

**THE
SEVENTH DAY SABBATH
IS IT ABOLISHED?**

Preface

This article is not intended to be comprehensive. There are many works already available which detail the importance and significance of the Sabbath. It is not the purpose of this article simply to rehearse what has been well stated previously by any number of authors. It is hoped, however, the reader will find the essential truths regarding the Sabbath in this brief work.

Credit should be given to Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi for his fine contributions on the subject of the seventh-day Sabbath. A number of his ideas were utilized in this article although they do not form the framework. His books *The Sabbath in the New Testament* and *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* were especially helpful.

A number of technical arguments have been addressed in this article—handled in a succinct manner so as not to overburden the reader. It is hoped these arguments have been sufficiently detailed to make the meaning of the Scriptures clear. Certainly, the seventh-day Sabbath has been written about as much as any Bible subject. Yet, observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is as controversial today as it was in the second and third centuries when Sunday observance began to predominate in nominal Christianity. It is hoped this article will convince the reader of the extreme importance of the seventh-day Sabbath, as well as the need to take its observance seriously—especially so in a world today that is rapidly departing from any semblance of "the faith once delivered to the saints."

The Seventh Day Sabbath Is It Abolished?

We live in a tension-filled society, full of restiveness and fear, where countless numbers of people are seeking inner rest and peace by enrolling in stress-management programs, health clubs, or meditation groups. They are taking pills, alcohol, or drugs in order to "cope." They are vacationing, indulging in various sports, or spending countless hours watching TV, all for the purpose of finding relief from the stress and worry of modern life. But it is the Sabbath that affords us the opportunity to experience inner rest and renewal by releasing us from the pressures of the weekday, allowing us to experience more freely and more fully the reality of God's divine presence, peace, and rest. Sabbathkeeping is not merely an abstract theological concept; rather, it is a concrete manifestation of the practice of one's faith. Indifference toward the Sabbath day—treating it as a holiday or workday rather than as a Holy Day—can be likened to defection from God and our own best interests.

The fourth commandment reads:

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).

In the fourth commandment we have the injunction to work and rest in order to imitate the pattern established by God during the creation week. The word "rest" used in Genesis 2:2–3 summarizes how God felt about His creation, that it was complete and perfect. In acknowledgment of this perfect creation, God stopped and "rested."

Sabbathkeeping means much more than receiving the benefits of physical rest one day a week. It means to acknowledge God's total claim over one's life. The believer who accepts God's claim over the last day of the week is on the way to accepting God's claim over his entire life, which in turn demonstrates a total belonging to God. The free offering of time to God is a supreme act of worship, acknowledging God as the possessor of the very essence of human life—time itself! For human life is time, and when time is up, human life ceases to be. Observing the Sabbath means to admit that the existence of the world is an absolute gift from God and that no one can truly worship God unless he first accepts Him as the perfect Creator. The memorial to His creation is, therefore, celebrated week by week by observance of the Sabbath—the day that is called "the day of delight" in the Bible.

One who refuses to observe the Sabbath indicates his mistrust for God and His providence. He constantly worries about the security and success of his job. The Sabbath, by placing a limit on work, is designed to counteract the temptation to deify work. The Sabbath teaches us that working six days finds its fulfillment in the *rest* of the seventh day. Resting on the seventh day means to reject a lifestyle which, in the process of achieving comfort and status, makes an idol of work. Sabbath fulfillment is not achieved by a quest for the physical pleasures of materialism, or sports, amusement parks, the beach, the dance hall, the restaurant, the ski-resort, etc., which merely provide a form of evasion and temporary oblivion, but in the end leave an internal spiritual emptiness. This spiritual emptiness is at the root of so much exhaustion and tension suffered by many. Seeking spiritual values and relationships by means of the Sabbath enables us to break away from the tyranny of materialism, the physical orientation that during the week seems to be the ultimate reality. By observing the Sabbath we come to see the true reality. Work, when not balanced by rest, is an oppressive and relentless master, degrading the human personality and destroying the balance between body and mind. Man, by the idol of work, becomes a brute.

The Sabbath represents the ideal example of God's care and method of accomplishing human freedom on the physical plane—the freedom from the tyranny of work, from pitiless exploitation, from over attachment to things and people, from the insatiable greediness of man, to enjoy the blessings of the Sabbath in order to prepare for the new week with renewed energy and zeal. One who observes the Sabbath is able to renounce the security of working every day, even when circumstances may seem unfavorable. He is able to renounce the greed and selfishness brought on by enslavement to material things. He is able to renounce self-sufficiency and faith in his own abilities, achievements, plans, and wishes. The Sabbath gives freedom from work for the master as well as the servant and working animals. God's concern for His creatures is as exemplary as it is for man, many creatures being the most defenseless against exploitation. The Sabbath protects the worker from undue abuse. It teaches the greedy to resist the temptation for continual accumulation—for at least one day a week—and to acknowledge gratefully the blessings he has received. When we finish working at the end of the week, we rest on the Sabbath. The sense of completeness that the Sabbath brings gives meaning to our lives and a sense of direction to what otherwise would be a continuous, meaningless, and linear existence.

When Israel was freed from slavery during the Exodus, the people were told to remember the deliverance by the Sabbath, a concrete experience which involved a future consideration for the less fortunate (Deuteronomy 5:12–13, 15). Sabbathkeeping, then, involved a genuine concern for the human rights and needs of others. The Sabbath was understood not only as a personal rest and liberation from social injustice, but also as the anticipation of the future rest and peace to be realized at the return of the Messiah.

One who accepts God as the Creator accepts what He has created; he does not change the Sabbath to another day of the week. The Sabbath is incorruptible because it is not a material symbol, like the Temple. It is immaterial because it represents time rather than space and matter. Ideas attached to material objects tend to deteriorate and disintegrate with time like the objects they represent. Monuments are gradually deprived of meaning and life. The Sabbath, however, is not only incorruptible, it is universal—accessible to all.

Sundaykeeping, religiously, is on the wane. Could the reason be there is neither Biblical nor apostolic mandate for its observance? One can hardly be expected to take Sundaykeeping seriously when he is told that the day is merely a convenient time for worship selected by the church and that in principle he is free from the observance of *any* special day. Sundaykeeping today is essentially an hour of worship rather than 24 hours devoted to God. Christian indifference toward "the Lord's day" is making the survival of Christianity itself a matter of vital concern. While Sabbathkeeping rests on explicit Bible commands (Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:8–11; Mark 2:27; Hebrews 4:9), Sundaykeeping is derived from a questionable church tradition. The vast majority of Christians regard Sunday as a holiday rather than a Holy Day. Only when there is strong theological conviction will a person act accordingly. Sundaykeeping, to this day, remains largely an hour of worship. Sabbathkeeping in the Bible is, on the other hand, a period of 24 hours of rest and worship, so the real difference between Sundaykeeping and Sabbathkeeping is the difference between a holiday and a Holy Day.

Sabbath Created at the Beginning

The Sabbath does not rest on a historically questionable church tradition. It was created at the beginning. In Genesis 2:1–3 we read, "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." Exodus 20:11 tells us, "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." Jesus stated, "... The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28). Jesus Christ *was* the God of the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 10:4). *He* created the seventh-day Sabbath and gave it for the purpose of benefitting mankind (Colossians 1:16; John 1:1–3; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Ephesians 3:9).

There is no credibility to the Jewish argument that the Sabbath originated with Moses and that it was given exclusively to Israel. In four places in the Bible the Sabbath is

described as a memorial of creation. These are Genesis 2:2–3; Exodus 20:11 (both cited in the above paragraph); Exodus 31:15–17; and Hebrews 4:4. Exodus 31:15–17 states, "Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. . . . 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." Hebrews 4:4 reads: "For he spake in a certain place on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works." Mark 2:27–28, also previously cited, proves the Sabbath was given at creation, and not by Moses. Once again notice, "The Sabbath was made for man [at the creation], and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."

The primary reason the Mosaic origin of the Sabbath was advanced by the Jews was that the rabbis were locked in combat with the Hellenistic forces coercing the radical abandonment of the Jewish religion. This exclusive and nationalistic view, adopted by the rabbis, was argued in order to preserve the Jewish identity. The same idea of the Mosaic origin of the Sabbath was later adopted by some of the early Church Fathers, later by radical groups during the Reformation, and recently by modern theologians. The strong desire by the rabbis to preserve their Jewish identity during the Hellenistic period reduced the Sabbath from a creation ordinance to a Mosaic ordinance given exclusively to Israel. Later the Mosaic origin and exclusive nature of the Sabbath was adopted by the Church Fathers as a challenge to those Christians who defended the binding obligation of the Sabbath commandment in the Christian dispensation.

The concept of "Sabbath delight" (Isaiah 58:14) appears to be derived from the creation Sabbath as a day of joy and delight and of harmony and peace, which served as an example for the future. The weekly Sabbath during the Old Testament period embodied the national aspiration for a resting place in the land of Canaan, a type of the future order of peace and rest in the Millennium. The typological meaning of the Sabbath, as a symbol of the future age of rest and prosperity, prompted the school of Shammai to prohibit contributions for the poor in the synagogue on the Sabbath. To them, acts of charity would negate the expectation of future material prosperity typified by the then-present Sabbath observance. Jesus' healings on the Sabbath, on the other hand, served to demonstrate how He fulfilled the Messianic expectations embodied by the celebration of the Sabbath. The coming of Christ, rather than representing a termination of the Sabbath, actualized the redemptive nature of the Sabbath. Luke 4:16 tells us that Jesus Christ was a habitual Sabbathkeeper. Matthew 24:20 takes for granted the permanence of Sabbath worship.

Weekly Cycle Cannot Be Broken

The idea that we cannot be sure which day is the seventh day of the week is disproved both by Scripture and history. Jesus kept the Sabbath. Since He was sinless (Hebrews 4:15), He did keep the correct Sabbath—the seventh day of the week. Chronology has been relatively easy to trace since the time of Christ. So, the seventh day sanctified at creation is the same Sabbath Christ kept. Time has not been lost and the weekly cycle has not been broken. According to the Bible, the weekly cycle cannot be broken. Genesis, chapter one, delineates the weekly cycle. See verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31, and chapter two, verses 1–3. The heavenly bodies were given to separate years, months, and days (Genesis 1:14–18). Day and night were separated by the sun and moon (v. 16). Jeremiah tells us, "Thus saith the Lord, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances [v. 35] depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever" (Jeremiah 31:35–36). "Thus saith the Lord; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; Then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant . . . Thus saith the Lord; If my covenant be not with day and night, and if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth; Then will I cast away the seed of Jacob, and David my servant . . ." (Jeremiah 33:20, 25–26). "Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light . . . He hath also stablished them for ever and ever: he had made a decree which shall not pass" (Psalm 148:3, 6). According to these texts, the weekly cycle cannot be broken.

Now, what about the argument that the principle of Sabbathkeeping consists of observing one day in seven rather than the seventh day of the week? This view rests on fiction. It is based on the notion that the specifying of the seventh day as the Sabbath is a ceremonial law given by Moses to Israel in order to teach them about the spiritual rest to be manifested in Christ. The principle of one day in seven, on the other hand, is regarded as a moral law given by God to mankind at creation. More will be stated about this concept later, but for the present let it suffice us to say that in the Scripture the idea of one day in seven is totally absent. Both at the creation and in the fourth commandment, the Bible specifically states "the seventh day." If one day in seven had been intended by God, He would have prescribed a rest day other than the Sabbath for the priests and Levites who normally worked on the Sabbath. Also, the notion that every day is a Sabbath to the Lord is equally faulty. Such a notion is an attempt not to worship God any day of the week. This theory ultimately results in no Sabbath at all and is essentially a deception intended to abrogate both the belief and worship of God.

Sabbath *Revealed* to Israel

An examination of Exodus 16 demonstrates that the violation of the Sabbath rest was a violation of the fourth commandment. Notice in two instances the commandment to rest on the Sabbath was a part of the law of God (vv. 4, 27–28). While the correct day to rest was revealed by a miracle, its origin, as we have seen, goes back to creation. Israel's long years in slavery had caused the nation not only to lose sight of the significance of the Sabbath, but of the correct day as well. In Exodus 16 Moses said, "Six days ye shall gather it [the manna]; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none" (v. 26). "So the people rested on the seventh day" (v. 30). Thus, in Exodus 20 where we read the fourth commandment, it is specifically stated, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (v. 8). Nehemiah wrote, "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 the holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant" (Nehemiah 9:13–14). While the Ten Commandments were given in a codified form one month after the Sabbath was revealed to Israel (compare Exodus 16:1 and 19:1), as noted, it was first revealed to mankind at creation. In fact, it can be demonstrated that all of the Ten Commandments were in effect before the time of Moses. The command to observe the Sabbath is mentioned several times in the Pentateuch. See Exodus 23:12; 34:21; 35:2–3; Leviticus 19:3, 30; 23:1–3; Deuteronomy 5:12–15.

Abraham was the father of the faithful. God called him out of his own country for a great purpose (Genesis 12:1–3). God instructed Abraham, ". . . walk before me, and be thou perfect. . . . And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:1, 7). Why did God choose Abraham? The answer is given in Genesis 18: "For I know him, 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" (v. 19). God promised to multiply the seed of Abraham "because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Genesis 26:5). Abraham, the father of the faithful, kept the Sabbath. Why? Because the command to rest on the Sabbath—the fourth commandment—was revealed at creation. Abraham observed God's law. Had he refused to keep the fourth commandment he would have been guilty of disobedience, not worthy of receiving God's blessing. The Sabbath is presented in Exodus 16 and 20 as being already in effect. Therefore, it should not be assumed that, since it is not mentioned between Genesis 2 and Exodus 16, no one observed it. The Bible indicates otherwise, since the first incidental mention of the Sabbath is found in 2 Kings 4:23 and describes the custom of visiting a prophet on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath—an Everlasting Sign and a Perpetual Covenant

Exodus 31 emphasizes the perpetuity of the Sabbath. Notice it: ". . . 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. . . . Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. . . . 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. . ." (Exodus 31:13, 15–17).

The perpetuity of the Sabbath as an identifying sign is repeated in Ezekiel. "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them. . . . I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgements, and do them; And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God" (Ezekiel 20:12, 19–20). The primary reason the Jews are identified in the modern world today is their faithfulness to the Sabbath law.

The Sabbath, Ezekiel says, is a sign between God and the children of Israel forever. In the Bible, "forever" means as long as the factors involved continue to exist. Notice this example in Exodus 21:1–6. A Hebrew bondman could exercise the option to be free after seven years. Should he desire to remain with his master, "then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever" (Exodus 21:6). Obviously, after death the servant is no longer serving his master. So, the factors of the "forever" in this case no longer exist. The factors in the perpetuity of the Sabbath are (1) day and night, so that the weekly cycle continues; and, (2) men present to observe the Sabbath. Since these factors continue to this day, the Sabbath remains an everlasting sign, a perpetual covenant. These factors will continue into the Millennium. For in Isaiah 66 we read, "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 66:22–23).

Sabbathbreaking—the Result

Though God gave the Sabbath as a perpetual sign between Him and the children of Israel forever, they did not obey Him for long. Even at the time God revealed the proper day to Israel, the people were obstinate. God instructed Israel, "Six days ye shall gather it [the

manna]; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, 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" (Exodus 16:26–27). Later, this rebellion against the law of God was dealt with severely. "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses" (Numbers 15:32–36).

God spoke to the nation of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah: "Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers. But they obeyed not, neither inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear, nor receive instruction" (Jeremiah 17:21–23). Because they refused, God warned: "But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (v. 27).

Israel rebelled against the Sabbath by polluting it even in the wilderness before reaching the Promised Land. God said through Ezekiel, "But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my sabbaths they greatly polluted. . . . Yet also I lifted up my hand unto them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands; Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths: for their heart went after idols. . . . Because they had not executed my judgements, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. Wherefore I gave them [up to] also statues that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live" (Ezekiel 20:13, 15–16, 24–25). Not only did God prevent that first generation which came out of Egyptian slavery from entering the Promised Land, He permitted them to follow their own man-made laws that were actually harmful to them.

Israel and Judah are likened to two women in Ezekiel 23. And what was their conduct? ". . . Son of man, wilt thou judge Aholah [Israel] and Aholibah [Judah]? yea, declare unto them their abominations: That they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their

sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them. Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my sabbaths (vv. 36–38). And what was their prophesied punishment to be? "For thus saith the Lord God; I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled. And the company shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire. Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness" (vv. 46–48). National calamity is the punishment for sins such as these; Sabbathbreaking is among them.

2 Kings 17 relates what happened to Israel because of her continued obstinacy and rebellion against the laws of God. Apostasy is likened to rebellion. "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight. . . . So was Israel carried away out of their own own land to Assyria to this day" (2 Kings 17:18, 23). And what happened to the people of Judah? Did they fare any better for their rebellion against God's Law? "And the city [Jerusalem] was besieged unto the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. . . . And they slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him with fetters of brass, and carried him to Babylon. . . . So Judah was carried away out of their land" (2 Kings 25:2, 7, 21).

God pronounces blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. In Leviticus 26, God says: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord" (v. 2). In the following verses we find the blessings for obedience. But notice the curses for disobedience, specifically for not observing the seventh-year land rest. "And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it" (vv. 33–35). See also 2 Chronicles 36:20–21.

Christ and the Apostles Kept the Sabbath

Christ was a habitual Sabbathkeeper. Luke 4:16 states: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, *as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day*, and stood up for to read." And why should He not? After all He was the Lord of the Sabbath. "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28). See also Luke 6:6. Another reference to Christ's keeping the Sabbath is found in Luke 13:10 where we read, "And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath." Christ's disciples

were also Sabbathkeepers. Notice Luke 23:54–56 and Mark 16:1. Both these texts demonstrate that the disciples were observing the Sabbath even during the crucial time period surrounding the crucifixion and burial of Christ.

There are several references to Sabbathkeeping in the book of Acts. Aside from Acts, chapter 2, which relates the observance of the Day of Pentecost by Christ's disciples, notice Acts 13:14, 42, 44. We see in these texts that even the Apostle Paul was a Sabbathkeeper (contrary to the false notion held by many that Paul advocated "doing away with the law") and that Gentile proselytes also kept the Sabbath. "But when they departed from Perga [Paul and his company], they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day and sat down. . . . And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. . . . And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." In Acts 16:13 we read another reference to the Apostle Paul, "And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made." And in Acts 17:2 we see that the Apostle Paul was also a habitual Sabbathkeeper: "And Paul, *as his manner* [custom] *was*, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures." Again, in Acts 18:4, "And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and *Greeks*." It should be obvious from the above texts that Christians attended the synagogue, where they worshipped on the Sabbath—including Gentiles.

Did Christ Break the Sabbath?

It has been stated that the Sabbath is no longer in effect because Christ, by His own example, broke the Sabbath. Matthew 12:1–8 is one of the texts cited. Here Christ's disciples were condemned by the Pharisees because they plucked a few ears of grain to eat on the Sabbath. Jesus dismissed their criticism by citing the example of David—what he did when he and his men were hungry. Jesus then went on to explain how the priests are not subject to censure for working on the Sabbath because they are engaged in the work of God. Likewise, then, He tells the Pharisees, had they recognized who Christ was and what work He was doing they would not have been so quick to find fault. For, as stated in Mark 2:27, the Sabbath was made for man's benefit. As the Creator, Christ made the Sabbath; it was not wrong, therefore, for Him and His disciples to pluck few ears of grain to eat on the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:10–14 is another text questioned. Here Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Christ, anticipating the Pharisees' criticism, promptly told them that if it were permissible by the law to rescue an animal on the Sabbath, it was certainly permissible to deliver a man from physical bondage. Since the Pharisees had no reply, their alternative was to silence Jesus by killing Him. A similar account of a healing

on the Sabbath is found in Luke 13:10–17. The Pharisees were shamed by Jesus' reply to their criticism in this instance and were silenced.

In John 5:1–18 a more detailed account of a healing on the Sabbath is outlined. Jesus healed a man who had been bedridden for thirty-eight years. The Jews hurled their customary abuse at Jesus for this act of kindness to the infirm man. In reply, Jesus told the Jews on that same Sabbath day, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (v. 17). What did Jesus mean by this remark? Did he say it was permissible to work on the Sabbath?

The word "hitherto" means "unto now" or "even unto now." That is, both the Father and the Son were working even unto "now." Yet, the Bible tells us God rested from His physical work (Hebrews 4:4; Genesis 2:2–3). So, while the Father and Christ are "working even unto now," this could not possibly be referring to any kind of physical work on the Sabbath. To what kind of work, then, was Jesus referring? Notice John 6:29. Jesus said the work of God is to "believe on him whom he [the Father] hath sent." In John 10:37–38 Jesus explained that even if some could not accept His person they should not reject the works which He performed, works which proved that He was doing the very work of the Father. This is repeated in John 14:11 where Jesus stated, "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake." In John 4:34 Jesus said, ". . . My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." And in John 15:24, Jesus emphasized, "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."

Jesus' works were spiritual in nature. Both He and the Father have been "working even unto now" to bring about the fruition of God's plan of salvation. "I am working until now" implies the saving mission of Christ. So, while God ended His physical work of creation as recorded in Genesis 2, He has not ended His spiritual work—the redemptive work of Christ. What Christ did on the Sabbath was all part of the redemptive nature of His commission, the redemption of the whole man, ministering to his physical needs as part of his spiritual needs. Healing on the Sabbath was a part of this redemptive mission, ministering to the spiritual needs of those He healed, as seen in John 5:14 and John 9:35–38. In the former verse, Jesus told the man who had been healed, ". . . Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." In the later text, Jesus said, ". . . Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou has both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him."

In every case where Jesus or His disciples were accused of Sabbathbreaking, Jesus defended their conduct, often appealing to the Scriptures, and showing that their activities were in harmony with the intent and purpose of the Sabbath. Certainly, Jesus said, in John

7:22–23, if it was permissible to circumcise on the Sabbath in order to obey the law of Moses by making the man complete or whole in the sight of God, it was permissible to make a man whole by healing him on the Sabbath day.

Acts 15 and the Sabbath

Some believe the decision made by the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 is proof the Jerusalem church was instrumental in abrogating the Sabbath. This chapter relates how some Jews came from Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria and taught the Christian brethren there that they must be circumcised in order to be saved. This generated an uproar in the church and it was decided to take the matter to Jerusalem where it could be settled in a ministerial conference. What has been generally overlooked by those who misconstrue what happened in this conference is that the Jerusalem church was made up of law-keeping Jews. The book of Acts relates the mass conversion of thousands of Jews (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1, 7; 9:42; 12:24). Among those converted were "a great company of priests," and "many thousands of Jews" which were zealous for the Law" (Acts 21:20). Based on these facts it is impossible to believe that the Jerusalem church was instrumental in abrogating the Sabbath.

The decision rendered by the conference in Acts 15 was that circumcision should not be a requirement for salvation and that the Gentile converts should not be compelled to be circumcised. However, they would be required to observe for things *inaddition* to keeping the law. They must refrain from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, and from the eating of blood (Acts 15:20). The reason: Because these prohibitions were taught in all the synagogues around the world, having been an integral part of the Mosaic teaching from the very beginning. All of the above prohibitions were a regular practice of heathen religions, and, as such, absolutely forbidden. The Acts 15 council did not exempt Gentile Christians from the Mosaic law in general, nor did it exempt them from Sabbathkeeping in particular. This council, rather than abolishing the Sabbath, endorsed it as a requirement upon all Christians—Gentile as well as Jewish.

Misunderstanding the judgement of the Acts 15 council has led many to believe there is a radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments; therefore, the contention is that the Sabbath has been abrogated or "done away." This notion can be traced back to some of the second and third-century theologians who taught that the Sabbath was a temporary ordinance derived from Moses, but abrogated by the coming of Christ. This concept has been carried down to our time, most theologians believing that the Sabbath was a "social institution" initiated after the Israelites entered the Promised Land, but annulled by Christ. Sunday is viewed as a Christian innovation to celebrate Christ's resurrection. Or, that Christ transcended the law; therefore, His followers had the right to choose a new day of worship.

Another view regarding the Sabbath is that while there is a basic unity between the Old and New Testaments, the decree by Constantine to observe Sunday as a day of worship is theologically binding. This view holds that the Sabbath was transferred to Sunday. Developed during the Middle Ages, this concept was refined by Thomas Aquinas, who differentiated between moral and ceremonial aspects of the fourth commandment. The moral aspect consisted of the principle of setting aside a regular time (one day in seven) for rest and worship in accordance with natural law. The ceremonial aspect consisted of a specific day (seventh-day Sabbath) which commemorated creation, as well as the present and future rest in God. This "transference view" was accepted by most of the churches that followed the Reformed tradition (Reformation view). It rests on an artificial distinction between moral and ceremonial aspects of the fourth commandment. Luther's radical separation between natural law and Mosaic law and between Law and Gospel was adopted by many denominations after the Reformation—the end result being that many churches today believe Christians are free to observe any day. Calvin followed the reasoning of Thomas Aquinas and accepted the notion that the ceremonial aspect of the law was abrogated. Those who follow this reasoning today have Biblical authority for this artificial and arbitrary distinction between the moral and ceremonial aspects of the fourth commandment supposedly "done away" by Christ.

The only view consistent with the Old and New Testaments is that the Sabbath has not been abrogated or transferred to Sunday. It was established permanently because of the explicit continuity between the Law of Moses and Christianity, as demonstrated in the third paragraph of page 10.

Joshua's Long Day

From God's Word, we have already seen that the weekly cycle cannot be broken. Yet, in spite of this fact some believe the weekly cycle was disrupted by Joshua's long day. This incident is recorded in Joshua 10:12–14. Israel was at war with the Amorites and needed more daylight in order to make the victory complete. Joshua said to the Lord in the sight of Israel, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies . . . So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day." Notice carefully what the text says: the sun hasted not to go down "about a whole day." The only alteration of time was the lengthening of the daylight portion of the day. In the Bible a calendric day is comprised of a period of darkness (night) and a period of light (day). The lengthening of one day *did not* result in the *addition* of a day. The weekly cycle was not disrupted because no new calendric day was added. This is why the Bible states in verse 14 of Joshua 10, "And there was no *day* like that before it or after it, that the

Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel." Regardless of the length of the day, it was still one day only.

The Sabbath that Joshua and the people of Israel observed is the same Sabbath Jesus observed. And the Sabbath Jesus observed is the same Sabbath observed by Sabbathkeepers today—the true Sabbath given at creation, the day we call Saturday, the seventh day of the week.

Paul—the Champion of Liberalism?

Church historians commonly assume that Paul was the one who detached Christianity from its Jewish cocoon, freeing it so that it could find its full expression in the Gentile world, liberated from the shackling restraints of law. Was Paul the apostle of liberalism?

Paul uses the word "law" in a number of different ways in his epistles. It sometimes refers to the Mosaic law (Galatians 4:21); sometimes to the entire Old Testament (1 Corinthians 14:21); it can refer to the will of God written in the mind of the Gentiles (Romans 2:14–15); or to the governing principle of faith (Romans 3:27); or to evil inclinations (Romans 7:21); and sometimes to the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:2). What is not generally understood is that when Paul speaks of law in the context of justification (right standing with God), he states that law-keeping is of no avail (Romans 3:20). But, when speaking of law in the context of sanctification (living right before God), Paul upholds the value and validity of God's Law (Romans 7:12; 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 7:19). Man, born a sinner, transgresses the Law of God almost from birth (Psalm 51:5). Future law-keeping will not justify or clear a man from his guilty past. Only the blood of Christ can do this. But after he is justified through the blood of Christ, man cannot continue in sin (Galatians 2:17–18). Right living before God entails obedience to the Law of God. This is why Paul upholds the law in the context of sanctification.

Did Paul observe the Sabbath? Yes, indeed! Notice Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 17:2; 18:4. Paul was not an apostle of liberalism; he kept the law (Romans 7:22, 25). Why, then, do so many of his writings seem to imply the law is abrogated?

Questionable Texts

Before looking at Paul's writings, let us notice what the Apostle Peter said of Paul, ". . . Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles,

speaking in them of these things; in which are *some things hard to be understood*, which they that are unlearned and unstable *wrest*, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction: (2 Peter 3:15–16). Even in Peter's day many were misinterpreting and perverting Paul's epistles.

Romans 3:20

Romans 3:20 is a text of Paul's which seems to abrogate the law, and hence the Sabbath. This text states: "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). This statement is perfectly understandable in the light of the third paragraph above. Law-keeping will not erase the guilty past. Only the shed blood of Jesus Christ justifies us from our past (Romans 5:9). The law reveals what sin is (Romans 7:7). But once we repent of past sins (Romans 3:25), we cannot continue to sin; to do so would place us under the penalty of death once again (Romans 6:23). Paul is not abrogating the law by his statement in Romans 3:20. He is simply stating that law-keeping in the context of justification is of no avail, but law-keeping in the context of sanctification is indeed valid.

Romans 14:5

Another questionable text is Romans 14:5. This text reads: "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike, Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." The text seems to imply that it makes no difference which day one observes as the Sabbath; it is a matter of personal choice. But is this text even talking about a day of rest?

Notice the subject matter under consideration. Verses one and two state, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs." So, the Christian is not to refuse into fellowship one who is weak, that is, one who has various doubts about spiritual matters and is a vegetarian. Verses three and four admonish the Christian not to look contemptuously upon such a one and not to judge or condemn him for his weakness. In verse five Paul introduces the matter of certain days—days that are esteemed or regarded above other days. Then, in verse six Paul brings up the matter of eating or not eating on these days. Verse five could not be a reference to the Sabbath day because the Sabbath was always regarded as a feast day (Leviticus 23:2–3). In the following verses Paul instructs Christians to recognize that we are all to be judged individually before God and that we have no right to judge or despise one who is considered weak. Rather, we should not put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in our brother's way (v. 13). Then, in verse 17, Paul summarizes, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy

[Spirit]." Clearly, then, Romans 14:5 is talking about certain days set aside by some to fast, a matter Paul says is an individual choice and not a reason to condemn or despise anyone. Attaining the Kingdom of God, Paul says, is not by means of meat and drink but by righteousness, peace, and joy in union with the Holy Spirit. So, Romans 14:5 decidedly is not talking about the Sabbathday.

2 Corinthians 3:7

Does 2 Corinthians 3:7 say the Ten Commandments are now null and void, as some believe? Beginning in 2 Corinthians 3:6, we read of God: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?" (vv. 6–8) This passage is taken to mean that the law is done away, and hence the Sabbath. But to what is this passage referring?

Notice it refers to "the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones." The Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18). Nowhere are they referred to as engraved. What, then, was the ministration of death that was engraved? In Deuteronomy 27:1–4 we read: "And Moses with the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, Keep all the commandments which I command you this day. And it shall be on the day when ye shall pass over Jordan unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, that though shalt set up great stones, and plaister them with plaister: And though shalt write upon them all the words of this law, when though art passed over. . . . Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaister them with plaister." This was accomplished by Joshua. Joshua 8:30–32 states, "Then Joshua built an altar unto the Lord God of Israel in mount Ebal. . . . And he wrote there upon the stones a copy of the law of Moses. . . ." This law was written upon the plastered stones, not on the altar, as it was expressly forbidden to use any iron tool on the altar (Deuteronomy 27:5).

It was the ministration of death that was to be done away. This legal system required the death penalty for many infractions of God's Law. But this was all to change. Paul states in 2 Corinthians 3:3: "Forasmuch as ye [brethren] are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Sprit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart." These brethren did not require a letter-of-the-law legal system to make them obey God. An inward change was taking place in their hearts and minds. The ministration of death was not the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were written on two tables of stone by the finger of God (Deuteronomy

9:9–11; Exodus 34:27–28). The whole stones which were overlaid with plaster contained the civil law, which included the ministration of death. This is what was to be done away, not the Ten Commandments.

Galatians 3:10

Galatians 3:10 is sometimes quoted as a text that abolishes the Law of God and, consequently, the Sabbath. Paul here is warning the Galatians of the useless of attaining righteousness by means of the law (Galatians 2:21). Rather, righteousness comes by faith in the blood of Christ and obedience to the Ten Commandments, once one has truly repented. As Paul states in Galatians 3:6, "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Some Galatians had been attempting to win God's favor and thus be accounted righteous by performing certain "works of the law," such as circumcision (vv. 2, 5; 5:1–6). Then, quoting Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Galatians 3:10). Paul was not telling these Gentiles they were under a curse for obeying the law. Rather, he was telling them that they were under a curse because they were not able to perform all that the law required. The Apostle Peter had stated at the Jerusalem council, "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the [Gentile] disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they" (Acts 15:10–11). Paul reiterates this same principle in Galatians 3:11, when he states, "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith."

Galatians 3:10 does not say the Law of God is abrogated; it says that one who does not keep all of it is under the curse. Rather than abolishing the Sabbath day, this text upholds it as a requirement of obedience. Lawkeeping, however, does not justify one from his *past* guilt. Only the blood of Christ can accomplish this. When one is forgiven of his guilty past, he is justified and comes under God's grace—His free, undeserved, unmerited pardon (Romans 3:24–25). He is not longer under (the penalty for breaking) the law (Romans 6:23). He is under grace. "What then? shall we sin [break the law—1 John 3:4], because we are not under [the penalty of] the law, but under grace? God forbid" (Romans 6:15).

Galatians 4:10

Some interpret Galatians 4:10 to mean that the Galatians, who had been delivered from their Jewish cocoon, were reverting back to Jewish practices, including the Sabbath. Paul is, therefore, warning them of a grave danger. Galatians 4:9–11 reads: "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and

beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." The weak and beggarly elements are taken to mean, among other things, the Sabbath.

Keep in mind that the epistle to the Galatians was written primarily to Gentiles. While the churches of Galatia were comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. (Galatians 3:1; Acts 13:14, 42–43; 14:1–4), it is clear from Galatians 4:8 that Paul is addressing the Gentiles. Verse 8 could not apply to the Jews, because it was to them God committed the oracles (Romans 3:2). The Gentiles had not known God previously. They had been enslaved to the "weak and beggarly elements." The idea that the weak and beggarly elements refers to the law of Moses is strictly an interpretation. According to a *Greek-English Lexicon* by Arndt and Gingrich, the meaning of "weak and beggarly elements" is much disputed. Some scholars believe it refers to elements of learning, fundamental principles—applying it to elementary forms of religion, Jewish and Gentile (which have been superseded by the new revelation of Christ). Other scholars believe it means elemental spirits, which were associated with the physical elements. Still other scholars take it to mean heavenly bodies (signs of the Zodiac), since these bodies were regarded as personal beings and were given divine honors (*A Greek-English Lexicon* by Arndt and Gingrich, p. 776). This tells us that no one completely understands the meaning of the expression "weak and beggarly elements." Since the authoritative lexicon by Arndt and Gingrich states that the meaning is much disputed, this text cannot be used to prove Paul was referring to the Sabbath. Even a combining of the three interpretations given above disproves it was the Sabbath.

Notice also the word "again" found twice in Galatians 4:9. These Gentiles were turning *again* to weak and beggarly elements, desiring again to be in bondage. If these weak and beggarly elements were something the Gentiles were turning to again, could they be a reference to God's Law? Did these Gentiles previously believe and understand the Truth of God? Of course not! It was the Jews to whom the oracles of God were committed! The oracles of God were never called weak and beggarly elements. The only aspect of God's oracles which could be considered burdensome were the sacrifices (Acts 15:10; Ezekiel 20:25). The "bondage" in verse 9 obviously includes sacrifices to pagan gods. It is common knowledge that the entire Gentile world offered myriad sacrifices to pagan gods.

Also, notice the word "observe" in verse 10. According to *A Greek-English Lexicon*, page 627, (παρατηρεω (*paratereo*) means to "watch closely, observe carefully. . . to watch someone to see what he does." In every instance or its usage in the New Testament, except Galatians 4:10, it means to "watch closely." See also *The Word Study Concordance*, page 593; *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, page 306; *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, volume II, page 153. The latter states that *paratereo*, apart from Galatians 4:10, means "lie in wait for" or "watch," as the English versions translate it. Galatians 4:10 means these

Gentiles were watching various days, months, times, and years for various signs. The word *paratereo* here does not denote a religious observance.

What about "days, months, times, and years?" Do these refer to the Sabbath in any way?

A Greek-English Lexicon, by Arndt and Gingrich (p. 266), states the following of *eniautoi* (year), in Galatians 4:10: "The meaning of *eniautos* in the combination *kairoi kai eniautoi* Gal. 4:10 is not certain. It could be an allusion to the so-called 'sabbatical years' (Lev. 25), but may also mean certain *days of the year* [emphasis theirs] . . . as *the New Year festival* [emphasis ours]." Those who say that "days, and months, and times and years" is in some way a reference to the Sabbath are simply interpreting. The meaning of "days, and months, and times, and years" is wide open to speculation, and no one can dogmatically say what it means. But one fact is certain, no one can deny that heathen nations observed many special days, days set aside for pagan celebrations of one type or another. These *Gentiles* were steeped in superstition. Therefore, to say "days, and months, and times, and years" is in some way a reference to the Sabbath is indeed mere speculation!

Ephesians 2:15

Ephesians 2:15 is a text sometimes mentioned to demonstrate that the Ten Commandments are done away. It reads: "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." What does this text mean? Does it refer to the Sabbath?

Paul points out in verses 11 and 12 that the Gentiles previously had no part in the promises and covenants made to Israel. They had been cut off from all hope and were without the true God. In verse 13 Paul tells the Ephesians that Christ has changed all this, that the Gentiles have now been brought into a spiritual relationship with God through Christ. He (Christ) has broken down the wall of partition that separated the Jews from the Gentiles (v. 14). Then, in verse 15, Paul states that He (Christ) abolished the enmity—the law of commandments—contained in ordinances; the result being a single new spiritual creation in one Body—the Church—thus bringing peace between the Jews and Gentiles. Both Jew and Gentile have now been reconciled to God by Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and the enmity between them has ceased (v. 16).

Was the abolishment of the Ten Commandments the manner by which the Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled? Some would tell us so. The word "ordinances" is the Greek word *dogmasin* (decrees). According to *A Greek-English Lexicon* by Arndt and Gingrich, p. 200, *nomos tōn entolōn en dogmasin* means *law of commandments consisting in* (single) *ordinances*. *Dogmasin*, then refers to *decrees* of various kinds. Were these decrees the Ten

Commandments? *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, volume I, page 330, states: "Eph. 2:15 uses the pl. *dogmata* to denote the individual statutes of the commandments (*entolōn*) of the Mosaic Law." Were there Mosaic laws that forbade social and spiritual intercourse with the Gentiles? Yes, indeed. See, for example, Exodus 34:12–16; Deuteronomy 7:2–6; Joshua 23:11–13; Numbers 1:51; 3:10; 18:4; Leviticus 22:10. To these the Jews added many more rules and regulations, so that Gentiles came to be considered as unclean as dogs. It is to these dogmas that Paul refers in Ephesians. The Gentiles were no longer prohibited from full and complete social and religious intercourse with the Christian brethren, not even with Jewish Christians. This matter had been cleared up in the church some years earlier when Peter went to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:28, 34). Paul explained this principle to the Ephesians in chapter 2, verse 15. The remainder of the chapter goes on to explain how that unity should prevail in the church now that the Gentiles have been given full spiritual status.

Colossians 2:14–17

Colossians 2:14–17 is a text often referred to in order to repudiate the Ten Commandments. This text is interpreted to mean that Christ nailed the Law of God to the cross—thus, the Sabbath is done away. The text says: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross. . . . 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."

Let us notice what *A Greek-English Lexicon*, by Arndt and Gingrich, has to say about the meaning of the expression "handwriting of ordinances." On page 889, this lexicon states that "handwriting of ordinances" means "*a (handwritten) document, specif. a certificate of indebtedness, bond . . . the bond that stood against us* [emphasis theirs]." It was the *bond* or *debt* against us that was blotted out and nailed to the cross. But the bond or debt of what?

Colossians 2:14 states that it was the bond or debt of *ordinances*. "Ordinances" is from the Greek word *dogmasin*, the same as in Ephesians 2:15—meaning "dogmas." This word is found in another form in verse 20, where it is also translated "ordinances." What are these ordinances? The word "ordinance" means "decree, ordinance, decision, command." So the particular debt or bond that was against us came about as a result of decree, ordinance, decision, or command. But what decree, ordinance, decision, or command?

Note what verses 8 and 22 tell us: Philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, rudiments of the world, commandments and doctrines of *men*! The ordinances that were against us were those ordinances and commandments of men which caused us to go contrary to God's Law, and which brought upon all mankind the death penalty—the *debt we owe* for

breaking God's commandments. This debt is what Christ blotted out by His death. He paid the penalty *we owe*—the debt we owe—for violating God's commandments. It was Christ who was nailed to the cross, not the Law of God!

This is why Paul continues in verse 16 to say, "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." The phrase "in respect of" means "part" in the original Greek. See under *meros* (*Greek Analytical Lexicon* by Harper, p. 264, *meros*). The English translation could just as well read, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink or *in part* [Bullinger: "in taking part"] of any holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days." Verse 17 states, "Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body (is) of Christ." The word "is" in verse 17 is *not* in the original. Paul is stating here that it is the Body of Christ (the Church) which judges the Christian. But what does Paul mean when he says the Church judges?

The word "judge" is κρίνω (*krino*). Besides meaning "judge" or "condemn," it means to "consider, to prefer" (*A Greek-English Lexicon* by Arndt and Gingrich, pp. 452–453). An obvious intention of Paul's statement, in Colossians 2:16–17, is that one must be careful not to offend his brother—relative to what one eats or drinks on those public occasions (sabbaths, feasts) where individual conduct is noticeable (see also 1 Corinthians 8:8–13; 10:31–33). Also, it should be considered that there were false teachers in Colosse who were attempting to impose regulations on how to "touch not, taste not, handle not" as a means of achieving the humility and neglecting of the body mentioned in Colossians 2:23. Paul refused to allow these false teachers to legislate concerning Sabbath or holy day observance. The Sabbath is certainly a foreshadow of things to come—the Millennium. The Sabbath was not nailed to the cross by the death of Christ—or else, Paul, writing to the Colossians thirty years *after* the crucifixion, would not have said it is a shadow of things to come. Colossians 2:14–17 does not say the Sabbath was nailed to the cross. This text says that by Christ's death *the penalty we deserve* for breaking God's commandments was nailed to the cross.

In the context of Colossians 2, one has a responsibility—as a Christian—not to cast a stumbling block before his brother, in respect to eating and drinking. Therefore, in the sense that one's conduct is regulated by what one's brother might think, one is judged by him. This is why Paul said he would not eat flesh while the world stood, if it caused his brother to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:13).

Paul addresses the question of eating and drinking, in the context of the Sabbath and holy days because man-made dogmas—"touch not, taste not, handle not"—were so deeply ingrained in some. And due to past teaching and experience, eating and drinking by Christians—without taking the whole problem into consideration—could very well cause a

brother to stumble. Paul warned the Christians at Colosse to be careful, lest Christian liberty become the reason for others' stumbling. See, for example, 1 Corinthians 8:9.

Colossians 2:14–17 does not abrogate the Sabbath; on the contrary, it upholds right Christian conduct on it.

Hebrews 9:10

Hebrews 9:10 reads: "Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." It actually explains what was annulled by the sacrifice of Christ. In the verses leading up to Hebrews 9:10, Paul describes the physical service of the Tabernacle. In very 9 he states that this system of worship was temporary in nature and was not intended to perfect the worshipper. Then, in verse 10, Paul tells us that the Old Testament physical system stood "only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances imposed on them until the time of reformation." The only words in question here are "carnal ordinances." Do these refer to the Ten Commandments, which includes the Sabbath day?

Let *A Greek-English Lexicon*, by Arndt and Gingrich, inform us. On page 197 this lexicon states: ". . . Hb 9:1; d. sarkos *regulations for the body* vs. 10." This text, then, does not refer to the Ten Commandments. Rather, it refers to sacrifices, various washings, and regulations for the body, that is, various laws regarding cleanness or uncleanness. The Old Testament has many laws on ceremonial purity, on who should be regarded as clean or unclean, depending on the infraction or circumstance.

This is why Paul describes the temporary nature of these laws in verse 11 and 12 of Hebrews 9: "But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once in to the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." The physical system of the Old Testament pointed to Christ. As Paul says in verses 14 and 15: "How much more shall the blood of Chris, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."

Hebrews 9:10 does not say the Ten Commandments were abrogated. This passage states implicitly that it was the sacrificial system with its attendant regulations for the body that was done away. The Law of God is eternal. ". . . All his commandments are sure. They

stand fast for ever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness" (Psalm 111:7–8). The only laws of God abrogated are those that were temporary in nature, imposed until the time Christ would freely offer Himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God.

Hebrews 4:9

This text bears an examination because it is mistranslated in the *Authorized Version*. Because it is mistranslated many have failed to recognize that Hebrews 4:9 enjoins the observance of the Sabbath in the New Testament. It reads in the *Authorized Version*: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." Hebrews, chapter 4, describes the physical rest Israel received upon entering the Holy Land—as a type of the future rest to be received by Israel in the Kingdom of God. The rest Israel received when entering the Promised Land under Joshua was not the fulfillment of God's purpose, as another time of rest lies ahead (v. 8). Then Paul writes, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (v. 9). The word "rest" throughout this chapter is καταπαυσις (*katapausis*), which means "a place of resting down." But in verse 9 the word "rest" is σαββατισμος (*sabbatismos*), which means "a sabbath rest" or "a keeping of the sabbath." The text should more properly be translated, "There remaineth therefore a keeping of the Sabbath to the people of God." Another variant of this would be, "So, then, a Sabbath rest is left behind (or remains) for the people of God."

What Paul is saying in this chapter is that since the Sabbath is a type, representing the unfulfilled Millennial rest in God's plan, Sabbath observance remains for the people of God. It has long been recognized that the Sabbath represents the time when the world will rest from sin. Since this will not take place until the return of Jesus Christ and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God, the Sabbath remains as a reminder, among other things, of the time when man will achieve peace and happiness in the Kingdom of God.

Revelation 1:10

Revelation 1:10 has been interpreted by many to refer to Sunday as a day of worship. The Apostle John, writer of the book of Revelation, is supposedly observing here a day of worship on "the Lord's day." But does "the Lord's day" in the book of Revelation refer to Sunday, the first day of the week?

Historically, Sunday was not designated as "the Lord's day" until the end of the second century. Scholars are in agreement that the book of Revelation was written at least one hundred years earlier. John, the author of the Gospel of John, which was written about the same time as the book of Revelation, refers to Sunday as "the first day of the week." So, Sunday was not referred to as "the Lord's day" by the Apostle John. What was the Lord's day in Revelation 1:10?

The book of Revelation is a detailed prophetic outline of future events, all to occur after the time of John, culminating in the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God. John the Revelator introduces these prophecies by announcing that he was "in" the Spirit "on" (Greek, *en* [in]) the Lord's day, that is, he was taken by the Spirit of God by means of vision into the Lord's day. What is the Lord's day or day of the Lord? Over thirty prophecies in the Old Testament describe the Lord's day or day of the Lord. Any concordance will list these prophecies. They tell us of a time period when God will take a direct hand once again in the affairs of men. It will be a time of world-shaking catastrophic events, a time when the sun will be blackened and the moon will turn blood red, a time of earthquakes, a time of war and death. Anyone who believes the Lord's day in Revelation 1:10 refers to Sunday as a day of worship had better take another look. A study of the texts in the Bible which refer to the Lord's day will quickly dispel such a notion.

Is There New Testament Authority for Sunday?

If Revelation 1:10 does not authorize Sunday observance, are there any New Testament texts that do? There are eight texts in the New Testament which refer to the first day of the week. Surely, if Sunday is authorized as a day of worship, one of these texts will make that requirement clear.

Four of these texts—Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1—refer to the same event. This was early Sunday morning, following the crucifixion, when the disciples came to prepare Jesus for burial. In every case these four texts refer to a work day, not a Sabbath rest, as the Sabbath rest had already occurred (Mark 16:1–2). Mark 16:9, another text, refers to Sunday morning, shortly after the disciples arrived to prepare Jesus for burial. There is no worship service authorized by this text. In John 20:19 we read that the disciples were gathered together behind closed doors on Sunday evening. The reason? "For fear of the Jews." They were not there for a worship service. They were gathered there secretly in order to hide from the Jews. This gathering was not for the purpose of worship.

Another text, Acts 20:7, describes what took place in Troas on the first day of the week. Here Paul was preaching to the disciples. The account says Paul preached until midnight and there were many lights in the upper chamber (vv. 7–8). In the Bible a day begins with the going down of the sun (Genesis 1:5). If Paul preached until midnight, and it was the first day of the week (v. 7), the only time period this could refer to is Saturday night after the Sabbath—the Sabbath ended at sundown. The next day, Sunday, still within the Biblical time period of the first day of the week, Paul walked about 19 miles as he made his journey from Troas to Assos. As these texts clearly show, Paul did not observe a Sunday worship service.

The final text, 1 Corinthians 16:2, is concerned with a collection for the saints on the first day of the week. Here Paul tells the Corinthians that collections should be "laid up in store" for the needy saints on the first day of the week. The reason: "that there be no gatherings when I come." Paul desired to take an offering to the needy saints in Jerusalem. If the Corinthians waited until Paul arrived to begin gathering the offering, it would be too late. So, Paul instructed them to lay in store, that is, at their homes, so that it could be accessible when he arrived. They were to do this gathering on Sunday, the first day of the week. Sunday was not a day for taking a church collection; it was *aday of work* in order to gather for the needy saints.

A brief examination of every "first day of the week" text in the New Testament clearly shows that in each case Sunday, the first day of the week, is an ordinary work day. There is no New Testament authority for Sunday observance.

Sabbath in the Millennium

Even those who oppose the seventh-day Sabbath recognize that the Sabbath will be observed in the Millennium. Notice, for example, Isaiah 66:23, which takes place after the return of Christ (v. 15): "And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord." Commentators recognize that the latter portion of the book of Ezekiel relates various events that will take place during the Millennium. Ezekiel 46:3 describes one of these: "Likewise the people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the Lord in the sabbaths and in the new moons." It seems rather illogical to suppose that the Sabbath was kept by God's people for thousands of years, then abrogated during the "Christian era," to be reinstated for the world during the Millennium. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). The Sabbath was instituted by God for all times; it is still in effect today!

The Unchanging Nature of God's Law

Jesus Christ, the God of the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 10:4), does not change (Malachi 3:6). He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He said in Matthew 4:4, ". . . Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The Sabbath commandment proceeded out of the mouth of God (Exodus 20:1, 8–11). Christ said in John 6:63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." Salvation, Jesus said, hinges on obedience to God's words. In Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 14, Moses said, "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgements,

which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. . . . And the Lord commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgements, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it."

It was Christ who instructed Israel, who talked with them face to face. "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. . . . The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire" (Deuteronomy 5:2, 4). But God knew how weak human beings really are. He said to Moses, ". . . I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever. . . . Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left" (Deuteronomy 5:28–29, 32). There is no Bible authority either from the Old or New Testaments for any day of worship other than the seventh-day Sabbath. Paul affirmed this in the New Testament when he said, "So then a Sabbath rest is left behind (remains) for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). There is no need to repeat the Ten Commandments in the New Testament, as it is the constitution of the Old Covenant, the added dimension of God's Spirit now to live in the minds and hearts of believers.

How to Keep the Sabbath

There is no need to list a series of *dos* and *don'ts* here. One who is spiritually oriented will quickly recognize that obedience to God's Sabbath law comes from the heart, not from legislation. But there are some general principles that should apply. Remember, as Isaiah tells us, the Sabbath is a day of delight. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, [that is] 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 59:13–14). Sabbath activities, therefore, should be God-centered, not self-centered. They should grant us freedom and joy from the drudgery and routine encountered by so many during the week today. In the recreative sense, they should refresh us mentally, emotionally, and physically. They should not result in exhaustion and dissipation. The Sabbath can be a day to do good to others in benevolent service, a day to refresh ourselves, and perhaps others, spiritually. Activities which do not accomplish these goals or which deprive us of the fulfillment of them are not the kinds of activities Christians should indulge in on the Sabbath. When we can

truly appreciate the benefits that God had in mind for us when he instituted the Sabbath, we will then realize the joy, spiritual and mental rest, as well as physical refreshment, that is ours to be had by properly observing this day of sacred time.

The Sabbath was given at creation for mankind. It is a memorial of God's creative magnificence and power. It was established within a weekly cycle that cannot be altered or broken. While first revealed to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, it was later given to Abraham and his descendants—the children of Israel—as an everlasting or perpetual covenant. Israel's failure to keep the Sabbath was one of the major reasons that nation went into national captivity and was consequently lost from sight. Christ reaffirmed the Sabbath and was a habitual Sabbathkeeper. So were the apostles, including the Apostle Paul. Christ demonstrated, by His life and conduct, the proper way to keep the Sabbath, in opposition to the Jewish religious leaders of His day, who had made Sabbathkeeping an intolerable burden. There is neither Old Testament nor New Testament authority for observing any other day of worship except the seventh-day Sabbath. It will be observed in the Millennium as it reflects the unchanging nature of God's Law. If kept properly it can bring the greatest delight and joy to all who are truly seeking God and His Kingdom. May God help you, as one of His true people, to always delight in His marvelous Sabbath day!