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The Sabbath

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Introduction

In both the OT and NT the weekly day for rest and special worship services was the seventh day of the week (Saturday), called the “Sabbath.” This word was also applied to certain annual holy or festal days, though its main use was for the seventh day of the week.

In post- NT Christian history the word “sabbath” eventually came to be applied in certain traditions to Sunday, the first day of the week, and is still used by various Sundaykeeping Christians to designate Sunday. In this article, when the word “Sabbath” is spelled with an initial capital letter, it refers to the seventh day of the week.

The Hebrew root from which “sabbath” is derived is *šbṭ* whose primary meaning is “to cease” or “desist” from previous activity. The noun form is *šabbāṭ* and the verb is *šābaṭ*. Modern English versions usually render the noun as “sabbath” and the verb as “to rest” (or sometimes as “to keep sabbath”). Although these renditions are correct and appropriate, the underlying concept of “cessation” suggests a relation to that which has preceded, rather than simply a recourse for weariness.

A further noun referring to the Sabbath in Exodus and Leviticus is *šabbāṭôn*, also derived from *šbṭ* and often translated “solemn rest.” Six of eleven times it appears in the phrase *šabbāṭ šabbāṭôn* (Ex. 31:15 ; 35:2 ; Lev. 16:31 ; 23:3 , 32 ; 25:4). The occurrence of *šabbāṭ* and *šabbāṭôn* together indicates intensification.

In the NT the word for “sabbath” is the Greek *sabbatōn*, or its apparent plural, *sabbata*. However, the latter may be simply a transliteration of the Aramaic *šabbāṯā*, which is the emphatic state of the singular noun. Thus when the term *sabbata* occurs in the NT, the context must guide as to whether the meaning is singular or plural.

Sometimes *sabbaton* in the NT refers to the entire week. For instance, in Luke 18:12 the Pharisee boasts that he fasts twice *tou sabbatou* (in the week). Also in a number of references the first day of the week is indicated by the numeral “one” with *sabbaton* or *sabbata* (Matt. 28:1 ; Mark 16:2 , 9 ; Luke 24:1 ; John 20:1 , 19 ; Acts 20:7 ; 1 Cor. 16:2), the noun “day” being clearly implied by the use of the feminine form of the numeral.

In Hebrews 4:9, the term *sabbatismos* is correctly translated as “sabbath rest.” In this general section of Hebrews (3:7–4:13), which employs the Sabbath as a metaphor for spiritual rest, the noun *katapausis* (rest) also occurs eight times, and the verb *katapauō* three times.

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I. The Sabbath in the OT

A. Pentateuch

1. General Overview

For the most part, *šabbāt*, *šābat*, and *šabbāṭôn* are used in reference to the seventh day of the week, but various passages in the Pentateuch also utilize this kind of sabbath terminology for certain annual festivals and for the seventh (“sabbatical”) year. In some instances it is used in a metaphorical sense as “rest” for the land.

Three passages in the Pentateuch specifically link the seventh-day Sabbath with Creation: Genesis 2:1–3 ; Exodus 20:11 ; 31:13–17 . A number of other passages refer to rest on the seventh day of the week. In the following discussion the Sabbath texts are analyzed in the order in which they occur in the Pentateuch. (See Creation I. A. 14.)

2.Sabbath References in the Pentateuch

a. Genesis 2:1 -3.2 After a description of God’s day-by-day activities during the first six days of Creation week, Genesis 2:1 gives a summary statement that Creation had been completed. Genesis 2:2 , 3 states, “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.”

Several items in this passage deserve special notice: 1. Although the Hebrew noun *šabbāṭ* does not occur, the verb *šābaṭ* appears in both instances that refer to God’s resting from His work of Creation. 2. The seventh day of the week is prominent, with five references to it, three using the specific expression “seventh day” and two using the pronoun “it.” 3. The statement takes the form of a chiasm or inverted parallel statement:

A. God finished his work (verse 2)

B. And he rested on the seventh day“from all his work which he had done“(verse 2)

C. So God blessed the seventh day“and hallowed it (verse 3)

B’. Because on it God rested from all his“work which he had done (verse 3)

A’. In creation (verse 3 , cont.)

This chiasm’s two introductory statements (A and B) call attention to God’s creative work and to His resting on the seventh day. The same two thoughts are presented at the conclusion of the chiasm, in reverse order (BN and AN). This leaves at the center of the chiasm (C) the reference to God’s blessing and hallowing the seventh day. In a chiasm that takes this A-B-C-BN- AN form, the central item normally represents the text’s major focus. Thus in Genesis 2:2 , 3 the major focus is the statement that “God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.”

The Hebrew verb used for God’s blessing of the seventh day is *bāraḵ*, also used for God’s blessing on animals and on humankind (Gen. 1:22 , 28). This divine blessing is not static, but continues to have special meaning onward from the time when it is first given. The basic meaning of the Hebrew term translated “hallowed” or “sanctified” (from *qādaš*, “to be holy”) is a “separating” or “setting apart” of something in fulfillment of a divine purpose and/or command. Thus the statement that God “hallowed” the seventh day not only distinguishes this day from the other six, but also reinforces the idea of a continuing special meaningfulness of this day for the human beings whom God had created. Something “set apart” has to be more than simply a memory relic of the past; it must have an ongoing significance. This hallowedness of the Sabbath is reiterated in various later Pentateuchal references (e.g., Ex. 16:23 ; cf. 31:14–16 ; 35:2) and the basic language of the entire statement in Genesis 2:2 , 3 reappears in the Sabbath commandment of Ex. 20:8–11 .

b. Exodus 5:5 . Exodus 5:5 contains sabbath terminology in the statement “And Pharaoh said, ‘Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest (*šābat*) from their burdens!’ ” While the seventh day of the week is not specifically mentioned, the immediate context implies that this rest had religious significance.

c. Exodus 16 . Exodus 16 contains the OT ’s first use of the Hebrew noun *šabbāt* (verse 23). In fact, in this passage the noun is used four times (verses 23 , 25 , 26 , 29). The setting is the giving of manna to the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sin two weeks before their arrival at Mount Sinai. According to Exodus 16:5 , on the sixth day the Israelites were to gather and bring in “twice as much as they gather daily.” Later in the chapter they are informed that on the seventh day no manna would appear (verses 25 , 26) and that although the manna gathered on each of the other days would spoil overnight, that which was gathered on the sixth day would keep (verses 19–24). On the seventh day some people went out into the field to look for manna but found none (verse 27). God’s response was, “How long do you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days; remain every man of you in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day” (verses 28 , 29). This wording gives the distinct impression that the Sabbath was already known to the Israelites.

d. Exodus 20:8–11 . Exodus 20 sets forth the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses at Sinai. In this law the fourth commandment specifies that work should be done six days and that the seventh day is to be observed as a day of rest. The basis for this injunction is that “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” (verse 11).

The language used here summarizes the content of Genesis 2:2 , 3 , leaving no doubt that Exodus 20:11 points to the Creation Sabbath. Also significant is that the Sabbath commandment appears within the ten-commandment law, which in turn was the center of God’s covenant. That this ten-commandment law was distinctive, with the other Pentateuchal laws as additions or commentary, is clear from the statement in Deuteronomy 5:22 that to these Ten Commandments God had “added no more”—i.e., the Decalogue was a complete entity in and of itself.

Furthermore, the covenant basis that is set forth in Exodus 20 for keeping the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment, is redemptive history, or more properly, divine redemption itself. The children of Israel had come into covenant relationship with Yahweh (see Ex. 19). Then in the preamble and historical prologue to the Decalogue, God states the prime element in the redemption which the Israelites had experienced: “I [Yahweh] am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:2). The Israelites had been redeemed from slavery, and this prior goodness of Yahweh provided the foundation for the covenant relationship in which the Israelites were, in turn, to be obedient to God’s commandments.

At times the Sabbath and the concept of God's covenant became virtually synonymous (cf. Ex. 31:16). More than any of the other nine precepts of the Decalogue, the Sabbath provided a visible distinctive that set God's people apart from any and all who did not serve Yahweh. Thus in a very real way it embodied the true meaning of covenant relationship with God, for it identified Israel as a people in fellowship with their Creator and Redeemer.

Moreover, the Sabbath commandment is the only one in the Decalogue that has the three distinguishing marks of a seal impression: the *name*, the *office*, and the *domain* of the individual or entity whose authority the seal represents. Thus the Sabbath commandment may be considered the *seal* of the Decalogue. (See also the discussion of the Sabbath as "sign" in connection with Exodus 31:13–17 and Ezekiel 20:12 , 20 .) The Sabbath commandment is distinctive not only by containing the three essentials of a seal, but also by utilizing a unique introduction, the word "remember." This word may carry several concepts: to remember the Sabbath as an institution that is already time-honored; to remember, because there may be a danger of forgetting; and to remember with a forward look, because the Sabbath is so central to the ongoing covenant experience. Whatever nuance or nuances the term may have had in the context of its original statement at Sinai, one thing is certain: The word "remember" is emphatic as an introduction here, and serves to call special attention to the Sabbath commandment.

e. Exodus 23:12 . After a reference to the "sabbatical year" in Exodus 23:10 , 11 , the following instruction is given concerning the seventh day of the week: "Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may have rest, and the son of your bondmaid, and the alien, may be refreshed" (verse 12). For the "rest" commanded to the Israelites in covenant relationship with God, the verb is *šābaṭ*, whereas for the beasts of burden, the type of rest is simply *nūaḥ*. And for the "son of your bondmaid" and for the "alien," the niphal imperfect of *nāpaš*, "to refresh," is used. This Hebrew word does not necessarily imply recovery from weariness, though that element may be included; rather it suggests an enhancement in quality of life or the pleasure of rest from work that has been accomplished well. Thus the Sabbath should be a meaningful spiritual experience for both the Israelite servants and the aliens sojourning among the Israelites.

f. Exodus 31:13–17 . " In Exodus 31:13–17 we find a statement very similar to those in Genesis 2:2–3 and Exodus 20:11 , but with several added features. 1. The keeping of God's Sabbath is a sign, not only of Creation (verse 17), but also of His sanctifying His people (verse 13). 2. The covenant relationship, earlier set forth in the context of the Decalogue (chaps. 19 and 20), is now explicitly applied to the Sabbath and termed "a perpetual covenant" (verse 16). 3. The penalty of death is decreed for profanation of the Sabbath (verses 14 , 15). 4. The emphatic terminology *šabbaṭ šabbāṭōn*, "sabbath of solemn rest," is used for the first time (verse 15). 5. In reference to the Creation Sabbath, the statement speaks not only of God's resting, as in Genesis 2:2 , 3 and Exodus 20:8–11 , but also adds that God "was refreshed" (verse 17), obviously not in the sense of recovery from weariness, but rather as a pleasant relaxation subsequent to, and because of, God's completion of His work in producing a perfect Creation.

The use of the word “sign” in verse 13 is noteworthy. A sign is something that points beyond itself to reveal a more profound reality. With respect to the Sabbath, that reality is twofold: The Sabbath provides an ever-present assurance of God’s sanctifying of His people (verse 13), and it serves as a constant reminder of God’s Creatorship (verse 17). In both aspects, the *keeping* of the Sabbath is what gives it effectiveness as a sign (verses 13 , 16).

g. Exodus 34:21 . Exodus 34:21 reads, “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.” Here the noun “Sabbath” does not occur, but “the seventh day” is explicitly indicated and the verb for both occurrences of “rest” is *šābaṭ*. That in an agricultural economy the Sabbath was to be kept faithfully during the two most crucial seasons for labor, “plowing time” and “harvest,” emphasizes the great sanctity with which God had invested the day.

h. Exodus 35:2 , 3 . In Exodus 35:2 , 3 the term *šabbaṭ šabbāṭōn* is used in a command to observe the seventh day as a “holy sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord.” The death sentence for violation is once again decreed, with the added remark that “you shall kindle no fire in all your habitations on the sabbath day.” Reference here is obviously to an unnecessary Sabbath task for the Israelites.

i. The book of Leviticus. Although the book of Leviticus has more occurrences of the terms *šabbaṭ* and *šabbāṭōn* than the other books of the Pentateuch combined, comparatively few of these refer specifically to the weekly Sabbath. References that do so are 19:3 , 30 ; 23:3 , 38 ; 24:8 ; and 26:2 .

In 19:3 , 30 and 26:2 the simple command is given, “You shall keep my sabbaths.” In the first instance it occurs after a reference to the honoring of parents, and in the last two instances it precedes the expression “and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.” Leviticus 23:3 states briefly, “Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest [*šabbaṭ šabbāṭōn*], a holy convocation; you shall do no work; it is a sabbath [*šabbāṭ*] to the Lord in all your dwellings.” This text gives evidence that the Sabbath was not only to be a “solemn rest” but also a “holy convocation.” The remainder of Leviticus 23 is devoted primarily to annual feasts, which are declared to be “besides the sabbaths of the Lord” (verse 38). Leviticus 24:5–8 specifies that each week on the Sabbath Aaron should replace the showbread in the sanctuary.

In Leviticus 16:31 the annual Day of Atonement is referred to as *šabbaṭ šabbāṭōn*. Also, in chapter 23 this day and various other annual days are set forth as “sabbaths” or “days of solemn rest.” For four of these the sabbath terminology used is *šabbāṭōn* or *šabbaṭ šabbāṭōn*: the first day of the seventh month (the blowing of trumpets), the tenth day of the seventh month (Day of Atonement), and the first and eighth days of the feast of booths (23:24 , 25 , 27–32 , 34 , 36). The first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the day of Pentecost may also have been considered as sabbaths, though the Essene and Boethusian traditions in later Judaism interpreted the references to “sabbath” in verses 11 , 15 , and 16 to be weekly seventh-day Sabbaths. On all of the

annual holy days, except for the Day of Atonement, no “laborious work” was to be done, but a stronger prohibition applied to that day: “No work” should be done (verse 28).

In Leviticus 25:2–6 sabbath language is again used, but the references are to the “sabbatical year.” In Leviticus 26 several references to “sabbaths” (verses 34 [twice], 35 , 43) are metaphorical, designating the future time when the covenant people of Israel, if disobedient, would be taken captive, so that the land could enjoy “sabbaths.” In addition to the plural noun, the verb *šābat* is also used, indicating that the land would have “rest” (verses 34 , 35).

j. The book of Numbers. The book of Numbers refers to the weekly Sabbath in two contexts. In 15:32–36 an account is given of a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath and consequently suffering the death penalty for what was obviously a flagrant violation of Sabbath regulations. In 28:9 , 10 there is a stipulation that on the Sabbath two one-year-old male lambs were to be sacrificed as a burnt offering in addition to the regular daily burnt offering.

k. Deuteronomy 5:12–15 . The final Pentateuchal reference to the Sabbath occurs in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 . Here Moses reiterates the Sabbath command in wording quite similar to that in Exodus 20:8–11 , except for one main feature: Instead of a reference to the Creation Sabbath, the rationale for observing the Sabbath is God’s rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. “You shall remember that you were a servant 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” (verse 15).

Some commentators take this statement to be evidence that the Sabbath was a relatively new institution, adopted by Israel on the basis of the Exodus, and not connected with a Creation Sabbath at all. Such a conclusion is unwarranted for several reasons: 1. The language used in verse 15 indicates that this verse represents Moses’ own elaboration of the Decalogue. 2. The book of Deuteronomy itself is a recital of Israel’s wilderness experience, and this context makes a reference to the deliverance from Egyptian slavery particularly appropriate. 3. The mention of Israel’s rescue from Egyptian bondage in no way negates the fact that Israel was well aware of the Sabbath as a Creation institution, a fact evidenced in Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 . 4. The deliverance-from-Egypt motif in connection with the Decalogue is not new in Deuteronomy 5 , for it had already occurred in conjunction with the giving of the Decalogue in Exodus 20 (see I. A. 2. d).

Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage was the redemptive act that gave evidence of His prior goodness and provided the basis for the covenant relationship between Him and His people. The preamble and historical prologue set forth in Exodus 20:1 , 2 are repeated in Deuteronomy 5:6 : “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” In extant ancient political covenants which have this same type of form, the suzerain’s prior relationship to the vassal ruler (and/or forebears), including raising the vassal to kingship, was foundational for the vassal’s commitments to the suzerain. Similarly Yahweh’s prior goodness to the

Israelites was foundational for their commitments to Him as stipulated in the Ten Commandments. It should not come as a surprise, therefore, that Moses should set forth as a basis for keeping the Sabbath commandment the fact that Yahweh had brought the Israelites out of Egypt “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (Deut. 5:15). The specific mention of this comes, moreover, in the normal flow of Moses’ thought, for after his reiteration of the part of the Sabbath commandment requiring that strangers and servants be allowed to rest (verse 14), he immediately gives the counsel, “You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt” (verse 15).

In this reiteration of the Decalogue Moses declares the definitive nature of the Decalogue as a discrete and complete entity. In Deuteronomy 5:22 Moses states that when God had spoken the Ten Commandments, He “added no more.” Furthermore, the standing of the Decalogue as the one and only body of apodictic law (broad statements of principles, universal in character) in the Pentateuch also sets it apart as unique, particularly so when it is compared with the Pentateuch’s multitude of “case-law” instructions. God chose to make the Sabbath an integral part of the “moral law,” thus emphasizing and enshrining its moral nature. For any human being to separate it from the other nine commandments of the Decalogue or to declare it to be “ceremonial” flies in the face of what God Himself has proclaimed.

B. Historical Books, Psalms, and Prophets

In Israel’s OT history subsequent to that covered in the Pentateuch, references to the Sabbath are comparatively fewer than in the books of Moses. However, the evidence for Israel’s continuing observance of the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath is clear and has not been seriously disputed by modern OT scholarship. In the following synopsis, we follow a basically chronological presentation of the biblical data.

1. Eleventh - and Tenth-Century References

The earliest post-Pentateuchal references to Sabbath observance are found in 1 and 2 Chronicles. Samuel the prophet and David established various persons “in their office of trust” (1 Chron. 9:22). Among these were certain Kohathites who “had charge of the showbread, to prepare it every Sabbath” (verse 32). Again, when David “was old and full of days,” he “assembled all the leaders of Israel and the priests and the Levites” (23:1 , 2), arranging various temple duties (23:1–28:21). In this context, there is reference to burnt offerings to the Lord “on sabbaths, new moons, and feast days” (23:31). The same days are mentioned in Solomon’s communication with Hiram of Tyre for help in building the Temple (2 Chron. 2:4). After the Temple was built and dedicated, Solomon offered the required offerings on those same days (8:13). Thus there is evidence of liturgical continuity with the Pentateuchal prescriptions that distinguished the three categories of “holy convocations” from the ordinary days.

2. Ninth-Century References

Two ninth-century Sabbath references appear in 2 Kings. The first of these (2 Kings 4:18–37) reports that when the son of a Shunammite couple died suddenly, the mother requested that her husband provide a donkey and a servant so that she could travel to visit the prophet Elisha. Not knowing that their son was dead, the father queried, “Why will you go to him [Elisha] today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath” (verse 23). This oblique reference to the Sabbath thus provides evidence for the religious nature of that day. It was obviously a day considered especially appropriate for visits to God’s prophets.

The second reference, 2 Kings 11:4–20 (cf. 2 Chron. 23:1–11), reports the coup d’état organized by Jehoiada, the high priest, in which he overthrew Athaliah and placed 7-year-old Joash on the throne. The day was the Sabbath, at the time of the changing of the temple guard. This was a propitious time from the standpoint of having a double contingent of guards present for the coup. Moreover, the coup itself had spiritual dimensions in its ejection of Baal-promoting Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, and in its religious consecration of the new king as he stood by one of the two pillars at the temple entrance (verse 14).

3.Eighth-Century References

a.Historical literature. The earliest eighth-century reference to the Sabbath in the OT historical literature is a notation in 2 Kings 16:18 of King Ahaz’ removal of the “covered way for the sabbath which had been built inside the palace.” This, along with acts of desecration in the Temple itself (cf. verse 17), was “because of the king of Assyria” (verse 18) and thus a part of the apostasy of Ahaz under Assyrian influence. In 2 Chronicles 31:3 , in connection with the great reform accomplished by Hezekiah, the king provided the “burnt offerings for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the appointed feasts.”

b.Rebukes by the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. Three of the earliest writing prophets—Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah—make pertinent references to the Sabbath. Amos, in his rebuke to the evildoers in the Northern Kingdom, quotes them as asking when the Sabbath would be over, “that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances” (Amos 8:5). Hosea, too, brings an indictment against Israel, quoting the Lord as saying, “I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts” (Hosea 2:11). Isaiah, in a sweeping complaint to Judah for mere formalistic religion, declares in a similar vein, “Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly” (Isa. 1:13).

Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah thus provide evidence that Sabbath observance was considered normative for God’s people in both Israel and Judah. The people in both kingdoms were, however, performing a heartless type of religious practice that included mere formalistic Sabbath observance.

c. Positive references in Isaiah. Isaiah furnishes some beautiful discussions of genuine Sabbathkeeping. The first of these, in Isaiah 56:2–8, takes the form of an extended beatitude. It pronounces a blessing upon the person “who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil” (verse 2). Then it reaches out to encompass foreigners and eunuchs (verses 3–7). The eunuchs who keep God’s Sabbaths and hold fast to His covenant will receive “a monument and a name better than sons and daughters” (verse 5), and the foreigners “who join themselves to the Lord” and keep the Sabbath will be made joyful in God’s house of prayer (verses 6, 7).

In Isaiah 58:13, 14, the Sabbath is mentioned within the context of a passage that expresses what a true fast involves. The specific Sabbath statement reads as follows:

“If you turn back your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Here the Sabbath is set forth as a day that God’s people are to honor. They are to refrain from doing their own pleasure on that day. And God promises that He will, in turn, provide them with rich spiritual and temporal blessings. The expressions “my holy day” and “the holy day of the Lord” have a parallel in the term “my sabbaths” in Isaiah 56:4.

Isaiah’s final reference to the Sabbath appears in 66:22, 23. Here an assurance is given concerning the future: “For as the new heaven and the new earth which I will make shall “remain before me, says the Lord; so shall your descendants and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord.”

4. Late-Seventh - and Sixth-Century References

a. Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah, whose prophetic ministry spanned some four decades from c. 626 to 586 B.C., reminded Judah’s royalty and people that on the Sabbath they should refrain from carrying burdens into Jerusalem, from bearing burdens out of their dwellings, and from doing any work, as God had commanded their forebears (17:21, 22). He promised glory and longevity for Jerusalem for obedience, and threatened a devouring, unquenchable fire to the city’s palaces for disobedience (verses 24–27).

Destruction did come to Jerusalem. In three campaigns Nebuchadnezzar subdued Judah, deported its inhabitants, and destroyed the temple. In this setting we find Jeremiah’s one further clear reference to the Sabbath: The “Lord has brought to an end in Zion appointed feast and sabbath, and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest” (Lam. 2:6).

b.Ezekiel. Ezekiel, exiled to Babylon, refers repeatedly to Sabbathbreaking in contexts that also mention other aspects of apostasy. In Ezekiel 20:12–24 the prophet brings out forcefully the intent and effect of true Sabbathkeeping: “Moreover I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I the Lord sanctify them” (verse 12); and “hallow my sabbaths that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I the Lord am your God” (verse 20). These statements are in a context that reiterates Israel’s wilderness experience at the time of the Exodus; thus they provide an obvious linkage to Exodus 31:13–17 , where the Sabbath is referred to as a “sign” of God’s sanctification of His people and of His Creatorship. They also reiterate the basic Pentateuchal emphasis on the Sabbath as a holy day (Ex. 20:8–11 ; Lev. 23:3) and on Israel as a holy nation or holy people (Ex. 19:6 ; Lev. 19:2).t

In addition to reaffirming the meaning of the Sabbath as a “sign” (Ex. 31:13–17 ; see I. A. 2 . f), Ezekiel has added an item: *knowledge* that the Lord sanctifies His people (20:12) and that Yahweh is their God (verse 20). This knowledge surely includes an intellectual awareness, but a far richer meaning also resides within the term: It includes and evidences the concept of a close *personal relationship*. For the ancient Hebrew, the matter of “knowing” involved first and foremost a relationship. And thus Ezekiel 20:12 , 20 sets forth—indeed, instructs and commands—a deep, genuine, and continuing spiritual encounter between God and His people that bonds them to Him in the closest possible personal relationship.

Several further references to the Sabbath occur in Ezekiel’s “ideal-temple” section in chapters 40–48 . Here, “the Levitical priests, the sons of Zadok” (44:15), “shall keep my [God’s] sabbaths holy” (verse 24). The prince was to furnish “the burnt offerings, cereal offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the new moons, and the sabbaths” (45:17). Finally, on Sabbaths and at the time of new moons, the “gate of the inner court that faces east”—a gate “shut on the six working days”—was to be opened for worship and for the appropriate liturgical activities (46:1–3).

5.Fifth-Century References: Nehemiah

Nehemiah, the Jewish leader after the return from Babylon, makes three references to the Sabbath. The first is in a penitential prayer affirming that God had given to Israel “right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments,” and had made known to them the “holy sabbath,” as well as “statutes and a law by Moses” (9:13 , 14). This statement shows recognition, as late as the fifth century, of a distinction between the commandments that God gave directly, including the Sabbath, and the ordinances that God gave through Moses. This distinction was blurred in later Judaism.

The other two references are in connection with a Sabbath reform. The people promised to desist from engaging in commerce with the “peoples of the land” on the Sabbath and other holy days. They likewise promised to maintain the service of God’s house, including the offerings for “the sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts” (10:31–33). Later, when Nehemiah saw agricultural products prepared and traded on the

Sabbath (13:15 , 16), he ordered the city gates of Jerusalem closed “when it began to be dark ... before the sabbath,” and not opened “until after the sabbath” (verse 19).

II. The Sabbath in the NT

A. Gospels

The NT presents important information about Sabbath theology and Sabbathkeeping. In particular, the teachings and practice of Jesus reveal the fundamentals that should guide His followers in regard to the Sabbath. In this section we review the main instances wherein Jesus taught by example, by word, and through miracles of healing the essence of true Sabbath observance. In evaluating Jesus’ Sabbath conflicts with the Jews, in which He even faced the charge of Sabbathbreaking, we must be aware of what was at stake: the question of the validity of the “oral law.” The Sabbath disputes arose, not over matters prohibited in the OT , but in connection with the traditions that had developed during intertestamental times (see V. A.2).

A basic principle enunciated by Jesus was that He came not to destroy the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17 , 18). This principle was exemplified in His treatment of the Sabbath and other stipulations of the Decalogue, such as honoring one’s parents and refraining from murder (verses 21 , 22 ; 15:3–6). His whole attitude was one of exalting the divine law; but this caused Him to come into conflict with Jewish additions to, and interpretations of, that law. His Sabbath activities and teaching, as portrayed in the four Gospels, reveal a recapturing of the original intent of the Sabbath by returning to its full, inward, spiritual meaning.

Some of the references to the Sabbath in the four Gospels involve no controversy of Christ with the scribes and Pharisees, whereas others reveal some sort of polemical setting and/or aftermath.

1. The Sabbath in Noncontroversial Settings

a. Jesus’ synagogue attendance. Jesus attended the synagogue on the Sabbath (Mark 1:21 ; 6:2 ; Luke 4:16 , 31 ; 13:10). According to Luke 4:16 , His “custom” was to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. By synagogue attendance, Jesus manifested His positive attitude toward the Sabbath as a time for “holy convocation” (Lev. 23:3).

b. Sabbath counsel in Matthew 24:20 . A statement in Jesus’ eschatological discourse recorded in Matthew 24 indicates the same sort of positive Sabbath emphasis. In predicting the time when Roman armies would take Jerusalem, Jesus urged His disciples, “Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath” (verse 20). The hardship of winter is readily understandable, but why would the Sabbath be mentioned? It is sometimes suggested that flight on the Sabbath would be difficult because of Jewish interference; however, if the Jews were occupied in warfare the Sabbath would be a propitious time to leave the city. Nor is there cogency to the concept that the “Sabbath-

day's journey" would be a hindrance, for the type of Sabbathkeeping set forth in the Gospels implies Christian rejection of this extrabiblical device (moreover, even Rabbinic tradition allowed flight for the purpose of saving life). The implication of the text is that the disciples should pray that their flight not be on the Sabbath to avoid an experience that would diminish their ability to engage in normal Sabbathkeeping and thus lessen their sense of Sabbath sacredness.

c.Sabbathkeeping when Jesus was in the tomb. Luke 23:54–56 provides an example of Sabbathkeeping on the day that Jesus was in the tomb. The women noted where His body was laid, then “prepared spices and ointments,” and on the Sabbath “rested according to the commandment.” They waited until early on “the first day of the week” to return to the tomb to anoint the body, but found it empty (Luke 24:1–3). The “commandment” that they had observed was obviously the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue. Their continued Sabbath observance at the time of Jesus’ death indicates that they followed His own example of Sabbathkeeping. It also undercuts the theory that Jesus had a negative attitude to the Sabbath that supposedly provided a basis for later rejection of the Sabbath.

d.Earliest recorded healings. The earliest recorded examples of healings by Jesus on the Sabbath appear not to have raised any controversy. Both Mark and Luke describe the healing of a demoniac who interrupted the synagogue service in Capernaum on a Sabbath (Mark 1:21–28 ; Luke 4:31–37). Later, evidently on the same Sabbath, Jesus also healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a high fever (Matt. 8:14 , 15 ; Mark 1:29–31 ; Luke 4:38 , 39). More healings followed after sundown (Matt. 8:16 ; Mark 1:32–34 ; Luke 4:40).

2.Sabbath Incidents Involving Controversy

a.Plucking grain on the Sabbath. The first Sabbath conflict recorded in the three Synoptic Gospels relates to whether it was lawful for Jesus’ disciples to pluck wheat heads on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1–8 ; Mark 2:23–28 ; Luke 6:1–5). The disciples picked heads of wheat and ate them after “rubbing them in their hands” (Luke 6:1). While the OT allowed persons going through a grainfield to so engage themselves to satisfy their hunger, the Pharisees challenged Jesus.

According to the oral law (later codified in the Mishnah and Talmuds), Jesus’ disciples were guilty regarding two main categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath: reaping and threshing (see V. A.2). Jesus defended the disciples, calling attention to David’s eating showbread when he was hungry, and He referred also to the fact that the priests in the Temple did extra work on the Sabbath and were guiltless (Matt. 12:3–5). Likewise, His disciples now were guiltless. Jesus further stated, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here” (verse 6), and also indicated that the Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa (Mark 2:27). All three Synoptics conclude with the forceful statement of Jesus that “the Son of man is lord of the sabbath” (Matt. 12:8 ; Mark 2:28 ; Luke 6:5 ; see Creation II. C).

b. Sabbath healings in the Synoptics. In Matthew 12:9–13, Mark 3:1–5, and Luke 6:6–10, there is record of the healing of an individual whose right hand was withered. The regulations as later codified in the Mishnah allowed that a sick or injured person could be treated on the Sabbath, but only if the situation was life-threatening. This case was chronic, and obviously not covered by this provision. Hence the scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus, “‘Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?’ so that they might accuse him” (Matt. 12:10 ; Luke 6:7). Jesus responded by asking, “What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?” (Matt. 12:11). Since rabbinical regulations allowed this, the basic question put to the Pharisees was whether less should be done for a human being (verse 12). Jesus confronted the Pharisees with an even stronger query: “Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4). For them to omit doing good was considered doing evil. So the failure to heal the man with a withered hand would be contrary to their own basic principles. Jesus “looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart” and healed the withered hand (verse 5).

Two further healings that raised questions are recorded by Luke: the “woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years” and the man with dropsy (13:10–17 and 14:1–6). In connection with these healings, Jesus again referred to the more humane treatment of animals on the Sabbath than what the scribes and Pharisees were willing to allow for human beings.

c. Sabbath healings in John. Two of Jesus’ Sabbath healings are recorded only in the Gospel of John: in 5:2–9 that of a lame man at the Pool of Bethzatha (Bethesda), and in chapter 9 that of a man born blind. In the first case, Jesus healed the man and commanded him, “Rise, take up your pallet, and walk” (5:8). The man arose and did exactly as he was told (verse 9), thus demonstrating that his healing was real and complete. This activity led to controversy with the Jews (verses 10–16), inasmuch as the healed man had broken the law pertaining to bearing a burden on the Sabbath, one of the 39 main classes of work later codified in the Mishnah. Jesus put this healing action within the context of “My Father is working still, and I am working” (verse 17). God was constantly active in sustaining the universe and also in the work of redemption of human beings. Jesus claimed simply, but forcefully, that He was participating in this ongoing divine redemptive activity, an activity fully compatible with the intent of the Sabbath. (See Creation II. C.)

That more than physical healing was involved is evident by the words of Jesus when He later found the man in the Temple, “Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you” (verse 14). The wellness of the man involved a spiritual dimension along with the physical. The same dynamic is revealed by Jesus’ healing of the paralytic in Capernaum (Matt. 9:1–7 ; Mark 2:1–12 ; Luke 5:17–25), whose sins Jesus forgave, giving evidence “that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins” (Matt. 9:6). The message is precisely the same as the one proclaimed in the healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethzatha. These miracles were thus a proclamation of Jesus’ divinity and Messiahship.

In the case of the healing of the man born blind, the Pharisees accused Jesus of not keeping the Sabbath (John 9:16). But again, what Jesus had failed to observe was the Pharisaical rules of Sabbathkeeping, not Scriptural injunctions. Indeed, Jesus called this miracle a work of God (verse 3). Just before performing this healing, Jesus spoke words very similar in meaning to those He had pronounced in connection with the healing at Bethzatha. Now He said, “We must work the works of him [the Father] who sent me, while it is day” (verse 4). This miracle revealed again Christ’s participation in the work of God the Father, and thus Jesus here too called attention to Himself as the Messiah, through whom divine grace and blessing are bestowed.

3. Significance of Jesus’ Sabbath Healings

a. Reasons for the Sabbath healings. Jesus could have restricted His healing miracles to days other than the Sabbath, but He did not. In fact, the Gospels appear to place a special emphasis on the Sabbath healings, which engendered controversy with the Jews. Through them Jesus taught lessons about true Sabbathkeeping. More fundamentally, by these miracles He called attention to His divinity, to His oneness with the Father, and to His work of salvation. The controversy over Sabbath healings gave a heightened opportunity for Jesus to teach the vital truths pertaining to His salvific work. Moreover, that the two Sabbath healings mentioned by John took place in Jerusalem at the time of annual feasts enhanced Jesus’ opportunity to proclaim truths vital for the salvation of human beings.

b. Healings as a proclamation of Jesus’ mission. The two Sabbath healings recorded by John are noteworthy because of the discussion that followed and because they were links in a progression of events affirming Jesus’ mission. When Jesus healed the lame man at the pool of Bethzatha and proclaimed that both He and His Father were working, the Jews understood this as a claim to equality with God and “sought all the more to kill him” (John 5:18). Jesus put forth a number of significant points: (1) The Son does the same things that the Father does (verse 19); (2) “the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him” (verse 20); (3) “as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will” (verse 21); (4) the Father, who has life in Himself “has granted the Son also to have life in himself” (verse 26); (5) the Father “has given all judgment to the Son” (verse 22); (6) the person “who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (verse 23); and (7) those who hear Christ’s word and come to Him have “eternal life” (verse 24 ; cf. verses 39 , 40).

Jesus’ teaching here, as in the following chapters, is that real life, “eternal life,” is available to human beings and that they can receive it only through Him. This is, in fact, the basic message introduced by John at the outset of his Gospel: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4).

“Eternal life,” which has Christ as its one and only Source, is what Jesus’ Sabbath healings are really about. In Jesus’ discourse at the Pool of Bethzatha the term itself occurs twice (John 5:24 , 39) and recurs in later chapters (John 6:27 , 40 , 47 , 54 , 68 ;

10:28 ; 17:2 , 3). Jesus made clear that this abundant life (John 10:10)—a life of fullness, wholeness, richness—begins *now* qualitatively for those who accept Him and His salvation (see John 5:24). Christ also gives assurance that this life will be extended into eternity when He raises the dead “at the last day” (John 6:40 ; also cf. 5:28 , 29 ; 6:39 , 40 , 54 ; 1 Cor. 15:51–54 ; 1 Thess. 4:16 , 17).

B. Acts, Epistles, and Revelation

1. Acts

The evidence of the book of Acts indicates that after Jesus’ resurrection the apostles continued to observe the Sabbath. In Antioch in Pisidia (in Asia Minor), Paul and Barnabas attended and participated in synagogue worship services two weeks in succession (Acts 13:14 , 42–44). Some years later, during Paul’s second missionary journey, Paul and Silas met on the Sabbath with a group of women gathered by the riverside in Philippi (16:12 , 13).

When Paul reached Thessalonica, he went into the synagogue “as was his custom” (17:2 ; an expression similar to the one about Jesus in Luke 4:16). On the three Sabbaths that he was in Thessalonica he expounded “from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead” (17:2 , 3 ; RSV translates *sabbata* in verse 2 as “weeks” instead of “sabbaths,” but since the account refers to Paul’s activity in the synagogue, the translation “sabbaths” or “sabbath days” is undoubtedly correct).

Later Paul worked in Corinth for a year and a half (18:1–18). During the week he engaged in his occupation as a tentmaker (verse 3), but “in the synagogue every sabbath” he argued and “persuaded Jews and Greeks” (verse 4). However, during part of his stay in Corinth he taught “the word of God” (verse 11) in the house of Titius Justus because of the Jewish opposition he encountered in the synagogue (verses 6 , 7).

The book of Acts thus records a number of instances of Sabbath observance by Paul and his companions. On the other hand, there is no account of these apostles having ever observed the first day of the week for worship services. Two references that have been suggested as evidence for regular Sunday worship services— Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 —are really nothing of the kind. The first actually refers to a night meeting for a special occasion (according to biblical reckoning, Saturday night); and the second suggests that money be laid aside *at home* (not in the church or synagogue) for a collection to be gathered later.

2. Epistles

Only two references in the NT Epistles use the word “Sabbath” (though with different Greek words, as we will note below): Colossians 2:16 and Hebrews 4:9 .

a. Colossians 2:14–17 . Modern scholars recognize that Colossians 2:2–23 is polemic against heretical teachings, possibly gnostic in nature (see especially verses 8–11 , 18–23). In this context we find a reference to God “having canceled the bond which stood against us” (verse 14) and the injunction therefore to “let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath,” which “are only a shadow of what is to come,” with “the substance” belonging to Christ (verses 16 , 17).

Some versions translate the sabbath reference as “sabbath days.” Whether the Greek used here, *sabbatōn*, is plural or singular is not clear. Many commentators have suggested that the text refers to the “sabbaths” or holy days of the Mosaic “ceremonial law,” not to the weekly Sabbath.

Such commentators and interpreters, however, generally have not grappled with the fact that the reference in Colossians 2:16 seems comparable to the repeated OT references to a trilogy in the pattern of annual-monthly-weekly observances (in that order or in the reverse). It is not absolutely certain, of course, that the heresy at Colossae involved this threefold group of celebration days, therefore the terminology here might not be comparable to that of the OT . It is also possible that Paul was using the common literary device of inverted parallelism, thus moving from annual to monthly and then back again to annual festivals.

In any case, what must not be overlooked is the fact that the very context in which the trilogy of terms is mentioned in Colossians deals, not with days per se, but with *ceremonies*. The text refers to temporal celebrations in which “food and drink” were present. In short, Colossians is here dealing with a ceremonialism that had lost sight of Christ, who is the very substance to which the OT ceremonies pointed).

It is striking too that in the OT references to the trilogy of celebrations invariably deal, not with the observance of the days, but with the way in which those holy days were related to specifications of the “ceremonial law” (1 Chron. 23:31 ; 2 Chron. 2:4 ; 8:13 ; 31:3 ; Isa. 1:11–14 ; Eze. 45:17). A misguided emphasis on ceremony and a self-satisfaction with “formalism could lead to a meaningless religious exercise, whether in OT or NT times. Colossians 2:16 , 17 gives precisely the same kind of message as Isaiah 1:11–14 ; in neither case is the sanctity of God’s appointed weekly day of worship in question. What is under attack in both instances is only a heartless “ceremonialism,” with Colossians going on to countermand the judgmentalism of some advocates of now-obsolete ceremonial observances.

Thus the *sabbatōn* reference in Colossians 2:16 neither suggests nor implies that the seventh-day Sabbath itself was abolished. Moreover, the well-attested Sabbath practice of the apostles flies in the face of any and all attempts to use Colossians 2:16 as an evidence that the seventh-day Sabbath had been abrogated.

b. Hebrews 3:7–4:13 . In the section of the book of Hebrews 3:7 through 4:13 the term *katapausis* occurs eight times (3:11 , 18 ; 4:1 , 3 [twice], 5 , 10 , 11), and the verb

katapauō occurs three times (4:4 , 8 , 10). All are usually rendered “rest.” The word *sabbatismos* occurs once (4:9), rendered “sabbath rest.” Thus the idea of “rest,” including “sabbath rest,” is obviously a key concept here. This passage in Hebrews constitutes a hortatory/homiletical exposition of Psalm 95:7–11 , which refers to the failure of the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings. Their failure led, in turn, to God’s oath that they would not enter His rest.

This particular line of thought in the psalm is introduced by the appeal, “O that today you would hearken to his voice! Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah” (verses 7 , 8). This statement is foundational to the entire passage in Hebrews (see 3:8 , 13 , 15 ; 4:7), with the word “rest” being used metaphorically to represent the salvation experience in Christ (cf. Matt. 11:28–30). This “rest” may also include a further, eschatological fulfillment. The book of Hebrews, in common with other NT literature, places stress both on the present faith experience and on the time of ultimate rewards (see Heb. 10:25 and Heb. 11).

In Hebrews 4:4 , allusion is made to God’s resting from His work at the time of Creation; the reference to the Sabbath (4:9 , 10) draws upon this: “So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; for whoever enters God’s rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his.” Various interpretations have been given as to what is meant here by “sabbath rest.” Because of the strong emphasis on patterning after God’s example, some have claimed that it refers to Sabbathkeeping. On the other hand, it has been unwisely used to bolster weekly Sunday observance, in spite of the fact that Sunday is nowhere mentioned in the passage. The “another day” of verse 8 is not Sunday, but clearly refers to a *time* that is future to that of Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan.

In view of the “rest” concept within the entire pericope, those who interpret the statement about “sabbath rest” in a metaphorical sense appear to be doing the best justice to what is intended. Unfortunately and incorrectly, some exegetes have argued that because the Sabbath rest is here used metaphorically to typify an experience in Christ, this must be evidence that the weekly Sabbath had been abrogated. More cogent, however, is the opposite view, for unless the weekly Sabbath was indeed being observed by the addressees of the book of Hebrews, the force of the homiletical/theological argument would be lost. Thus although Hebrews 4:9 , 10 does not deal primarily with Sabbath observance, it does provide indirect corroboration of apostolic observance of the seventh day of the week.

3.Revelation

Revelation 1:10 uses the expression “Lord’s day” to designate the day when John received his vision on the Isle of Patmos. This term obviously stands in contrast with the Roman emperor’s days: It exalts the Lord Jesus Christ over Domitian, who had banished John to Patmos and who enjoyed having himself referred to as “Lord and God.”

Many interpreters have concluded that this was the first day of the week, or Sunday. However, not until about a century later do we find the earliest example of “Lord’s day”

used in a patristic source to signify the weekly Christian Sunday (see V. B. 2. b). Methodologically, it is not sound to read this usage back into the NT , where there is no prior or contemporary evidence for it. The Gospel of John, dating to perhaps a few years from the writing of Revelation and which should therefore be a particularly helpful source, consistently uses the designation “first day of the week” for Sunday. Not once does it use “Lord’s day,” a strange phenomenon if “Lord’s day” were already the Christian designation for Sunday.

A minority of interpreters claim that John was carried in vision to the end-time, and that this is the meaning of his use of “Lord’s day.” There is no linguistic basis for such usage (the expression differs from “day of the Lord” and “day of Christ”). Moreover, since the first vision and several of the others have at least their initial sections pertaining to John’s own day, it is untenable to invest the term “Lord’s day” in Revelation 1:10 with future eschatological implications.

Several lines of evidence indicate, instead, that the seventh-day Sabbath was the “Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10 : 1. This day had consistently been honored by Christ and His apostles through attendance at worship services; additionally, it was the day of which Christ expressly called Himself Lord (Matt. 12:8 ; Mark 2:28 ; Luke 6:5). 2. The book of Revelation is immersed in OT language and imagery, and therefore there may be special relevance for Revelation 1:10 in the fact that the OT refers to the Sabbath as God’s holy day (Isa. 56:4 ; 58:13 ; Eze. 20:12 , 13 , 16 , 20 , 21 , 24 ; 22:8 , 26 ; 23:38). Revelation shows a particular closeness to basic concepts and imagery in Ezekiel, and it is significant that Ezekiel is the OT prophet who most repetitively used the phrase “my [God’s] sabbaths.” 3. The message of the first angel of Revelation 14:6 , 7 emphasizes Creation language that is similar to that in the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue; this message is also linked with the psalm of praise ordered by King David at the time when the ark containing the Ten Commandments was brought to Jerusalem (see 1 Chron. 16:7–36). 4. The emphasis of the book of Revelation on the commandments of God (cf. Rev. 12:17 ; 14:12) suggests the totality of God’s requirements, including Sabbath observance.

C. Summary of the NT Evidence

The NT evidence reveals that Christ and His apostles regularly honored the seventh-day Sabbath by attending “holy convocations” (usually in synagogues). Moreover, nowhere in the NT is there evidence of any other day being honored as a day of worship. Furthermore, there is no evidence of Sabbath-Sunday controversy in the NT . Whenever a major change in religious practice occurs, controversy inevitably ensues, as in the case of circumcision in the NT . But nowhere in the NT is there any polemic whatever regarding worship on the seventh day of the week. This fact becomes an added strong evidence for the continuance of Sabbath observance. In the NT period, the seventh day of the week was the one and only *Christian Sabbath*.

III.A Biblical Theology of the Sabbath

The axiom that religious practices are no better than the theology that informs and undergirds them applies to Sabbathkeeping and Sabbath theology as well as to all other facets of religious observance. This fact highlights the importance of having an intelligent Scripture-based understanding of genuine Sabbathkeeping. But there is also a further consideration: The Sabbath is not an end in itself, but a manifestation of an inward experience. For Christians, the center of religious experience is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and through Him also with God the Father (John 14:9 , 21 , 23 ; 17:21–23 , 26). This relationship is the heart of the experience reflected in the Sabbath. Every aspect of Sabbath theology, as well as the Sabbath practice that it informs, is an outworking of, and reflects a vital relationship with, the Godhead.

For a Sabbath theology to be valid, it must be Bible based, thoroughly rooted in the OT and NT . In this respect a theology of the seventh-day Sabbath is completely different from any so-called theology of the “Sunday sabbath,” which has no divine word pertaining to it, for nowhere in the Bible is there any mention of special sanctity for Sunday. On the other hand, Scripture contains numerous references that describe the nature of the seventh day of the week and declare that it is the day that God set apart for worship and rest.

In examining the theology of the Sabbath, we relate it to other biblical doctrines. The final picture should present an intertwined whole.

A. The Sabbath and the Doctrine of God

The basic question that we must ask is, “What does the Sabbath teach us about God?” The following list, though by no means exhaustive, draws attention to some of the main features of the nature, character, and activity of God that are illuminated by the Sabbath as set forth in Scripture.

1. God as Creator

God is the omnipotent Creator, whom human beings need to recognize and revere, and with whom they need fellowship in order to have fullness of life. This message comes through clearly in Genesis 1 and 2 , as well as in the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue and in various other Sabbath passages. The Creator provided the Sabbath as a blessing to human beings, who need the special fellowship with their Creator that the Sabbath memorializes and fosters.

We must remember that Christ, the divine Son of God, as well as God the Father, participated in Creation and in the establishment of the Sabbath. Without Christ “was not anything made that was made” (John 1:1–3); “in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible” (Col. 1:16).

2. God as Redeemer

God is the all-sufficient Redeemer and Saviour, whose redemptive action precedes a covenant relationship with His redeemed people. Among the Scriptures we earlier noted, Exodus 31:17 and Ezekiel 20:12, e20 refer to the Sabbath as a sign of the lordship of Yahweh and to Him as the Sanctifier. Also, in direct connection with the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, the Decalogue's historical prologue refers specifically to Yahweh's mighty redeeming act in saving His people from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 20:2 ; Deut. 5:6). Furthermore, Moses' reiteration of the Sabbath commandment contains a reference to God's saving activity (Deut. 5:15).

The Sabbath as a sign of redemption actually has precedence over the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation. Only those who are redeemed by Christ can truly recognize and understand what Creation means. Indeed, the example of God's redemption of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage leads our minds to the redemption made available through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That redemption is, in fact, what makes all lesser redemptions, including the Exodus from Egypt and Israel's deliverance from Babylon, efficacious and meaningful.

3. God as Covenant Maker

God loves fellowship with His created beings. This was demonstrated at Creation by His setting apart the Sabbath as a special day of fellowship with the human beings He had created. Christ's ministry on earth bears out this same lesson. He fellowshiped with His people on the Sabbath and daily manifested a close relationship with them. Just as the Sabbath was intended in biblical times to be a day for God's children to have special fellowship with Him and with their fellow worshipers, so its purpose is still the same today.

The sin problem and God's deliverance of human beings from it have brought an added dimension to God's fellowshiping with humankind. Those who accept the divine saving grace are distinguished from the rest of humanity by being placed in a covenant relationship with God. In the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai, His prior goodness in delivering the Israelites from Egyptian bondage formed the basis for the relationship. And among that covenant's stipulations—the Ten Commandments—the Sabbath was so integral that it was itself referred to as “a perpetual covenant” (Ex. 31:16).

Covenants have mutual obligations. At Sinai, the great Sovereign Suzerain of the universe stooped down to enter a formal covenant with the people He had delivered from cruel bondage. That covenant guaranteed His continuing care and protection for them, but required in turn their obedience in manifestation of their loyalty to Him. The covenant relationship that was thus developed made Israel a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6). This description is echoed in the NT regarding the Christian church (1 Peter 2:9 ; Rev. 1:6). The NT new covenant, which is grounded directly in the salvation brought about at infinite cost to the Godhead, guarantees God's continuing care. But it also requires obedience to God's commandments in gratitude and loyalty to Him (Heb. 8:10 ; 10:16 ; cf. Jer. 31:31–33).

4. God as Giver of Good Gifts and Sustainer of His Creation

The Sabbath, in calling attention to God's creative and re-creative activity, shows His generosity. In Eden He bestowed everything needed by His created human beings. This included life itself, human and divine fellowship, complete health and happiness, a perfect environment, and all the talents and mental and physical capabilities necessary for humanity to function well. Through the redemption and salvation made possible by Christ's sacrifice, all the blessings of a renewed fellowship with God are restored. Through Christ, human beings can receive forgiveness of sin, spiritual revitalization, and the joy and internal peace that only His salvation can bring. Beyond this, God provides physical blessings even to those who do not recognize Him. In the words of Christ, the Father in heaven "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45).

This statement by Jesus is a declaration that God is the Sustainer of all, who constantly watches over His created human beings and meets their needs. This aspect of the Father's and Christ's character and activity is also set forth in the pronouncement that Christ made after one of His Sabbath miracles of healing: "My Father is working still, and I am working" (John 5:17). Indeed, Christ's Sabbath healings are themselves a powerful witness to the fact that God is the great Sustainer as well as the Saviour and the Giver of all good gifts (James 1:17)

5. God as the Ultimate in Fairness

Yahweh is the ultimate in fairness. He "shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34). The seventh-day Sabbath is a very special token and demonstration of God's complete and unswerving fairness. It is a gift to mankind that is equally applicable and accessible to everyone. It comes everywhere with the same regularity and in the same amount. Furthermore, in connection with Sabbathkeeping among the ancient Israelites, God specified that all—the servant and the alien as well as the landowner (Ex. 23:12)—should have this one day every week free from their common labors, thus showing total impartiality.

6. God as Perfection

God is perfect. The basic witnesses to this are the facts of Creation and redemption, which the Sabbath serves to memorialize. In the beginning God's works were perfect, and they remained so until sin brought a blight upon His creation. The salvation that Christ offers is perfect. Jesus Christ is both the "pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Moreover, Christ's Sabbath miracles and His discourses in connection with them reveal the perfection of the Godhead in the work of salvation. Finally, we must note that the "new heaven and the new earth" which God will create will also be perfect (Isa. 66:22 ; Rev. 21:1-4).

7. Christ's Divinity

Christ is God. The Sabbath testifies to the divinity of Christ by means of His declaration that He is Lord of the Sabbath (Matt. 12:8) and through His Sabbath healing miracles. He is the Lord of the Sabbath because He made it. His healings involved not only supernatural physical cures, but also the forgiveness of sin and the granting of spiritual wholeness, giving indisputable witness to His divine nature and underscoring the truth of His claim to be one with His heavenly Father (John 5:17 , 19 , 20 ; 9:3–5 ; 10:30). Thus the Sabbath helps us to recognize the divinity of Christ. (For other aspects of the doctrine of God, see God I-VIII.)

B. The Sabbath and the Doctrine of Humanity

1. The Sabbath and Human “Createdness”

The inverse side to the question of what the Sabbath teaches us about God is “What does the Sabbath tell us about ourselves as human beings?” By calling our attention to Creation week, the Sabbath reminds us that we are created “beings. As such, God has given us a variety of capabilities and talents, commensurate with the activities in which human beings can engage. Our first parents were created in the image of God, and that image has in certain ways lingered on, in spite of the distortions brought to it by sin. Among the capacities that God has given to the human family are those of fellowship, love, compassion, and the variety of emotions that we experience. Though some of these have been severely constricted or even obliterated by sin, God’s redemption in Christ can and does restore them to those who accept Christ’s saving grace.

The fact of our being created individuals carries with it a variety of aspects of “createdness” and “creatureliness.” In our createdness, we are mortal. When God created human beings, He did not bestow upon them immortality, pthus all human beings have been subject to death. God alone has immortality (1 Tim. 6:16). Only He can bestow immortality, and this He will do for His faithful followers when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:51–54 ; 1 Thess. 4:15–17).

As the Sabbath leads us to consider our human “createdness” and “creatureliness,” it reminds us that we are neither omnipotent nor omniscient, but that we live and perform solely within the limited sphere of life and capability that our Creator has bestowed upon us. This should foster in us a spirit of true humility, for the fact that all human beings owe their existence and talents to the same sovereign God leaves no room for any to boast. Indeed, the realization of our own human createdness should give us an attitude of respect and care for all other human beings. In addition, it should make us sensitive to our environment as we realize that God has made us caretakers of it.

2. The Sabbath as a “Leveler”

The Sabbath, by calling our attention to Creation and to our own createdness, has a “leveling” effect. As noted previously (III. A. 5), the Sabbath is equally accessible to all human beings with the same regularity and in the same quantity. In addition, God indicated the applicability of its rest to *all* persons, servants and aliens as well as property

owners. The universality of the Sabbath is set forth also by Isaiah in his reference to its observance by “foreigners who join themselves to the Lord” (Isa. 56:6 , 7). As a portion of time, the universality of the Sabbath places it within reach of all human beings, impartially and cost-free.

3.The Sabbath and Our Value to God

The Sabbath also teaches that we are of value to God and that He has given us remarkable potential. One of the expressions of His love for us is the very fact that He gave the Sabbath to the human beings whom He created, so that they could have special fellowship with Him. But all the other blessings—life itself, human fellowship, a beautiful environment, and intellectual and physical strength—have also come from Him. Thus human beings are capable of undertaking worthwhile and challenging enterprises that can result in valuable contributions to God and to society. God has given us a sequence of six days in which to do meaningful work. Just as He saw that what He had created in six days was “very good” (Gen. 1:31), we at the end of our six days of work can turn in gratitude to Him for what He has made possible for us to accomplish.

4.The Sabbath and Fellowship, Love, and Compassion

The Sabbath reminds us that God has bestowed on human beings the need for fellowship and the capacity to love, care, and be compassionate. The Sabbath was to be a day for holy convocation (Lev. 23:3). It was also a reminder to the ancient Israelites that because God had been very kind in delivering them from Egyptian bondage they should act compassionately, treating their fellow human beings with love and kindness.

C. The Sabbath and the Doctrine of Salvation

Sin disrupted God’s original plan for the human beings He created, but through Christ that plan has been reinstated and is functional for all who accept His saving grace. The Sabbath has a role in dealing with the sin situation, for it is a sign of the sanctifying power and lordship of Christ. It helps us to realize our need of redemption, of salvation, of restoration. It turns our minds to Him who alone holds the remedy that overcomes the sin disease and its enslavement. The Sabbath, by pointing to Christ as the Redeemer, helps us to recognize our need for salvation and the infinite expense to God the Father and to Jesus in providing it.

The biblical basis for the soteriological significance of the Sabbath emerges from several considerations: 1. The obligation for keeping the Sabbath, along with the other nine commandments of the Decalogue, was set forth at Sinai in the framework of God’s redeeming love and saving activity. 2. The Sabbath was declared to be a sign that Yahweh is the God of His people and that He sanctifies them. 3. Rightly observed, the Sabbath results in delighting oneself in God as set forth in Isaiah 58:13 , 14 . 4. Christ’s Sabbath healings forcefully illustrate His power to heal spiritually as well as physically. Indeed, Christ is the only Saviour. It was He who redeemed Israel from Egyptian

bondage (see 1 Cor. 10:1–4), and it is He who forgives sins and gives to sin-shackled human beings both freedom and wholeness.

As a concluding remark about the Sabbath in relationship to salvation, we repeat that for human beings in a world of sin the Sabbath as a sign of redemption has precedence over it as the sign or memorial of Creation. The work of “re-creation” must come to us first if Creation and our Creator are to have real meaning to us. This does not demean or lessen the importance of the Sabbath as a memorial of Creation, but simply calls attention to the vital fact that for human beings under the bondage of sin, a release from that bondage precedes and is basic to all knowledge of, and relationship to, God. Meaningful Sabbathkeeping occurs only within a personal fellowship with Christ.

D. The Sabbath and the Doctrine of the Church

As we have seen, the Sabbath is a “leveler” both by its very nature and by its keeping us aware of our createdness. But the Sabbath is also a “leveler” in its soteriological dimension, not only because of the need for salvation that is shared by *all* human beings, but because those who accept it in their lives are brought into a fellowship in which there “is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female,” but all are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This fellowship is Christ’s *ekklēsia*, the Christian church.

The Sabbath as a sign of Christ’s redeeming power gives it a role in creating loving respect throughout the entire Christian fellowship. It reminds us that we all share a common salvation and that the One who is our Lord and Saviour is also the Lord and Saviour of our Christian brothers and sisters. As we worship together from Sabbath to Sabbath, we grow in mutual love and respect. The bond among genuine followers of Christ becomes so close, in fact, that they are imbued with the spirit of Christ’s saying, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). When Jesus spoke these words, He undoubtedly thought of His own impending death, but His statement also had a predictive and promissory significance for all Christians. The statement carries the implication for the corporate life of the church that each individual member so loves his or her brothers and sisters in Christ as to be willing, ready, and happy to take death in their place. And indeed, early-church history testifies repeatedly that true Christians, when persecuted, fulfilled Jesus’ words.

The ecclesiological aspect of the Sabbath has another important facet, one that relates to the work of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the congregation and for its outreach to the world at large. This is God’s giving of special gifts to the Christian community through the Holy Spirit, endowments that are appropriately called spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:4–8 ; 1 Cor. 12:4–11 ; Eph. 4:11–14). On the Sabbath various of these gifts are manifested publicly. Moreover, the fact that the Sabbath is a sign of redemption should make us grateful, not only for the gifts which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon us, but for the gifts He has bestowed upon others. And as church members work together, they should seek to affirm the spiritual gifts of one another. (See Spiritual Gifts II.)

E. The Sabbath and the Doctrine of Last Things

Ancient Judaism had a saying that the Sabbath was a foretaste of eternity in this world (Mishnah *Tamid* 7. 4). It would not be surprising if NT Christians held a similar concept, but concerning this there is no entirely clear Scripture evidence. While the “rest” in Hebrews 3:7–4:13 may possibly be taken as referring to the new earth, the main emphasis is on the spiritual experience in Christ that begins in the present age. This experience is, of course, the beginning of eternal life and will continue in heaven and the new earth.

Despite the nearly universal disregard of the Sabbath among contemporary Christians, the Scriptures continue their call for its observance in honor of Christ as Creator and Redeemer. Such a condition inevitably involves the Sabbath in controversy.

The Sabbath will have a special place, as well, in the final crisis of this earth’s history. Near the end of this age there will be an upsurge of demonic power. The wrath of Satan, the dragon of Revelation 12, is directed toward the remnant of the woman’s (the church’s) offspring (Rev. 12:17), and the nature and intensity of this wrath are subsequently elaborated in 13:11–17. This last-day remnant is described as keeping God’s commandments and having the testimony of Jesus Christ (12:17). A false mark, the mark of the beast, is forced, with severe sanctions, upon the world (13:16, 17). This mark stands in contrast with God’s sign, which is set forth in Scripture as the seventh-day Sabbath. Just as the Sabbath was a sign for the ancient Israelites that Yahweh was their God, in the end-time crisis it will be a sign of loyalty to God by those who keep *all* of His commandments. It will display the full trust of Christ’s people in His saving power and will signify their rejection of the beast entity and the latter’s mark. (See Remnant/Three Angels V ; Great Controversy V. A-D.)

IV. The Importance of the Sabbath for Christians

Believers who observe the Sabbath according to the biblical instructions do so with joy, not by constraint. In the Sabbath they see evidences of God’s love; they also understand that by observing the Sabbath they reciprocate His love. True Sabbathkeeping Christians think far less of Sabbath restrictions than of Sabbath privileges.

The Sabbath is the high day of the week. When God in His omniscience and goodness saw fit to create this world and do it in six days of creative work, He also saw fit to add one more day—a day of “cessation” or “rest”—to complete the seven-day week. That day is made even more special because Yahweh blessed it and hallowed it (Gen. 2:3). The Sabbath remains for humanity a particularly significant parcel of time, whose meaning and whose physical and spiritual blessings are today as rich as ever. Therefore, for us who live in this generation, the Sabbath’s divine enrichments still apply and can be experienced fully. When through Christ’s grace we accept and live in the joy of the Sabbath, it becomes truly *our* crowning day of the week.

The mature Christian experiences the Sabbath as a vital part of abundant life, the “eternal life” in Christ, which begins qualitatively now and is extended quantitatively to all eternity at the Second Advent. The growing Christian finds that the Sabbath provides closer fellowship with Christ, while at the same time that very fellowship with Christ—along with the spiritual rest, joy, and assurance that it gives—leads to a better understanding of the Sabbath and into enhancement in the experience of Sabbathkeeping. From both perspectives, the Sabbath is not a burden, but rather a pleasant release from the humdrum that so frequently fills the other six days of the week. It encapsulates, as it were, the “rest” in Christ, of which He spoke: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28–30).

The basis for both our Sabbath theology and our Sabbathkeeping is a close personal relationship with Christ, our Saviour. He is the Center from which all of our religious beliefs and activities radiate. Without Him they are null and void, for He is the perfect one, in and through whom alone we can grow up in valid and meaningful Christian experience.

Genuine Sabbathkeeping presupposes a “holiness” of life that is found only in Christ. In the OT , God emphasized repeatedly to Israel their need to be holy because He is holy (e.g., Lev. 11:44 ; 19:2 ; 20:26). This is a theme reiterated for Christians in the NT (1 Peter 1:15 , 16). Ellen White has pointed out that “the Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy” (DA 288) and that “in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy” (*ibid.* 283). Another writer has aptly stated, “The Sabbath has no meaning at all unless creative power accomplishes its result in the life of the one who observes the day. Holiness *of* time must match holiness *in* time” (Kubo 49).

V. The Sabbath in History

A. Intertestamental Period and Early Judaism

1. Intertestamental Period

The intertestamental period (late fifth century B.C. through early first century A.D.) has many lacunae with regard to the precise development of Judaism and its practices. Nonetheless, some documentation exists.

a. The Elephantine Jews . Documentary evidence from Elephantine, an island in the Nile River in Upper Egypt, near modern Aswan, indicates that a colony of Jews existed there as early as the fifth century B.C. In the 1940s specialists studied a group of inscribed potsherds from this Elephantine Jewish colony. Two of these mention the Sabbath only obliquely, but nonetheless thereby give an awareness of the Sabbath. Two others, however, are more specific. In one case, a woman named Yislah is ordered to “arrange” (“bind” [?]) an ox on (or before[?]) the Sabbath, lest it become lost. In the other case, a certain task, possibly the receiving of a shipment of fish, was to be done prior to

the Sabbath. Whatever religious syncretism may have existed in the practices of the Elephantine Jews, they displayed some concern for proper Sabbath observance.

b. Maccabean defensive war . By the outbreak of the Maccabean revolt (166–142 B.C.) against the Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Jews had an established tradition of total noncombatancy on the Sabbath. Early in the Maccabean struggle, however, when the enemy troops routed and killed some thousand Jews (1 Macc. 2:31–38), the Maccabean leader Mattathias and his companions determined that *defensive* warfare was proper for the Sabbath (verses 39–41).

In 63 B.C. Pompey the Great, a Roman general, used the Sabbath days for military preparations such as raising earthworks against the walls of Jerusalem; finally, after a three-month siege, he entered the city on a Sabbath. Again in 37t B.C. it was on a Sabbath that the Romans captured Jerusalem.

c. The books of Judith and Jubilees . Two OT pseudepigraphical works provide information regarding the Sabbath. Judith and Jubilees both date to the mid-to-late second century B.C. The concept of nonfasting on the Sabbath occurs in both works. Concerning Judith (supposedly a heroine of the Exile period, but most likely a fictional character), it is reported that after her husband died of sunstroke during the barley harvest, “she fasted all the days of her widowhood, except the day before the sabbath and the sabbath itself” (Judith 8:2–6). The book of Jubilees prescribes the death penalty for Sabbath fasting (50:12, 13). The death penalty is also indicated for traveling, kindling a fire, slaughtering, trapping, and fishing, and making war on the Sabbath.

Among other activities prohibited on the Sabbath, on pain of death, are spousal cohabitation; discussion of business matters, including travel plans; drawing up water; and picking up anything to carry out of one’s dwelling (50:8). The only types of permissible Sabbath activity relate to (1) eating, drinking, resting, and blessing God; and (2) burning frankincense and bringing gifts and sacrifices before the Lord (50:9–11). God and the angels are portrayed as having kept the Sabbath in heaven before it was made known to any human being on earth (2:30).

2. Rabbinic Tradition

The first comprehensive written codification of the oral law was the Mishnah, produced early in the third century A.D. This document furnishes a good picture of the type of legal tradition operative among the Jews in NT times. Although the Sabbath is mentioned in a number of the Mishnah’s 63 tractates (or “books”), two of them are devoted specifically to the Sabbath and the “Sabbath-day’s journey”— *Shabbath* and ‘ *Erubin*, respectively.

The tractate *Shabbath* sets forth 39 main classes of work that must be avoided, and indicates numerous activities that fall under each of them. The main classes are the following: “sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or

dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting fire, striking with a hammer and taking out aught from one domain into another” (*Shabbath* 7. 2).

These 39 main classes have numerous subsections. For instance, quantity limitations were specified for products or objects that could be carried on the Sabbath: “straw equal to a cow’s mouthful,” “milk enough for a gulp,” “rope enough to make a handle for a basket,” and many others (*Shabbath* 7. 2–8. 7). Among further illustrations from the tractate *Shabbath* are the following: “Greek hyssop may not be eaten on the Sabbath since it is not the food of them that are in health” (14. 3). A person whose teeth are paining “may not suck vinegar through them but he may take vinegar after his usual fashion, and if he is healed he is healed” (14. 4). Various knots are listed that may not be tied or untied on the Sabbath, but one rabbi declared that nobody “is accounted culpable because of any knot which can be untied with one hand” (15. 1). If water was drawn from a well or cistern, a gourd weighted with a stone could be used; but if the stone should fall out, the person would be culpable (17. 6), presumably because the stone was not part of the vessel for drawing water but had been instead a burden within that vessel.

Work, as understood by the rabbis, meant *purposeful* activity, done in the *normal manner*. Thus, writing with one’s foot or mouth or elbow, not being the ordinary way to write, was exempt from culpability. Further complicating the situation was the lack of agreement of the authorities on exactly what actions made a person culpable (*Shabbath* 12. 3–12. 5).

The tractate ‘ *Erubin* relates to distances people could travel or move on the Sabbath, such as the 2,000-cubit “Sabbath-day’s journey.” This distance could be extended, however. If before sunset at the beginning of the Sabbath, an individual would go 2,000 cubits from the city where he lived and place there the amount of food for two meals and declare in the proper way that this was his ‘ *erub*, that location would technically become his dwelling for the Sabbath. Then on the Sabbath itself he would be able to go to that place plus another 2,000 cubits beyond it, and thus a total of 4,000 cubits.

The ‘ *erub* was also used in connection with the moving of objects from one dwelling to another. This overcame the four-cubit limitation on movement that pertained to individual residences. If food were placed jointly by occupants of neighboring dwellings in the common courtyard before the beginning of the Sabbath and the ‘ *erub* declared, the various dwellings (and the common courtyard) could be considered as one larger dwelling. Thus, on that Sabbath, foodstuffs or other objects could be carried into the courtyard and back and forth among the participating dwellings. But there were restrictions: For instance, two outer courtyards making ‘ *erub* with a courtyard between them would be allowed access to it, but the two outer courtyards were not allowed access to each other (‘ *Erubin* 4. 6). The various activities and circumstances involving the use of the ‘ *erub* are multitudinous.

The foregoing examples from the Mishnah show how Rabbinic tradition both “fenced in” the law and liberalized Sabbath restrictions. For instance, the rigorous rules about moving objects on the Sabbath, based on the elaboration of the restrictions in Jeremiah 17:22, were mollified. A further illustration of the liberalizing attitude is that in order for there to be culpability for Sabbathbreaking, one’s *complete act* of work must be done in error. If persons “began the act in error and ended it wittingly, or if they began it wittingly and ended it in error, they are not liable: ... unless both the beginning and the end of their act were done in error” (*Shabbath* 11. 6). If a person threw something on the Sabbath and then remembered it was the Sabbath, but the object was intercepted by another human being or a dog, or burned up, the individual would not be culpable. If an object were thrown to wound either a man or an animal, but before the wound was actually inflicted, the individual who threw the object remembered that it was the Sabbath, he would not be culpable for Sabbathbreaking.

The casuistry of the scribes in developing the oral law provided such a multitude of human restrictions and accommodations that only the teachers of the law were able to grasp and cope with the various nuances. The common people, by and large, were greatly bewildered, and thus gained a reputation for ignorance regarding the law.

In spite of such a cumbersome load of restrictions and modifications, ancient Judaism considered the Sabbath a day of special privilege and delight. On Friday evening the Sabbath was welcomed with special joy. The Sabbath noonday meal was to be particularly good, and by no means should it be missed. Sabbath rules were relaxed for certain occasions, such as religious festivals, and in cases of extreme emergency.

3.Essenes and Boethusians

Josephus refers to the Essenes as the strictest sect of the Jews. They were a minor, but nonetheless significant, party during the NT epoch. An Essene work composed probably not more than a century later than the book of Jubilees, and referred to as the Zadokite Document or the Damascus Document, gives numerous specifications concerning the Sabbath (10. 14–11. 18). Its general thrust parallels to a great degree that of the material in the book of Jubilees. However, the death sentence is not mentioned for Sabbathbreaking (possibly because by this time the “power of life and limb” was in Roman hands). Moreover, the Sabbath-day’s journey was not to be more than 1,000 cubits (half of that allowed by the Pharisees), although in going after an animal on the Sabbath to pasture it, a person could go 2,000 cubits. The Damascus Document also stipulates that infants should not be carried around on the Sabbath, that animals were not to be assisted in giving birth to their young on the Sabbath, and that if a newborn animal would fall into a cistern or a pit it should not be lifted out on the Sabbath. Josephus notes that the Essenes would not even allow defecation on the Sabbath (*Wars* 2. 8. 9)!

Although the Sadducees, the priestly aristocracy of the NT, were Hellenizers, they followed the norms of the Pharisaic party in basic Jewish religious observances. A Sadducean subgroup known as Boethusians appears to have approached the Essene rigors. In common with the Essenes Boethusians followed a solar calendar that

eliminated the possibility of having the annual festivals ever fall on a weekly Sabbath. In their view this provided a safeguard for the Sabbath.

4.Philo and Josephus

At the time of transition to the NT epoch in the first half of the first century A.D. Philo of Alexandria provides insights into Sabbath theology and activities. These were given in an apologetical context and reflect the situation in Alexandria rather than Palestine. Philo speculates on the meaning of the number seven, refers to the Sabbath as the birthday of the world, and treats the philosophical meaning of rest, including the aspects of equality and freedom inherent in the Sabbath commandment (*Special Laws* 2. 15; and *Decalogue* 20).

As for practice, Philo refers to attendance at the synagogue on Sabbaths for the purpose of studying “philosophy”—i.e., the OT . Undoubtedly he used the term because of the philosophical orientation at Alexandria and his own philosophical bent. He states further that the Sabbath should be devoted solely to philosophy aimed at improvement of character and submission to conscience (*On Creation* 43). Jewish synagogues were “schools of good sense,” where temperance, courage, justice, and other virtues were fostered (*Special Laws* 2.15). Utilizing leisure time in such places for the pursuit of wisdom was far superior, he felt, to the debilitating effect of spending time in sports and entertainment (*Moses* 2. 39).

Josephus, also, in the latter half of the first century A.D. , speaks of the Jews setting the seventh day apart from labor and dedicating it to the learning of Jewish customs and laws (*Antiquities* 16. 2. 3). Moreover, he describes the practice of a priest in Jerusalem standing near the tower at the southwest corner of the Temple and blowing a trumpet to signal the approach of the Sabbath on Friday afternoon and also at the Sabbath’s close on Saturday evening (*Wars* 4. 9. 12). He gives, as well, evidence of the normative Jewish tradition of nonfasting on the Sabbath, mentioning the requirement of eating the noon meal on the Sabbath (*Life* 279).

B.Sabbath and Sunday in the Early Church

1.The Origin of Sunday Observance

The precise sequence of events that led to the rise of a weekly Sunday is somewhat obscure. It is clear that Sunday observance did not originate as a substitute for the Sabbath. Not until the fourth century did Sunday begin to replace the Sabbath as a rest day; until then the weekly Christian Sunday had been a workday, with time set aside for special worship services.

An *annual* Sunday resurrection celebration may have been antecedent to the weekly Sunday observance that eventually came to be recognized as a resurrection festival. In the NT , the Jewish Passover was considered as typifying the real Paschal Lamb; likewise,

the Jewish firstfruits celebration was considered as typifying Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 5:7 ; 15:20).

According to Leviticus 23:11 , the wave sheaf was to be offered on the "morrow after the sabbath." The Pharisees interpreted that day as the day after the Passover Sabbath. They killed the Passover lamb on Nisan 14 , celebrated the Passover Sabbath on Nisan 15 , and offered the firstfruits wave sheaf on Nisan 16 , regardless of the day of the week on which those dates might fall. In contrast, the Essenes and the Sadducean Boethusians interpreted the "morrow after the sabbath" as the day after a weekly Sabbath, and thus *always* a Sunday.

Christians celebrated their Resurrection "firstfruits" festival *annually*, not weekly, and most likely kept it in harmony with their previous custom in the Jewish celebration of the firstfruits. Thus early Christians adopted both types of Jewish reckoning—the Pharisaic and the Essene-Boethusian—as is evidenced by the "Easter Controversy" of the late second century.

Eventually this *annual* celebration may have spread into a *weekly* one because of a variety of factors, such as anti-Jewish sentiment (especially prominent in Rome and Alexandria) and the downgrading of the Sabbath through the Sabbath fast. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that the seven weeks between Easter and Pentecost had special significance for certain segments of the ancient church, and a practice of honoring the Sundays during this season eventually may have spread throughout the year.

2.Sabbath and Sunday in the Second and Third Centuries

a.Earliest information. Three second-century references to a day of rest should be mentioned, because they have been argued as attesting either Sunday or Sabbath observance, though none specifically mentions either day. These are Ignatius of Antioch; Pliny, a Roman governor of Bithynia; and the *Didache*.

Around A.D. 115 Ignatius of Antioch wrote an epistle to the Magnesians in Asia Minor, in which he warned these Christians against an extreme variety of Judaistic practice. In *Magnesians* 9. 1, he speaks of "no longer sabbatizing but living according to the Lord's, in which also our hope has risen in him." This has often been interpreted as "no longer keeping the Sabbath, but living according to the Lord's day [Sunday]." The word "day" is not in the Greek, but has been supplied. In place of adding the word "day," one could supply the word "life," which would give the translation "living according to the Lord's life." Either meaning is possible by the Greek construction used, but "Lord's life" seems especially fitting in view of the fact that in it (or, by it) "our hope has risen in him [Christ]."

The expression "sabbatizing" reflects a general lifestyle rather than observance of a day. A fourth-century interpolator of Ignatius did not equate "sabbatizing" with Sabbathkeeping, but encouraged observance of both Sabbath and Sunday. His only objection was to the Jewish *type* of Sabbathkeeping (see V. B. 3. a). The context of

Ignatius' statement—an appeal to the example of the OT prophets (8. 2–9. 1)—suggests that he was dealing with a *manner of life* rather than with days of worship. Those OT prophets, who no longer were sabbatizing and were living according to the “Lord’s,” did not keep the first day of the week, but kept the seventh-day Sabbath.

A letter of Roman governor Pliny to the Roman emperor Trajan in A.D. 112 speaks of practices of Christians in Bithynia. Some of these Christians had apostatized; and when interrogated by Pliny about their earlier beliefs and practices, they indicated that the extent of their wrongdoing had been that before sunrise on a “stated day” (or “fixed day”) they had met and sung hymns to Christ as to a God (*Letters* 10. 96). This practice looks more like an annual resurrection-day sunrise celebration than it does the observance of either a weekly Sabbath or a weekly Sunday.

An instructional manual entitled *Didache*, perhaps dating to the early second century, urges in its chapter 14 that “according to [or “on”] the Lord’s of the Lord” there be assemblage, the breaking of bread, and the holding of Eucharist. This text has been interpreted as referring to a weekly Sunday celebration, to an annual Easter, or to the seventh-day Sabbath. The context and nature of the statement, however, makes a totally different suggestion seem more viable: that *instruction* (or “command” or “doctrine”) is the noun to be supplied. This would give the reading, “according to the Lord’s instruction.”

b.Second-century Church Fathers. The earliest reference that reveals honor to Sunday as a day for weekly Christian worship comes from the *Epistle of Barnabas of Alexandria* (c . 130). In a thoroughly allegorical discourse, Barnabas refers to the Sabbath as a sign of the millennium and to the “eighth day” (Sunday) as a symbol of the new earth; he also seems to suggest that the “eighth day” is either the day being kept by Christians or the day that should be so kept (*Epistle* 15).

If Barnabas is somewhat ambiguous, Justin Martyr in Rome (c . 150) provides unequivocal evidence. In his *Apology* to the Roman emperor and senate, he describes the Sunday-morning worship service with which he was familiar (*1 Apology* 67). The service apparently took place in the very early morning. Recent scholarly examination, however, raises question whether section 67 may be a later interpolation. Justin’s *Dialogue With Trypho the Jew* sets forth Justin’s view of the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. In his polemic in this work Justin denigrates the Sabbath, as the following statement shows: “Do you [Trypho] see that the elements are not idle, and keep no Sabbaths? Remain as you were born” (23).

Toward the end of the second century Clement of Alexandria berated the Sabbath and favored the first day of the week. In a variety of speculative ways, Clement gave priority to the first day of the week. He is also the earliest Church Father to refer to the weekly Sunday as “Lord’s day,” doing so in a curious and highly allegorical reference to the Greek philosopher Plato (428–348 B.C.): The “Lord’s day Plato prophetically speaks of in the tenth book of the *Republic*, in these words: ‘And when seven days have passed to

each of them in the meadow, on the eighth they are to set out and arrive in four days' ” (*Miscellanies* 5. 14).

Irenaeus of Gaul (fl. c . 175–200), applied “Lord’s day” to Easter Sunday in his treatise *On Easter* (no longer extant). An unknown later writer indicated that for Irenaeus “Pentecost” was “of equal significance with the Lord’s day.” Thus Irenaeus’ “Lord’s day” was the annual Easter, for the comparison is obviously between two *annual* festivals (*Fragments From the Lost Writings of Irenaeus* 7).

c.Second-century apocryphal sources. Two apocryphal sources refer to “Lord’s day,” perhaps two or three decades earlier than Clement of Alexandria (though the dating is uncertain): The Gospel of Peter speaks of Christ’s resurrection as occurring on the “Lord’s day” but does not mention the keeping of either an annual or a weekly celebration of that day. The Acts of John relates that the apostle John broke his fast “on the seventh day, it being the Lord’s day.” In the latter source we find John traveling as a prisoner, and possibly the seventh day of the journey is intended. However, inasmuch as the church in the East did not fast on the Sabbath (see V. B. 3. b), John would be breaking his fast on that day. Neither of these two apocryphal sources deserves great credence. But the fact that the Acts of John and the book of Revelation both come from the Roman province of Asia suggests a common usage and meaning of the term “Lord’s day” for the seventh-day Sabbath in these Acts and Revelation 1:10 .

d.Third-century Church Fathers. During the third century A.D. Christian observance of Sunday on a weekly basis became rather widespread. However, there was as yet no basic controversy over the Sabbath, except in a few places, such as Rome, Alexandria, and the “area around Carthage, which was influenced “by Rome. Just as in NT times, such silence as to controversy would be an indication that generally throughout Christendom the status quo was being maintained.

In Rome and North Africa there were differences of view. In contrast to the earlier polemic of Justin Martyr, Hippolytus of Rome in the early third century strongly objected to fasting on both Sabbath and Sunday. In Rome the practice of fasting every Sabbath had arisen, making the Sabbath a day of gloom rather than of joy. Never was there a fast on Sunday, however, and Hippolytus argued for a similar honor for the Sabbath.

In North Africa, Tertullian, a contemporary of Hippolytus, at first seemed negative toward Sabbathkeepers, since he felt that their practice of not kneeling on the Sabbath was causing dissension (*On Prayer* 23). (In the Roman West, kneeling was considered a negative mode, not proper for a day of joy, and therefore Christian worshipers did not kneel on Sunday.) Later, however, he defended the Sabbath, vigorously opposing the Sabbath fast (*Against Marcion* 4. 12, 30, and *On Fasting* 14). We may conclude that in Rome and North Africa, the Sabbath had not entirely disappeared. Throughout the rest of Christendom the lack of polemic indicates that whatever Sunday observance did exist was not considered as interfering with the Sabbath.

3.Sabbath and Sunday in the Fourth Through Sixth Centuries

a. Fourth century. In the early fourth century Constantine's famous Sunday edict of March 7, 321, had a most striking bearing on both Sabbath and Sunday. It reads as follows: "On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or for vine-planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost" (9BC 999).

This edict obviously lacked in Christian orientation, for it refers to Sunday as "the venerable Day of the Sun." Moreover, Constantine's regulations were not patterned after the OT Sabbath, for he exempted agricultural work, a type of work specifically prohibited in the Pentateuch. A further edict dated July 3 of the same year provided military regulations regarding Sunday.

Some sixty-five years later, in A.D. 386, the emperors Theodosius I and Gratian Valentinian forbade litigation and the payment of public or private debt on Sunday. Subsequent rulers extended restrictions even more, so as increasingly to "sabbatize" the Christian Sunday.

The earliest known ecclesiastical enactment rejecting Sabbath observance and replacing it with weekly Sunday observance comes from a regional council in Laodicea thought to have taken place about A.D. 364. In its Canon 29 this council stipulated, "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day [Sunday] they shall especially honour, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ" (Hefele 2:316).

Loyalty to the seventh-day Sabbath did not succumb without a struggle. In fact, in the fourth century we find considerable polemic regarding Sabbath and Sunday. In contrast with the enactment of the Council of Laodicea, a fourth-century compilation known as the *Apostolic Constitutions* states, "Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath-day [Saturday] and the Lord's day [Sunday] let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety" (8. 33) and, "But keep the Sabbath [Saturday], and the Lord's day festival [Sunday]; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection" (7. 23). The same source contains several other similar statements (2. 36; 2. 47; 7. 36). At about the same time, the interpolator of Ignatius advised: "Let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all the days" (*Magnesians* 9).

b. Fifth century. In the fifth century John Cassian (360–435) made reference to church attendance on both Saturday and Sunday, stating that he had even seen a monk who sometimes fasted five days a week but went to church on Saturday or on Sunday and brought home guests for a meal on those two days (*Institutes* 5. 26). Other statements of Cassian also refer to church services on both Sabbath and Sunday (*Institutes* 3. 2; *Conferences* 3. 1). Another Church Father who made favorable mention of both days is

Asterius of Amasea. About the year 400 he declared that it was beautiful for Christians that the “team of these two days comes together”—“the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day”—each week assembling the people with priests as their instructors (*Homily 5*, on Matt. 19:3).

Augustine (354–430), bishop of Hippo in North Africa, dealt in several of his letters with the controversy over Sabbath fasting (*Epistles* 36 [to Casulanus], 54 [to Januarius], and 82 [to Jerome]). In the letters to Casulanus and Januarius, he noted that the large Christian church in Milan did not observe the Sabbath fast (36. 32 and 54. 3, respectively).

Augustine made clear, as well, that Sabbath fasting was limited to Rome and some other places in the West (36. 27); churches in the East and “by far the greater part of Christendom” did not observe the Sabbath fast (82. 14). Cassian’s testimony is similar, for he states that “some people in some countries of the West, and especially in the city [Rome]” were fasting on the Sabbath (*Institutes* 3. 10).

Especially interesting are the records of two church historians of the fifth century. Socrates Scholasticus (fl. c . 440) wrote, “Although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries [the Lord’s Supper] on the sabbath [Saturday] of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this” (*Ecclesiastical History* 5. 22). Sozomen, a contemporary of Socrates, wrote, “The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria” (*Ecclesiastical History* 7. 19). It is pertinent to recall here that Rome and Alexandria were the only two cities displaying a negative attitude toward the Sabbath as early as the second century (see V. B. 2. b).

c.Sixth century. During the sixth century major steps were taken toward bringing about the demise of the Sabbath and promotion of Sunday observance. Certain theological rationales downplayed the importance of the Sabbath, but much more significant were the decrees of church synods and the ordinances of rulers. In A.D. 538, the Third Synod of Orleans forbade “field labours” so that “people may be able to come to church and worship” on Sunday (Hefele 4:209). Whereas Constantine’s Sunday law had exempted agricultural labor from Sunday observance, now “field labours” were specifically included. This was a giant step toward applying the Pentateuch’s Sabbath specifications to Sunday. The Second Synod of Macon in 585 and Council of Narbonne in 589 decreed further stipulations for very strict Sunday observance (*ibid.* 407, 422). Moreover, the ordinances of Macon “were published by King Guntram in a decree of November 10, 585, in which he enforced careful observance of Sunday” (*ibid.* 409). Thus a civil authority rendered support to the church, a phenomenon that grew in magnitude and scope during the next several centuries. By the end of the sixth century Sunday had supplanted the Sabbath well-nigh universally in Europe. It now served “as the Christian weekly day of rest as well as of worship.

d. Sabbath and Sunday in Ethiopia. At least in some parts of the country or among certain groups of people in Ethiopia there developed a somewhat different relationship between Sabbath and Sunday. In the so-called *Egyptian Church Order*, apparently based on Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* of the early third century, there is in the Ethiopic version a prescription stipulating that on both the Sabbath and first day of the week "the bishop, if it be possible, shall with his own hand deliver to all the people, while the deacons break bread." The same document indicates that both of these days were considered different from the "other days," and there is, in fact, even a reference to these two days as "sabbaths" (*Statutes of the Apostles* 66).

C. The Sabbath in the Middle Ages and Reformation Era

From the sixth century onward rigid Sunday observance developed in Europe. During the early Middle Ages the first day of the week increasingly came to be looked upon as having the characteristics of the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue. There is no evidence in this period, however, of any widespread use of the word "sabbath" as a designation for Sunday. In Europe the expression "Lord's day" was the common one used for the first day of the week. But in Ethiopia, the tradition of considering both Saturday and Sunday as "sabbaths" continued on into modern times.

1. The Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages a Catholic theology developed concerning Sunday as fulfilling the Sabbath commandment. The concept was that the stipulations of the commandment remained intact, but the specific day had been changed from Saturday to Sunday by the Catholic Church. The specifications were considered to be moral and continuously binding, whereas the choice of the day itself was looked upon as ceremonial and therefore temporary, transitory, and subject to change by the church.

Several ninth-century sources reveal clear evidence of an awareness of Sunday's being a replacement for the Sabbath, such as Canon 50 of the Synod of Paris of A.D. 829. But the classical theological formulation came with Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), who nevertheless did not think that the Sunday sabbath needed to be as strictly observed as the OT Sabbath. He stated that in its literal sense the "commandment to keep the Sabbath [in the Decalogue] is partly moral, and partly ceremonial"—moral in that human beings should set aside some time for concentrating on the things of God, and ceremonial as to the particular time set apart (*Summa Theologica* 2a2ae. 122. 4).

During most of the medieval period there is evidence of strong efforts by both ecclesiastical authorities and secular rulers to enforce Sunday observance. Nevertheless, some Christians in Europe refused to discard the Saturday Sabbath. Glimpses of such Sabbathkeepers come from the late Middle Ages: a case of Sabbathkeeping in England in 1402; a group of some 16 to 18 persons arrested in Douai, France, in 1420 because of their theological views and practices that included Sabbathkeeping; and Sabbathkeepers in Norway in 1435 and 1436. The information in each of these instances comes from the opponents of the Sabbathkeepers. However, in the early sixteenth-century documentary

evidence from Norway cites ecclesiastical prohibition of Saturday Sabbathkeeping on the one hand, and of some small degree of clerical encouragement for such Sabbathkeeping on the other.

2. The Reformation Era

a. Major Reformers. Because Martin Luther (1483–1546), the pioneer Protestant Reformer, emphasized Christian freedom and opposed the numerous ceremonies and “ceremonial strictness” of the Roman Catholic Church, he felt that neither Sabbath nor Sunday was a divine requirement and that the Catholic sabbatizing of Sunday was invalid. Since, however, it was important to have one day each week for worship services, Luther selected Sunday, for this was the traditional weekly worship day on which people were accustomed to gather for church.

John Calvin (1509–1564) held a view similar to Luther’s regarding the observance of Sunday as a convenience rather than a necessary requirement in fulfilling a divine prescription for weekly worship. Calvin differed from Luther, however, in rejecting the Catholic distinction between moral and ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath commandment, a distinction which Luther retained. Calvin believed that the Sabbath had been abrogated, with Sunday being substituted for it by the early Christian church. He also elucidated more clearly than Luther a theology of the Sabbath by pointing out three main functions: (1) the Sabbath is important for spiritual growth; (2) it is the anchor for public worship; and (3) it has social and humanitarian benefits in its practical concern for giving rest to servants. These elements were enunciated as early as his 1536 edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Martin Bucer (1491–1551), the prominent Reformer in Strassburg, was renowned for his spirit of openness and toleration, but rather strangely he heralded a strict Sunday observance. On Sundays no one was to perform “unnecessary corporal works,” even useful ones, and “no works of the flesh” (remunerative labor, repayment of debts, sports, etc.) should be engaged in, nor should there be absenteeism from religious gatherings (*De Regno Christi* 2. 10). In 1532 Bucer and his colleagues went so far as to ask the Strassburg civil authorities to put an interdiction on all Sunday work except activities necessary to satisfy bodily needs. By 1534 the city passed an ordinance to this effect, with heavy financial penalties for noncompliance.

Close associates of Luther in Wittenberg, such as Philip Melancthon (d . 1560), adhered basically to Luther’s position. In Zurich, Ulrich Zwingli (d . 1531) and his followers treated their Sunday observance in much the same way. A notable exception was a former friend and colleague of Luther’s, Andreas Bodenstein von Carlstadt (d . 1541), who, to the dismay of Luther, in 1524 published a treatise in which he set forth rather strict Sabbath observance. In it Carlstadt also indicated that Sunday was a day “which men have established” and referred to the Saturday Sabbath as a disputed matter.

Certain early-sixteenth-century English Reformers, such as William Tyndale (d . 1536), went further than Luther and Calvin in playing down the need for any specific day

of the week as the day for congregational worship. In fact, Tyndale suggested that the main day for worship could be every tenth day, if this would be helpful toward counteracting superstition. In practice, however, he followed the usual custom, which dictated that the weekly gathering in England, as elsewhere, be on the first day of the week.

b. Sixteenth-century Sabbathkeepers. In Europe during the Reformation Era, Sunday was by far the predominant day for Christian worship services, but some groups made Saturday their main worship day. In a relatively few instances they observed both Saturday and Sunday.

The most striking example of seventh-day-Sabbath observance in Europe during the sixteenth century is that of a few Anabaptist groups. The detailed evidence concerning their beliefs comes by way of their detractors. In an effort to discredit these Anabaptists, their opponents detailed what the specific Anabaptist arguments were. This is true, specifically with regard to no-longer-extant writings about the Sabbath by the Anabaptists Oswald Glait and Andreas Fischer, who had accepted Saturday as the Sabbath c. 1527 and 1528. Their biblical arguments, from both the OT and NT, are very similar to those still set forth by those who observe the seventh-day Sabbath. They also referred to the first Sunday enactment as being issued by Emperor Constantine the Great.

In Spain, a reform movement led by Constantino Ponce de la Fuente (d. 1560) included observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. Another such movement was inaugurated in Transylvania by Andreas Eössi toward the end of the sixteenth century, and flourished in the second decade of the following century. However, Simon Pechi, Eössi's successor in the leadership of these Transylvanian Sabbathkeepers, made the movement more Jewish than Christian. In the Nordic lands, a decree against Sabbathkeepers was issued in Norway in 1544, and a decade later a decree against Sabbathkeeping in Finland was issued by King Gustavus I Vasa, who ruled both Sweden and Finland. By the end of the sixteenth century there is evidence of Sabbathkeepers in Sweden. And from the Netherlands, France, Russia, and elsewhere in Europe, there are reports concerning Saturday Sabbathkeepers, but in some cases the Sabbathkeepers may have been Jews rather than Christians.

D. The Sabbath Among Puritans and Baptists

1. Puritan Sunday Sabbatarianism

The Protestant emphasis on Sunday as the "Christian sabbath" emerged in the late sixteenth century among the Puritans of England. For the Puritans, the day was honored not only with worship services, but with very strict prohibitions. This restrictiveness was not compatible, however, with the general attitude in England, especially among the Anglicans, who constituted the "Established Church." In the religious settlement made by Queen Elizabeth I there had been allowance for considerable latitude in religious belief and practice, a factor that made the Puritan stringency even more distasteful. In 1585, for

example, the Queen opposed an attempt of Parliament to pass a law for stricter sabbath (Sunday) observance.

The Sunday sabbath became a strong bone of contention between the Puritans and the Anglican party. Nicholas Bownd's *Doctrine of the Sabbath* of 1595 was a Puritan clarion cry concerning the validity of the "biblical sabbath" (Sunday sabbath) for England as a "Holy Commonwealth." Bownd utilized a "transfer theory" for making Sunday the sabbath, claiming that the apostles themselves had changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.

Puritan Sunday observance called forth a response by King James I in 1618, in his *Book of Sports*, which set forth and supported the Anglican position. Serious debate followed, and later King Charles I reissued the *Book of Sports*. Anglicans held their main weekly worship services on Sunday, but after church attendance the people were free to engage in business pursuits, sports, or other entertainments. The practice of the Puritans was in stark contrast with this, as they seriously endeavored to make their Sunday sabbath conform to the OT Sabbath regulations. Puritanism, as it came to America in the 1620s and 1630s, carried with it this same attitude of very strict Sunday observance.

2.-The Saturday Sabbath in England

Within the ranks of English Puritanism several groups emerged, including those who believed in adult baptism. These Baptists were, for the most part, also staunch Sundaykeepers. However, among them there arose certain prominent advocates of Saturday as the Sabbath. In studying the rationale for making Sunday a sabbath, they took the next logical step: they adopted *the very day* set forth in Scripture as the Sabbath.

John Traske (d . c . 1636) and Theophilus Brabourne (d . c . 1661) were among the early powerful exponents of Saturday as the true Sabbath. Nowhere in Scripture could they find a "transfer theory." What they did find was that the day of worship for Christ and His apostles had been Saturday. Beginning with a publication in 1628, Brabourne produced no fewer than four major works on the Sabbath over some three decades. Although it appears that under ecclesiastical pressure Brabourne finally returned to the Anglican position, in his publications he firmly advocated to the very end the observance of the seventh day of the week.

3.The Saturday Sabbath in the New World

In the New World (Western Hemisphere), Jewish immigrants were the first keepers of the Saturday Sabbath. The earliest Jewish settlers emigrated to Brazil from Portugal in 1502. Another group reached Mexico by 1521. Toward the end of the sixteenth century Jews settled in Argentina as well; and by the mid-seventeenth century, Jewish congregations were established in the Netherlands Antilles. The founders of the first Jewish congregation in what was later to become the United States were immigrants from Brazil who in 1654 established (*Sherith Israel* in New Amsterdam (now New York).

Seventh Day Baptists were the first Christian Sabbathkeepers in the New World, the earliest documented observance of the Saturday Sabbath being that of Stephen Mumford, who in 1664 emigrated from England to Newport, Rhode Island. There he joined the Baptist congregation, influencing some of its members to adopt the biblical Sabbath and thereby arousing serious controversy. Eventually he drew the condemnation of that congregation upon himself and his converts. In December of 1671, together with some six or seven others, he withdrew from the Newport Baptist Church and founded the first Seventh Day Baptist community on American soil. These Sabbathkeepers elected William Hiscox, one of Mumford's converts, as their first pastor. Soon Seventh Day Baptists spread into other parts of New England and even farther to the west.

Seventh Day Baptists were ardent advocates of the Saturday Sabbath, publishing and disseminating literature on the subject. With growth in its membership and in the number of congregations in America, this group of Sabbathkeepers eventually organized into a fellowship of communions during the first years of the nineteenth century. In 1818 they officially adopted the name "Seventh Day Baptist." Their *Missionary Magazine* and *Protestant Sentinel* were launched in 1821 and 1830, respectively, and were replaced in 1844 by *The Sabbath Recorder*. One of the main objectives of these journals was promulgation of material regarding the seventh-day Sabbath. A tract society was established in 1835 (since 1844 bearing the name American Sabbath Tract Society), and by 1850 a series of 17 tracts and six books about the Sabbath had been published, including a reprint of George Carlow's *Truth Defended* of 1724.

In the early nineteenth century Argentine patriot Ramos Mexía (1773–1825) studied the Bible and became convinced of the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath. On his farm south of Buenos Aires, all work ceased every week on Sabbath.

E. Jews and the Sabbath in Modern Times

In spite of restrictions codified in the Mishnah and the Talmud, Jews throughout the Common Era have been joyous and ardent Sabbathkeepers. Pious Jews welcome and cherish the Sabbath hours as if they brought the visit of a queen or bride, two of the metaphors used to describe the Sabbath. In present-day Judaism, however, strictness about traditional Sabbath observance varies among the several major groups into which Judaism has become subdivided.

Certain Jewish writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have made a considerable impact in developing theological thought about the Sabbath. Prominent among these are Samson Hirsch, Hermann Cohen, Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig, who have set forth the Sabbath's relationship to God's sovereignty, human ethics, and general morality. Cohen sees, for example, the Sabbath as the initial step toward abolishing slavery, a concept paralleling Hirsch's reference to the Sabbath's placement of master and servant on equal footing as free persons.

Perhaps no other Jewish publication in recent times has had a greater impact on Sabbath theology, however, than Joshua Abraham Heschel's *The Sabbath: Its Meaning*

for *Modern Man* in 1951. Much of the same ethical concern of the previously mentioned Jewish writers, including the concept of the Sabbath as a “leveler,” is evident in Heschel. One of his major themes is the universality of time. Among his beautiful descriptions of the Sabbath is “a palace in time,” the title of his first chapter. He points out, as well, that whereas human beings compete for space, time is always available to everyone. However, the Sabbath is a special segment of time that stands apart from time in general. Indeed, the Sabbath is “the armistice in man’s cruel struggle for existence” (29). But it is also more than this, for it is “a profound conscious harmony of man and the world, a sympathy for all things and a participation in the spirit that unites what is below and what is above” (31, 32).

F. The Sabbath in Seventh-day Adventist History and Practice

1. The Beginnings of Adventist Sabbathkeeping

The seventh-day Sabbath began to be kept by certain Adventists shortly after the Disappointment in 1844. Rachel Oakes, T. M. Preble, and Joseph Bates were the earliest Sabbath advocates. Ellen and James White soon accepted the teaching, which they presented in the “Bible Conferences” in 1848.

a. Rachel Oakes and T. M. Preble. Knowledge of the seventh-day Sabbath came to those who had been within the Millerite movement through two main avenues. One was Rachel Oakes (later married to Nathan Preston), a Seventh Day Baptist, who in early 1844 distributed Seventh Day Baptist publications among members of the Christian Brethren Church in Washington, New Hampshire. Through the influence of Oakes, Frederick Wheeler, a Methodist minister who had adopted the Adventist stance and who had this Washington church in his preaching circuit, began to observe the Sabbath about March of that year. Soon several members of the Farnsworth family and a few others also accepted the Sabbath. These formed the nucleus for the first group of Sabbathkeeping Adventists. By 1850 they joined with other Sabbathkeepers to become the nucleus of the SDA Church, which was officially organized in 1863.

The second avenue through which knowledge of the seventh-day Sabbath came to Adventist believers was an article by T. M. Preble, a prominent Millerite minister who frequently wrote for Adventist papers. He lived near Washington, New Hampshire, and may have learned of the Sabbath from someone in the Washington Christian Brethren Church. In August 1844 he began to keep the Sabbath. Moreover, he also prepared an article on the subject, published in the *Hope of Israel* of February 28, 1845. This article was later reprinted as a tract and in that form reached many Adventists, among whom was Joseph Bates.

b. Joseph Bates. Preble’s article came to Joseph Bates’s attention by March of 1845, and Bates took an immediate and strong interest in the material it presented. Bates himself soon began to write on the topic of the Sabbath, by May 1846, expressing his new convictions in a short section toward the end of a 39-page pamphlet entitled *The Opening Heavens*. This pamphlet had been inspired by his reading of O.R.L. Crosier’s

discussion of the heavenly sanctuary of Daniel 8:14 . Strangely, in his *Opening Heavens* Bates did not connect the Sabbath with the ark of the testament in heaven mentioned in Revelation 11:19 , but only with the ark in the ancient Israelite sanctuary.

Bates's first publication specifically on the Sabbath was his *Seventh Day Sabbath, a Perpetual Sign*, a 48-page tract that appeared in August 1846. Preble had referred to Daniel 7:25 as being fulfilled by the activity of the "little horn" in endeavoring to change "times and laws," and Bates followed Preble's reasoning in *Tract Showing That the Seventh Day Should Be Observed as the Sabbath* that "all who keep the first day of the week for 'the Sabbath' are the Pope's Sunday Keepers!! and God's Sabbath Breakers!!!" (10).

In his publication, however, Bates now began to move beyond the traditional Seventh Day Baptist expositions by suggesting a link between the Sabbath and the "Third Angel's Message" of Revelation 14:9–11 . In his second edition (January 1847), in his *Vindication of the Seventh-day Sabbath* (January 1848), and in *A Seal of the Living God* (January 1849), he moved progressively to an understanding of the Sabbath as linked to the ark in heaven and also as representing the "seal of the living God" mentioned in Revelation 7 .

c. James and Ellen White. Ellen Harmon apparently had her first contact with the Sabbath question in 1846, when with her sister and James White she visited Joseph Bates in New Bedford, Massachusetts. At that time she did not accept Bates's Sabbath views. On August 30, 1846, James White and Ellen Harmon were married, the same month in which the first edition of Bates's Sabbath tract appeared. The evidence in this tract led James and Ellen to begin to observe the Bible Sabbath and to teach and defend it during that very autumn (1T 75). The next April, Ellen had her first vision concerning the Sabbath (EW 32–35), a vision corroborating what had already been ascertained by careful study of the Bible and by much prayer.

d. The "Sabbath Conferences." During the earliest stage of their development, Sabbathkeeping Adventists had no formal organization; but in 1848 a number of them attended seven small local meetings. These later came to be called "Sabbath Conferences" because they were meetings of "friends of the Sabbath" interested in the "third angel's message" (Rev. 14:9–11). These conferences had a select agenda, including the Sabbath, and helped to bring a sense of unity to the rather widely scattered groups of Adventist Sabbathkeepers.

e. Time for beginning the Sabbath. Not until the 1850s did the time of day for commencing and closing the Sabbath become fully clarified for the growing number of Sabbathkeeping Adventists. Although Seventh Day Baptists had observed a sunset-to-sunset Sabbath on the basis of scriptural evidence (e.g., Mark 1:32), Joseph Bates was of the opinion that the Sabbath should begin at 6:00 p.m. on Friday and end at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday (RH Apr. 21, 1851). Bates's view did not, however, find universal favor among the Sabbathkeeping Adventists. James White wrote in 1855, "We have never been fully satisfied with the testimony presented in favor of 6:00 o'clock" (*ibid.* Dec. 4, 1855). At

that time, in addition to those who adhered to Bates's practice, some observed a midnight-to-midnight time frame, others used the sunset-to-sunset guideline, and still others thought that the Sabbath should begin on Saturday morning.

In view of these differing viewpoints, J. N. Andrews was assigned the task of making a thorough investigation of the subject. In his written report, which was published in the same issue of the *Review and Herald* as James White's comment, he demonstrated from the OT and NT that the biblical word "even" (or "evening") means sunset. Prior to this he had also presented his finding orally to an assembly of Sabbathkeeping Adventists, nearly all of whom had accepted his solution to the question. Among the dissenters were Joseph Bates and Ellen White, who still held to the 6:00 position. At the close of the assembly, however, Ellen White received a vision in which she was shown that the Sabbath should be observed from sunset to sunset. Some 12 years later James White could write that this vision "settled the matter with Brother Bates and others, and general harmony has since prevailed among us upon this point" (*ibid.* Feb. 25, 1868).

f. The Sabbath and prophecy/eschatology. At the outset Adventist Sabbathkeepers adopted, for the most part, the same rationale, arguments, and understanding that the Seventh Day Baptists had set forth regarding the Sabbath. The Seventh Day Baptists had strong scriptural arguments, from both the OT and the NT, but they failed to relate the Sabbath with other major theological concerns, including various aspects of prophetic fulfillment and the eschatological focus of certain passages of Scripture. The one notable exception was their attention to the prophecy of Daniel 7:25 and the related passage in Revelation 13:5, 6.

As Bates and others continued their study of the Sabbath, however, they soon came upon a connection with the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 (especially the third one). Further prophetic links emerged, such as the Sabbath as God's seal of Revelation 7, and the trade embargo and death decree depicted in Revelation 13:16, 17 as inclusions in expected forthcoming Sunday legislation. Bates himself, in his continuing publications, set forth these new insights, as well as making an integral connection between the Sabbath and the heavenly sanctuary. The Sabbath's connection with the sanctuary, accompanied by a call for revival as set forth in Revelation 14, became a major emphasis in the Sabbath theology of Bates and other of the Adventist "pioneers" who were forerunners (and for the most part founders) of the SDA Church.

g. Early publications on the Sabbath. The Sabbath took considerable space in some of the earliest SDA periodicals—for instance, in the *Present Truth*, which was inaugurated in 1849, and in its successor, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, from 1850 onward.

In 1861 J. N. Andrews published a 340-page book entitled *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week*. This rather comprehensive work was enlarged and revised for later editions. Andrews for the most part adhered to Seventh Day Baptist concepts and historical treatment, but he also did extensive reexamination of the basic historical sources. In addition, he cited many Sundaykeeping authors. L. R. Conradi took an interest

in Andrews' work, and in 1891 translated his *History* into German. In 1912 he issued in English, as coauthor, an enlarged and substantially revised edition, indicated as being the "fourth edition."

2. Adventist Sabbath Practice

The SDA Church considers the Scriptures of the OT and the NT as the normative guide for its theology and practice. For this reason SDAs celebrate the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath. On it they endeavor to follow pertinent OT regulations, but especially the example of Christ in the NT, as to how the day should be treated. Based on the scriptural evidence, SDAs have adopted the practice of keeping Sabbath from sundown Friday night to sundown Saturday night. All of these hours are considered sacred to God. They are a time when personal pursuits and interests are set aside for spiritual refreshment. SDAs believe, moreover, that proper preparation for genuine Sabbath observance must be a *daily* practice of making Christ the Lord of the Christian's life, and therefore daily devotions and self-surrender to Christ are not to be neglected at any time.

On Saturday mornings (or in exceptional cases, on Saturday afternoons) SDAs have regular worship services. These normally consist of (1) Sabbath School, with a Scripture lesson study as the primary focus (usually in small groups or "classes," and with special sections devoted to youth and to children); (2) a short "missionary period" for setting forth plans for local missionary activity and Christian "help work"; and (3) the preaching service, in which the Scripture reading and sermon have the primary emphasis. On a quarterly basis the Sabbath morning preaching service includes celebration of the ordinances of footwashing and the Lord's Supper, patterned after Christ's example and instruction set forth in John 13:1–17; Matthew 26:26–30; 1 Corinthians 11:23–29.

In many SDA churches there are also sundown meetings on Friday and Saturday evenings. Where such services do not exist, or when attendance is not possible, personal or family devotions mark the beginning and the ending of the Sabbath. Business affairs and personal secular pleasures and entertainment (such as sports) are avoided by SDAs during the Sabbath hours. Frequently nature hikes (especially for children and youth), participation in local missionary-type outreach, and general spiritual fellowship with other SDAs or with non-SDAs are engaged in, as being in harmony with divine instruction for Sabbath observance. Although SDA physicians normally do not keep office hours on Sabbath, they do stay "on call" for aid to the sick, including persons who may be hospitalized. All essential personnel in SDA medical institutions must rotate Sabbath service time so that patients are always cared for, even though general routines are normally reduced during Sabbath hours.

The SDA position regarding the use of the Sabbath hours has aptly been set forth by Ellen White, whose writings are respected in the SDA Church: "The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day; but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon

the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds” (DA 207).

In keeping with the importance of Sabbath observance, a major volume entitled *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* was published in 1982. This work represents the combined effort and work of some 19 specialists and treats in detail the Sabbath throughout the OT and NT , as well as in Christian history. It also includes three chapters on Sabbath theology.

VI. Ellen G. White Comments

Ellen G. White has written so widely about the seventh-day Sabbath that only a sampling of her insights and counsels regarding it can be given here. Much of what she has written is occasional in nature, speaking to various specific situations requiring the same or similar counsels, a fact that accounts for a fair amount of repetitiveness in her treatment of the Sabbath. This survey presents typical or representative statements on major aspects of the Sabbath and Sabbathkeeping.

A. The Origin and Significance of the Sabbath

“In Eden, God set up the memorial of His work of creation, in placing His blessing upon the seventh day. The Sabbath was committed to Adam, the father and representative of the whole human family. Its observance was to be an act of grateful acknowledgment, on the part of all who should dwell upon the earth, that God was their Creator and their rightful Sovereign; that they were the work of His hands and the subjects of His authority” (PP 48).

“The Sabbath is not introduced as a new institution but as having been founded at creation. It is to be remembered and observed as the memorial of the Creator’s work. Pointing to God as the Maker of the heavens and the earth, it distinguishes the true God from all false gods. All who keep the seventh day signify by this act that they are worshipers of Jehovah. Thus the Sabbath is the sign of man’s allegiance to God as long as there are any upon the earth to serve Him” (*ibid.* 307).

“The Sabbath institution, which originated in Eden, is as old as the world itself. It was observed by all the patriarchs, from creation down. During the bondage in Egypt, the Israelites were forced by their taskmasters to violate the Sabbath, and to a great extent they lost the knowledge of its sacredness. When the law was proclaimed at Sinai the very first words of the fourth commandment were, ‘Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy’—showing that the Sabbath was not then instituted; we are pointed back for its origin to creation” (*ibid.* 336).

“The fourth commandment is the only one of all the ten in which are found both the name and the title of the Lawgiver. It is the only one that shows by whose authority the

law is given. Thus it contains the seal of God, affixed to His law as evidence of its authenticity and binding force” (*ibid.* 307).

B. Human Need for the Sabbath

“God saw that a Sabbath was essential for man, even in Paradise. He needed to lay aside his own interests and pursuits for one day of the seven, that he might more fully contemplate the works of God and meditate upon His power and goodness. He needed a Sabbath to remind him more vividly of God and to awaken gratitude because all that he enjoyed and possessed came from the beneficent hand of the Creator” (*ibid.* 48).

“The Sabbath, as a memorial of God’s creative power, points to Him as the maker of the heavens and the earth. Hence it is a constant witness to His existence and a reminder of His greatness, His wisdom, and His love. Had the Sabbath always been sacredly observed, there could never have been an atheist or an idolater” (*ibid.* 336).

C. Christ the Maker of the Sabbath

Ellen White repeatedly notes that Christ was with God the Father at Creation, active in the work of Creation, as the NT makes clear (John 1:1–3).

“Since He [Christ] made all things, He made the Sabbath. By Him it was set apart as a memorial of the work of creation. It points to Him as both the Creator and the Sanctifier” (DA 288).

“He [Christ] who made the Sabbath did not abolish it, nailing it to His cross” (*ibid.* 630).

“All things were created by the Son of God And since the Sabbath is a memorial of the work of creation, it is a token of the love and power of Christ” (*ibid.* 281).

“Christ, during His earthly ministry, emphasized the binding claims of the Sabbath; in all His teaching He showed reverence for the institution He Himself had given” (PK 183).

D. Christ’s Sabbath-Observance Principles

In connection with conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, Christ enunciated true biblical principles of Sabbath observance in contrast with the human-made restrictions:

“As the Jews departed from God, and failed to make the righteousness of Christ their own by faith, the Sabbath lost its significance to them In the days of Christ the Sabbath had become so perverted that its observance reflected the character of selfish and arbitrary men rather than the character of the loving heavenly Father. The rabbis virtually represented God as giving laws which it was impossible for men to obey. They led the

people to look upon God as a tyrant, and to think that the observance of the Sabbath, as He required it, made men hard-hearted and cruel. It was the work of Christ to clear away these misconceptions. Although the rabbis followed Him with merciless hostility, He did not even appear to conform to their requirements, but went straight forward, keeping the Sabbath according to the law of God” (DA 283, 284).

“He [Jesus] had come to free the Sabbath from those burdensome requirements that had made it a curse instead of a blessing.

“For this reason He had chosen the Sabbath upon which to perform the act of healing at Bethesda. He could have healed the sick man as well on any other day of the week; or He might simply have cured him, without bidding him bear away his bed. But this would not have given Him the opportunity He desired. A wise purpose underlay every act of Christ’s life on earth. Everything He did was important in itself and in its teaching. Among the afflicted ones at the pool He selected the worst case upon whom to exercise His healing power, and bade the man carry his bed through the city in order to publish the great work that had been wrought upon him. This would raise the question of what it was lawful to do on the Sabbath, and would open the way for Him to denounce the restrictions of the Jews in “regard to the Lord’s day, and to declare their traditions void.

“Jesus stated to them that the work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath law. It was in harmony with the work of God’s angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity. Jesus declared, ‘My Father worketh hitherto, and I work’ ” (*ibid.* 206).

“Christ would teach His disciples and His enemies that the service of God is first of all. The object of God’s work in this world is the redemption of man; therefore that which is necessary to be done on the Sabbath in the accomplishment of this work is in accord with the Sabbath law. Jesus then crowned His argument by declaring Himself the ‘Lord of the Sabbath’—One above all question and above all law. This infinite Judge acquits the disciples of blame, appealing to the very statutes they are accused of violating” (*ibid.* 285).

E. Sabbathkeeping and Holiness

Ellen White has repeatedly emphasized that mere formalistic Sabbathkeeping is meaningless or worse. True observance of God’s Sabbath involves the sanctification of life which Christ gives.

“It [the Sabbath] declares that He who created all things in heaven and in earth, and by whom all things hold together, is the head of the church, and that by His power we are reconciled to God Then the Sabbath is a sign of Christ’s power to make us holy. And it is given to all whom Christ makes holy. As a sign of His sanctifying power, the Sabbath is given to all who through Christ become a part of the Israel of God” (*ibid.* 288).

“The Sabbath was not for Israel merely, but for the world. It had been made known to man in Eden, and, like the other precepts of the Decalogue, it is of imperishable obligation

“No other institution which was committed to the Jews tended so fully to distinguish them from surrounding nations as did the Sabbath. God designed that its observance should designate them as His worshipers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ” (*ibid.* 283).

F. The Sabbath Through the Ages

“In the first centuries the true Sabbath had been kept by all Christians. They were jealous for the honor of God, and, believing that His law is immutable, they zealously guarded the sacredness of its precepts. But with great subtlety Satan worked through his agents to bring about his object. That the attention of the people might be called to the Sunday, it was made a festival in honor of the resurrection of Christ. Religious services were held upon it; yet it was regarded as a day of recreation, the Sabbath being still sacredly observed” (GC 52).

“From that day [the time when the law was given at Sinai] to the present the knowledge of God’s law has been preserved in the earth, and the Sabbath of the fourth commandment has been kept. Though the ‘man of sin’ succeeded in trampling underfoot God’s holy day, yet even in the period of his supremacy there were, hidden in secret places, faithful souls who paid it honor. Since the Reformation, there have been some in every generation to maintain its observance. Though often in the midst of reproach and persecution, a constant testimony has been borne to the perpetuity of the law of God and the sacred obligation of the creation Sabbath” (*ibid.* 453).

Ellen White also notes that among the Waldenses were some who “were observers of the Sabbath,” and that in Ethiopia, too, Christians observed the Sabbath, even though they also abstained from labor on Sunday (*ibid.* 577, 578).

G. The Sabbath in the Final Crisis of Earth’s History

“The Sabbath will be the great test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve Him not. While the observance of the false sabbath in compliance with the law of the state, contrary to the fourth commandment, will be an avowal of allegiance to a power that is in opposition to God, the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God’s law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator. While one class, by accepting the sign of submission to earthly powers, receive the mark of the beast, the other choosing the token of allegiance to divine authority, receive the seal of God” (*ibid.* 605).

“But not one is made to suffer the wrath of God until the truth has been brought home to his mind and conscience, and has been rejected. There are many who have never had an opportunity to hear the special truths for this time. The obligation of the fourth commandment has never been set before them in its true light. He who reads every heart and tries every motive will leave none who desire a knowledge of the truth, to be deceived as to the issues of the controversy. The decree is not to be urged upon the people blindly. Everyone is to have sufficient light to make his decision intelligently” (*ibid.*).

“The Sabbath question is to be the issue in the great final conflict in which all the world will act a part. Men have honored Satan’s principles above the principles that rule in the heavens. They have accepted the spurious sabbath, which Satan has exalted as the sign of his authority. But God has set His seal upon His royal requirement. Each Sabbath institution bears the name of its author, an ineffaceable mark that shows the authority of each. It is our work to lead the people to understand this. We are to show them that it is of vital consequence whether they bear the mark of God’s kingdom or the mark of the kingdom of rebellion, for they acknowledge themselves subjects of the kingdom whose mark they bear” (6T 352).

“God has called us to uplift the standard of His downtrodden Sabbath. How important, then, that our example in Sabbathkeeping should be right” (*ibid.* 352, 353).

H. Preparation for the Sabbath

Preparation for the Sabbath should occupy the whole week, and in all preparation the spiritual dimension is paramount.

“We are not merely to observe the Sabbath as a legal matter. We are to understand its spiritual bearing upon all the transactions of life. All who regard the Sabbath as a sign between them and God, showing that He is the God who sanctifies them, will represent the principles of His government. They will bring into daily practice the laws of His kingdom. Daily it will be their prayer that the sanctification of the Sabbath may rest upon them. Every day they will have the companionship of Christ and will exemplify the perfection of His character. Every day their light will shine forth to others in good works” (*ibid.* 353, 354).

“When the Sabbath is thus remembered, the temporal will not be allowed to encroach upon the spiritual. No duty pertaining to the six working days will be left for the Sabbath. During the week our energies will not be so exhausted in temporal labor that on the day when the Lord rested and was refreshed we shall be too weary to engage in His service” (*ibid.* 354).

But while “preparation for the Sabbath is to be made all through the week, Friday is to be the special preparation day” (*ibid.*):

“See that all the clothing is in readiness, and that all the cooking is done. Let the boots be blacked and the baths be taken. It is possible to do this. If you make it a rule you can do it. The Sabbath is not to be given to the repairing of garments, to the cooking of food, to pleasure seeking, or to any other worldly employment. Before the setting of the sun let all secular work be laid aside and all secular papers be put out of sight. Parents, explain your work and its purpose to your children, and let them share in your preparation to keep the Sabbath according to the commandment” (*ibid.* 355, 356).

“On this day all differences between brethren, whether in the family or in the church, should be put away. Let all bitterness and wrath and malice be expelled from the soul. In a humble spirit, ‘confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed’ (James 5:16)” (*ibid.* 356).

I. The Sabbath in the Home

In her discussion of the Sabbath in the home, Ellen White’s first instruction is that before “the setting of the sun [on Friday evening] let the members of the family assemble to read God’s word, to sing and pray” (*ibid.*). Then regarding the Sabbath day itself, she declares:

“Let not the precious hours of the Sabbath be wasted in bed. On Sabbath morning the family should be astir early. If they rise late, there is confusion and bustle in preparing for breakfast and Sabbath school. There is hurrying, jostling, and impatience. Thus unholy feelings come into the home. The Sabbath, thus desecrated, becomes a weariness, and its coming is dreaded rather than loved.

“We should not provide for the Sabbath a more liberal supply or a greater variety of food than for other days. Instead of this the food should be more simple, and less should be eaten, in order that the mind may be clear and vigorous to comprehend spiritual things
... .

“While cooking upon the Sabbath should be avoided, it is not necessary to eat cold food. In cold weather let the food prepared the day before be heated. And let the meals, though simple, be palatable and attractive. Provide something that will be regarded as a treat, something the family do not have every day” (*ibid.* 357).

“In pleasant weather let parents walk with their children in the fields and groves. Amid the beautiful things of nature tell them the reason for the institution of the Sabbath. Describe to them God’s great work of creation. Tell them that when the earth came from His hand, it was holy and beautiful. Every flower, every shrub, every tree, answered the purpose of its Creator. Everything upon which the eye rested was lovely and filled the mind with thoughts of the love of God. Every sound was music in harmony with the voice of God. Show that it was sin which marred God’s perfect work; that thorns and thistles, sorrow and pain and death, are all the result of disobedience to God. Bid them see how the earth, though marred with the curse of sin, still reveals God’s goodness” (*ibid.* 358).

“As the sun goes down, let the voice of prayer and the hymn of praise mark the close of the sacred hours and invite God’s presence through the cares of the week of labor” (*ibid.* 359).

J. Travel on the Sabbath

Ellen White points out that travel on the Sabbath should be avoided as much as possible. But in “order to reach the churches that need our help, and to give them the message that God desires them to hear, it may be necessary for us to travel on the Sabbath.” In such cases, “so far as possible we should secure our tickets and make all necessary arrangements on some other day” (*ibid.* 360). In addition, when “starting on a journey we should make every possible effort to plan so as to avoid reaching our destination on the Sabbath.” And when “compelled to travel on the Sabbath we should try to avoid the company of those who would draw our attention to worldly things.” Nevertheless, whenever “there is opportunity we should speak to others in regard to the truth. We should always be ready to relieve suffering and to help those in need.” We should not, however, “talk about matters of business or engage in any common, worldly conversation” (*ibid.*).

K. Sabbath Meetings

“Wherever there are as many as two or three believers, let them meet together on the Sabbath to claim the Lord’s promise.

“The little companies assembled to worship God on His holy day have a right to claim the rich blessing of Jehovah. They should believe that the Lord Jesus is an honored guest in their assemblies. Every true worshiper who keeps holy the Sabbath should claim the promise: ‘That ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you’ (Ex. 31:13)” (*ibid.* 360, 361).

“The preaching at our Sabbath meetings should generally be short. Opportunity should be given for those who love God to express their gratitude and adoration” (*ibid.* 361). “Let none come to the place of worship to take a nap. There should be no sleeping in the house of God” (*ibid.*).

All should feel that they have “a part to act in making the Sabbath meetings interesting”:

“You are not to come together simply as a matter of form, but for the interchange of thought, for the relation of your daily experiences, for the expression of thanksgiving, for the utterance of your sincere desire for divine enlightenment, that you may know God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent” (*ibid.* 362).

L. Further Concerns

With specific regard to the Sabbathkeeping practice of workers in SDA medical institutions, Ellen White pointed to the example of Christ, to the need for rest, and to the importance of the Sabbath as a sign between God and His people.

“Often physicians and nurses are called upon during the Sabbath to minister to the sick, and sometimes it is impossible for them to take time for rest and for attending devotional services. The needs of suffering humanity are never to be neglected. The Saviour, by His example, has shown us that it is right to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. But unnecessary work, such as ordinary treatments and operations that can be postponed, should be deferred. Let the patients understand that physicians and helpers should have one day for rest. Let them understand that the workers fear God and desire to keep holy the day that He has set apart for His followers to observe as a sign between Him and them” (7T 106).

“All our medical institutions are established as Seventh-day Adventist institutions, to represent the various features of gospel medical missionary work, and thus to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord” (*ibid.* 107).

Concerning the operation of public health-food restaurants, the following counsel is given:

“The question has been asked, ‘Should our restaurants be opened on the Sabbath?’ My answer is: No, no! The observance of the Sabbath is our witness to God, the mark, or sign, between Him and us that we are His people. Never is this mark to be obliterated” (*ibid.* 121).

A restaurant could, however, provide food packages on Friday for those who wish to take health foods home for use on the Sabbath (*ibid.* 121, 122).

Instruction has also been given regarding business plans and partnerships with those who do not respect the Sabbath:

“There is need of a Sabbath reform among us, who profess to observe God’s holy rest day. Some discuss their business matters and lay plans on the Sabbath, and God looks upon this in the same light as though they engaged in the actual transaction of business.

“Others who are well acquainted with the Bible evidences that the seventh day is the Sabbath, enter into partnership with men who have no respect for God’s holy day. A Sabbathkeeper cannot allow men in his employ, paid by his money, to work on the Sabbath. If, for the sake of gain, he allows the business in which he has an interest to be carried on on the Sabbath by his unbelieving partner, he is equally guilty with the unbeliever; and it is his duty to dissolve the relation, however much he may lose by so doing. Men may think they cannot afford to obey God, but they cannot afford to disobey Him. Those who are careless in their observance of the Sabbath will suffer great loss” (Ev245).

The high standard which Ellen G. White sets forth as an absolute necessity in true Sabbathkeeping is well summed up in a statement quoted earlier: "In order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ" (DA 283).

VII.Literature

Introductory Note: The literature regarding Sabbath and/or Sunday is massive. This listing is a select bibliography. Of the limited number of titles given, a few are not compatible with the views expressed in this chapter (especially so in the case of the books by Carson and Rordorf; these are listed simply because of the wide public attention they have received). In general, however, the selections will be supportive.

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Appendix The Seven-Day Week and the Julian-Gregorian Calendar

Two items of technical nature deserve brief attention: the rise of the “Planetary Week,” and the “Julian-Gregorian Calendar.”

A. The “Planetary Week”

There is no evidence in the ancient world of any seven-day week aside from that of the Hebrews until the rise of the “Planetary Week” in *post-* OT times.

Quite early in their history both the Babylonians and the Greeks took an interest in astronomy. Since the planetary week has its days named after the sun, moon, and five planets of the solar system, it is obvious that astronomy or astrology lies in its background. Through a rather lengthy process of study of the heavens by Babylonians and Greeks, eventually there emerged, somewhere between 300 and 150 B.C. , a sequence of the “seven planets”: the sun and moon and the five planets known to the ancients. This sequence, was Saturn-Jupiter-Mars-Sun-Venus-Mercury-Moon. It was based on the “spatial” distance of each of the heavenly bodies from the earth as determined through astronomical calculations.

The astrology of Hipparchus (190–126 B.C.) in western Asia Minor influenced astronomical/astrological research in Alexandria, Egypt. In addition, the Egyptian priests about this time developed a day with 24 sixty-minute hours. In Alexandria, all the necessary ingredients for the creation of a planetary seven-day week were brought together about 150 B.C. These were the concept of planetary gods, originally developed by Babylonian priests; the mathematical and astronomical data produced by the Greeks; the system of 24 hours, an Egyptian innovation; and knowledge of the Hebrew weekly cycle.

The most complete information concerning the process involved in this astrological or planetary week comes from the Roman historian Cassius Dio, who wrote in the early third century A.D. , at a time when this planetary week had gained universal acceptance in the Roman world. According to Dio (*Roman History* 37. 18, 19), the 24 hours of each day were believed to be ruled in sequence by the “seven planets” (including Sun and Moon). The planet ruling the first hour of a day gave that day its name. Since Saturn began the seven-planet sequence, Saturn would rule the first day. The first hour of the second day would be the “Sun’s day,” so that Sunday followed Saturday. In a similar manner all seven of the heavenly bodies were given authority over the first hour of a day, and gave their names to their days.

As the planetary week developed, Sunday, not Saturday, was given the priority as the first day of the week. This was because the Sun was by far the brightest celestial body. In the biblical pattern for the week, which had been spread widely throughout the then-known world by Jews of the Diaspora, the seventh day would be equivalent to the one called “Saturn’s day” in the planetary week. This was actually attested by later Roman

writers, who stated that as early as 63 B.C. the day on which the Jews held their Sabbath was “Saturn’s day” (*ibid.* 37. 16. 2–4).

B. The Julian-Gregorian Calendar

In recent discussions it has sometimes been contended that the weekly cycle has been “altered since ancient times, thus changing the sequence of the days. The main calendar that is used throughout the world today, called the “Gregorian Calendar,” effected no weekly change from that of its predecessor, the “Julian Calendar” (instituted in 45 B.C. by Julius Caesar). Therefore, it is certain that the days of the week in NT times are still the same days of the week at present.

In the 12-month year of the Julian Calendar, the addition of a leap year every four years finally threw the calendar off by about 11 minutes and 14 seconds annually. Cumulatively, this amounted to approximately three days in every four centuries. In 1582 the vernal equinox occurred on March 11 instead of on March 21, the day when it had occurred at the time of the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. To remedy the discrepancy, Pope Gregory XIII decreed in 1582 that 10 days be dropped out of the reckoning, with the result that Thursday, October 4, was followed by Friday, October 15 (not by October 5). No adjustment or change was made in the weekly cycle.