemplified through us (Romans 8:4). Should this not be our delight?

6. NOT necessarily the day to gather for “worship”

As we contemplate the thought of sanctifying the Sabbath, as required by the Lord, we must be careful to separate what has become common practice on Sunday from what the Lord desires of us for His Sabbath. This is not an exercise in simply moving our traditional Sunday activities back one day. If we pause to consider the day and how God set it into place, perhaps we can catch a glimpse of how it really has very little to do with what we have traditionally considered as acceptable Sunday activities.

There was a day when Sunday was kept very differently than it is today. It used to be a day free of work and included church attendance (at least once) and a quiet family time. Organized sports were frowned upon, and anything that demanded effort was out of the question. It was generally observed as a day unto the Lord. However, today it is rare that anyone keeps any day in this manner; church attendance is taken care of either Saturday evening (if the congregation is large enough) or Sunday morning – the rest of the time is yours to play, shop, take in a movie, or do virtually anything that you like. “Honoring” God has been crammed into one hour per week, and is scheduled at our convenience.

We have grown up with the tradition (if we are “well-churched”) of attending church Sunday mornings and evenings and then a mid-week prayer meeting. As a matter of fact, you will find many Fundamental Baptist preachers riding their members to be in church every time that the doors are open, yet in all of their zeal, they neglect to take a second glance at the Fourth Commandment of God. Perhaps

¹⁵⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

if they gave careful consideration to the efforts that they invest in building their church empire, they would exercise greater zeal for teaching and preaching the truths of God's Word, and spend less time on their programs and political maneuvering. What needs to be understood is that a proper keeping of the Sabbath does not necessarily include church attendance; it is a day that you are to take and fill in such a way that will strengthen your relationship with the God of the Sabbath. If we follow the example that we have from Paul's ministry, we will meet after the Sabbath is ended (Acts 20:7-12).

Chapter 11 – Concluding Comments

There are other evidences, although secondary to what we have already considered, that are used to try to prop up our traditional week in the way that we are most comfortable. We are so used to thinking that the way that we do things is the way that everyone does them, and the way that they have always been done, but we must guard against holding such an arrogant view of the world.

For example, if we simply look at the Greek word for *Friday*, it is the same as the word that is translated as *preparation* in our Bible.¹⁵⁵ It was the day of preparation for the Sabbath, and the meaning has not been lost in the Greek language if we would take the time to look for it. As we look carefully around the world, we will realize that not all countries follow what we have come to consider as our universal view of things – work days are Monday through Friday, with a Saturday-Sunday weekend. In Nepal, the “workweek is five and a half days from Sunday through Friday,”¹⁵⁶ and Bangladesh has recently returned “to a 5 day, 40 hour work week, with a Friday and Saturday weekend.”¹⁵⁷ As amazing as it might be to us, not all things are done according to our North American timetable; as much as we might like to think it, we are not the center of the world.

When you speak to someone about keeping the Sabbath, as the Lord intended it to be kept, a typical response is: “If you keep the Sabbath, then you have to keep all of the other Mosaic laws as well.” This demonstrates a sad lack of knowledge of the Scriptures, and, more specifically, concerning the Sabbath; this response assumes that the Sabbath began with Moses, and it also fails to acknowledge that the ordinances and traditions of Moses were ended in Christ (of which the seventh-day Sabbath is not one). In essence, this comes from a poor understanding of the Scriptures, a satisfaction with the way that things are, and a general lack of motivation to check anything out according to the Word of God.

A mantra that is quite common among Evangelicals is “we’re not under the law, we’re under grace” (seeking to apply this much-abused text of Scripture, Romans 6:14, to the keeping of the Sabbath demonstrates the same shortcomings just outlined). This text is most often cited when someone is faced with something that they don’t want to do, but inwardly they know that they probably should, or when they are faced with something that they want to do, but their conscience is not totally

¹⁵⁵ Strong’s Online, compared with <http://www.kypros.org/cgi-bin/lexicon> “Friday.”

¹⁵⁶ http://www.nepembassy.org.uk/fact_file.html

¹⁵⁷ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61705.htm>

free about doing it. In the first case, it is used to salve the conscience, and in the latter to numb it. In both situations, it becomes a mechanism to dodge the truth of God's Word for the fulfillment of a fleshly desire. However, as we have amply clarified, the Sabbath is not under the Law of Moses, which saw completion in the work of Christ; rather, it was established at creation and reiterated as part of the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God upon tables of stone – a double emphasis of their permanency (Exodus 31:18; 34:1), and, we must not forget, that they are now written by God upon the tables of our hearts under the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34).¹⁵⁸ The grace of God never permits us to violate His commandments (Romans 6:1-2), and the Spirit of God is the means by which we will live in holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16) – an outward expression of the righteousness of God's Law (Romans 8:4).

There is real confusion among Evangelicals today on many fronts, and it is no less the case concerning the observance of the Sabbath; this confusion is illustrated so thoroughly in Easton's Bible Dictionary. Under the heading "Sabbath," we find this remark: "The Sabbath, originally instituted for man at his creation, is of permanent and universal obligation."¹⁵⁹ The statement seems clear and concise; there can be no misunderstanding of this comment. However, under the same article we also find this:

It [the Sabbath] was originally a memorial of creation. A work vastly greater than that of creation has now been accomplished by him [Christ], the work of redemption. We would **naturally** expect just such a change as would make the Sabbath a memorial of that greater work. True, **we can give no text authorizing the change** in so many words. We have no express law declaring the change (emphasis added).¹⁶⁰

What confusion! There are two admissions within this latter quote that reveal the true basis for the Evangelical and Fundamentalist position on the Sabbath. First of all, they would *naturally* expect to have the Sabbath change; however, we are to guard against imposing our *natural* expectations onto what God is doing. It was Eve's *natural* desire that saw her deceived into believing the lie of the devil; we must avoid trying to spiritualize our *natural* responses, lest we fall for the devil's version of God's truth. Secondly, and most obvious, Easton openly and readily admits that

¹⁵⁸ This is the subject of a separate study, but, under the New Covenant that was implemented by Jesus with His disciples at the Last Supper, we now live with the Law of God (Ten Commandments) written upon our hearts and the Spirit of God abiding within to work out the righteousness of His Law.

¹⁵⁹ Easton's Online, Revised Dictionary, "Sabbath."

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

there is no text of Scripture authorizing such a change. Need we say more? If the Scriptures are really the “sole rule for faith and practice,”¹⁶¹ why do we religiously follow something that has no foundation in Scripture, yet disregard what should be so evident?

A Roman Catholic by the name of Peter Geiermann, a priest in the order of Redemptorists founded in 1732, wrote what he called *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*. The edition published in 1930 provides a very interesting insight regarding our subject. Following the typical catechism format of question and answer, we find this:

3. The Third Commandment.¹⁶²

Q. *What is the Third Commandment?*

A. The Third Commandment is: Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.

Q. *Which is the Sabbath day?*

A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Q. *Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?*

A. **We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.**

Q. *Why did the Catholic Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?*

A. The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday, because Christ rose from the dead on a Sunday, and the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles on a Sunday.

Q. *By what authority did the Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?*

A. The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday by the plenitude of that divine power which Jesus Christ bestowed upon her.

Q. *What does the Third Commandment command?*

A. The Third Commandment commands us to sanctify Sunday as the Lord's Day (emphasis added).¹⁶³

Here is a Roman Catholic priest who attributes the shift from Saturday to Sunday to the Catholic Church, even if he uses a contrived reason for doing so. Despite such a bold statement, Evangelicals and Fundamentalists alike will use similar reasons for the change, but will foist the responsibility for it onto the Apostles (even though there is not one shred of evidence for doing so – as Easton readily admitted).

¹⁶¹ This is an extract from the position of Bethel Baptist Church (which is the home church for David Cloud) regarding the Scriptures. http://www.bethelbaptist.ca/doc_statement.htm

¹⁶² The Catholics conveniently merge the First and Second Commandments, and then split the Tenth Commandment into two in order to still have Ten Commandments.

¹⁶³ Peter Geiermann, *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (1930 edition), p. 50.

Most arguments presented today against keeping the seventh-day Sabbath seem to stem from an unwillingness to live Biblically; we have learned the fine art of blending in, and, keeping the Sabbath as God ordained would call us to step out. We have become comfortable with our practices; our traditions have come to us from many sources, and we are feign to depart from them as long as someone can provide a half-way plausible excuse to keep doing what we are doing. Evangelicals are trudging steadily onward toward eternity, and, for the most part, oblivious as to how far they have departed from the one Standard that God has given to us – His Word. Spiritual ignorance is the blight of the day; all thinking has been left to the “experts” who seek only to provide the masses with a message that they will find acceptable, and one that will maintain their own personal popularity (2 Timothy 4:3-4). In most respects, Evangelicals have bowed before the god of pragmatism: they do what is required to keep most of the people happy, and if a method works, then they will use it.

Clearly, Evangelicals today do not understand God’s intent in creating the seventh-day Sabbath for mankind, and what’s more, they really don’t care to think about it. God’s desire has always been to have fellowship with man, and this day was specifically sanctified by God for just that purpose. Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary forever opened the way for us to have fellowship with God, yet we spurn the day that God established, from the beginning of time, for such fellowship. God help us to walk according to His standards, and not according to the measure of fallen man. Whether or not we find it to be a convenient truth is not a matter for consideration; we are called to obedience. “He that keepeth his [God’s] commandments dwelleth [*meno*] in him, and he in him” (1 John 3:24); Jesus said, “Abide [*meno*] in Me ...” (John 15:4).¹⁶⁴ If we desire to abide in the Lord, then we must live in obedience to the commandments of God – there is no other way; the two are inseparable. May we be faithful in our obedience to the Word of God and to all Ten Laws that He has written upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33), including:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore **the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.**

¹⁶⁴ Strong’s Online.