

# A REPLY TO “WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES SAY ABOUT THE SABBATH?”

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In 1995, the Worldwide Church of God, a Sabbatarian denomination, published an extended document titled, “What Do the Scriptures Say About the Sabbath?” as a supplement to the organization’s well-known journal, *The Plain Truth*. In this statement the present leaders surprisingly deny that Christians are under any moral obligation to observe the Sabbath precept of the Ten Commandments.

They write:

As we in the Worldwide Church of God continue to worship Jesus Christ on the seventh day, we will be asked why we do differently than most Christian churches. We will have to explain why we worship on the seventh day, and the honest answer is that we used to think that we absolutely had to, but we no longer think that. Then we’ll be asked why we continue to worship on the seventh day, and the honest answer is that we are free to be different” (p. 23).

Since Seventh-day Adventists are also Sabbatarian Christians, we have a sincere interest in this vital truth as well. We are sorry for this repudiation of the Sabbath. Without attempting to respond to every argument, we offer the following critique of the major reasoning and textual expositions the authors have taken to arrive at their conclusion. We do not challenge the sincerity of the authors nor of other Christians who, in the past or presently, have taken a similar stance. But we do question the validity of their presuppositions and expositions of certain passages by which they have arrived at their belief on this subject. We will first identify and discuss the major presuppositions upon which the argument of the document rests. We will then examine the authors’ expositions of the biblical passages most germane to the topic.

## Presuppositions

### **Biblical Authority: Limited for Christians to the NT**

This presupposition is both stated and implied. For example:

“Our doctrines must be based on scriptures that are applicable to the age we live in” (p. 9). “If the Sabbath were a requirement, it would be astonishing that the New Testament never mentions such an important command” (p. 18). “But it [the NT] never commands Sabbath-keeping” (p. 23). “The entire Torah went with circumcision” (p. 3). “We cannot use Exodus 16 to prove anything about Christian requirements today” (p. 3).

### **The Religion of the NT is Essentially Different From That of the OT**

This presupposition is assumed throughout this document. For example, an unnamed author is cited approvingly as follows:

Christianity is a new marriage, a new covenant. “We have been released from the law so that we

serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (p. 7, n. 3). “God punished the Israelites for Sabbath-breaking because the Sabbath was a requirement for the time they lived in, for the covenant they lived under. But that cannot prove that the physical details of the Sabbath are still required in a new age” (p. 7). “If we are to require Christians to rest on the Sabbath, we must base our doctrine on other passages of Scripture” (p. 2).

### **The Decalogue: Not a Unit of Precepts of Binding Moral Obligation**

The New Testament does not distinguish the Ten Commandments from any other group of laws. It does not give them any particular name or give them any special status. . . . If there is any consistent grouping in the New Testament, it is the last six commandments—the first four are not quoted with the others. We cannot assume that all 10 must remain together (p. 5).

The Ten Commandments contain some temporary portions as well as some timeless truths (p. 5).

Portions of the Ten Commandments are appropriate to Israel and not everything in the Ten should be considered eternal truth. We cannot assume the continuing validity of the Sabbath law merely because it was given with other laws that have continuing validity—especially when that package, considered as a whole, is called obsolete in the New Testament. We cannot assume that all 10 must stay together (p. 5).

Sabbatarians commonly assert that all the Ten Commandments are in the category of moral law, but there is no biblical proof for this assumption (p. 5).

The requirement that the day of rest specifically be the seventh day of the week is not an interpersonal matter. It was specified by God and was a worship detail (p. 5).

### The Demise of the Old Covenant Cancels the Sabbath Obligation

Exodus 34:28 tells us that the old covenant was composed of the Ten Commandments. However, if all ten commandments are still in force in the same way, how can it be said that the old package is obsolete? We should expect a difference—a difference between the Abrahamic covenant and the Sinaitic covenant, a difference between the Sinaitic covenant and the Christian covenant. Most of the commandments are repeated in the New Testament, but the Sabbath is not (p. 4).

“The old covenant was a mixture of moral, civil and ceremonial laws” (p. 5). “The new covenant

has made the old covenant obsolete and the old laws have been set aside” (p. 7).

Of course, there is no New Testament verse that says the Sabbath is now obsolete. Instead there are verses that say the entire old covenant law is obsolete (p. 18).

In Christ, we have rest. He has freed us from the old covenant, which was a yoke too difficult to bear, and has given us a new covenant, which is a yoke that is so much easier to bear that it is called a “rest” (Matthew 11:28-30) (p. 19).

### The Sabbath: A Shadow-type, Foreshadowed Rest in Christ

The bulk of the document is given over to raising questions about the validity of observing the Sabbath by Christians, concluding that they are under no obligation to do so. The authors then argue that the purpose of the Sabbath was to *foreshadow* (like the typical rituals of the sanctuary) a future, spiritual rest in Christ, the rest of grace.

“The Sabbath . . . looked forward, prefiguring something, as a predictive shadow of a coming reality, our spiritual rest” (p. 20). “The Sabbath . . . foreshadowed and pointed to our salvation in Christ” (p. 21). “The weekly seventh-day Sabbath, which was enjoined upon Israel in the Ten Commandments, was a shadow that prefigured the true Reality to whom it pointed—our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (p. 23).

## Our Reply

Our premises naturally affect our conclusions, they determine the outcome of the reasoning process. We believe the presuppositions upon which the document rests are defective and, consequently, have led its authors to reject the observance of the Sabbath as a moral obligation for Christians. We turn then to the biblical data to determine what the Scriptures actually have to say in these areas of concern.

**1. The extent of biblical authority.** The Hebrew Bible (the Christian’s Old Testament) was the authoritative Word of God from which Jesus and the apostles taught the truths of the faith. No portion of the NT existed in the days of Jesus. It was only during the later ministry of the apostles that the several components of the NT Scriptures came to be written.

For Jesus, the OT was the sacred Word of God, the final court of appeal. He met Satan’s fiercest tempta-

tions with citations from Deuteronomy. To each challenge He replied, “It is written” (cf. Matt 4:4; Deut 8:3; Matt 4:6; Deut 6:16; Matt 4:10; Deut 6:13; 10:20). Jesus acknowledged that the OT bore witness to Him (John 5:39). In fact, He said:

If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words? (John 5:46-47, RSV).

On another occasion, Jesus showed His regard for the OT when He said, “scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35, RSV).

The apostles maintained the same high regard for the authority of the OT. Peter declared that the writings of the OT did not come by the impulse of man, “but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:21,

RSV). Indeed, he asserted, it was "the Spirit of Christ" which inspired the OT prophets (1 Pet 1:11, RSV).

Paul, who wrote approximately half of the documents that compose the NT, continually acknowledge the teaching authority of the OT in the Christian church. Writing what proved to be his final instructions to Timothy, his associate, he said:

Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with *the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching [didaskalia, teaching, instruction], for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:15-17, RSV).*

Thus, it is evident that in the days of Jesus and the apostles the Christian church—although founded on Christ (1 Cor 3:11)—was led in that direction, grounded, and supported by the authoritative teachings of the OT, the only portion of sacred Scripture available. The church was functioning and spreading a score of years before the first inspired documents were written which eventually came to compose the NT canon, rounding out the authoritative Scriptures of the Word of God. These historic facts explain why the apostles saw no need to repeat or discuss in detail in their letters every moral truth that was already plainly presented in the Scriptures they held in hand.

The Christian church in general has always recognized the validity of both Testaments as the basis for faith and practice. The OT sheds light on the NT, and the NT in turn sheds light on the OT. Together, they form a unified body of spiritual truth and instruction. The biblical authority for the Christian faith is not limited to one Testament. Rather, Christians accept the entire scriptural canon as the inspired basis for their faith.

It is objected that the OT contains instructions which are no longer binding upon God's followers in this dispensation. This is true. In addition to the moral law of the Ten Commandments and applications based on them and other timeless truths, the OT also contains instructions pertaining to Israel's ceremonial worship and civil institutions. All these issued from God. Since the nation functioned as a Theocracy (a union of church/state ruled directly by God), the violation of the divine will in any of these aspects was liable for punishment. *But the permanency of these various categories of instruction lay in*

*their internal nature, not in the fact that they were linked together in Israel's theocratic nation.*

The Ten Commandments and related truths and teachings would be as permanent in one dispensation as in another because they are embedded in the very will and character of God Himself. Ritual or ceremonial instruction pertaining to the sacrificial system was by its very nature temporary—intended only to point the believer's faith forward to the coming Redeemer by means of rites and symbols. Civil laws and institutions could only function as long as Israel existed in an independent national capacity.

It is a fundamental weakness of the document that it gives equal weight to these various categories of instruction—even including nonbiblical rabbinical requirements (p. 13)—in its argument against Sabbath observance for Christians:

The old covenant was a mixture of moral, civil and ceremonial laws. . . . Although we can categorize those laws according to function Scripture does not (p. 5).

Although an Israelite lived in a theocratic form of government that combined these various categories of instructions, if he were spiritually attuned, he clearly perceived their distinct differences. The prophet Micah expressed this point precisely:

With what should I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? . . . He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:6-8, RSV).

In his last expression Micah summarizes the two tables of the Decalogue in the manner Jesus did (cf. Matt 22:36-40). He distinctly separates the ritual requirements from the greater moral obligations and summarizes the first table of the Decalogue under the rubric, "walk humbly with your God"; and the second table under the rubric, "do justice," "love kindness" with respect to your neighbor.

When Jesus gave a similar summarization of the Ten Commandments, a scribe responded:

Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the

understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, *is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*. Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:32-34, NKJV).

Here is clear evidence that the Jews did not see "the law" as one "seamless" garment of moral, ritual, and civil instruction. They perceived the differences. And while temporary ritual/ceremonial and civil instruction ceased to be requirements in the Christian dispensation, the fundamental doctrines and moral truths of the OT continued, rooted as they were in authoritative Scripture.

**Summary.** In light of the biblical data briefly reviewed above, Christians accept the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the authoritative basis for their beliefs and practice. If the OT presents a fundamental truth such as the Sabbath doctrine, it is not necessary for it to be repeated in the NT. "All scripture is inspired by God *and profitable for teaching*" (2 Tim 3:16).

**2. The religion of the two Testaments.** Since both the OT and NT form the scriptural authority for the Christian, we may expect that the religion of both Testaments is one and the same. It is a false dichotomy to divide biblical religion into separate sets of beliefs. We note the following facts:

a. The *same God* speaks to His people in both Testaments.

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers [patriarchs/Israelites] by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us [Christians] by a Son . . . (Heb 1:1-2, RSV).

b. *The same problem exists in both Testaments, the moral problem of sin* (the transgression of God's will as defined by the moral law of the Ten Commandments (1 Kings 8:46; Rom 3:23)).

For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law, *since through the law comes knowledge of sin* (Rom 3:20, RSV).

If it had not been for the law, I should not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet" (Rom 7:7, RSV).

c. The *same gospel/plan of salvation* is offered to sinners, and on the *same basis: faith*.

According to the NT, the patriarch Noah who survived the Flood "became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith" (Heb 11:7, RSV). And the apostle Paul, who declares that the truth about the righteousness of God through faith is taught in the OT ("the law and the prophets"), proves his assertion from the examples of Abraham and the writings of David (Rom 3:21-22; 4:1-8, RSV). The apostle also notes in Hebrews Israel's belief:

For indeed the gospel was preached to us [Christians] as well as to them [Israel in the Exodus]; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it (Heb 4:2, NKJV).

This statement about Israel in the Exodus sheds considerable light on the meaning of the sacrificial system as practiced by the patriarchs and enlarged upon in the Israelite sanctuary worship. Since the patriarchs and Israelites—at least the more spiritual among them—understood the gospel of salvation by faith in a coming Redeemer, they must have received it through an understanding of the symbolism of the sacrificial rites. In the substitutionary sacrifices they perceived the promised "Lamb of God" who would take away "the sin of the world" (cf. John 1:29).

In spite of Jewish failures, Jesus affirmed to the Samaritan woman, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, *for salvation is from the Jews*" (John 4:22, RSV). In other words, the Jews have God's truth. In the shadow-types of the tabernacle/temple sanctuary rites, in the messianic prophecies, and in the didactic teachings of the OT, the Israelites had the truth about God and salvation from sin—the same truths which became the heritage of Christians.

The religion of the two Testaments is one. Before the cross, God's people were taught the same gospel/plan of salvation by means of the Scriptures and the sacrificial system that later Christians were taught by the same Scriptures and the actual appearing and death of Jesus Christ, further supported by the apostolic witness which came eventually to form the NT.

**Summary.** Inasmuch as the religion of the total Bible is the same—as evidenced by the data—we have strong, presumptive evidence that a cardinal doctrine of the OT, such as the Sabbath, remains a cardinal doctrine for Christians. As the authors of our document admit, "there is no New Testament verse that says the Sabbath is now obsolete" (p. 18).

**3. The permanency of the Decalogue.** The reader will notice at once the particular presupposition the authors of the document employ to downplay the importance of the Ten Commandments. The "*New Testament*," it is argued, "does not distinguish the Ten Commandments from any other group of laws." Such a stance *avoids* the unequivocal statements that the authoritative OT makes about the Decalogue. What are the biblical facts? Has God indeed distinguished the Ten Commandments in a manner which sets them for all time apart from all other instruction He has given? Three facts stand out:

*a. The Creator Himself proclaimed orally from Mount Sinai the Ten Commandments.* No other instruction has ever been given in this manner, a fact which underscores the uniqueness of the Decalogue. The Sabbath precept shares in this uniqueness.

*b. The Creator Himself inscribed the Decalogue twice on tables of stone.* The obvious reason for this action was to emphasize graphically the enduring, permanent nature of the Ten Commandments; The Sabbath precept shares in this permanency.

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no form, . . . And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone (Deut 4:12-13; see also 10:4, RSV).

*c. Moses placed the stone tables of the Decalogue in the nation's most sacred location: within the golden ark in the sanctuary's Most Holy Place.* The ark with its attached cherubim represented the Creator's throne (2 Sam 6:2, RSV). The Decalogue resting beneath the cherubim attested to the divine will, the foundation of the covenant between God and His people, and the moral basis for His universal rule and government. It likewise reflected His righteous character.

What more could God have done to distinguish the Decalogue as a particular, unified body of law which defines the believer's duty to his Creator and to his fellow beings? No need existed for the apostles to repeat in their writings what was so obvious in the OT. Both Jesus and Paul demonstrated the spiritual nature of the Decalogue which convicts us at the level of our thoughts as well as in the overt act (cf. Matt 5:21-27; 15:19; Rom 7:7; 13:8-10).

A second objection to the Decalogue as a unified code of moral precepts binding upon believers in the Christian dispensation asserts that portions of it are tem-

porary and are appropriate only to Israel. In other words, the Ten Commandments are viewed as a mix of permanent and temporary injunctions, so that we cannot assume the Sabbath precept is a permanent command because it is found with some permanent elements in this code.

This position forgets that God determined to continue the preservation and the sharing of the truth about Himself and His plan of salvation by employing the agency of a nation rather than families of individual patriarchs. Consequently, God planted the nation of Israel at the crossroads of three continents (cf. Ezek 5:5) and committed to them written Scripture (Rom 3:1-2), the Ten Commandments, the sanctuary ritual worship, His promises/covenants, and promised the Messiah to come through their line (Rom 9:4-5). The Temple-sanctuary would function as God's "house of prayer for all peoples" (Isa 56:7).

Thus, it was only natural that in proclaiming the Ten Commandments from Sinai God would make some *applications* of the precepts to Israel's situation.

The so-called "portions of the Ten Commandments" that are appropriate to Israel, are all in the area of applying the precepts to their immediate situation. *There is not a single precept that can be claimed to be directed only to Israel and not to all believers.*

The statement in the second precept—"for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation"—is argued to be a precept for Jews only under the rubric of the blessings/curses of the covenant. But this is mere speculation. It is far more biblical to see this divine statement to mean exactly what the apostle Paul was inspired to write: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal 6:7, RSV). We moderns know far more than our ancient counterparts the terrible consequences of parental misconduct on their future progeny!

An application of the Sabbath precept is indeed made to Israel's situation in which slaves formed a part of some households and foreigners lived in their land under the theocratic government. These were to keep the Sabbath with them, living as they did in their homes and communities. Likewise also a promise is given in the fifth precept. The obedient might expect to live long "in the land which the Lord your God gives you," that is to say, in the land of Canaan. But in the apostle Paul's understanding, this application—in the form of a promise—escalates to a promise to Christians as well: "that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth" (Eph 6:3, RSV).

Obviously, these few *applications* to Israel's situation in no wise detracts from the permanent, moral obligation of these precepts and principles which are embodied in the Ten Commandments which define human obligations to God and man.

The most serious charge against the Decalogue by the authors of this document is the implication that the Ten Commandments is not a code of moral precepts! We are amazed to what lengths some will go to avoid the obligation of the Creator's gift of the Sabbath rest! ("Sabbatarians commonly assert that all the Ten Commandments are in the category of moral law, but there is no biblical proof for this assumption" (p. 5).

Moral law has to do with human behavior—what is right and what is wrong in terms of behavior. The Creator is the moral governor of His universe, and He has determined the correct behavior pattern of His intelligent creation. The precepts of the Ten Commandments, being "holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12) derive from the very character of the Deity.

In the final analysis the authors of the document concede that "Many theologians say that Old Testament moral laws have continuing validity" (p. 5), and they accept a moral element in the Sabbath precept in the general aspect of rest and worship, but deny that the specific day has any moral worth, being—for them—only a "worship detail." This viewpoint is not new; it has been a position long-held by anti-Sabbatarians.

However, this position is both contrary to the Scriptures and sound reason. The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath precept lies at the very foundation of all worship of the true God and human morality as He has defined it. The seventh-day Sabbath keeps ever present the true reason why our worship, obedience, and allegiance is due to God: because He is the Creator, and we are His creatures. It cannot be denied that our moral duty to love and obey God rests on these fundamental facts. If children are expected to obey their parents who gave them birth, how much more should human beings worship and obey the Creator who gave them life and sustains it.

The reason, offered in the fourth precept why the human family should keep the seventh-day Sabbath is the historical fact of Creation and the Creator's resting on that day: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exod 20:8-11, RSV). So long as the fact that He is our Creator continues to be a reason why we should worship and obey God, just so long will the observance

of the seventh-day Sabbath continue to memorialize that truth. No other day of the week can hold this significance. Christ's advent, His atoning death and resurrection has in no wise abolished these fundamental facts about creation and the seventh-day Sabbath.

**Summary.** The Decalogue is a unified body of permanent moral law, proclaimed and engraved on stone as such by the Creator. The fourth precept calling for the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is as permanent as the historical fact that God the Son created the human family; its observance continually memorializes that event and keeps the believer ever aware of dependency upon his Creator (cf. Ezek 20:20).

**4. The Covenants.** Many Christians have adopted the viewpoint that the obligation to observe the Sabbath terminated with the collapse of the Sinaitic covenant. The argument sounds plausible: If only the Ten Commandments formed the Sinai covenant, and if this Sinai or "old" covenant became obsolete, then of course, the Ten Commandments would be no longer binding on God's followers. But this line of reasoning "proves" too much inasmuch as it leaves the Christian without any moral guidelines! Thus, resort is made to the untrue assertion that nine of the precepts of the Decalogue are *repeated* in the NT—all except the Sabbath precept.

The truth is that none of the first four precepts, which define man's duty to God, are repeated *verbatim* in the NT. Surely Christians should worship only the true God, and should not worship Him by means of idols nor take His name in vain! But it is argued that these precepts are alluded to—and we would agree—and so is the Sabbath, even more prominently. Did not Jesus declare that "the Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27). and did He not give a number of examples of what constituted true Sabbath observance? Yes, these biblical facts are true.

But what about the biblical doctrine of the covenants and its impact on the Christian faith? As we have already observed, just as this document moves to reduce biblical authority to the NT, so in its discussions on the covenant, it reduces the biblical religion to what can be found only in the NT. A sharp distinction is made between the religion of Israel and that of Christians. But this reductionism is false to the Scriptures. We repeat, the full Bible (both Testaments) is the final authority for the Christian, and the religion of both Testaments is one and the same because it is grounded in the same Creator God (Heb 1:1-2).

The document asserts that we should expect a difference between the Abrahamic, Sinaitic, and "new" covenants. But *what kind* of difference should we expect?

Does the Bible teach two different religions? Are there two different roads to Heaven? The Scriptures know of only one God, one sin problem, and one saving gospel as we have already shown. The covenants do have some differences, but issuing as they do from the same Creator God, they teach the same fundamental religion.

One major reason why the covenants are difficult for many Christians to understand is because they are not fully discussed in any one place by the Bible writers of either Testament. Consequently, the data must be assembled from the various parts of the Bible. Since space is limited, we will deal only with the essentials which impact on the matter of the Sabbath. We note then the following points:

1. The religion of the Bible is expressed in the form of a covenant, a committed relationship between God and the believer, much like a marriage bond to which it is compared (see Ezek 16:8; Jer 31:32). A marriage covenant separates two persons from the masses of humanity and links their lives in a loving, responsible, committed union. Promised blessings and stipulated obligations are a part of such a commitment. Couples in love never consider the parameters of their marital covenant restrictive. Rather, the bond is a source of security and satisfaction to rest within. The thread which links these three formulations of the biblical covenant (Abrahamic, Sinaitic, New) emphasizes this truth: "I . . . will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev 26:12; cf. Gen 17:2, 7-9; Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10).

2. The biblical covenant establishes a *saving relationship* between God and the believer in addition to a committed bond. Within this union divine grace operates to save and to transform the human partner, bringing him/her into harmony with the character and will of God. Thus, in its most complete expression the biblical covenant—as an *arrangement* to bring about the full salvation of the believer—contains more than just the Ten Commandments. Actually, we may say that the biblical covenant contains three fundamental articles:

- a. The *covenant promises*, affirmed by God's oath (Eph 2:12; Gal 3:16-17).

- b. The *covenant obligations*, obedience to God's will as expressed in the moral law of the Ten Commandments (Deut 4:13). This is not to suggest that the believer—in covenant with God—is expected to earn his salvation by works of obedience. Rather, the Ten Commandments function as a guide for the believer's behavior in his/her response to God's grace. There could be no real fellowship between God and His child without obedience on the part of the child (see 1 John 1:3, 7). The moral law informs the believer of the right course of ac-

tion and convicts the conscience if the believer strays.

- c. The *covenant means* by which to meet the obligations or conditions, namely Jesus Christ—as He is set forth in the gospel/plan of salvation (Isa 42:1-4, 6-7). We may observe in passing that any of these major elements—promises, Ten Commandments, Christ—may be referred to as the "covenant."

Since the Abrahamic covenant for all practical purposes melds into the Sinaitic covenant (cf. Ps 105:6-10), we will limit our survey to the covenant made at Sinai and to the "new covenant." (Sometimes the Sinai covenant is designated "old" in contrast with the "new"; sometimes its is called "first" in contrast with an understood "second," or "new covenant").

The covenant made with Israel as a nation at Sinai (the people living at least in theory already within the Abrahamic covenant) we may safely infer contained all the promises made to Abraham concerning his seed, the Messiah, and the land (Gen 12:1-3; 17; 22:15-18; Ps 105:6-11). According to the apostle Paul the promise of the "land" was understood to be far more inclusive than Canaan.

The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that *they should inherit the world*, did not come through the [works of] law but through the righteousness of faith (Rom 4:13, RSV).

It is also evident that God included in the Sinaitic covenant the Ten Commandments which He personally spoke from the mountaintop and inscribed upon tables of stone (Exod 20; Deut 10:4).

The "means" by which God's people could be saved from sin and could maintain and grow in their covenant relationship was provided for in the rites of the sanctuary system. We note: "The first covenant [Sinaitic covenant] had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary" (Heb 9:1, RSV). By means of the sanctuary types, rituals, and festivals, Israel was taught the same gospel Christians are now taught (Heb 4:1-2).

To this same covenant given at Sinai were evidently added the civil statutes (Exod 21-23), various other guidelines for living a holy life (Lev 17-27), and the blessings and curses/judgments that could be expected according to the the national response to God in the theocratic from of government Israel was to live under (cf. Lev 26; Deut 28).

In summary, we may say that for all practical purposes the nation of Israel lived within the Sinaitic-Abrahamic covenant relationship throughout the remainder of their history as recorded in the OT. In the NT two views are taken of the Sinaitic arrangement:

(1) The apostle Paul surprisingly sees two covenants here (Gal 4:21-31). He links the Sinaitic covenant with Hagar and her son Ishmael and the Jewish nation of his day. He implies that the true covenant is to be linked with Sarah and her son Isaac. Obviously, only one covenant was made at Sinai and not two. The apostle implies that just as Abraham "perverted" Hagar's role—making Sarah's lawful slave into his wife so as to obtain an heir by natural generation, so the nation had perverted the Sinaitic covenant into a system of works whereby it could "earn" or merit God's salvation. In other words, God properly renewed His covenant with national Israel (the descendants of Abraham), but they misused it and saw its instructions—both moral and ritual—as things "to do" to obtain the desired end. "Faith" lost out (cf. Heb 4:2).

2. The other NT view of the Sinaitic covenant looks at it in connection with the promised "new covenant": "In speaking of a new covenant," the apostle observes, "he [God] treats the first [the Sinaitic covenant] as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb 8:13). It is this latter aspect we wish to examine since it is referred to so many times throughout the document we have under review. The "he" in the verse just quoted is God who is speaking through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34; cf. Heb 8:6-13).

The setting for the Jeremiah passage is the first quarter of the sixth century B.C., just as the nation of Judah is about to crumble under Babylonian conquest and captivity. In this desperate situation God encourages the nation to accept the needed discipline, because beyond this trial a new age is coming—the Messiah is to appear, the long-hoped-for Redeemer (cf. Jer 30:1-10; 33:15-16). And with the Messiah's coming God would make a new covenant with His people:

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: *I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer 31:33, RSV).*

It is not possible in our limited space to speak to all aspects of this promised "new covenant," that would be made with Israel when the Christ came. It would indeed be a new day with His advent—His teaching about God, His atoning death for sin (not the illustrated atonement by sacrificial animals, Heb 10:4), His resurrection and

ascension, His priesthood in heaven, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with great power. All these aspects tied to the advent of the Christ would make the new covenant tremendously successful in the saving of sinners.

However, God had always desired to place His law within the hearts of His people Israel, and He had been successful in part (see Ps 37:31; Isa 51:7). Grace in the covenant for the forgiveness of sins had always been available through faith in the coming Redeemer portrayed in the rituals of the sanctuary (Heb 9:1; cf. Lev 4:35, etc.).

As we examine God's promise through Jeremiah that in the coming new age He would make a "new covenant" with His people, we ask, "What is really new?" The great spiritual promises made and preserved in the Abrahamic-Sinaitic covenant have become the heritage of Christian believers in covenant with God (see Gal 3:7, 29). But what about the moral law of the Ten Commandments? Our document argues that this great code which defines man's duties to God and to his fellows goes out with the "obsolete" old covenant. But that is *not* what God said through Jeremiah would happen. Rather, the Lord promised: "*I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*" (Jer 31:33, RSV).

God wrote only one law: The Ten Commandments. The Lord is here contrasting His writing of the precepts of the Ten Commandments *upon tables of stone* (an external writing) with a promise to write the same code *upon the heart/mind* (an internal writing). "God would honor His promises. He would make a new covenant, *not new in essence*, but new in fulfillment. His law would be written on hearts of flesh" (J. Arthur Thompson, "Covenant [OT], *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979], 1:792, emphasis added).

God, of course, does not write with pen and ink on human hearts. This is but a figurative way to state that the Creator promises by means of the Holy Spirit to implant an internal love within the mind of the believer that will prompt him or her to obey the divine precepts of the Decalogue. The Messiah's own words captures the idea: "*I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart*" (Ps 40:8, RSV). The apostle Paul explains how this works in practical everyday life:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment,

are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:8-10, RSV).

The same is true with our obedience to God. To love God supremely with all the heart means to serve Him only, worship Him in a spiritual manner without idols, to treat His name and person in a reverential manner, and to worship Him as the Creator—remembering His special, memorial day of the Sabbath.

C.J.H. Wright has put it this way:

The principle fruit of the Spirit is love, and love is the fulfilling of the law, especially of the commandments (Rom 13:8-10); to love God and one's neighbor as oneself constitute the very essence of the Decalogue as well as the whole Law and the Prophets. The Decalogue, then, retains its theological and moral validity for the Christian because it stands at the heart of the covenant, with its unambiguous call for obedience as the proof of love—love that is the grateful response to grace, which has established that covenant within which believers dwell securely ("Ten Commandments," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988], 4:790).

Unfortunately, God could not fulfill the promise He had made through Jeremiah about the "new covenant" in the manner He had desired. On the morning of Christ's trial before Pilate the national leadership of Israel rejected the Covenant-maker Himself (John 19:5). As a result Israel's national role as God's agents to convey His truth to the world was transferred to the Church (Matt 21:43; 1 Pet 2:2-9). The Church, composed of both Jew and Gentile believers in Christ, became the new Israel—spiritual Israel—in God's plan (Gal 6:15-16) and the inheritor of the divine promises (Gal 3:26-29).

The covenant was renewed with the Church—this "remnant" of Israel (Rom 11:5)—in the persons of Christ's disciples at the time He instituted the Communion Supper. His death, which occurred the next day, ratified in this manner the "new covenant" ("This cup is the new covenant in my blood," 1 Cor 11:25, RSV). Thus, Jesus became the Mediator of the "new covenant," as God foretold by Jeremiah (cf. Heb 8:6-13).

The basic change between the Abrahamic/Sinaitic covenant formulated at Sinai and the "new covenant"

predicted by Jeremiah lies in the third element of the covenant arrangement: the covenant *means*. With the coming of Christ there is a shift from the ritual types to the antitype—to Jesus Christ Himself. The ritual means of the tabernacle/temple sanctuaries by which the people had been taught the gospel ceases its foreshadowing function. The civil laws of the theocracy naturally terminate with the collapse of the nation. But the moral law of the Ten Commandments, defining man's duty to God and man, is by its nature permanent. *It remains an essential part of the new covenant.* And its fourth precept is as valid as any of its other nine precepts.

**Summary.** It is a false presupposition to hold that when the advent of Christ rendered the Sinaitic covenant obsolete, it rendered the Ten Commandments—including the Sabbath precept—obsolete. The testimony of Jeremiah's prediction of the "new covenant" (Jer 31:31-34) and Hebrews agreement (Heb 8:6-13) deny that position. According to these passages the Decalogue which was a part of the covenant made at Sinai remains an essential part of the "new covenant." God has not changed, neither have the Ten Commandments. Rather, God promises in the new situation brought about by Christ's coming, His atoning death, resurrection, and priesthood—and the fuller operation of the Holy Spirit—to succeed in implanting the teachings of the Ten Commandments deep within the believer's heart so that the impulse to obedience will come from within. The Sabbath precept is an important part of the "new covenant."

**5. The nature of the Sabbath.** Does the observance of the Sabbath embody a permanent, moral truth or is it simply a temporary type foreshadowing the rest of grace in Christ? Only two passages can be adduced to support the shadow-type notion: Colossians 2:14-17 and Hebrews 4:1-11. The first is questionable; the second is misinterpreted. Furthermore, it is necessary to nullify the historical record of Genesis 2:1-3 which portrays God the Son's instituting the Sabbath by His own rest and His acts of blessing and hallowing the seventh day as a Sabbath rest for His human creation. We will examine this passage in more detail later.

**Summary.** Since the Sabbath was instituted at the close of Creation week, it is not a shadow-type of anything. Rather, it is a permanent truth and obligation that binds the dependent human creation to the Creator and Sustainer in a loving bond.

## Some Passages Examined

### Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Mark 2:27

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation (Gen 2:1-3, RSV).

In spite of the clarity of this passage the authors of our document deny that it sets forth a divinely initiated observance of the Sabbath for the human family. Say the objectors: It does not say humans rested or were told to follow God's example to rest. It does not say that God created the Sabbath. And it is argued that the text is so vague we cannot be sure if God blessed only the seventh day of Creation week or every seventh day thereafter. And if it were the latter, we are not told anything about how it was to be kept, etc. (p. 2).

This kind of reasoning is due to reading an eastern Book with western eyeglasses! For all practical purposes the Bible can be understood by persons from any culture. But it is out of place to demand that the written Word supply all the details on a given point which a western mind-set might desire. The passage is clear in itself if we will accept its obvious intent and thrust. In response to the document's denial that Genesis 2:1-3 sets out a seventh-day Sabbath observance for the human family, we will examine what other Scriptures say about the origin of the Sabbath.

1. The NT states that Jesus Christ, as God the Son, functioned as the active agent in the creation of this earth.

Through *whom* [the Son] also *he* [God] created the world (Heb 1:2, RSV).

For in *him* [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col 1:16-17, RSV).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. . . . He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. . . . And the Word became flesh and

dwelt among us, . . . we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father (John 1:1-3, 10, 14, RSV).

God the Son "finished his work" and "rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done." It was, therefore, *Christ* who "blessed the seventh day and hallowed it."

2. Verse 3 explains *why* Christ made the seventh day into a holy day for sacred usage. "So God [God the Son] blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, *because* (*kî*) on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation."

In this instance, *kî* is being used as a causal conjunction with the causal sentence following. The meaning may be seen more clearly if the clauses are reversed in their sequence: *Because* [God the Son] rested from all his work which he had done in creation, [He] blessed the seventh day and hallowed it." Obviously, as the omnipotent Creator, Christ did not rest on the seventh day of creation week due to weariness. His resting *provides the reason why* He placed a blessing upon the seventh day and why He sanctified or dedicated it to a holy use.

The context of Genesis 1-2 makes it abundantly clear that the Creator's objective was to bring into existence the human family. The Creator acted on the first five days and part of the sixth to provide a suitable, *physical* environment for the first couple and their potential descendants. When Christ blessed Adam and Eve and entrusted to them the dominion of the earth—telling them to be fruitful and to fill the earth and subdue it—His words extended to all their descendants. In like manner Christ provided for humanity's *spiritual* needs when He blessed the seventh-day Sabbath and set it apart for a holy use (the plain sense of the verb, "to hallow/sanctify"). His own resting on the Sabbath would clearly imply a divine example to be followed by His intelligent creatures, even as His personal baptism centuries later implied the pattern His followers were to copy.

To argue that Christ's blessing and sanctifying do not mean the same thing as "creating"—("It does not say God created the Sabbath," p. 2)—is simply to quibble over semantics. The blessing of the seventh day and the setting it apart was as much a creative act as was the speaking of something into existence. Neither existed before the Creator acted.

3. Although the account in Genesis 2 does not end with the usual formula, "there was evening and there was

morning," (RSV), the passage definitely declares that God the Son blessed and consecrated *the seventh day* of creation week. There is not the slightest hint that this seventh "day" is any different in length or in form from the other six or that it signified a symbolic day with some kind of open-ended meaning. The fourth precept of the Decalogue makes clear:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; . . . *for [kî]* in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; *therefore* [*‘âl-kên*, introduces a statement of fact, Brown, Driver, Briggs, 487] the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it (Exod 20:8-11, RSV).

It is simply a case of reading into the text to argue that the creation Sabbath is in some manner different from the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments. Both the historical record (Gen 2:1-3) and the fourth precept of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:8-11) speak of the same event which took place on the seventh day of Creation week: the divine instituting of the Sabbath.

4. The Creator, God the Son, has Himself informed us *for whom* the Sabbath was blessed and consecrated. As the incarnate God, He declared, "The sabbath *was made for man*" (Mark 2:27, RSV). Literally, He says, it was made for *the man*. Jesus spoke Aramaic, but Mark under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit understood Jesus to mean mankind in general and thus employed the "generic" article "the" to denote "man" as a class or group (cf. Dana and Mantey, 144).

If the observance of the Sabbath had originated in Judaism, Christ would simply have said to His contemporaries: "The Sabbath was made for you," or "Moses gave you the Sabbath," or some similar expression. The point we wish to make here is this: The Creator never blessed and consecrated the Sabbath for the sake of the Deity. Christ makes it clear beyond all quibbling that the Sabbath was made *for the sake of* or *on account of* (*dia ton anthrōpon*) of mankind. Christ's words immediately explain why the Sabbath was brought into existence: like everything else Christ made in Creation week, the Sabbath too was made for man's blessing and happiness.

But the objection is made, "Jesus did not say when the Sabbath came into existence. Nothing in the context indicates that Jesus was alluding to creation week" (p. 10). Furthermore, it is added that in Mark 2:27 Jesus did not use the word for "create." Rather, He used the word *egeneto* (the aorist tense of *ginomai*) "which is usually

translated 'became.' " (p. 10). It is argued that "this word does not allude to the creation account (the Septuagint does not use *egeneto* in Genesis 2:2-3), etc." (p. 10, n. 16). But this objection does not tell all the facts. We note the following biblical data:

a. Jesus Christ, who said, "The sabbath was made for man," *is the Creator Himself*. As the active Creator, He surely knew *when* the Sabbath was blessed and consecrated. Both the historical record (Genesis 2) and the fourth precept of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) locate the Sabbath's origin at the close of creation week. To say that the Creator did not know *when* the Sabbath came into existence is to opt for willful ignorance.

b. *Egeneto* (*ginomai*, is its present tense, lexical form) is a good creation word. The term is freely used in the NT account portraying Christ as Creator:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things *were made* [*egeneto*, "became"] through him, and without him was not anything *made* [*egeneto*, "became"] that *was made* [*gegonen*, "became"]. . . . He was in the world, and the world *was made* [*egeneto*, "became"] through him, yet the world knew him not (John 1:1-3, 10, RSV).

While it is true that the Greek verb *ginomai* carries the general idea "to become," it is obvious from the passage cited above that its range of nuances also contains the ideas of "*being made, created, be established*" (Arndt and Gingrich, "Ginomai," 157-159).

If the apostle John could speak of Christ's creative activity at the creation of this world by using the verb *ginomai*, how can it be argued that *ginomai* could not possibly link the Sabbath in Mark 2:27 with the creation of this earth just because the Septuagint (third-second century B.C. translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek) does not use that particular verb in its translation of Genesis 2:2-3. This is overstraining the employment of a particular word. The argument is without weight in the light of John 1.

But the fact is, the Septuagint does indeed use the verb *ginomai* as a Creation term in another passage:

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spoke, and it *came to be* [*ginomai*]; he commanded, and it stood forth (Ps 33:6-9; *Septuagint* Ps 32:6-9)

c. The generic use of "man" (*ton anthrōpon*) indicates that the Sabbath was made for all mankind, as we

have already observed. Since Jesus' words are given in a past tense ("was made"), only two times can qualify for the "when" of the Sabbath's origin: (1) at the close of Creation week, or (2) just before Israel reached Sinai in their flight from Egypt (Exod 16). Since Christ could have said the Sabbath was made for the sake of Israel, but actually said for the sake of mankind, the implication is clear that the origin of the Sabbath must be seen in Christ's acts of blessing and consecrating of the seventh day at the close of Creation week.

5. Near the close of their document the authors do admit that "the Sabbath was indeed a memorial of creation" (p. 21). But a *memorial* of this kind—a special day—is *not of much benefit unless it is observed* (cf. Jesus' request about observing the Communion Supper, Luke 22:19, NRSV; 1 Cor 11:24-26, RSV). But the function of the Sabbath as a memorial of creation is not the authors' real interest at all, as may be seen by their next sentence: "The Sabbath was indeed a memorial of Creation. *And it foreshadowed and pointed to our salvation in Christ*" (p. 21, emphasis added).

Here is the real reason why the authors of our document deny that Genesis 2:1-3 sets forth the observance of the Sabbath as a creation command. It is not difficult to see. If the seventh-day Sabbath was divinely blessed and set apart for a day of spiritual rest for mankind in Eden *before the entrance of sin*, then the permanence of its observance is not only assured, but also the Sabbath can *never* be employed as a shadow-type to point us "to our salvation in Christ" (p. 21). No sin existed in Eden, nor did the Creator intend that it should.

It is unfortunate that the authors of our document, in effect, pit Christ the Saviour against Christ the Creator. The conflict is of their own devising; none exists in the biblical data.

**Summary.** The historical record of the blessing and consecrating of the Sabbath for the sake of mankind by Christ at Creation, and the divine placement of the fourth precept within the Decalogue, demonstrates that the observance of the Sabbath was instituted before the Fall (Gen 2:1-3; John 1:1-3, 10; Mark 2:27). It forever memorializes Christ's creative activity and keeps the Deity ever at the center of human worship and dependence. The Sabbath existed in Eden before the entrance of sin; consequently its primary function could never be that of a shadow-type. If the Fall had never occurred, the Sabbath would still have functioned to bond the intelligent creation to their Creator.

### Acts 15:1-32

In this passage Luke records the discussion and position which the leaders of the apostolic church took

in order to preserve unity between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles. The authors of our document interpret the meaning of this council as follows:

When the early Church met to decide whether Gentile converts should keep the "law of Moses" (Acts 15:5), pre-Sinai commands given through Moses would have been considered part of the "law of Moses." The Torah of Moses included not just sacrifices, but all the other regulations that Moses wrote about, whether before Sinai or after. "*The law of Moses*" is not required for Christians today. Peter said that those regulations were an unbearable yoke (Acts 15:10) and were not required for gentiles (verses 28-29). (p. 3, emphasis added).

As the reader can see, our authors have taken the same approach toward "the law of Moses" as they have taken toward the Sinai covenant. Since "the law of Moses" or the "Torah of Moses" contains the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) which includes the moral law of the Ten Commandments, and since the early Church is alleged to have voted to drop its teachings *in toto*, Christians are no longer obligated to observe the Sabbath, the fourth precept of the Ten Commandments. But neither Jesus nor the apostles ever took such a narrow approach to the Pentateuch, the very heart of the Scriptures entrusted to His people (Rom 3:1-2). Just what did the Jerusalem council decide?

The "law of Moses" simply means, in the Hebrew thought pattern, "the writings of Moses." It is quite correct to say that not everything Moses recorded originated with him (cf. John 7:22). Naturally, Moses recorded the Ten Commandments in his manuscripts which God had spoken and written on stone, as well as all the other guidelines given for his people: moral, ritual, civil, etc. The problem is that our authors resist the evidence that the instructions which Moses wrote down are of different kinds—some having only a temporary "life span," as it were, while others were of permanent value and have become the heritage of the Christian faith.

What was the problem that the early church wrestled with when Gentiles began to flood the Christian ranks at the same time many from the Jewish priesthood and from the sect of the Pharisees were also joining (Acts 6:7; 15:5)? It would appear that persons from this latter group in Jerusalem visited the largely Gentile congregation in Antioch, Syria, and stunned these new believers with the assertion, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, *you cannot be saved*" (Acts 15:1, RSV). Later, in the council, they were to reassert the same position: "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to charge

them [the Gentiles] to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:5, RSV).

Now, what were these Jewish Christians talking about when in this instance they referred to "the law of Moses"? They certainly were not arguing that the church should impose Israel's civil laws on these converts! Nor were they asserting that the church should teach them the importance of the Ten Commandments. No Gentile Christian would have objected to that. It is plain—in *this context*—that the expression, "the law of Moses" designated the instructions relating to the ritual practices and circumcision.

In his letter to the Ephesians the apostle Paul clearly indicates what aspects of the writings of Moses these Judaizing Christians had in mind—and what the Gentile Christians were resisting:

But now in Christ Jesus you [Gentiles] who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace (Eph 2:13-15, NASB).

The "Law of commandments contained in ordinances" is not a reference to the Ten Commandments, the divine moral law. Rather, it designates the ritual or ceremonial "law" of the sacrificial system (cf. Heb 10:1) as it came to be added to by the rabbis and perverted into a system of works. It was this misused ritual system, represented in sum by the rite of circumcision, that built a wall and shut out the Gentile from the Jew.

God had ordained the ritual system to teach His people the gospel (Heb 4:1-2), but Judaism perverted the system into one of works and added so many rabbinical rules and interpretations as to make it a yoke which "we have not been able to bear," the apostle Peter exclaimed in the council (Acts 15:10, RSV). The apostle was not charging God with imposing a harsh system of worship upon the Jews. He is speaking in terms of what the system came to be under the distortions of the "traditions of the elders" (cf. Matt 15:1-9).

Concerning "the Law of the commandments contained in ordinances" which Christ "abolished" by His death, W. G. Blaikie writes:

"In ordinances" limits [defines] the law of commandments. The law abolished or superseded by

Christ was the law of positive requirements embodied in things decreed, evidently the ceremonial law of the Jews, certainly not the moral law (see Rom. iii.31). By removing this, Jesus removed that which had become the occasion of bitter feelings between Jew and Gentile; the Jew looking down proudly on the Gentile, and the Gentile despising what he deemed the fantastic rites of the Jews ("Exposition," *Pulpit Commentary*, new edition [Chicago: Wilcox & Follet Company, Publishers, nd], 46:65).

It is clear that that the Jerusalem council had to decide how Gentile Christians should relate to the Jewish ritual system and to the rite of circumcision which had become its sign. The perverted ritual system was the barrier which separated the two groups.

Actually, when the Judaizing Christians at the council insisted that Gentile Christians would have to be circumcised and would have to observe the Mosaic ceremonial regulations (Acts 15:1, 5), they posed two problems: one somewhat hidden, the other prominent. The hidden agenda concerned the question: How is a person saved? Is he saved by merely obeying God's instructions (moral, ritual, civil, etc.)—and *thus meriting salvation*, or is salvation obtained as *a gift through faith in Christ* (cf. Gal 2:16). The visible agenda was whether Gentiles had first to become acceptable Jews—being circumcised and observing the rites—before their faith in Christ could save them (cf. Acts 15:1).

The apostle Peter resolved these problems before the council by observing that the Holy Spirit had already settled these matters in the conversion of the centurion Cornelius, his kinsmen and friends—all uncircumcised Gentiles who did not observe the rituals/festivals of the Temple worship. Peter argued that God saved these believing Gentiles (evidenced by the outpouring of His Spirit) *solely* on the basis of His grace and their faith:

And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. . . . But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will (Acts 15:8-11, RSV).

The conversion of this group of Gentiles clearly demonstrated that circumcision and the rituals were external matters of the biblical religion, that salvation was not earned or merited by simply observing them, and it implied that with the arrival of the Messiah the types of the ritual system had met their objective or antitype in Him.

On the basis of this event and on the basis of Scripture which had foretold the coming of the Gentiles to God, James led the council to the decision not to impose circumcision or the ritual observances upon the incoming Gentile Christians (Acts 15:13-19, 38). However, in order to facilitate church unity and to make table fellowship possible between these diverse groups, the Gentile converts were asked to abstain from four things (Acts 15:28-29): (1) eating food that had been previously dedicated to idols; (2) eating animal blood; (3) eating the flesh of a strangled animal; and (4) immorality.

In regard to item (1) a Jew would consider the eating of such food as tantamount to the worship of the idol. Items (2) and (3) are similar. The prohibition against the eating of blood antedates the nation of Israel having been imposed by God after the Flood when permission to eat animal flesh was first given (Gen 9:4). The blood of a strangled animal would have remained in its flesh. It is evident, from the many references in the letters of Paul in which sexual immorality is touched on, why emphasis on moral purity needed to be made in item (4). The morality of the Roman-Greek world was quite loose.

**Summary.** The biblical data clearly indicates that the leaders in this important council made no attempt to define the doctrines of the Christian faith, nor is there the slightest evidence that they disposed of the Ten Commandments or any of its precepts. The discussion dealt with the status of the ritual system and whether the Gentile converts were obligated to observe its rituals in order to be saved.

However, the leaders did leave open an unspoken question as to whether *Jewish Christians* were under continued obligation to the ritual system. This was a time of transition, and it was difficult for Jewish Christians to shed at once the typical system, although its function was no longer needed (cf. Acts 21:20-25). The destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70 settled this issue.

### Romans 14:5-6, 22-23

Romans 14 forms part of the apostle Paul's general counsels to the Christians in the city of Rome (chs. 12-16), following his more formal theological presentation. The verses under discussion read as follows:

One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. . . . The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God; happy is he who has no reason to judge himself for what he approves. . . . for

whatever does not proceed from faith is sin (vss. 5-6, 22-23, RSV).

The authors of our document apply this passage to the seventh-day Sabbath in connection with what they perceive to be Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath:

Throughout these Sabbath incidents, Jesus liberalized the standards. He repeatedly did things that could have waited until sundown. He boldly claimed to have authority to work on the Sabbath. That is one reason why many Christians concluded that the Sabbath is no longer required. Other Christians, who are also committed to God conclude that they should keep the Sabbath, although not as strictly as the Pharisees did. *They are welcome to their opinions provided they do not judge others on this topic.*

Every Christian should be fully convinced, living every day to the Lord, seeking to be led by the Holy Spirit. If people think that the day is required, then to them it is required. *If people think that they have freedom in this matter, then Christ expects them to act responsibly with that freedom.* Whatever is not done in faith is sin (p. 13, emphasis added).

Romans 14 is sketchy. We wish Paul had said more, or had inserted a few footnotes! But there really is no evidence that the apostle is here discussing Sabbatarianism (vss. 5-6). This idea is being read *into* the passage by our authors.

The NT notes in some detail two problems that affected Gentile Christians especially. Romans 14 seems to allude to these. The first problem related to eating food from which a portion had been presented to an idol. Was it proper to eat, or was it to be regarded as unclean and unfit for Christian consumption (cf. Rom 14:1-4, 14-23; 1 Cor 8; 10:14-33)? The second problem concerned whether Gentile Christians were obligated to be circumcised and to practice the ritual system?

As we have seen in the previous discussion, the Jerusalem council asked Gentile converts to refrain from eating any food that had been dedicated to an idol since Jewish Christians would regard such eating as an act of idol worship. But it was soon discovered that in other lands of the Roman Empire outside Palestine this was difficult to implement. The carcasses of thousands of animals sacrificed in pagan temples ended up on the open market and were sold as food to the populace. What was a Christian to do who had to depend on the public market for his daily food? The apostle's practical answer

was, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience" (1 Cor 10:25, RSV), since "an idol has no real existence" (1 Cor 8:4, RSV) and the believer's purchase in the open market would probably not cause anyone to stumble over his example.

With regard to the second problem, as we have seen, the Jerusalem council did not see fit to impose the Jewish ritual system upon the Gentile converts; however, nothing was said about Jewish Christian practice.

Now, if we move from Palestine to the Christian congregations scattered throughout the Roman Empire, we can see at once the situation that the council's "double standard" created regarding the observance of "days" which Romans 14 alludes to.

These congregations of Christians were composed of both Jews and Gentiles. Perhaps the Day of Pentecost arrives or the season for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jewish Christian with his background and habits feels the need to commemorate these special days. His Gentile brother on the other hand has no convictions on these matters. Criticism begins. The Christian Jew condemns the Christian Gentile for his nonobservance of these important days; the latter responds in kind, seeing no value in rites that are passé. The result: bickering and contention—and divided churches. The problem of internecine criticism is the burden of Romans 14:

Why do you pass judgment on your brother?  
Or you, why do you despise your brother? . . . Then let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother (vss. 10-13, RSV).

This passage in Romans 14:5-6 is referring to the various ritual days of the ceremonial system. The Jerusalem council had not imposed the observance of the various holy days of the system upon the Gentile converts and it was left to Jewish converts to do what they pleased in this regard. Each member could make his own decision. But the observance of the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments is not a debatable issue. No believer in the true God is left to decide whether he will or will not observe the day Christ blessed and hallowed for His people—and at the same time to expect God's approval if he tramples it underfoot.

The fourth precept is rooted in creation. The distinction between the creature and Christ the Creator cannot be obliterated. We repeat: the basis for all human worship of God is the fundamental fact that the Deity is

the Creator, and we are His creatures. On this basis we owe the Deity our love, allegiance, and obedience. As long as the fact remains that God the Son created us, the command to "remember the Sabbath to keep it holy," will remain in force, for it is the memorial of that creation—of our specific origin at the hand of God the Son.

**Summary.** The weight of the biblical evidence indicates that Romans 14:5-6 is referring to the various special days of the ceremonial system and not to the Sabbath of the Ten Commandments. In the transition period from the ritual system to faith in the actual events brought about by Christ's life and death, the matter of continued observance of the system's various holy days was left to individual preference.

### Colossians 2:14-17

This passage is cited by the authors of our document not only as an argument against Christian observance of the Sabbath, but as proof that the day was intended to be a shadow-type of salvation in Christ. Note the following statements:

If we want to know what Paul himself taught about the Sabbath, we must turn to the only place the word "Sabbath" is used in his epistles—Colossians 2:16-17: "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (NIV) (p. 16).

Christ's death had changed something about the Christian's approach to the Sabbath. Christians were not to be judged by anyone regarding the Sabbath (p. 16).

The Sabbath, festivals, new moons and the entire Jewish calendar were a "shadow" of things to come. They were foreshadows—predictive shadows symbolizing things to come (p. 16).

The contrast between "shadow" and "reality" is found also in Hebrews 10:1—the sacrificial laws were a shadow of good things that were coming (same Greek word and tense as in Colossians 2:17), not the reality. *Just as the sacrifices were shadows that pointed to Christ and were superseded by him, the old covenant worship days were also shadows that pointed to Christ* (p. 16, emphasis added).

The Sabbath is a foreshadow of salvation in Christ. In this way, the most important doctrine of the new covenant (Christ) is included within the Ten Commandments (p. 16, fn. 22).

The observant reader will notice that the authors of our document have now restricted their biblical author-

ity to the Pauline letters, that is, to a single passage in his letter to the Colossians. Furthermore, they have chosen to cite the NIV, a dynamic translation, whose translators have capitalized "Sabbath" to indicate their interpretation of the Greek word to mean the seventh-day Sabbath. But the Greek text does not capitalize words as English does. Since our authors suggest that the passage be read in its context, we will start with verse 14, employing a more neutral, formal translation:

Having *wiped out the handwriting of requirements* [*cheirophon tois dogmasin*] that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, *having nailed it to the cross*. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ* (Col 2:14-17, NKJV).

Since "three-fifths of Colossians is reflected in Ephesians" (Goodspeed), we need only to compare this passage with its parallel in Ephesians to accurately identify "the handwriting of *requirements* (*dogma*, 'ordinance')." In the parallel Paul designates the same body of instruction as "the Law of commandments contained in *ordinances* (*dogma*, 'ordinance,' Eph 2:15, NASB)."

In Ephesians the apostle describes this body of ordinances as forming a barrier or dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, a barrier which Christ abolished by His death on the cross (Eph 2:16). In Colossians similar language is used of this same body of ordinances: Christ "wiped out" these *ordinances* (*dogma*) which were "against us," "contrary to us" [like the barrier wall of Ephesians] and "nailed" them to His cross, as it were.

In Colossians 2:16 Paul lists some of these ordinances as they related to eating/drinking, ritual festivals, and new moon festivals. These he identifies as "a shadow of things to come" (Col 2:17). The body of instruction in the Mosaic writings which dealt with shadow types is clearly identified as the ritual or sacrificial instruction:

For since *the law has but a shadow of the good things to come* instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same *sacrifices* which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near (Heb 10:1, RSV).

It is important to note what the apostle Paul is *not* saying in these three passages (Eph 2:15-16; Col 2:14-17; Heb 10:1). He is *not* saying that Christ "abolished" or

"wiped out," or "nailed" to His cross the Ten Commandments, or any part of the Decalogue as though the Ten Commandments formed a barrier wall between Jew and Gentile, or that the Ten Commandments are against the believer and contrary to him. For the apostle Paul, the Decalogue was "holy and just and good" (Rom 7:12).

The apostle is not even saying that Christ abolished and nailed to His cross the Abrahamic-Sinaitic covenants as a "package." Rather, the apostle's focus is upon the ritual or ceremonial system of rites and festivals that had originally been designed to teach and to foreshadow the gospel realities. However, the ceremonial system—burdened with unauthorized rabbinical requirements and perverted into a system of works—not only separated the Jew from the Gentile but also became a heavy burden to the Jews themselves—results God never intended. It was this ritual system that Christ's atoning death brought to an end.

The prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27, which foretold the time of the appearing of the Messiah and His atoning death, also foretold that He would "bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (vs. 27, NKJV). Animal blood could never atone for sin (Heb 10:4), but it was used in a ritual way to foreshadow the Saviour's death. But once Christ makes the supreme sacrifice for sin (Heb 9:26), the ritual system ceases to have any more meaning. Heaven signified this fact by causing the great veil of the Temple to tear from top to bottom at the moment of Christ's death (see Matt 27:50-51; Luke 23:45). From this point on the entire sacrificial system with its rites and ceremonies and festivals no longer had a foreshadowing function for God's people. Type met its antitype in Jesus Christ.

But what about the Sabbath? Didn't Paul include the Sabbath in his identification of this body of instruction that Christ "wiped out" and "nailed" to His cross (Col 2:14-17)? Let us observe again what the apostle says. Since Christ "abolished" the ritual system, Paul notes some practical results:

So let no one judge you in *food* [*brōsis*, "eating"] or in *drink* [*posis*, "drinking"], or regarding a *festival* [*heortē*, "feast"] or a *new moon* [*neomēnia*, celebrated as a festival] or *sabbaths* [*sabbaton*], which are a *shadow of things to come*, but the substance is of Christ (Col 2:16, NKJV).

As our authors have pointed out, the key for identifying these items, which no longer concern believers, is the word "shadow." As we have observed earlier, Paul is speaking in this context about the fact that Christ has brought an end to the ritual instructions dealing with types

and shadows. Thus, all the listed items in verse 16 must be seen as "shadows" pointing forward to the gospel realities which found fulfillment in Christ.

The terms (translated "food" and "drinking") refer to *typical* eating and drinking and not to the dietary laws of clean and unclean flesh which date back to Noah's time (cf. Gen 7:1-3) and which had no foreshadowing quality. The Israelites engaged in typical eating and drinking when they participated in the Passover meal, the communal meals accompanying every peace offering sacrifice, and in the meals eaten in connection with the other festivals.

The *festivals*, such as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, Blowing of Trumpets, Feast of Tabernacles, and *new moon feasts*, were also special times when Israel gathered together in ceremonial worship.

It is evident, therefore, that the "sabbaths" or "sabbath" Paul mentions in this list must likewise belong to the ritual instruction of the shadow types. Yes, says our authors. *But the question is whether the apostle is referring to the seventh-day Sabbath—blessed and hallowed by God the Son at creation (Gen 2:1-3; Exod 20:8-11; Mark 2:27) or whether he is referring to the seven ceremonial or annual sabbaths that were celebrated in connection with the various festivals?*

In this discussion it should be noted that the Greek word for "sabbath" in this verse appears in its plural *form*. However, this particular word in its plural *form* may have either a plural or a singular *sense*. Thus some versions will translate the term as "sabbaths," while other translators opt for the singular sense, "sabbath." Be that as it may, there is no coercive evidence that Paul did not intend a plural sense here. But in either case, the real meaning of the term is rendered by the defining word "shadow" in vs. 17.

We now can see why our authors go to such extreme lengths to deny that Genesis 2:1-3 presents a Divine instituting of the Sabbath for the human family. If the Sabbath was instituted at Creation *before* the entrance of sin, *it could never function as a shadow-type*. It would always have its function in a sinless world—or later in the sin situation—of pointing the believer to his Creator and back to creation.

It is evident from our study of Genesis 2:1-3 that Christ, the Creator, never intended for the observance of the Sabbath to have a foreshadowing function. Such a concept would have had no meaning in a sinless world. The sacrificial system with its types, symbols, and shadows was instituted *after* the Fall to inspire sinners with hope in a coming Redeemer. But even in the sin-situation, the Sabbath did not function to point to a coming Re-

deemer. Its purpose was to draw the believer into an ever closer bond of dependence on the Creator and to keep the distinction between the believer and the Creator.

We have earlier examined the data of Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11, and Mark 2:27, and it is clear that Christ, our Creator, established the observance of the Sabbath at Creation before the entrance of sin. The Sabbath is indeed a Creation institution "made for mankind" (Mark 2:27). Consequently, the "sabbaths" or "sabbath" of Colossians 2:16 must refer to the seven annual, ritual sabbaths which were observed in connection with the festivals: the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:7-8); the day of Pentecost (Lev 23:21); blowing of trumpets—New Year's day (Lev 23:24); the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27, 32); and the first and eighth days of the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:39). Like any fixed holiday, these ritual holy convocation rest days fell on different days of the week each year. They were observed just like a seventh-day Sabbath: from sunset to sunset, by religious worship, and by abstention from the worshipers regular employment.

Observers of the seventh-day Sabbath are not the only ones who have recognized the ritual nature of these "sabbath(s)" mentioned in Colossians 2:16. The well-known Presbyterian scholar, Albert Barnes, has noted:

The word *sabbath* in the Old Testament is applied not only to the seventh day, but to all the days of holy rest that were observed by the Hebrews, and particularly to the beginning and close of their festivals. There is, doubtless, reference to those days in this place [Col 2:16]. . . . The use of the term in the plural number, and the connection, show that he had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law, and not to the moral law, or the ten commandments. No part of the *moral* law—no one of the ten commandments could be spoken of as "*a shadow of good things to come.*" These commandments are, from the nature of moral law, of perpetual and universal obligation." (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament* [London: Blackie and Son, nd], 7:267, author's emphasis).

**Summary.** It is never wise to build a major theological position on a single text—and a debatable one at that. Colossians 2:14-17 provides no coercive support for identifying the seventh-day Sabbath as a shadow-type. In the plain historical statement of Genesis 2:1-3, in the fourth precept of the Decalogue (Exod 20:8-11), and in the authoritative words of Christ, our Creator (Mark

2:27), there is clear evidence that the Sabbath was instituted at the close of Creation week before the entrance of sin; hence, the Sabbath can never be viewed as a temporary shadow-type pointing forward to the spiritual rest of grace to be found in Christ.

### Hebrews 4:1-11

This passage, together with Colossians 2:14-17, is cited by the authors of our document as the Scriptural basis for their view that the Sabbath was intended by God to be a shadow-type pointing forward to our spiritual rest in Christ in the same manner as the sacrifices pointed forward to Christ's atoning death. Once we have found spiritual rest in Christ, the actual observance of the day no longer matters. Our authors write:

Let us paraphrase the passage [Heb 4]: God promised a rest, but the first Israelites did not enter it because of unbelief and disobedience. Joshua brought them into the land, but the Israelites were still being exhorted to enter the promised rest. *It still was future*. Therefore, since there is still a promise of rest, we must be careful that we do not fall short of it. We who have faith in Christ enter the promised rest, which is called God's rest.

God rested at the end of creation, so this is the divine rest, the supernatural rest, the spiritual promise that believers enter. . . .

Why does the writer use the word *sabbatismos*? ["There remains therefore a *rest (sabbatismos)* for the people of God," vs. 9, NKJV]. It clearly refers to the weekly Sabbath, but it is being used figuratively. The author is telling us that this spiritual rest is what the weekly Sabbath had pictured all along. The Sabbath was not only a reminder of the end-of-creation rest and the Exodus, *it also looked forward, prefiguring something, as a predictive shadow of a coming reality, our spiritual rest*. We enter God's rest by faith in Christ (verse 3), and by doing so, we enter the rest that God entered when he completed his creation (verse 3b-4). (p. 20, emphasis added).

The Sabbath was indeed a memorial of creation. *And it foreshadowed and pointed to our salvation in Christ* (p. 21, emphasis added).

The spiritual purpose [of the Sabbath] is to point us to Christ. *Now that we have come to Christ, the pointer is of such diminished importance that (whether we understand its function or not) Paul can say that it is not a matter on which Christians should be judged* (p. 17, comment on Col 2:14-17, but with the same view as taken on Heb 4:1-11, emphasis added).

We agree with the authors of our document that the passage in Hebrews 4:1-11 is dealing primarily with

the believer's rest of grace. The reference to the Sabbath is a related point to the general thrust of the argument. However, we believe our authors misinterpret the intent of the passage when they argue that it teaches that the Sabbath was a shadow-type of the future rest of grace that would be found in Christ. This is not the argument of the passage at all. This concept is being superimposed upon the passage.

Again we see the reason why the authors of our document wish to start the observance of the Sabbath with the nation of Israel rather than have its observance begin in Eden before the Fall where the biblical evidence so clearly places it. In no way could the Sabbath, instituted in Eden *before* the Fall, have functioned as a "predictive shadow of a coming reality, our spiritual rest."

Although the apostle's reasoning in this passage is somewhat difficult to follow, his major line of argument is clear enough. It really begins in Hebrews 3:7 where he cites God's appeal to the nation of Israel in David's time. We quote a portion from the OT psalm:

For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: "Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest' " (Ps 95:7-11, NKJV).

On the basis of this Davidic psalm and its historical record the apostle appeals to the Jewish Christians of his day not to follow the pattern of their ancestors whose unbelief led to their exclusion from Canaan (Heb 3:12-19).

That first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt lost out not only on their hoped-for Canaan rest, but more important, on the spiritual rest of grace which David presents in the psalm: "Today, if you will His voice. . . ." And so the apostle earnestly entreats his fellow Jewish Christians who seem on the point of giving up the faith:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you [Hebrew Christians] seem to have come short of it. *For indeed the gospel was preached to us [Hebrew Christians] as well as to them [the Hebrews of the exodus]; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard*

*it. For we [Hebrew Christians] who have believed do enter that rest . . . (Heb 4:1-3, NKJV).*

Here is the nub of the apostle's argument: The Israelites in the exodus from Egypt were taught the same gospel as we have been taught. But their lack of faith prevented them from entering into the offered spiritual rest of grace. Our lack of faith will likewise prevent us from experiencing the rest of grace as well. *But* "we who have believed do enter that rest."

The apostle continues to develop and to underscore his main argument. He notes that although Joshua eventually settled the nation (second generation) in Canaan, they too did not find the spiritual rest of grace which they could have found (vs. 8). But, he observes that God's appeal through David ("Today, if you will hear His voice . . .") still stands as an invitation to all who seek the spiritual rest of grace ("There remains therefore a rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God," vs. 9).

At this point the apostle links the illustration of the Sabbath—first mentioned in vs. 4—to this appeal to his brethren to accept the spiritual rest of grace that God desires to grant to every believer:

For he who has entered His rest *has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His*. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience [referring to the unbelieving Israelites of the exodus] (vss. 10-11, NKJV).

The Jews of Paul's day sought to *earn* their salvation—to merit it—by simple obedience (cf. Rom 1:1-3; Gal 2:16). Jewish Christians were in danger of slipping back into that same mode. But the teaching of Scripture is that salvation comes by exercising faith in Jesus Christ. The believer who enters God's spiritual rest of grace (Matt 11:28-30) ceases from all attempts to earn his salvation by his deeds (Rom 3:20; 5:1). In that sense he shares a parallel with the Creator who rested after His activity (works) of creation.

The apostle's argument is simply this: The Israelites in the exodus could have found the spiritual rest of grace if they had exercised faith in God who was teaching them the gospel through the sacrificial system. The Israelites in Joshua's time could also have found spiritual rest if they had desired it. The same was true later in David's time when God spoke through him to the nation. And that promise of salvation was still available in the apostle's day. In sum, God's grace was always available, but the people failed to accept it by exercising faith in Him.

It is evident that the apostle's line of reasoning is in no way arguing that the Sabbath is a shadow-type, "prefiguring something, as a predictive shadow of a coming reality, our spiritual rest." *This concept is being read into the passage*. The apostle is not using the Sabbath institution in any prophetic sense. *He is simply arguing that spiritual rest was always available along the way for Israel, but their lack of commitment to God prevented them from receiving it, so let Hebrew Christians who were drifting away from Christ beware*. But why did the apostle introduce the Sabbath into his appeal?

It is only natural that the Sabbath, which Christ as Creator made and consecrated to bond the human family to Himself, would take on other nuances after the Fall. For example, Moses, when reciting the Ten Commandments to the Israelite assembly in the land of Moab, broke off his recital to make an application of the Sabbath to Israel's recent condition as slaves who had served under harsh taskmasters with little opportunity for rest.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day (Deut 5:15, RSV).

Since the observance of the Sabbath involved rest from the daily labor of earning a living (Exod 20:8-11), it could also serve as a *reminder* of their release from slavery by God's intervention, and its observance with this fact in mind would increase their gratitude toward their Deliverer as well as Creator.

But more important than the Sabbath's *reminder* of their physical deliverance from slavery was the meaning God invested in the Sabbath as a *reminder* of His power to deliver them from the bondage of sin.

Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for *it is a sign between Me and you* throughout your generations, that you may know that *I am the Lord who sanctifies you*" (Exod 31:13, NKJV).

Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a *sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them* (Ezek 20:12, NKJV).

The divine command, "Be holy, for I am holy" is extended to all believers regardless of the dispensation they live in (cf. 1 Pet 1:15-16; Lev 19:2). Just as Christ

created the heavens and the earth, so He is able to re-create a penitent sinner. When a believing Israelite observed the Sabbath, he not only was drawn to acknowledge God as his Creator and his dependency upon Him for every blessing such as his physical freedom from slavery, but he was also drawn to praise Him for His grace in sanctifying—separating him from sin. In no way could he “work” out his own deliverance from the pervasive power of sin. He realized that it would take the same creative power that brought the world into existence to create a new life in himself (cf. Ps 51:10-12; Ezek 36:26-27). Consequently, in the sin-situation God intended the observance of the Sabbath to be a continual *reminder* to the believing Israelite of his spiritual rest in God.

**Summary.** Sabbath observance in OT times was intended by God to keep steady the believer’s faith and

trust in God as both his Creator and Sanctifier from sin. It pointed the believer back to creation and to his allegiance to the Creator (Ezek 20:20), and continually reminded him of the Creator’s love and grace to separate and save him from the bondage of sin. In no sense did Sabbath observance function as a shadow-type of grace *yet to come* with the advent of the Messiah. Rather, the Sabbath carried a message of “present truth” that right then and there the God who created all things was both Lord and Saviour (cf. Isa. 45:22-25).

The authors of our document misinterpret Hebrews 4:1-11. Its obvious intent lends no support to their presupposition that the Sabbath—like the sacrifices—was only a temporary, forward-looking shadow-type.

## Jesus and the Sabbath

Unfortunately the comments which our authors make about Jesus and the Sabbath are so phrased as to make it appear that He disparaged the Sabbath. We cite some examples:

*Work must be done on the Sabbath, Jesus said. . . . Making mud was against their law, and so was healing, and they judged unrighteously (p. 13, emphasis added).*

*Throughout these Sabbath incidents, Jesus liberalized the standards. He repeatedly did things that could have waited until sundown. He boldly claimed to have authority to work on the Sabbath [alluding to John 5:17] (p. 13, emphasis added).*

Jesus criticized the Pharisees’ approach to various laws and rituals, including ritual hand washing (Matthew 15:2), phylacteries (Matthew 23:5) and Corban rules (Mark 7:11-13). In all these things he antagonized the Pharisees and risked his life. But these criticisms were not attempts to tell his disciples how to continue these customs in a better way (p.13). [The implication is that even though Jesus critiqued the Sabbath observance of the Pharisees, it doesn’t follow that He desired His followers to observe the Sabbath in a better manner].

This kind of reasoning is false and misleading. Jesus indeed said, “As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me” (John 9:4, NIV) and “My Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working” (John 5:17, NIV). But it is clearly evident that in these statements Christ was not speaking of secular toil—like

His carpenter’s trade—to make a livelihood! In His mission as the Messiah, Jesus’ “work” was always along spiritual lines and was in complete harmony with the nature and purpose of the Sabbath.

*Making clay to heal the blind man was not a violation of any scriptural injunction nor were His several recorded acts of healing done in opposition to the Scriptures. Jesus did not liberalize any Scripture teachings.*

Christ’s constant clashes with the Pharisees and scribes arose from their enforcement of *rabbinical teachings*—the traditions of the elders (see Matt 15:8-9)—and not from violations of Scriptural teachings about Sabbath observance. Although He was indeed accused of breaking the Sabbath by His acts of mercy (John 5:18), Christ’s Sabbath ministry was in complete accord with the Scriptures.

What He “broke” were the numerous rabbinical restrictions (for example, ritual hand washing, wearing of phylacteries, and the practice of corban). He purposely healed on the Sabbath so that He might teach the Jews in general and His disciples in particular the true spirit of Sabbath observance. “It is lawful to do good on the sabbath,” He affirmed (Matt 12:12). The Sabbath was made for the sake of man—for the blessing of mankind, He asserted, and as Creator He claimed lordship of it (Mark 2:27).

It is true that Jesus was born under the Jewish system (Gal 4:4). In this situation the brief records do show Him observing at least some of the festivals (Passover; Feast of Tabernacles), although it is doubtful, as the

sinless Messiah, He personally offered sacrifices. Nevertheless, while the rites will drop away, it is important for Christians to note His observance of the Sabbath and His clear indications regarding how it should be kept. The reason is evident from our previous examination of this topic. Christ's example is important because the Sabbath in itself—and as part of the Ten Commandments—functions as the memorial of Christ's creative power and remains a permanent injunction within the new covenant bonding the believer to Him as both our Creator and Saviour.



Since we have summarized our study of the biblical data as we have examined the document, we will not compose a formal conclusion here. Suffice it to say that it is our opinion—in the light of the biblical data—that the presuppositions upon which the document rests are invalid and its expositions of key passages are unsound. The Scriptures do not present the Sabbath as a shadow-type; rather, they present its observance as a fundamental precept of the Ten Commandments and, thus, as part of the new covenant relationship. It is as permanent an obligation as is the fact that the Deity created the human family—a fact which it memorializes.

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