The Significance of the Sabbath:  
a brief examination of the place & importance of the Sabbath for the NT believer.  

(Except where indicated, all quotations are from the ESV).  

By James Gunn © 2012

Part One: Theological foundations

IN THIS INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW, I will attempt to determine the place and importance of the Sabbath for the NT believer. Because of limitations of space and time however, we are not able to look very closely at the bigger question of the “law” or the Torah (except as it bears directly on our purpose) and will not consider in detail the question “If I’m to keep the Sabbath, then aren’t I also to keep every other aspect of the law or the Torah? (James 2:10).

This essay is aimed at Christians who are serious about their faith, who are seekers of truth and who are not afraid of being confronted by uncomfortable choices. In what follows the words “ekklesia” and “assembly” refer to the apostolic and very early post-apostolic organization of believers (Jew and Gentile together), as well as the complete body of the redeemed in all places and times, the “elect.” The word “church” refers to the later post-apostolic, essentially Gentile organization.

I BEGAN THINKING ABOUT AND REFLECTING UPON THE ISSUE of the Sabbath well over two years ago. In that time, it has been a constant refrain in my life, sometimes taking prominence, sometimes forming a kind of background accompaniment, but always being to one degree or another an ever-present, underlying strain. The issue arose primarily as a result of the in-depth study of the book of Revelation. In that study, a discordant note soon started recurring and by the time I reached chapters twelve and thirteen of that apocalypse the discordant note had become a strident trumpet blast. In my study of the prophet Daniel as a major source for much that John was concerned about, the Holy Spirit caused me to see a deep conflict between Dan. 2:21 and 7:25; the first verse referring to God as the creator and determiner of the times and seasons for worship, and the second to a beast who appropriates that function to himself. As I considered these verses more deeply, I was led to see the actions of the Church (particularly the Roman church) as corresponding in some significant way with what was being described by Daniel, especially in 7:25. I faithfully followed this sound, now becoming a kind of melody. And as I investigated and reflected upon it, a new theme began to form in my spiritual ear. This essay is the culmination of my thoughts and reflections on the theme of the biblical Sabbath and its place and importance for the NT believer. The conclusions I have arrived at surprised me and have left me with a far deeper appreciation of God’s Word but also a more frightful awareness of how corrupted by fallen men the intentions and purposes of Scripture have become. In that sense, it is not a condemnation of the Church, but rather of our endless and all too human proclivity to idolatry.

This essay is offered in the hope that a new appreciation for God’s Word will be instilled in the hearts of its readers and that the Sabbath will be recognized for what it truly is, a sign and seal of God’s people for His glory and our joy. “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul” (Psalm 19:7a).

Before commencing though, we need to be cognizant of a very important truth: that because salvation is not a matter of works but of sovereign grace in Christ, keeping the Sabbath is not required for salvation. Salvation is not a work of the law. Let’s be clear about this. Jesus came to fulfill the demands of the law or Torah on our behalf and which He accomplished once and for all. We are saved by grace not by works. But that does not mean we are thereby prohibited from keeping Sabbath for reasons other than the gaining of salvation. This, I think, is a matter of Christian liberty (WCF 20:2) as we will see in due course.
With this understood (and accepted?), we can begin. Our tasks are first to define at the outset what we mean by the terms “day of rest”, “sabbath” and “Lord’s Day.” We will then move on to the important metaphor of the “olive tree” and include some thoughts on the Jerusalem Council as recounted in Acts 15. In the third part of the essay, we will consider the contributions that the growth of anti-Semitism, persecution, and the role of the Church of Rome (CoR) have had on the schism within the Ekklesias. Part One is closed by a few summary conclusions. In Part Two, after very briefly examining the historical context of Rabbinic Judaism, we will close the essay with some thoughts on several underlying qualities of the Sabbath.

The first mention of a “day of rest” is in Gen. 2:2, “And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done” (italics added). Then in verse three, God “blesses” this day and “sanctifies” it. To bless something or someone is to invoke, declare, request or confer well-being, favour or benefit upon something or someone. But since God is sovereign, He does not request that benefit be given. He declares it to be so and confers it by his own absolute and final will and authority. To sanctify something is to set it aside, making it ceremonially clean, separating it to oneself for special purposes or intentions. In the OT it is to make or declare and to observe something as holy (the core attribute of God himself), pure, fundamentally different from the merely profane, dedicated to a different purpose and so on. The day of rest being described in these verses is part of creation; it is not an afterthought of God. It does not exist in some unknowable or imperceptible state of being but is made experiential within creation (this is sometimes referred to as the “wilderness”). The seventh day would have been just another day had not God made it distinct by sanctifying it. Therefore, this day is no ordinary day. It has been set aside by God for a special purpose. That primary purpose is rest. (A secondary purpose will be discussed below.)

Jump forward to the sojourn in the wilderness. We are told in Exo. 16:2-3, that after six weeks out from Egypt, the people began to grumble about a lack of food. Consequently, God informed Moses that both meat (quail) and bread (manna) would be forthcoming, warning, however, that on the seventh day this food would no longer be available. On that day, the people were to eat what they had gathered on the day before and this food would no longer be available. On that day, the people were to eat what they had gathered on the day before and this food would no longer be available. The reason given by God is that “Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD….” And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will 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 each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day!” (Exo. 16:28-29, italics added). This passage, especially verse 28b, and corroborated by such verses as Gen. 26:5 (Abraham’s obedience) shows clearly that God’s laws had already been communicated by Him to people before Sinai, which was still future. This should prove that God’s law is not a condition imposed exclusively by the giving of the covenant on Sinai and so only pertains to the people of the Mosaic covenant, but is (in principle at least) universally applicable.

In Exodus 20:8, part of the Ten Commandments, there is reference to the “Sabbath” of the LORD—the same LORD who created the heavens and the earth and who sanctified the seventh day as a day of rest. When giving the Ten Commandments, God defines this seventh or Sabbath day and gives the reason and purpose for it. He says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” In verse 20:8, he is declaring a covenant condition that His people keep this day holy and undefiled. He then explains this particular commandment. In Exo. 20:10-11, God says, “the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (italics added). God says the seventh day of creation is the Sabbath day. He further explains its essential purpose as a God-ordained opportunity for rest, that is, cessation of the work and toil that was part of the other days. In Genesis 2:3 the word translated as “rested” in English is the Hebrew word shabbat. According to Strong’s Concordance, the word shabbat (or sabbath) means to desist from exertion, in other words to refrain from work. But this of necessity also implies a degree of enjoyment of such rest. Moreover, in Exo. 20:10, the LORD makes it clear that this
sabbath rest was intended not just for card-carrying (circumcised) Jews, but for everyone living within the community of Israel, including slaves as well as uncircumcised foreigners. Even the animals who worked in various capacities were included. This is as inclusive as it gets. In Exodus 20:8, 10-11, God makes it plain that the day being referred to is—in its description of distinction and purpose—identical to the day of rest referred to in the second chapter of Genesis, even though not named sabbath in Genesis. (The fact that a thing lacks a specific title or name is irrelevant if it is described in terms that effectively match something else. In this regard, I am reminded of the old saying that if something looks like a duck, walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it very probably is a duck.)

So I believe we are on terra firma if we accept that the Sabbath and Genesis’ day of rest are in fact the same day. But is the day of rest a creation ordinance, that is, does it apply to humanity in general and not exclusively to Jews? Well, first, remember that there were no Jews until Abraham. Adam was not a Jew, neither was Eve. Their children were not Jews or their grandchildren. They were all “Adam”, the name given in Genesis for human beings in general. Even so, in spite of their status as non-Jews and prior to their sin of disobedience, Adam and Eve were still the eligible recipients of the blessing of this rest. In fact, their “pre-fall” life in the Garden was this very rest. That is precisely why they were put in the Garden, not to work, but to keep or maintain (through obedience to God, in service to Him through His creation) the purity and sanctity of the yet unspoiled, garden. There was to be no toil, no tiring and unpleasant labour, and no painful exertion; there was to be no anxiety or worry. As well, we have the testimony of Exo. 16:28-30 which, as I have already said, is ample proof that God’s law is not a condition imposed exclusively by the Sinai covenant. Therefore we must conclude that this day (the day of rest or the Sabbath), was indeed a creation ordinance, especially since in Christian and Jewish understanding, Adam was the federal head or representative of all humanity. As a creation ordinance, God did not give this day of rest to the nations in a legal way, as He would for the Hebrew nation, the father of which was Abraham. God gave the day of rest but never imposed it on the nations. Why not? Allen Ross explains:

“The Sabbath commemorates God’s cessation from all his creative work of forming a perfect creation out of chaos (Gen. 2:2-3). God rested because everything he had created was perfect and good. He set the seventh day apart as a reminder to unfallen humans that he had created everything perfect. This Sabbath rest was possible because the people that God had made rested in perfect and unbroken fellowship with the Creator. But sin ruined that rest in fellowship with the Creator, as well as God’s rest in a creation unspoiled by sin. This made it impossible for God to impose the Sabbath on fallen humankind, because the thing that it memorialized—divine rest in a perfect creation—had been destroyed. God began the work of redemption toward a new creation that once again was at rest (Gen. 3:15, 21; John 5:17); he worked to restore the divine rest destroyed by sin (Rom. 8:18-22). The idea of the Sabbath, therefore, disappeared from Scripture [as a binding ordinance on all people] until it was re instituted at Mount Sinai for the people whom God redeemed. It was at Sinai that the observance of Sabbath could be instituted, because there God made a covenant with his redeemed people. The meaning of this law, like all the moral laws expressed in the Ten Commandments, had been revealed from the beginning. But the difference was that the enjoyment of the Sabbath had been possible only for unfallen humans, whereas the other nine commandments were binding [of necessity] upon all people from the beginning…. The Sabbath was never imposed on any people other than Israel [in order for God to maintain his own integrity]. All the other commands express eternal and moral principles that are binding on all of God’s [moral, Gen. 1:26] creatures; they were not altered by the fall.1

However, for the offspring of Abraham, it was a different matter. For God’s people the day of rest, or the Sabbath, was officially and legally mandated by the giving of the covenant on Mount Sinai, mediated by Moses (Exo. 31:16-18). This covenant was given as a necessary component for God’s ultimate plan of redemption which would find its fulfillment in the Messiah. Nor should it have come as a surprise to the people that God had this in mind. For instance, in Exo. 16:23 Moses announces the “commandment” of the Sabbath in the giving and harvesting of the manna. Then, in 16:28, God gave the people a hint of what was coming when He asked rhetorically, “How long will you refuse to keep my
commandments and my laws?” By this, we understand that God was referring obliquely—not just to legal principles but also to the specific day of rest. However, God had not yet made this day a covenant stipulation.

But so far our discussion has not addressed the important secondary purpose of the Sabbath or day of rest—worship. Most people uncritically take for granted that the day of rest and the day of worship are one and the same, that is, we are to worship God on our day of rest (whether Saturday or Sunday). In the OT, sacrifices were made daily at the tabernacle or temple. In this sense worship (as the offering of sacrifices by individuals) was ongoing, it happened virtually every day. (This is the underlying context for Paul’s appeal to the NT ekklesia in Rom. 12:1). We read in Lev. 23:2-3a, “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts. Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation.” But to assist us in our understanding of worship, we need to understand the meaning of the terms “appointed feasts” and “holy convocations” as these terms have a direct bearing on our subject.

An appointed feast is one of the seven feasts or corporate celebrations described in Lev. 23:2-44. They are not creation ordinances but were given exclusively to God’s people. They are variously called “holy convocations”, “holy assemblies”, “designated and holy” [times] and “sacred occasions”, depending on the translation. The word translated as convocation is miqrá:é in the Hebrew and means a summoned assembly or meeting of people together. For me, the fact that the feasts or appointed times are “holy” clearly indicates the special and sanctified purpose of formal, corporate worship of God. By describing these feasts, beginning with the weekly Sabbath, the Bible makes it very clear that the day of rest and the day of worship are meant to be one and the same.

But traditionally, Christians have held their primary corporate worship services on Sunday, the first day of the week—also known among believers as the “Lord’s Day”—in celebration of the cosmic creation and Christ’s resurrection. However, it is very important to understand that Sunday is not the scripturally commanded day of corporate worship, neither is it one of God’s appointed feasts or holy convocations. (In fact, it was nearly three hundred years after Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension that a church council—the Counsel of Laodicea, see below—officially instituted Sunday, the so-called Lord’s Day, as the designated Gentile day of rest and worship.)

An important related question is how do we know that Saturday, of the seven possible days, is the actual day of rest and worship, and not some other? After all, when God sanctified the last day of creation, there were no historians or calendarists to make note that the day blessed by God was eventually to be known by the Hebrews as the Sabbath and by the Romans (for instance) as Saturn’s Day. Our calendars do not go back to the beginning of creation, so how can we be sure that the day known as the Sabbath is the same day as the seventh day of creation? Well, we must arrive at our conclusion by “good and necessary consequence” (that is, deduction or inference) to quote the Westminster Confession. I freely admit that I have found no specific evidence in the Bible to identify our Saturday and the Jewish Sabbath as the appointed, hallowed and blessed day of rest and worship. Having made that admission however, I also think it is important to consider the way God revealed His will to His people. God ordained through Moses, that the Hebrews remember the Sabbath Day (Deut. 5:12-15), and since God revealed his will to them through Moses, (Deut. 29:1), it is reasonable to conclude that God would also have indicated on which day He wanted them to observe and remember His Sabbath. This conclusion is corroborated by Nehemiah, “You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant” (Neh. 9:13-14, italics added). In other words, Nehemiah is testifying that God revealed this information to Moses, who then relayed it to the people (Deut. 5:2-5a). Now I am assuming here that God would not reveal the nature of the Sabbath without also revealing the time and frequency of its celebration. This, I think, is only reasonable.

But furthermore, God placed the lights in the heavens for “times and seasons” so that His people could not only confirm the seventh day Sabbath, but also the beginning and culmination of each day. In other words, God made the universe to be one big clock or calendar. Allen Ross says, “The Lord of
eternity created time so that all his works could fulfill his plan in the seasons and sequences of this life. He then stepped into time to redeem his fallen creatures from death and receive them into his eternal rest. Every celebration in the sanctuary was a participation in the Sabbath rest of the Creator, for Leviticus 23 designates all the festivals as times of special Sabbaths. By using each day, week, month, and season as an occasion for worship, people could truly appreciate the Lord as the creator and sustainer of all life. And because the Lord’s saving acts had taken place in time, each appointed time of worship enabled the people to celebrate him as their Redeemer as well. Then, in the fullness of time God sent forth his Son into the world (Gal. 4:4), and time came to its focal point. The appearance of the Lord of Glory late in time now guides the Christian view of time, not only in its understanding of the plan of God, but also in its seasons of worship. 

In the end though, I think what it comes down to is faith. Since there is no way to prove it one way or another (as far as I know) there is a simple choice to be made. Believers will accept Saturday as the Sabbath, the last day of the week as a matter of faith because it is strongly hinted at by Scripture, which for the true believer is the rule of life. Our discernment—informed by Scripture, illuminated by the Holy Spirit and strengthened by faith—will undoubtedly determine our position in this regard.

Moving on, and having introduced it briefly above in connection with the day of rest and the Sabbath, let us now consider the Lord’s Day more closely. The term Lord’s Day occurs only in Revelation 1:10 and nowhere else in the NT. But to what does it refer? Is it the same as the Sabbath day of rest or does it point to something else? Most, since the early days of the Christian Church, have understood the words to be referring to the day of Christ’s resurrection, the first day of the week. The phrase implies possession—the day belongs to the Lord.

In the OT, in similar language, the phrase “day of the Lord” signified an idea very different from that held by the early church concerning the Lord’s Day. In the OT, the “day of the Lord” was one of judgment and punishment. It was symbolic language for the righteous anger or wrath of God against all those who worked against Him and His purposes for His people and for creation in general. Numerous examples (such as Isa. 13:6, 9; Jer. 46:10; Eze. 30:3; Joel 2:31, etc.) confirm this. The day is the “day of the Lord” because it is His day, it belongs to Him, and He is its author. He has authority and power over it; He is its master; it is under His control and He brings it to pass. But another day that could legitimately be described as “the day of the Lord” is the Sabbath, the day of rest. This day is “holy to the Lord” (Exo. 31:15; 35:2). That is to say, God has sovereignly dedicated it to Himself, for His glory; it is His possession in the same way as the incense of the altar (Exo. 30:37), the golden plate on the turban of the High Priest (Exo. 39:30), the tithes of the land (Lev. 27:30) and even the people (Deut. 7:6) were all His possession. That “holy to the Lord” meant exclusive ownership is made unequivocally clear by Deut. 7:6, “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” In Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28 and Luke 6:5, Jesus names Himself as “lord of the Sabbath.” The word “lord” is in Greek krios and essentially means master or owner. Jesus is master or owner of the Sabbath. He describes Himself as the one who is “in charge” of the Sabbath; it is His day. But the Sabbath, as we have seen, was instituted by the God of creation Himself. It was (and always will be) His day. While the “Lord’s day” of the NT and the “day of the Lord” in the OT are completely different in their purpose, nevertheless they are the same in that both belong to God. They are His; He owns them and has authority over them. This is equally true of the Sabbath which, as we have seen, is “holy to the Lord”, that is, dedicated by Him for His own honour. This makes it effectively His day. Two conclusions are inescapable: First, Jesus is in effect proclaiming Himself to be on an equal footing with the God of creation. This was and continues to be blasphemy for the Jewish religious authorities, as we learn by reading the gospel accounts of Christ’s trial before the Sanhedrin and the High Priest (Matt. 26:63-66; Mark 15:61-64 and Luke 22:67-71). Second, the only other occurrence of parallel language in the NT apart from Revelation 1:10 is found in the three verses from the synoptic gospels cited above. In each case the reference of ownership is to the Sabbath, not Sunday! However, at some point, a change occurred. Sometime in the first century Christians began to believe that Sunday was the Lord’s Day because that was the day of His resurrection.
Because Christ was resurrected on Sunday, this must mean it is His day. I’m now convinced that most Christians came to believe that idea because it is what they were being taught by teachers who wanted a separation between the Jewish “Christ-killers” and the church. This attitude, when in full bloom, is known as triumphalism. We will have a closer look at this in the third part of our examination.

The writer of the Revelation—who was probably the apostle John, author of the fourth gospel—referred to the Lord’s Day but made no reference to its significance. The context suggests that his immediate readers would have known exactly to what he was referring, making explanation unnecessary. According to early Christian documents such as the Didache among others, the Lord’s Day served a similar purpose to that of the Sabbath, at least in terms of gathered, formal worship. As Jews gathered in the Temple or the synagogue for worship on the Sabbath, so Christians at some point seem to have gathered on the Lord’s Day, which was Sunday, the first day of the week. But whereas Scripture made Sabbath keeping and worship very plain (often referring to it as a “holy convocation”) Scripture is utterly silent regarding any change of the worship of God from the original day to the new day. Therefore the idea of the change in the day of rest and worship from the Sabbath to Sunday must be an inference of those who were promoting it. And we know from the historical record that many if not all of these early theologians were, to varying degrees, anti-Semitic, as we will see in due course.

However, we are still left with the question, “Is then the Lord’s Day the replacement of the Sabbath?” Does it, since Christ’s ascension, take the place of the Jewish Sabbath? If so, how do we know this? If we accept the authority of Scripture, then what do we do with its resounding silence regarding this change from Sabbath to Lord’s Day?

Well, I think it is important to first consider the arguments above concerning the day of rest and the Sabbath. In those arguments I believe I have shown that the day of rest (the seventh day of creation) and the Sabbath are exactly the same. Moreover, I have maintained that the day of rest was a creation ordinance since it was given to and for the benefit of those who were not Israelites (i.e. Adam and Eve), and that since the Sabbath is none other than this same day of rest, it too must be a creation ordinance (therefore “accessible” by non-Jews).

I also maintain that for these reasons, the day has never exclusively belonged to Israel since, as a creation ordinance, it was in a sense offered to all the nations, but that nevertheless God did indeed decide to give it in a special way to Israel by the covenant on Sinai, and to which covenant the people agreed (Exo. 19:5-6, 8). But why would God formally and forensically mandate this day for the Israelites and not for other nations? We find a clear expression of God’s reason for His decision in the book of Deuteronomy, “For you [Israel] are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery” (Deut. 7:6-8). So because God loved Abraham with a special love, He gave to Abraham’s descendants—both of the flesh, ethnic Israel and the promise, spiritual Israel, the special privilege of the Sabbath, which He embedded as part of the unchanging moral law, summed up in the Ten Commandments. But ethnic Israel—that is the nation as a whole—was stiff-necked and proudly stubborn and continually refused to sincerely accept anything more than intermittent obedience to the moral law that God had covenantally enacted for His people. (This of course made them no worse than the nations surrounding them, but neither did it make them any better.)

However, in His mercy, God had determined that a portion of those from ethnic Israel would receive the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants. These constitute God’s redeemed, the remnant of Israel. It is to the redeemed remnant that Paul refers in Rom. 9:4-8, “to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but
the children of the promise are counted as offspring” [referring to Gen. 22:15-18]. So we have now introduced this new idea of a remnant that will inherit all the blessings of God. Nevertheless, God has also determined that even apostate, ethnic Israel will be given one final chance for redemption (Hos. 1:10). This He will accomplish through a people who were not His people—the Gentiles.

TO THIS NEW BUT VERY IMPORTANT IDEA—that of remnant theology—and which Paul illustrates in Romans 11—we must now turn.

To a significant degree one’s assumptions regarding the spiritual status or prominence of the church will influence what one believes about the Sabbath versus the Lord’s Day. That is to say, if you proceed from the triumphalist point of view that the church has superseded Israel as God’s people—for the reason that God has forever and irrevocably rejected Israel because of her unbelief and rebellious obstinacy and has instead bestowed the promises on the new people of God (the so-called Church, a word I have come to dislike)—then you will not likely be comfortable with the idea of keeping the OT Sabbath celebration, preferring instead to celebrate on Sunday, the first day of the week, as do the overwhelming majority of Christians. If however, you are willing to accept the possibility that God has not entirely written off His people Israel and that there is a degree of overlap between Israel and Christ’s ekklēsia or assembly then you will probably not be uncomfortable with the idea of keeping the Sabbath in a biblically appropriate fashion (and not according to Rabbinic accretions, i.e. the traditions of the elders, Matt. 15:3).

Most Christians today hold to one of two differing views regarding the relationship between Israel and the church. The first, replacement theology is the view that though Israel was once God’s chosen people, because of her disobedience in rejecting Jesus as Messiah God has transferred the promises of the covenants to the Christian Church. Israel forfeited all the blessings originally promised to her, which are now the possession of the church. The second view, separation theology, holds that the church and Israel are completely separate entities, with entirely different destinies. Many separation theologians maintain that Israel will inherit all God’s worldly promises (including an independent nation-state) while the church will inherit all the spiritual promises. According to Separation theologians, the church had her beginning with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost following Christ’s ascension. Before that time, they believe, the church did not exist and therefore there can be no continuity with Israel. My own growing conviction is that there is instead an overlap between Israel and the church. I arrive at this conviction from such passages of Scripture as Romans 9 and 11, Eph. 2:12-22; 3:4-6 and so forth. This understanding of the overlap is known as Remnant theology. However, this overlap in no way makes Israel and the church identical, or that the assembly (Heb. qahal) in the OT was simply the promise or type of which the church of the NT is the fulfillment or antitype. While Replacement theology maintains that the church has taken prominence over Israel as the true Ekklēsia of God and that the remnant (believing Israel) has been grafted into the church, the opposite position is taken by Remnant theology which maintains that the NT ekklēsia or assembly has been grafted into the believing remnant (Isa. 10:22; Rom. 9:27) of Israel—an important distinction.

Scripture uses many metaphors and symbols to represent God’s people. One found in both testaments is the metaphor of the olive tree. For instance, we read of God’s people in Jeremiah that “The LORD once called you ‘a green olive tree, beautiful with good fruit’” (Jer. 11:16a). Again, referring to Israel Hosea says, “…his beauty shall be like the olive [tree]” (Hos. 14:6b). King David refers to himself as “like a green olive tree in the house of God” (Psalm 52:8). (Zechariah chapter 4 also employs the image of olive trees and branches, but consideration of that use of the metaphor would take us too far off the path we are on, therefore we will not consider it in this context.) The image of the olive tree already had a solid place in Scripture as representing God’s people when Paul was inspired to use the metaphor to illustrate the “mystery” of the relationship between Israel and the Ekklēsia. This olive tree metaphor was a very suitable instrument for Paul’s purpose of disclosing an extremely important spiritual truth.

So with these introductory thoughts in mind, we turn our attention to Paul’s understanding of Israel and how Israel and the Ekklēsia are related. We will then move to a consideration of the inception of the church in Matt. 16:18 and the outcome of the Council of Jerusalem only some twenty five years
after the ascension of Christ. This long two-part section forms an important foundation for our overall conclusion.

In chapter nine of Romans, Paul begins to lay out the groundwork for the “problem of Israel.” This “mystery” he discloses in chapter 11 and by which the ekkllesia of Christ should have been profoundly and humbly affected but—because of the sins of ignorance, fear and arrogance—was not.

In Romans 9, Paul begins to build an argument for the eventual salvation of all Israel as well as the Gentiles by demonstrating through the metaphor of the olive tree that (with the coming of Christ) there is a kind of unity between Israel and the Ekklesia. He begins his argument by lamenting that Israel, in spite of being the recipients of adoption as God’s sons, God’s glory, the covenants, the Torah, temple worship and the promises of God to the Patriarchs, from whom is traced the human ancestry of Christ (vs. 1-5) has in spite of all that, seemingly failed of salvation. His heart is burdened almost to breaking, especially as he identifies so strongly with his cultural as well as spiritual heritage (Phil. 3:4-6). He then explains that it is not because God has failed or broken His promises to Israel, but rather that Israel has collectively failed to uphold God’s promises and intentions for her.

Romans 11 is based on the figure of an olive tree. Some of the branches of this tree have been broken off, while others—from a wild olive tree—have been grafted in to the tree (the existing rootstock). The rootstock, which receives the new, foreign branches, is the remnant of Israel and the original inheritor of God’s salvation through its own root, Abraham and the other patriarchs. The branches which have been broken off of the olive tree constitute unbelieving Israel, while those branches grafted in from the wild olive tree are the Gentiles, saved by God’s gracious action of giving them access by faith to Christ as well as the “oracles of God”, the holy Scriptures, and thereby they come to “share in the nourishing root of the olive tree” that is, the covenants made with patriarchs (v. 17). This God has done not only to fulfill His own promises concerning the Gentiles (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 9:2; Rom. 3:29-30;15:9) but also, through these new grafted in branches, to provoke some of unbelieving Israel to jealousy, which Paul assures will lead to new faith and so to be themselves grafted back into their own rootstock. Together, the remnant of Israel with the prophesied addition of Gentiles, constitute the ekkllesia of God, to which the remainder of those destined for salvation will be added. But Paul goes on to warn the Gentiles that they should not be arrogant since it is not they who support the root, “but the root supports you” (v. 18) and that if God could break off the natural branches because of unbelief, he can do the same to the Gentiles for arrogance and ungratefulness (vs. 20-22).

In the opening verses of chapter 11, Paul makes it clear that God has not rejected His people, that is, those He foreknew (vs. 1-2) but declares rather—in keeping with Isaiah, (Isa. 10:22, LXX)—that a remnant of the faithful has been chosen by grace (v. 5). “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel… and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named’” (Rom. 9:6-7).

In verses 17 and 24 Paul depicts Gentiles as branches from a wild olive tree that have been grafted into a cultivated rootstock. Elsewhere—but echoing Romans 11—Paul says that Gentiles have up till then been excluded from citizenship in Israel, are foreigners (i.e. a wild olive tree) to the covenants of promise and therefore have been without hope and have been far away (Eph. 2:11-13). As idol worshippers (1 Cor. 12:2), Gentiles have been beyond God’s pale as it were, whereas Jews were entrusted with the very oracles of God (Rom. 3:2). In the development of his argument Paul stresses that there is a remnant of Israel saved by grace. This remnant is the inheritor of God’s promise of salvation made to the patriarchs, who form the root of the olive tree. In v. 16, Paul uses an additional metaphor in order to reinforce this idea. He says that “If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches”. The firstfruits and the dough both refer to the Patriarchs and the saving promises given to them, the root of the olive tree. It is the saving promises that have made salvation possible for Gentiles, not their own goodness (Eph. 2:8). The majority of Jews were removed (as branches broken off the tree) because of their obstinate disbelief, while the Gentile branches have been grafted into the tree of Israel because of their faith in God made known to them through the word of God, both written and living. It is important to understand that the metaphor of the olive tree teaches first, Gentiles are
indebted to Judaism for this salvation (John 4:22) and not the reverse and second, that God has not finally forsaken his people Israel (Deut. 4:30; 28:64; 30:3; Eze. 37:11-14; Isa. 43:5-6).

This means two things. First, it means that if God has not finally forsaken His people, then they are still the inheritors of His covenant blessings. This is the meaning of the message of Jeremiah 31:30-33. The new covenant applies directly and firstly to Israel and indirectly and secondly to the Gentiles. Let me quote David Stern on this point. “God’s New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (Jeremiah 31:30-33 (31-34) through Yeshua the Messiah blesses all mankind by providing the final and permanent atonement for sin and by promising that the Holy Spirit of God will write the Torah on the heart of anyone with faith. It thus complements the earlier covenants without annulling them (Galatians 3). It was promised in the Tanakh, and the books of the New Testament elaborate on it.” The fact that God always had a heart for Gentile Christians is manifest in several places in Scripture (i.e. Gen. 12:3; Isa. 11:10; 49:6). But the covenant (and therefore the law, including the fourth commandment) applies to Gentiles only in the sense that those who receive the blessing of salvation receive it as branches grafted into the rootstock of the remnant of Israel. Not only that, but the grafting in of the Gentiles—and therefore the blessing of salvation given to them through the original covenant with Abraham—has the secondary purpose of creating jealousy (a kind of covetousness) in unbelieving, Rabbinic Judaism. According to Paul, this will cause them to turn back to the root of their faith and become children of the promise, that is, believers in Christ Jesus as the one true Messiah. The point being made here (and in what follows) is that Gentiles have received the blessing of the covenant in a way similar to how adopted children receive their inheritance. It is not their birthright in the way it is for the natural offspring, but is theirs because it was given to them by a decision made. The inheritance belongs to the natural children by right of birth and is then shared with the newly adopted sons or daughters. So the blessings of the law, including the fourth commandment, are given to Gentiles in a similar fashion, and all the rights, responsibilities and privileges of the law are just as binding on them as on the natural children.

Now coming to consider the account of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, we will see that it offers a differing (but not conflicting) perspective than that of Romans 11 on the relationship between Judaism and the Ekklesia. In the context of Acts 15:1-21, we are given James’ speech outlining his plan of concession for reconciling the Gentile believers with their Jewish brothers and sisters, particularly with the party of Judaizers. The entire account is important for two reasons. One, it acknowledges the widening rift between the two groups within Judaism at large, but specifically between Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians, polarized by the issue of circumcision,6 and two, it refers to a poorly understood OT original promise later echoed by Christ in the NT that seems to indicate that Christ would rebuild or restore something that had fallen on hard times, that is, the remnant of God, including Gentiles, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” The passage that Jesus seemed to have in mind is found in James’ speech beginning at verse 16 and which is a quote from the prophet Amos, “After this [or “in that day”] I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old” (italics added; quoting Amos 9:11-12, LXX). Thus, the rebuilding of David’s tent echoes the idea of Paul that Gentiles were grafted into something that had already existed and was the manifestation of the promise of salvation and the blessings of God. It was indeed something new and novel, never having existed before, but at the same time it was also something that God had laboured over long before according to the good purpose of His will (Isa. 55:8-9).

Focusing for the moment on the second aspect from Acts 15, the building (or rebuilding) of Christ’s Church or Ekklesia, we will consider the first aspect—some of the causes of the growing rift between sanctuary and synagogue—in a following section. I’d like to begin by considering the belief of many Christians that the church had its genesis on the day of Pentecost, with the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4) and that prior to this event, did not exist. This belief is contrary to the belief of covenant theologians—mostly Reformed or Calvinist—who maintain the continuity of God’s people from the OT but who nevertheless believe at the same time that the church has superseded Israel as God’s
chosen people, an idea Paul found outrageous according to my understanding of Romans 11. This belief we described earlier as Replacement theology (because the church has replaced Israel as being more worthy of the favour of God). This orientation is also known as Triumphalism because supposedly the Gentile Church of Christ has triumphed over the Jewish Tabernacle of Moses.

Interestingly, the Pentecost event was revealed not to Gentiles at all, but to Jews, described as “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5ff). The others who mocked were either worldly, irreligious Jews and/or Gentiles then residing in Jerusalem. The sermon that Peter preached that day (Acts 2:14-36) was preached to these devout men, “men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” as well as to many Jews on pilgrimage to Jerusalem from other countries. In other words, the audience of this first sermon was predominantly if not exclusively Jewish! Not only that, they were convicted on the spot by Peter’s sermon and three thousands of them came to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the prophesied Messiah. Peter targets his message by saying that “the promise [of salvation in Christ as Messiah, through Abraham and Isaac, the root of the olive tree] is one, for you and your children and two, for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” [i.e. Jews first, then Gentiles]. Let me make the point once again that there were no Gentiles in the early, apostolic Ekklesia. The account of the coming to faith of three thousand Jews establishes Christ’s admission: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24, see also 10:5-6). Moreover, since these initial three thousand converts were described as devout people, it is reasonable to conclude that they were members of synagogues in their home communities. As well, most, if not all, were in Jerusalem in order to participate in Shavu’ót or the Feast of Weeks, a harvest festival mandated by God (Lev. 23) and which began on the fiftieth day from the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:15-21; Num. 28:26-31; Deut. 16:9-12). Remember, all these devout men were circumcised, card-carrying Hebrews who kept Torah, not only Shavu’ót but the fourth commandment as well!

So, getting back to James and the quote from Amos, we see from the prior event at Pentecost that the words of Christ—and Amos before Him, quoted by James and that corroborated the same message preached by Paul in the eleventh chapter of his letter to the Romans—were being fulfilled and carried out by His apostles, beginning with Peter. But what does the quote from Amos have to do with Jesus’ words in Matt. 16:18 and what does any of this have to do with the Sabbath? I’m working my way to it; stay with me.

“In that day [paraphrased by James as “after these things”, that is, meaning after the Destruction and Exile of ethnic Israel described by Amos in vs. 8-10, and from which a remnant will emerge] I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and will rebuild the ruins of it, and will set up the parts thereof that have been broken down, and will build it up as in the ancient days: that the remnant of men, and all the Gentiles upon whom my name is called, may earnestly seek me, saith the L. The words in Greek script are hard to distinguish. Moreover, some have noted that the Greek can easily take the sense of “to build again.” This option is confirmed by the words “as in the ancient days” or “as the days of old” (NETS). This qualifying statement, beginning “as in…” strongly implies that the building is not unique but is a kind of renewal or repair of what had been built before but was now in a state of decline or decrepitude. (As well, there is the possibility of scribal error between oikodomeo and anoikodomeo. The words in Greek script are hard to distinguish).

In light of Amos and James, when Christ said “I will build my church” I believe he meant “I will rebuild my church.” The word translated “build” in English is the Greek oikodomeo. In the LXX version of Amos (the version known and used by Jesus and all the apostles, including James) the word is anoikodomeo, to rebuild. But depending on how one reads the grammatical construction, the Greek can allow the word oikodomeo to easily take the sense of “to build again.” This option is confirmed by the words “as in the ancient days” or “as the days of old” (NETS). This qualifying statement, beginning “as in…” strongly implies that the building is not unique but is a kind of renewal or repair of what had been built before but was now in a state of decline or decrepitude. (As well, there is the possibility of scribal error between oikodomeo and anoikodomeo. The words in Greek script are hard to distinguish).

So what? Well, just this: the Ekklesia, that is, the Assembly, was in some way already in existence when Christ spoke to Peter in Matt. 16:18. But not in the way that covenant theologians understand. The true Israel of God was a remnant from within larger ethnic Israel as we can see from the
verses immediately preceding our previously quoted passage from Amos: “Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the kingdom of sinners [ethnic Israel], and I will cut it off from the face of the earth; only I will not utterly cut off the house of Jacob, saith the Lord. For I will give commandment, and sift the house of Israel among all the Gentiles, as corn is sifted in a sieve, and yet a fragment [the remnant] shall not in any wise fall [become extinct] upon the earth” (Amos 9:8-9).

This remnant is the very olive tree spoken of by Paul in Romans 11. As such it will be saved along with all the elect Gentiles grafted into its rootstock! Christ did not create a new entity; he renewed one that already belonged to Him and had been in existence from at least the calling of Abraham.

In regard to the obligatory nature of the Sabbath for God’s people—and in light of Paul’s inspired use of the metaphor of the olive tree—it is well to keep in mind the implications of remnant theology which maintains the unity of a believing remnant of Israel and the Gentile ekklesia. If remnant theology is correct and the church has indeed been grafted into believing Israel, and if God gave His chosen people the Sabbath—as part of the moral law—then the privilege and blessing of accepting the Sabbath as part of the new covenant is binding on the church as it has always been binding on Israel, unless—and this is extremely important—under the terms of the new covenant it can be clearly shown from Scripture that the fourth commandment has been repealed (or significantly amended) by God! But nowhere in Scripture—let me repeat myself—nowhere in Scripture, is there to be found a statement of such a repeal or amendment.

In the foregoing I have tried to provide a theological basis for my central contention, which I now articulate:

- Since the Sabbath, being a creation ordinance, is not restricted to ethnic Israel;
- and as Gentile believers are “grafted in” to the root of Israel and are consequently governed by the same (covenant) conditions;
- and as these conditions form the substance of the covenant imposed by God through Abraham and confirmed with Isaac and Jacob, who are collectively the root of the olive tree;
- and as the moral law forms the essential terms of God’s covenant;
- and as the Sabbath is part of the moral law;
- therefore, Gentiles are both privileged and obligated to keep the Sabbath which is theirs as by adoption or grafting in.

Having referred to the moral law, it is necessary for me now to very briefly describe what I mean by the term as far as it bears on my overall thesis.

The moral law—in our specific context—refers to the Ten Commandments, which are summary statements of all God’s moral demands and standards.7 This law, written directly and immediately by the LORD God on tablets of stone, communicated the moral standards of God which apply universally to men because mankind is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). This law, as an expression of the moral essence of God, is therefore an unchanging, eternal, and binding set of requirements.

The moral law is divided into two parts. The first part pertains to mankind’s relationship with God. The second part pertains to the proper and required relationship that human beings are to have with one another. (It is instructive that this division is implied by two specific examples of God’s law found in the OT scriptures, Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5. It is not a coincidence that Christ refers to these same two moral requirements in Matt. 22:36-40. By doing so, He demonstrates the binding nature of the moral law for all believers, not just those who were bound by the covenant on Sinai. By this admonition, Christ declares that the moral law is still in effect—not as a means of justification—but as the rule of devotional thankfulness to the one who, through perfect obedience, fulfilled every requirement of the law on behalf of His people who, in themselves, have never been able to obey the law (Num. 15:15-16; Matt. 5:17; James 2:10-11).
Let me draw a brief distinction between the three aspects of the law. The “moral law” is foundational and eternal. It is binding on every human being. The “civil law” is the outward or social application of the principles of the moral law for the purpose of social justice. The “ceremonial law” is the spiritual application of the principles of the moral law for the purposes of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. The civil and ceremonial aspects of the law were Israel’s application of the moral law to the experience of everyday life in the world.

It is critical to understand that the command to keep the Sabbath is embedded in the moral law of God. The fourth commandment cannot be considered as part of the ceremonial or the civil law. To do so is to do a severe injustice to the Word of God. As we have already seen, the Sabbath commandment is found in several places in Scripture and is summarized in the two separate renditions of the moral law (Exo. 20:2-17; Deut. 5:6-21). Therefore, anyone who maintains that the Sabbath commandment is not part of the moral law is guilty of perverting the Word of God.

But just how can keeping the Sabbath be a moral injunction? What can resting (or worshipping) on a particular day have to do with morality? Well, if we see this as a merely human issue we will never understand. The Sabbath commandment is the last commandment of the first table, the table that describes our relationship with God. Remember from Gen. 2:3 that God “blessed” the seventh day (the Sabbath) and made it “holy.” Remember that blessing is to confer benefit upon something or someone. By blessing this day, and including it as part of the moral law, which God gave for our benefit and happiness, God is saying that by keeping this day holy—in remembrance of Him, our ultimate benefactor—we will obtain the blessing attached to the day—the blessing of rest, both physical and spiritual. And by acknowledging the holiness of the day, we are declaring our love for God, and our joyful willingness to trust Him and His promises. This is at least partly why the Sabbath is included in the moral law. Moreover, since the moral law is eternal and unchanging, the Sabbath too is eternal and unchanging. Accordingly, just as we have no excuse for theft, adultery or murder, we have no excuse for neglecting the Sabbath.

How then did the church deviate from this truth? In the next section, we will look briefly at some factors that appear to have contributed to and exacerbated the growing schism and hostility between Torah-believing Jews and Gentile believers, thus ensuring a rejection by the church of any OT practices not also unavoidably mandated in the NT. We have already mentioned the theological chasm that separates Jew from Christian—the claim made by Christ, His apostles and all true believers that Jesus is the Messiah. This is too large an issue to address in this essay. I must ask the reader therefore to accept that this (along with the implied threat to Hebrew monotheism posed by it, Deut. 6:4) was and is the bottom line of the separation between ethnic Israel and followers of “the Way”, the Ekklesia and what came to be known as the Church.

GIVEN THE FUNDAMENTAL—AND SEEMINGLY UNRESOLVABLE—PROBLEM of Christ’s divinity, misunderstanding, fear, hostility and persecution were bound to follow and so they did. The hostility and persecution were major contributing factors in the eventual rejection or manipulation by Christian leaders and teachers of not a few Jewish doctrines and understandings, including the place and importance of the Sabbath. Of course, at first the hostility and persecution were one-sided. The position of the power-elite of the Jews—mostly Pharisees who would, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, transform Temple Judaism, based on sacrifice, into Rabbinic Judaism, based on devotion and good works—was compromised by what the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin saw as a dangerous threat to their religious status and economic and social well-being (Matt. 23:23). And too, being merely human, they sometimes sincerely and sometimes hypocritically tried to follow the dictates of Torah as law, often willfully and stubbornly misunderstanding the fact that salvation has never been of works of the law, but always, in both dispensations, of grace alone (Gen. 15:6; Hab. 2:4b; Mark 7:3; Luke 18:11-12). If we do not accept the fact of this basically insurmountable divide, what follows will make no sense. This profound difference—a difference not only of worldviews but of the nature of God and His redemptive grace—has worked itself out in history with grievous consequence for Jew and Gentile alike, much to the delight of
the Accuser of men.

The divide was not just between Gentiles and unbeliefing Jews. It is evident from Acts, chapter 15 that very early on in the assembly of Christ, there was a dangerous divide opening up between Gentiles and Messianic (believing) Jews, in spite of Paul’s declarations of and exhortations for unity within the Ekklesia (Rom. 12:4-5, 18; Eph. 4:1-3). In the account of the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-21), we are given a clear view of the serious rift that was threatening the assembly even though only about 25 years had passed since Christ had walked the land and taught the people. There, in response to members of the Jewish law faction (the “Judaizers”), who maintained that it was necessary for Gentiles to become circumcised, the council decided (with the agreement of the Holy Spirit) that formal obedience to the entire law of Moses, including circumcision, was not required by Gentile members. However, in order not to offend those Jewish believers who still mistakenly believed that full compliance with the Torah (the law), was a requirement for salvation, a compromise was agreed to since apparently, as James argued, the Gentiles who were attending synagogue services anyway would sooner or later learn and accept the demands of the Torah, understanding that, because of Christ, such acceptance was not a requirement for salvation.

But unfortunately this solution didn’t stop the growing alienation. Nor was the alienation now felt only on one side. Obviously paying no attention to Paul, both believing Jews and Gentiles were becoming increasingly hostile to one another. Non-believing, mainstream Jews were hostile to both as we see from the Birkat ha-Minim⁹, a so-called Jewish “benediction” aimed by post-temple Rabbis at filtering out heretics, dissidents and other assorted trouble-makers. (John’s Gospel refers to exclusion from the Synagogue in three places, John 9:22; 12:42; 16:2, and although not certain this exclusion may have at least partly resulted from the public reading of the Birkat during synagogue services.) As we know from the Gospels, the Sanhedrin was instrumental in the persecution, arrest and initial prosecution of Christ, and was as a body only accidentally innocent of His blood, the intention of the leaders being Jesus’ death, one way or another. The Jewish authorities (including Saul, the Pharisee, before his conversion on the road to Damascus) were also persecuting the apostles soon after the death of Christ. Illustrative of this is the stoning of Stephen by a Jerusalem mob (Acts 7:58) while Saul looked on approvingly.

Persecution of Messianic Jews and Gentile converts by the largely Pharisaic Sanhedrin began almost immediately after Christ’s resurrection and ascension (as recorded in Acts 4 for instance). So the drift away from the Torah was already underway by the time John wrote his Revelation and made reference to the Lord’s Day. This hostility was a major barrier to accepting anything which smacked of OT ceremonialism. Unfortunately, this included keeping the Sabbath as it was such a public and open expression of the OT dispensation.

But two other significant events need to be mentioned as contributing to the rift between Jews and Gentiles. These were the two revolts or wars by the Jews against Rome, the First Jewish–Roman War (66–73CE) and the Bar Kochba revolt (132–136 CE). The first war changed Judaism fundamentally, enabling the Pharisees to gain the lion’s share of the power within the Jewish world and (eventually) bringing to a close the sacrificial system upon which mainstream Judaism had rested.

According to Wikipedia, “The Bar Kochba revolt (132–136 CE)...was the third major rebellion by the Jews of Judaea Province against the Roman Empire and the last of the Jewish-Roman Wars. Simon bar Kochba, the commander of the revolt, was acclaimed as a Messiah, a heroic figure who could restore Israel. The revolt established an independent state of Israel over parts of Judea for over two years, but a Roman army...finally crushed it. The Romans then barred Jews from Jerusalem, except to attend Tisha B’Av. Although Jewish Christians hailed Jesus as the Messiah and did not support Bar Kochba, they were barred from Jerusalem along with the rest of the Jews. The war and its aftermath helped differentiate Christianity as a religion distinct from Judaism” (italics added).

The smoldering resentment of the Jews was made much worse because in both wars, the Christians refused to be combatants. In fact, the Bar Kochba rebellion forced Jews and Gentiles even further apart because Bar Kochba was believed by Jews to be the Messiah, whereas Christians along with Messianic Jews understood that Christ was the Messiah. This meant that believers could not give their
support to Bar Kochba as that would demonstrate not only disloyalty to Christ but downright rejection of Him as the true Messiah—an option that was unthinkable for the faithful.

Recapitulating the argument thus far, what we see from the biblical record, as well as the secular record from men such as the historian Josephus, is a growing schism between Jews and Gentiles beginning soon after the death of Christ, fundamentally caused by the profound theological difference between the two groups.

As time passed, more and more Gentiles were being evangelized and baptized, adding almost exponentially to the number of Gentiles within Judaism—especially so since the Council of Jerusalem in about 50 CE, freed all gentile converts from the unpleasant ritual of adult circumcision. Partly as a result of these two trends, coupled with increasing anti-Jewish teachings, the shift away from the Sabbath by Gentiles grew more pronounced. With the second century well underway (and resulting to a great extent from persecution, evangelism among the nations and infant baptism) Sunday was gaining ground in churches as the day of worship. Among Messianic Jews however, the Sabbath was still held in pristine regard. In the dialogue surrounding the issue of the Lord’s Day, the important Christian document, Didache (dated by most scholars to the late first or early 2nd century) has this to say “On the Lord’s day, gather yourselves together and break bread, give thanks, but first confess your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure” (14:1). This seems to be describing a minimal form of established worship. So by late in the first century at least some Christians, in some places, were engaging in Sunday worship. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of the apostle John, in his letter to the Magnesians refers to those who had “obtained new hope, no longer ‘Sabbathing’ but living according to the Lord’s [Day] on which our life dawned through Him and His death”, not understanding the true import of passages such as Heb. 9:23-24.

A second example illustrating the growing popularity of Sunday worship is an early document from the pen of Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) who wrote that Christians in his day gathered together on Sunday for worship, “because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things” (First Apology, Ch. 67). Interestingly, Justin is putting a distinct spin (to be generous) on the teachings of Jesus. Reading Justin, it sounds as if Jesus taught that because He was resurrected on Sunday, His disciples should worship—not on the day appointed by God, His “holy convocation”—but instead on the first day of the week, which just happened to be a pagan day of worship. But Christ nowhere teaches such a thing, nor do His apostles. In fact, not only is the Bible (both the OT and the NT) silent on any day but Saturday as the divinely sanctioned day of corporate or assembled worship, it nowhere teaches the reasons given by Justin for the change. Justin gives as His first reason that it is the first day of creation, “having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, [God] made the world.” But where in the Bible does God announce this? Where does God command us to worship and rest giving His act of creation as the reason? Nowhere. But what does the Word of God actually teach? “So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Gen. 2:3). We have seen that God blessed this day, later named the Sabbath, and called it a “holy convocation.” Rather than giving the reason for a special day as the beginning of creation, the Bible makes it plain that it was the end, cessation and completion of creation that God commanded to be commemorated on the last day of the week, the Sabbath. For Justin to give any other reason (especially the one he does) is to pervert the Word of God. And as far as the teaching of the Bible that a second reason for the change was the resurrection, again, where is this found in the Bible? And again we answer “Nowhere.” It sounds oh so pious and holy to say such a thing but this is exactly how Satan operates in the world—by twisting, perverting and corrupting our understanding of the Word, using our own ignorance, envy and pride to “lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:24).

As well, nowhere in the NT—in spite of numerous opportunities—is the resurrection given as a reason for resting and worshipping on Sunday, the first day of the week. There are indeed two reasons for the Sabbath, but they are definitely not the ones provided by Justin and accepted by the church at large.
Exo. 20:11 and Deut. 5:15 are the explicit, God-given reasons for Sabbath keeping. We are to rest on the seventh day because God rested on the seventh day and we are to remember that God delivered His people from the bonds of slavery. And is this deliverance from slavery not the essential reason for Christ’s foretold life and sacrificial death (Gen. 3:15)? In the sense that Christ has delivered all God’s people, the true Ekklesia, from the curse of death, this deliverance through Christ leads us to abide in Him through devotional gratefulness and the certain trust that removes every shred of doubt and fear. What can be said, in light of some verses of the NT (Gal. 4:10 perhaps being most prominent), is that—because Christ is the fulfillment of all of God’s laws, ordinances and commandments as well as the one true and final sacrifice for sin—when we are “in Christ” (Gal. 2:20) we are indeed abiding in God’s rest (itself a form of perpetual worship) so consequently there seems to be a certain degree of liberty or freedom to rest and or worship on any day of the week. But such freedom in no way alters the fact that Sabbath is and always will be the only divinely sanctioned day on which to gather together as God’s summoned assembly for rest and worship. The Sabbath was both a private as well as collective day of rest and worship and this is significant to understanding its importance. We may be at liberty as individuals to rest and worship whenever we are able and have opportunity (including Sunday), but as God’s assembly, only one day will suffice—the Sabbath. The church has done nothing less than turn away from God’s commandments and laws and has instead substituted and embraced her own “traditions of men” (Isa. 1:12; Matt. 15:3, 8-9).

So then, the first day of creation and the resurrection of Christ have been the fundamental justifications for keeping Sunday as the Christian day of worship, in spite of a complete absence of testimony from Scripture. However, on balance, we also have the witness of those who testify that the practice of Sunday worship was not automatically accepted by all believers as the rule. For example, Socrates of Constantinople, (380 CE) also known as Socrates Scholasticus, a Greek historian of the church, known to be fair and objective, wrote that “almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries [the Lord’s Supper] on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, [remember this piece of information] on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this” (Ecclesiastical History, Book 5, Ch. 22, italics added). A contemporary of Socrates, Sozomen, confirmed a lingering ambivalence surrounding the issue, “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 [again, remember this bit of information] or Alexandria” (Ecclesiastical History, Book 7, Ch. 19, italics added).

Into the second century, while the church was undergoing a severe trial of persecution by pagan Rome, she was simultaneously shooting an increasingly hostile series of polemic homilies and diatribes at Jews. Before moving on therefore, it is necessary to give one or two representative examples of this growing verbal hostility. We have already made reference to Justin Martyr and his rationalization for declaring Sunday the Christian day of worship. And in his Dialogue with Trypho [a Jew], after paraphrasing Scriptural passages he claims refer to the church, not Israel, he writes, “They are contained in your Scriptures, or rather not yours, but ours. For we believe them; but you, though you read them, do not catch the spirit that is in them” (Ch. 29, italics added). Earlier in the same Dialogue, he writes, “For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; and that you alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem” (Ch. 16, italics added).

But as time wore on and the church (now the church of Rome) became powerful as a result of the Council of Laodicea (see below), stalwarts of the faith were more brazen in their condemnation. The “golden-mouthed” preacher John Chrysostom from Antioch (c. 347-407 CE) wrote “Many I know respect the Jews and think that their present way of life is a venerable one. This is why I hasten to uproot and tear out this deadly opinion…the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theatre; it also is a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts…when God forsakes a people, what hope of salvation is left? When God forsakes a place, that place becomes a dwelling of demons…The Jews live for their bellies, they gape for the things of this world, their condition is no better than that of pigs or goats because of their wanton ways
and excessive gluttony. They know but one thing: to fill their bellies and be drunk” (Adversus Iudaeos, 1.3.1; 1.4.1, quoted in Our Father Abraham). We should note that in claiming that God has forsaken His people the Jews, Chrysostom deftly manipulates God’s Word so as to leave the impression that God has forever and utterly forsaken the Jewish nation. And though it is true that God had, from time to time, temporarily forsaken His people for egregious sin (Deut. 28:20; Judges 10:12-14; Amos 5:2, etc.) such rejection is neither permanent nor total (1 Kings 19:18; Psalm 9:10; Isa. 60:15-16; 62:4-5; Matt. 15:24; Rom. 11:1 etc.). That truth is conveniently overlooked by Chrysostom and many church fathers.

Yet another tactic employed by the church to hijack the sacred writings was (and still is) to overly allegorize passages so as to make them favourable to herself or to show that much of the OT was pointing by way of typology to Christ, the apostles, the new covenant, the church and so on (triumphalism). Let me provide but two examples of the unreliability of such allegorizing. Going back to Justin Martyr and his dialogue with Trypho, he writes, “‘And the offering of fine flour, sirs,’ I said, ‘which was prescribed to be presented on behalf of those purified from leprosy, was a type of the bread of the Eucharist, the celebration of which our Lord Jesus Christ prescribed…’” (Ch. 61). And again, “the prescription that twelve bells be attached to the [robe] of the high priest, which hung down to the feet, was a symbol of the twelve apostles” (Ch. 62, italics added). Many more examples could be provided, but these will suffice for our purpose.

The church had to allegorize the OT scriptures, since—because of the authority given them by Christ and the apostles—she was not at liberty to ignore them. But through the use of biased allegory, the church was able to hijack the Jewish Scripture, and through the very unJewish system of Greek philosophy (primarily Platonic and Aristotelian) Hellenized the scriptures, making them her own.

Now though we still have much ground to traverse, we cannot leave this part of our subject until we have given at least fleeting consideration to the role of the Roman Emperor Constantine (272-337 CE), the Edict of Milan (313 CE) and the Council of Laodicea (364 CE) in the final separation of Scripture from Biblical Judaism.

Who was Constantine? The foremost Roman general of his time, Constantine defeated the emperors Maxentius and Licinius during a period of Roman civil war. He also fought successfully against the barbarian tribes of central Europe as well as the remnant of the Medo-Persian Empire, the Parthians. Constantine also transformed the ancient Greek colony of Byzantium into a new imperial residence—Constantinople—which would be the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire for over one thousand years.

In 312 CE, Constantine, on his way to a pivotal battle, is said to have seen a Christian sign appear in the sky, displaying the words, “In Hoc Signo Vinces.” In short order he had the message painted on his troops’ standards and went on to fight the battle of the Milvian Bridge (against then Emperor Maxentius). He won the battle and became the new Emperor. A year later, (313 CE) because of winning this key battle under the Christian insignia, he converted to a form of Christianity (Arianism, later denounced as heretical) and then proclaimed the Edict of Milan, which confirmed two earlier unenforced letters of toleration by the previous emperors Galerius and Licinius. The Edict allowed Christianity equal status with other religions, but quickly this led to preferred status over all the other religions in the empire, especially of Judaism. It also helped to legitimate the claim of the Bishops of Rome that they were Peter’s heirs and the vicars of Christ on earth thus driving the wedge even more deeply between Judaism and what had become a separate Gentile body, called the church.

With her establishment as a legally separate entity, completely cut off from her Jewish roots and with growing influence and power as a result of Constantine’s patronage, the church (of Rome) had the freedom to say and do what she wanted. And one of the things she wanted most was to be rid of any and all associations with Judaism. As we have seen, she had already started the divorce proceedings through abusive verbal attacks but also by hijacking the scriptures through an excessive and unjustified use of allegory, which enabled her to put a distinctly Gentile (even pagan) perspective on the Jewish Torah.

Now however, in the power of her new freedom, she would go one step further, officially changing the day of worship from Saturday, the Jewish day of rest, to Sunday the pagan Day of the Sun. She was quick to justify this change with the rationale of Justin Martyr. But unnoticed by most is the
simple fact that this is an inference or a “personal interpretation” of Scripture, about which we are warned by the apostle Peter (2 Peter 1:20-21) and which teaching is nowhere articulated in God’s Word.

The prophet Ezekiel in 22:26 excoriates the house of Israel because “Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things. They have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them” (italics added). But this is precisely what the CoR did at the Council of Laodicea around the year 364 CE, “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord’s Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema (cursed or damned) from Christ” (Canon 29, Percival trans., Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Vol. 14, italics added). What had been a trend or custom (tradition) resulting from ignorance and animosity, became enshrined as church law. Indeed, the church of Rome is bold to take credit for the change, which in effect re-writes the Word of God,

“Is not every Christian obliged to sanctify Sunday and to abstain on that day from unnecessary servile work? Is not the observance of this law among the most prominent of our sacred duties? But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify.” — James Cardinal Gibbons, The Faith of Our Fathers (1917 edition), p. 72-73 (16th Edition. p 111; 88th Edition, p. 89).

“For example, nowhere in the Bible do we find that Christ or the Apostles ordered that the Sabbath be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We have the commandment of God given to Moses to keep holy the Sabbath day, that is the 7th day of the week, Saturday. Today most Christians keep Sunday because it has been revealed to us by the [Roman Catholic] church outside the Bible.” — Catholic Virginian, October 3, 1947, p. 9, article “To Tell You the Truth”, (italics added).

“Perhaps the boldest thing, the most revolutionary change the church ever did, happened in the first century. The holy day, the Sabbath, was changed from Saturday to Sunday. ‘The day of the Lord’ was chosen, not from any direction noted in the Scriptures, but from the (Catholic) Church’s sense of its own power...People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority, should logically become 7th Day Adventists, and keep Saturday holy.” — St. Catherine Church Sentinel, Algonac, Michigan, May 21, 1995.

“It was the Catholic church which...has transferred this rest to Sunday in remembrance of the resurrection of our Lord. Therefore the observance of Sunday by the Protestants is an homage they pay, in spite of themselves, to the authority of the (Catholic) church.” — Monsignor Louis Segur, Plain Talk About the Protestantism of Today, p. 213.

Sunday worship is the official position not only of the church of Rome but of most Protestant denominations and congregations (CCC Part 1, Sec. 2, Ch. 1 Art. 3; WCF, 22:7; Heidelberg Q&A 103).

WE COME NOW TO CONCERNS based on what appears to be conflicting Scriptural testimony. Let us take a moment to consider this testimony, sincerely looking to Scripture in the spirit of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) to see if we are mistaken in our contention that the Word of God nowhere teaches that Sabbath keeping has been abrogated for God’s people.

Exo. 31:16-17
These verses are saying that sabbath-keeping was a special sign between God and Israel.
And with that I have no quarrel. We have seen that indeed, this passage is clearly stating that the Sabbath belongs, *in a legal sense*, to Israel. It was given to Israel forensically and covenantally. But as adopted sons and daughters—that is as branches of a wild olive tree grafted into the rootstock of Israel—Gentiles too are privileged, and in fact obligated, inheritors of the Sabbath covenant.

**Matt. 5:20-22; Mark 10:18-20; Rom. 13:9; 1 Tim. 1:8-10; James 2:11; etc.**

Many think that because it is not mentioned in these lists of commandments, the fourth commandment was made redundant. This of course is to ignore the obvious fact that these were *all incomplete*—and therefore only *representative*—lists. The point is that in all these passages Christ, Paul and James were referring to the Ten Commandments as being the *authoritative source* in determining correct moral behaviour. It is worth reflecting on the fact that James in his letter refers directly to the law of God (the Ten Commandments) and categorically states that when one commandment is broken, it is as if they were all broken. We cannot cherry-pick which Commandments we will accept, and which we will reject. These Commandments are all of a piece and cannot be separated from one another without doing violence to the entire Torah of God.

**Acts 15:1, 5, 10, 11, 20, 21**

What is the real issue here? The main concerns of the council were that many (Judaizers) mistakenly believed that the Torah or law was required in order to be saved (salvation by works, 1 Cor. 1:23) and that Gentiles could only be included in God’s plan of salvation by complete acceptance of the Torah (Rom. 3:29). In this account there is no hint that the Sabbath was no longer binding. The council (and the Holy Spirit) could have used this perfect opportunity to alter application of the law for Gentiles so as to allow Sunday worship (or at least to declare the Sabbath as no longer binding) but didn’t. In every case where the writers of NT scripture could teach about a change in the moral law, no such teaching occurs.

**Rom. 14:5**

The meaning of this verse is found in the context of the entire passage which we discover from the very first verse. In this passage, Paul addresses the weak faith of some believers and how they are to be treated by those stronger in their faith. He uses the two examples of food and holy days (and spends more time talking about eating and drinking than about holy days or festivals). If we are to consider seriously the remarks of Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen, though they wrote much later, it nevertheless could be that by the time Paul wrote this letter (57 CE), the Roman congregation may already have been thinking about making the switch to Sunday worship. In any event, this verse (supported by its context) does not have Sabbath keeping in view. But Paul, ever the one to seek peace and unity among the brethren, was being diligent in trying to find some common ground on which to build.

Paul was proud of his Jewish heritage and was himself a Pharisee and was taught the Torah by Gamaliel, one of the leading Rabbis of the era (Acts 5:34; 22:3). He valued the law highly, though he understood the danger of confusing works righteousness with grace. To presume that Paul could jettison the moral law of God because of the danger of legalism or ceremonialism is a very serious mistake.

**1 Cor. 16:2 & Acts 20:7**

In 1 Cor. 16:2, it appears at first glance (in light of Acts 20:7 and 2 Cor. 9:12) that Paul is telling the Corinthians to bring a financial offering when they come together to break bread (celebrate the Lord’s Supper?), “On the first day of every week, *each of you* is to put something aside and store it up, as *he* may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.” But the Greek does not indicate this exactly. Certainly Paul is demanding an offering (probably of money) for the Jerusalem church, but the Greek gives the sense that Paul is addressing his demand to individual members of the Corinthian congregation and as each member has prospered (treasured up) he should decide on an amount he could afford and put that amount aside, weekly. Then, when Paul comes to Corinth, he will not have to wait further for collections to be made as people would have been setting money aside prior to his visit. However, there is
no evidence in 1 Cor. 16:2, 2 Cor. 9:12 or Acts 20:7 to support the contention that these offerings were made during worship services; only that they were set aside by individuals on the first day of the week (Sunday). To assert that they were made during worship services and to go from there to assuming this is proving and legitimizing Sunday worship is to read our own presuppositions into the text. Therefore I contend these texts do not support the primacy of Sunday worship. Even if that could be shown, the early church did not recognize the Sabbath day as a day of rest. Gentile Christians, coming from, and still largely part of, a pagan culture, had no day of rest. They worked within a grid of 7 days a week, sunup to sundown. Their times of worship occurred either in the early morning or in the latter part of the evening. For them, the Lord’s Day was a day of *remembrance* and worship, not a day of *rest* and worship.

Many Christian commentators are of the opinion that in Acts 20:7, Luke is describing a Christian worship service (specifically a communion service, the Lord’s Supper) because of his reference to breaking bread. They then uncritically form the conclusion that this legitimizes their practice of Sunday worship. But “breaking bread” was a common Jewish expression describing a meal, usually communal, sometimes sanctified, but not necessarily so. Communal Jewish meals commenced with a prayer of thanksgiving, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth” followed by the breaking in two of a loaf of bread, which in turn was followed by the meal proper.19 Since Paul boasted of his Jewish heritage, of which he was very proud (Phil. 3:5), and began his evangelical ministry to Jews not Gentiles (Acts 9:29; 13:5; 17:1-2)—therefore putting his activities in a Jewish milieu—it is reasonable to conclude that when the phrase “breaking bread” is mentioned, it is in reference to common shared meals, not worship services, especially so since in v. 11 there is a specific reference to Paul eating after breaking bread. Therefore the fact that Acts 20:7 says, “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them” writes Luke “intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight” in no way proves Sunday worship. Moreover, it was common in Paul’s day as it is today for Jews to gather together toward the close of the Sabbath for informal worship, further teaching, discussion of biblical issues and so on; this is known as *Havdallah.* This is likely what Acts 20:7 is describing when it describes Paul prolonging his message until midnight. This of course would by then be the first day of the week and which would—by Jewish reckoning—have started several hours earlier.

**Gal. 4:9-10**

The “weak and worthless elements” are in no way referring to the moral law. If that were the case, Paul could legitimately be labelled a hypocrite since throughout his writings he makes it plain that he upholds the moral law, distinguishing it from the merely ceremonial. The moral law is the law of the inner man, (Rom. 7:22) in which Paul delights, (Rom. 3:31; 7:12) while the ceremonial law is of the outer (i.e. carnal, worldly) man. It was this inner law (specifically the tenth commandment) by which he was convicted of sin (Rom. 7:7). And too, the “days and months and seasons and years” cannot be referring to the divinely mandated feasts of God given for instance in Lev. 23. Paul recognized Jesus as co-equal with God. And since God created the feasts for the rest and joy of His people, it hardly seems reasonable that Paul could now characterize them as “weak and worthless.” The Galatians were in jeopardy of sliding back into the various traditions of men, along with all their man-made rules and regulations. Indeed, in this regard, Paul is really only reiterating the OT prophet Isaiah who also railed against these meaningless and man-created and man-centered rites, “Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them” (Isa. 1:13-14).

Furthermore, in Gal. 2:16, Paul refers to law without the definite article (the). The normal meaning of law (Gk. *nomos*) would refer then to the idea of law in general, that is, any system of law or code of moral conduct. So Paul is condemning any and every system of law-keeping (whether Jewish or Gentile) that is employed as a *substitute for salvation by grace.* That’s what this letter is really about. It is not a polemic against any and all uses of the law (1 Tim. 1:8) but only a caution (and rebuke) against using the law unlawfully, that is as a means of salvation, which is impossible (Rom. 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16).
Col. 2:14-16
If we choose to believe that the “record of debt...with its legal demands” refers to the fourth commandment and that such a record was only applicable to those within the OT, while NT saints are under no obligation to obey, then we are obliged to believe that the other nine commandments are also expressions of the record of debt with its legal demands and are no more binding on us than the keeping of the OT Sabbath. The Sabbath command is definitely part of the moral law, and according to both Paul and James (Gal. 3:10; James 2:11) when we contravene one, we contravene them all; we have become transgressors of the entire law.

Of verse 16, the commentator Albert Barnes says, “The word Sabbath in the Old Testament is applied not only to the seventh day, but to all the days of holy rest that were observed by the Hebrews, and particularly to the beginning and close of their great festivals. There is, doubtless, reference to those days in this place, since the word is used in the plural number, and the apostle does not refer particularly to the Sabbath properly so called. There is no evidence from this passage that he would teach that there was no obligation to observe any holy time, for there is not the slightest reason to believe that he meant to teach that one of the Ten Commandments had ceased to be binding on mankind. If he had used the word in the singular number – ‘the Sabbath,’ it would then, of course, have been clear that he meant to teach that that commandment had ceased to be binding, and that a Sabbath was no longer to be observed. But the use of the term in the plural number, and the connection, show that he had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law, and not to the moral law, or the Ten Commandments. No part of the moral law—no one of the Ten Commandments could be spoken of as ‘a shadow of good things to come.’ These commandments are, from the nature of moral law, of perpetual and universal obligation” (italics added).

AS WE COME TO THE CLOSE OF THIS BRIEF EXAMINATION, we must now ask a question on everyone’s mind, “Did Jesus keep the Sabbath?”

We introduce our answer by quoting Reisinger (The Law and the Gospel) “The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) expresses our Lord’s relationship to the law. Any careful study of this sermon of all sermons should conclude that Jesus was not abrogating or changing the moral standard of righteousness. That is clear from His words in Matt. 5:17-20…. Far from doing away with the law, Jesus is restoring its true and spiritual meaning, which the scribes and Pharisees have lost. Speaking of the whole Old Testament (apparently) in verse 18, the commandments in verse 19, and His main theme of righteousness in 5:20, Jesus draws two important conclusions: (1) He passionately denies that His ethical teaching is in opposition to, or at variance with, the moral system of the Old Testament. His teaching agrees perfectly with the moral commandments of the law and the prophets. (2) He emphasizes that the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees is so erroneous that anyone who does not rise above their ethical standard will surely not enter the kingdom of heaven…. That is further established by the fact that Jesus and His apostles constantly appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures to prove and buttress their teaching.”

In several places in Scripture, we see Jesus defending the validity and authority of God’s moral law (the Ten Commandments). And as we have seen, his apostle Paul also upheld the law. However, this was definitely not the ceremonial aspects of the biblical law (including blood sacrifice, Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1) which indeed enslaved people because they were misunderstood as means of obtaining salvation, but were merely a law of condemnation and were “shadows” acting as a “guardian” pointing to the goal of the law, Christ Jesus, the true and final blood sacrifice (Rom. 7:4).

After testifying that nothing will render the law of God obsolete, our Lord proclaims Himself as that which completes (Gk, pléōō) or embodies what the law had all along been pointing to (Luke 24:27; Rom. 8:3-4), not because the law was insufficient in itself but because its only purpose was to point toward a goal, and that goal is the Messiah. The law then lacks nothing. But fulfillment of the law does not replace the law. Paul testifies to that fact when he says, “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Rom. 3:31). Jesus makes this very plain in the
Hebrew original of Matthew’s gospel when He commands, “The Pharisees and sages sit upon the seat of Moses. Therefore, all that he says to you, diligently do, but according to their reforms and their precedents do not do, because they talk but they do not do” (Matt. 23:2-3, italics added). The idea here being that we are to practice what “he” that is, Moses, tells us in the Torah, the moral precepts of the law, (the authority of Moses symbolized by the “seat”). This was not being done by the Pharisees and scribes (sages) who were instead self-righteously practicing “their” own ceremonial aspects (the reforms and precedents) of the law while neglecting the law’s spiritual heart (Matt. 23:23). Jesus teaches categorically to practice certain aspects of the law, referring to the Ten Commandments as we learn from Matt. 5:19, “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” The word “these” is a demonstrative pronoun referring to the commandments described beginning in verse 21. It’s as if Christ was saying “the commandments that follow” or “the commandments I’m about to describe.” Matt. 5:1-16 is a description of the quintessential ecclesiastical qualities of believers and the types of blessings that should be expected as members of Christ’s Ekklesia. But verse 17 begins a shift in the subject: from blessings to commandments. From the context we are able to understand that the commandments are those from the OT and that these commandments are perpetual, though they have been completed (in the sense of being embodied) in Christ. But because Christ upholds the “Law and the Prophets” and because He is eternally active as our high priest in Heaven, the Law must also be eternally active and binding for the saved.

Jesus was a Jew, born under the law (Matt. 3:13, 15; Luke 3:21; Gal. 4:4) that is to say, subject to the law and all its demands. He was an obedient son (Luke 2:51) whose parents were law-abiding Jews (Luke 2:21-23, 39-42). He attended worship services on the Sabbath and taught in synagogues (Matt. 4:23; Mark 1:21, 39; Luke 4:16) and when young attended a house of instruction as a student of the Rabbis (Luke 2:46). In light of these facts therefore, to assume and teach that Christ would not have kept the Sabbath as a law-abiding Jew is completely unwarranted. That Jesus did not have abrogation of the legitimate, spiritual law in mind is made clear by such passages as Matthew 15:1-9, “Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ‘Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.’ He answered them, ‘And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, “Honor your father and your mother,” and, “Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ ” ‘But you say, “If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” he need not honor his father.”’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you [here Jesus gives authority to the OT], when he said: ‘This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’”

The point is that Jesus recognized the permanent legitimacy and authority of the moral law, as summed up in the Ten Commandments, and kept them. This must of necessity include keeping the Sabbath since the Sabbath was one of the ten.

Finally, this section would not be complete without some discussion of Mark 2:27-28, “And he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.’” These two verses show that Christ owned the Sabbath; it was His day. It was His because He was co-equal with God the Father and shared in the work of creation, including the seventh day Sabbath. In other words He created the Sabbath. Yet it was His in another sense as well. If the Sabbath was made for man (anthropos, man in general) then it belonged to Christ as the second Adam and the representative of redeemed humanity. As the federal head of redeemed humanity, the “Ekklesia”, it is His by right. Much more could be written here, but I believe enough has been said to make my point.

The central proposition of this essay can be summed up as, “according to the Word of God, the Sabbath is the proper and legitimate day of worship and rest for the people of God, composed of the
remnant of Israel and those who were formerly unsaved Gentiles coming together as a single redeemed body, the Ekklesia or Assembly” (Rom. 3:29, Eph. 2:14).

A secondary proposition is that even as Israel had before her, so the church has “despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths” (Eze. 22:8, italics added) in choosing—by Her own authority and confession—to rest and worship on the first day of the week instead of the seventh. This is just as true for most Protestant assemblies as it is for the CoR. (This illustrates the final failure of the Protestant Reformation.) We are told in Scripture, in both the OT and the NT that we are to follow, and indeed to love, the commandments of God, not of men, (Psalm 119:47; John 14:15; 15:10).

To come at the argument one more time then, “Why does God consider the seventh-day Sabbath as being so important? Why can’t we rest and worship on any seventh day and not just on Saturday? Wouldn’t God be just as happy if we worshipped Him on Wednesday, for instance? Isn’t the underlying principle just resting and worshipping one day out of seven?” I believe the extremely important—even crucial—answer to these questions is to be found in four passages in Scripture, two from the OT and two from the NT. Together, they provide us with God’s final answer to our questions.

“Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be a

“sign and seal" (Eze. 22:8, italics added) in choosing—by Her own authority and confession—to rest and worship on the first day of the week instead of the seventh. This is just as true for most Protestant assemblies as it is for the CoR. (This illustrates the final failure of the Protestant Reformation.) We are told in Scripture, in both the OT and the NT that we are to follow, and indeed to love, the commandments of God, not of men, (Psalm 119:47; John 14:15; 15:10).

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“And I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers [apostate Israel], nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may fear the LORD your God...

The sign is the mark of divine approval and ultimate protection of God for His people. Together, the sign and seal separate us as being “sojourners and exiles” in the wilderness. By the sign, we announce to the world that we have been chosen by God. By the seal, God announces that He has indeed chosen us and has separated us to Himself as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Peter 2:9).

As we learn from Ezekiel, the sign that we are to display (on our hands and foreheads, which is to say by our beliefs as they are embodied in our moment by moment activities in the wilderness of this world) is keeping the Sabbath. When we keep the Sabbath, we are the bride who says to her betrothed, “I love you.” Put plainly, keeping the biblical Sabbath is the supreme sign of devotion demanded by God (Eze. 20:20) as a faithful and sincere admission that we belong to Him, that we are His possession, that we love Him even as we are loved by Him. By proudly finding refuge and comfort in the
“commandments of men”, refusing to display the sign of the Sabbath, we announce that we have no real desire to be God’s Bride, His special people. Allen Ross, in Holy to the LORD, provides some further thoughts,

“As the people of God [of necessity including the remnant, the Ekklesia], the Israelites were identified with their creator and Redeemer by sharing...Sabbath. This was no mere token; the Sabbath was the sign of the entire covenant. Those who wished to show that they were faithful ‘kept Sabbath’; those who lived in the promise of a restored rest for the whole earth observed its sign. Siker-Geiseler says ‘The extent to which Israel [and the Ekklesia] keeps the Sabbath is a sign to which Israel wishes to acknowledge God as sanctifier and creator.”

The Sabbath is Israel’s birthright and has become the right of Gentiles as the adopted sons and daughters of God. Through the process symbolized by the grafting of our own wild branches into Israel’s rootstock, we have been brought close by the mercies of God, “even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles...Those who were not my people I will call “my people,” and her who was not beloved I will call “beloved.”” And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God’” (Rom. 9:24-26).

A FEW CONCLUDING WORDS ARE NEEDED FOR THE SAKE OF CLARITY. After all is said and done, must we—even though we are not Jewish—rest and worship only on the Sabbath; isn’t that “legalistic”? May we not continue to worship on the first day of the week? In answer let me say that until the Council of Laodicea, that is exactly what many, if not most, Gentiles were doing. That is, they were resting and worshipping on both days. And there seems nothing wrong with that—perhaps in light of Gal. 4:10—if we understand that resting and worshipping on any day in addition to, not instead of the Sabbath is a matter of Christian liberty, since we are called to make God the centre of our attention and activities on every day (1 Chron. 16:11; Psalm 35:28; 61:8; 71:6; 113:3; Acts 16:25 etc.). In that case though, we must realize that Sunday has no greater spiritual significance than any other day of the week. That being so, it is entirely in keeping with the message of the NT and our liberty in Christ to worship whenever we choose. But given the nature and purpose of the fourth commandment (as part of the moral law) I believe we are not at liberty to replace the Sabbath, nor do I understand why—except out of self-righteousness—we would want to.

If it were not for the fact that the Sabbath is part of the moral law, which is eternal and universal, I would be inclined to entertain a more liberal attitude. But the Sabbath is not only a creation ordinance (and so is universally applicable), it is a commandment to God’s called out ones, His Ekklesia, which He has never abrogated or amended. Still, let every believer become “fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5) as this is not a salvation issue; we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone, our eternal rest.

Finally, given what we have said above, what specific reasons might there be for Christians to keep and remember the Sabbath? The following are taken (with modifications) from John J. Parsons:

1. The Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments (Exo. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12).
2. The Sabbath is blessed by God (Gen. 2:3).
3. The Sabbath commemorates the exodus from Egypt, God’s prototypically redemptive symbol for deliverance from pain, suffering and want (Deut. 5:15).
4. The Sabbath remembers God as the creator and providential sustainer of all things. Thus, it acknowledges His absolute sovereignty and our submissive dependence on Him alone (Gen. 2:2; Exo. 31:12-17; Isa. 66:2).
5. The Sabbath is (or should be) a delight, not a burden (Isa. 58:13; Matt. 11:28-20; Heb. 4:9).
6. Yeshua and His disciples (including the apostles) observed the Sabbath day and its customs (Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 4:16; Acts 13:13-42; 18:4 etc.).
7. The Sabbath will be honoured (kept and remembered) in the Heavenly Jerusalem and in the redeemed, resurrected world to come (Isa. 66:22-23).
Part Two: Practical considerations

**PART ONE OF OUR ESSAY CONSIDERED** the theoretical basis for keeping the Sabbath in the context of Messianic Christianity, that is, for those from outside ethnic Israel who nevertheless are part of the Ekklesia, those who believe that Jesus (Yeshua) of Nazareth is the Messiah prophesied by the OT. We surveyed the Biblical record for the identity of the Ekklesia or Assembly in light of Paul’s metaphor of the olive tree and examined James’ solution for reducing the growing rift within the Assembly which was approved by the council of elders and apostles at Jerusalem. We also considered some contributing historical factors that led to the transformation of the ekklesia into the Gentile Church. Moreover, we reflected briefly on the ceremonial and moral aspects of the law (Torah) and concluded in general that ceremonialism—as an end in itself—was no longer required. Finally, we asserted that the Sabbath is in *principle* binding on all those who truly believe, regardless of ethnic or cultural background, as it is part of the moral law of God.

We now come in Part Two of the essay, to a consideration of just how ethnic Gentiles might keep the weekly Sabbath. One point being made is that most if not all of the Jewish ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath are in fact rabbinical accretions (i.e. Pharisaic traditions of the elders) many having their genesis at the Council of Jamnia in 90 CE (after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 CE). These ceremonial “traditions of the elders”—such as the lighting of candles, hand-washing and so on—are in no way binding on any member of the Ekklesia or Assembly, including Messianic Jews, and in fact may in some cases represent the same kind of meaningless ceremonialism rejected by Christ and His apostles.

First though, more history. The fall of Jerusalem and the total destruction of the temple in 70 CE had catastrophic consequences for Judaism. The entire cultus was facing extinction because the system of Temple-based sacrifice and holy convocations or national religious festivals (the “feasts of the LORD”) was rendered inoperative. This system was built on the expiation or atonement for sin—for the individual as well as collectively for the entire nation—and the thrice-yearly gathering for scripturally prescribed covenant-renewal ceremonies. The Temple (and before it the Tabernacle) which had housed the Ark of the Testimony, was the very heart of Judaism and the ongoing system of sacrifices was its life-blood. When these two went, the entire religion was in jeopardy of demise. (Synagogues were never places of sacrifice or of the prescribed feasts but were the local centers of study, prayer and worship within their communities. It is believed that they had their beginning after the destruction of Solomon’s Temple and the consequent three forced deportations of Jews by the Babylonians in 597, 587 and 582 BCE.) This series of events was as catastrophic for biblical Judaism as the later Roman destruction. But whereas the returning Babylonian exiles largely reconstituted the pre-exilic Scripture-based religion of Judaism with the reintroduction of the Holy Scriptures (which the remaining population in Judah had essentially lost) by the scribe Ezra and the rebuilding of the Temple by Nehemiah and Zerubbabel, the Jewish leaders of the Roman period re-invented Judaism after their own Pharisaic worldview. Their solution had its germ at a council of Rabbis convened in the small town of Jamnia (Yavne) in the last decade of the first century.

According to the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, “the outcomes attributed to the Council of Jamnia did occur whether gradually or in a definitive, authoritative council. Several concerns of the remaining Jewish communities in Israel would have been the loss of the national language [and] the growing problem of conversions” [away from mainstream Judaism to Christianity or Messianic Judaism].…. The Talmud* relates that some time before the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkaï relocated to the city of Yavne/Jamnia, where he received permission from the Romans to found a school of Halakha (Jewish law). Yavne was also the town where the Sanhedrin relocated after the destruction of the Temple. Zakkaï’s school became a major source for the later Mishna, which records the work of the Tannaim, and a wellspring of Rabbinic Judaism.”
Rabbi Zakkai and many other Rabbis believed that if Judaism (as the mostly Pharisieic Rabbis conceived of it) was to survive the crisis, something else would have to take the place of the earlier Temple-based Judaism. As a result, what had only been an informal idea up to this point now took on greater importance. This was the idea of the oral Torah. The rabbis gave more formality and authority to their oral traditions and beliefs (and by which Christ was so offended). They conceived of the idea that God had in fact given two Torahs (that is, Torah in its sense of instruction or teaching) on Mount Sinai: the written Torah given to Moses on tablets of stone, and the oral Torah which was essentially the interpretation of the Torah or law and which the rabbis maintained was imparted orally to Moses during the forty days that he was on the mountain.

Eventually though, the oral tradition—composed primarily of rabbinic interpretation and commentary on the written Tanakh (the Jewish bible)—was gradually committed to writing and was given its more or less final form by Rabbi Judah haNasi around 200 CE. The idea of the oral interpretation—and the consequent idea of the final authority of rabbis to unilaterally interpret scripture by means of applying the oral Torah to the written Torah in the context of daily life—is a major part of modern Judaism. There is a problem with the legitimacy of the oral Torah however, since the Jewish Scriptures—ultimately from which the oral traditions receive their spiritual authority—state that God only gave the written Torah (Deut. 5:22). In any event, Rabbinic (that is to say Pharisieic) influence actually grew stronger after 70 CE, eclipsing that of other factions within mainstream Judaism such as the Sadducees, Ebionites, Zealots and Qumranite Essenes, (the group responsible for writing the Dead Sea Scrolls). And while Jesus denounced the oral traditions not found in the written Torah, calling them “traditions of men” (Mark 7:4), this did not stop the practice of the unscriptural accretions, which in fact piled up even higher until the close of the Talmud. These unscriptural traditions were also concerned with the celebration of the Sabbath.

The entire Torah, including the Ten Commandments (or Words), is ambiguous on many of the finer points of how the Torah itself was to be kept. Moses’ writings consist essentially of commentary on the appropriate application of the moral law in response to the inevitable and common exigencies of life in ancient Israel. There are 613 distinct commandments in the Torah, which may seem like a lot. However, on closer reflection, we realize that even all these commandments were never meant to determine the appropriate actions for every possible situation that one could be confronted with in the course of life. They were meant rather to illustrate and to instruct in the principles underlying the application of the Torah to real life.

Having supplied some background context, it is now time to get closer to our goal by looking at the main spiritual qualities or characteristics that support the Sabbath. The four primary qualities of the Sabbath are:

- Rest: Gen. 2:2; Exo. 16:23; 20:8; Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:9, 11
- Remembrance: Gen. 9:15; Deut. 5:15; Numbers 15:39; Mark 8:18
- Holiness: Gen. 2:3; Exo. 12:16; 20:8; Lev. 23:2-4 Heb. 9:1; 12:14 and

These qualities should be in evidence whenever God’s people gather before Him in worshipful assembly (calling to mind that according to Christ even when only two are gathered in His name, such an assembly constitutes a legitimate expression of the Ekklesia). If these minimal qualities are not in evidence outwardly in our circumstances and actions as well as inwardly in our minds and hearts (in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount) then we are not fully honouring God, who brings us together for the purpose of worship.

Rest

Perhaps the most fundamental of the four qualities, rest is essential for physical as well as psychic and spiritual wellbeing and rejuvenation. A person who is not rested is one who is not functioning at optimum
levels and may be in a spiral of deterioration leading ultimately to physical and mental breakdown or even death. One who is not in this restful state of spiritual wellbeing will be self-absorbed and unable to remember (in the sense of rehearsing or re-experiencing in the mind) the blessings promised by God to those who love Him.

Remembrance
Remembrance is not just recall of events or experiences, although it certainly includes that. Rather, remembrance in the biblical sense has more to do with being mindful of something which one may or may not have experienced personally. This is the case with Deut. 5:15. Only those who were led by Moses out of Egypt and into the wilderness could ever remember, in the sense of recalling, the exodus. For everyone else that “memory” was an abstract idea and could only be a description of an event that happened to others. So when Jews and Christians alike are called to “remember” the Sabbath we need to understand that it is in the sense of being mindful, of reflecting upon the meaning and intention of the Sabbath as well as on the One by whom it was given. Those who are not sufficiently rested (and whose attention is therefore focussed on worldly concerns, worries and so on) cannot “remember” the Sabbath because they are overcome by thoughts and feelings which are not conducive to their wellbeing and are therefore ultimately harmful. When this state of mind is present, it acts to block out our recognition of God and our single dedication to Him, which is our holiness or sanctification.

Holiness
Biblical holiness is a state of “otherness.” In itself, it is not an expression of piety or religious devotion. However, when one is truly holy (and this state is variable—it can wax and wane) one will consequently manifest piety or sanctified attitudes and behaviour (Matt. 12:33). The quality of “otherness” is to be found in an absolute degree in God. It is perhaps His most salient attribute. When we are able to be mindful of God, we inevitably discover His attribute of holiness and in so doing we are able to become holy in relation to the world, to be separated from it, to be other than what it is. This holiness is a kind of echo of God’s holiness and enables us to untangle our minds and hearts from the distractions of the world and to be fully engaged by God, living in and for Him alone (Gal. 2:20). In this state of being, we are potentially able to experience great joy.

Joy
When we are in the state of holiness (both subjective and objective) we are able to experience a degree of joy. This joy is the subjective apprehension of an objective state of separation from physical and emotional distractions such as fear, anger, envy, covetousness and so on and a corresponding devotional attachment to God and His Kingdom. This joy is not “happiness” as we understand it. We don’t walk around with a goofy grin or whistle “Oh, What a Beautiful Morning” all day long. This joy is experienced more as a deep, settled contentment or a profound sense of assurance. It brings a smile to the heart but not necessarily to the lips. It’s a revelation in the heart of God’s omnipotence and His faithfulness to deliver on all His promises, both curses and blessings.

It perhaps goes without saying that these qualities are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit (Ruach haKodesh) working in the mind and heart of the born-again believer, whether Jew or Gentile. Without this ministration of the Holy Spirit, the four Sabbath qualities can only ever be intellectual concepts, not experienced realities.

The celebration of the Sabbath should enable the celebrant to experience all four of these qualities or characteristics, which are linked together in a kind of “silver chain” (cf. the “Golden Chain of Salvation” in Rom. 8:28-30). In order to experience spiritual joy we must be holy. To be holy we must be mindful of or “remember” the fearful reality of God as well as all the words and actions of God within creation. This will not be possible if we are constantly at the mercy of worldly distractions or concerns. And to be free of such distractions and concerns we must be rested, physically mentally and spiritually.
As part of my attempt to provide workable guidelines or suggestions for NT Sabbath keeping, I have to define—in purposefully broad strokes—the meanings and intentions of some of the main ideas associated with the Sabbath (and all other holy convocations). It is my belief that to provide a long list of do’s and don’ts would be to fall into exactly the same error as the Pharisees. We must be courageous enough to apply the principles to our own contexts, according to our degree of faith in and submissive obedience to our Lord. To that end, we offer the following definitions.

_Work_
By this I mean any activity that does not contribute to feelings of rest, relief, or thankfulness for God’s providence. By it I mean any activity pertaining to earning a livelihood, the common daily labour for which one is remunerated, as well as any unnecessary activities that do not contribute to comfort and wellbeing. An example from my own experience would be cooking. Cooking, when undertaken as joyful and willing service to oneself and others, may be an unnecessary activity, nevertheless it contributes to comfort and wellbeing and so is in that sense perfectly suitable for the Sabbath. Gardening is another example of work which may be unnecessary but which can be rejuvenating, pleasurable and helpful to others by creating beauty, growing food and so forth. Such activities are not only permitted, they are encouraged. But all must be done in the proper spirit (1 Cor. 10:31).

_Rest and remembrance_
These are the two key components of Sabbath keeping. Any activities we may engage in, if they partake of these qualities, are edifying, noble and desirable. By rest we mean in a negative sense, the cessation of common, ordinary or obligatory work and in a positive sense anything that rejuvenates, heals, comforts. By remembrance we mean an active engagement with God and His kingdom, His deeds and promises, His blessings and curses. This would be accomplished by the reading of His Word along with worship, study, meditation, and good works such as visiting the sick, delivering food, general care for the needy and such related subjects. By such activities, the Sabbath is exalted.

Sabbath is a _means to an end, not an end in itself_. As our Lord Yeshua taught, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath should ease our burdens, not add to them. As the God of rest, the Lord invites all the overburdened, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

AMEN.
Notes

2. ------ Recalling the Hope of Glory, Kregel, Grand Rapids, 2006.

3. “Church” is a word that originally meant “of the Lord”, that is, something belonging to the Lord. According to the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, “The English language word ‘church’ is from the Old English word cirice, derived from West Germanic *kirika, which in turn comes from the Greek kuriakē, meaning ‘of the Lord’ (possessive form of kurios ‘ruler, lord’). Kuriakē in the sense of ‘church’ is most likely a shortening of kuriakē oikia (‘house of the Lord’) or ekklēsia kuriakē (‘congregation of the Lord’). Christian churches were sometimes called kuriakon (adjective meaning ‘of the Lord’) in Greek starting in the 4th century, but ekklēsia and basilikē were more common.”

   In the NT, the word first appears in Gal. 1:13, the earliest of the NT writings. In all its occurrences in the original Greek manuscripts of the NT, the word referring to those who follow the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, those who fellowship and worship together, is the word ekklesia (or one of its variants). And whereas the word “church” is from the Greek and means belonging to the Lord, the word ekklesia means “out from and to”, that is, those who are called out from the world and called into God (i.e. His kingdom). As such, it refers to the elect, the so-called “invisible church” the body composed of true, born again believers (including the remnant of Israel). The LXX translation used the word ekklesia in place of the Hebrew (OT) word qahal. Qahal means assembly, those who are called for worship at holy convocations. The Hebrew qahal and the Greek ekklesia are equal terms; they mean the same thing.

   There was simply no theological or linguistic reason to use the word church when the word ekklesia was available as a transliteration. Besides, English words such as assembly, congregation, and community and so on are closer in meaning to both the Greek ekklesia and the Hebrew qahal than is the word church, and so maintain greater integrity. I believe the word church was an unfortunate choice by early translators because of its connotations of spiritual distance between Gentile and Jewish believers.


6. The growing split between believers and the Jewish mainstream as well as by Messianic Judaizers is exemplified by the denial of the necessity for circumcision. Why did the Council decide against circumcision? Exo. 4:25 gives us a clue to the underlying reason why circumcision was not considered binding by the Council: “Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and touched Moses’ feet with it and said, ‘Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me’” (emphasis added). Often overlooked is the fact that circumcision was a ceremonial blood sacrifice. In the OT law, promises and stipulations (covenant belonging, spiritual purification, forgiveness of sin, obedience) were ratified through the shedding of blood (Gen. 3:21; 15:9-10). Blood sacrifice was an integral part of the dispensation of the ceremonial aspects of the OT, as we know. While apparently not having circumcision in mind particularly, the author of Hebrews discusses the issue of blood sacrifice in chapters nine and ten and summarizes his argument by saying, “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb. 9:22). He concludes his argument by stating, “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our
hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb. 10:19-22). The idea here is that circumcision, being a blood sacrifice mandated by the law, was fulfilled in Christ’s offering up of himself, and therefore (like all the other law-mandated, *ceremonial sacrifices*) made redundant, unnecessary and in fact a hindrance, since it diverted the believer away from the real and final blood sacrifice of Christ on the cross, of which baptism, strangely enough, is a more apt sign. This is, so I believe, why the Jerusalem church did not consider circumcision a requirement; in fact it is likely that the assembly (by invocation of the Holy Spirit as a judge in the matter) was giving a strong seal of approval for *not* becoming circumcised (Act 15:1, 8-9, 28-29).


In regard to the Ten Commandments as the complete and whole Torah or law of God, it is instructive to read Jeremiah 7:22ff. The point that Jeremiah makes is that God gave only the Ten Commandments. He did *not* give any of the other 603 commandments found in the OT; these are man-made (rabbinical?) accretions. In his commentary on this verse, John Gill, the Baptist pastor, biblical scholar, and theologian (1697-1771), writes of all the various burnt offerings and sacrifices that they, “are no part of that law or covenant, but are an appendage or addition to it; and though they are of early institution and use, yet they never were appointed for the sake of themselves, but for another end; they were types of Christ, and were designed to lead the faith of the people of God to him; they never were intended as proper expiations of sin, and much less to cover and encourage immorality; whenever therefore they were offered up in a hypocritical manner, and without faith in Christ, and in order to atone for sinful actions, without any regard to the sacrifice of Christ, they were an abomination to the Lord. These were not the only things the Lord commanded the children of Israel; nor the chief and principal ones; and in comparison of others, of more consequence and moment, were as none at all; and which are next mentioned.” In light of Jeremiah, whenever Christ refers to commandments it is *exclusively* to the Ten Commandments.

8. It is to be noted here that the *Birkat* was merely symptomatic of the growing rift, in itself it was not causative. One version of the *Birkat* reads: “For apostates [meshumaddim] let there be no hope, and the dominion of arrogance do Thou speedily root out in our days; and let Christians [ve-ha-Notzrim] and minim perish in a moment, let them be blotted out of the book of the living and let them not be written with the righteous.” The reference to Christians is not original but was added. This benediction is to be recited by all professing Jews. (See *Our Father Abraham*, Eerdmans Grand Rapids, 1989.


12. Demonstrative pronouns are pronouns that point to specific things. “This, that, these, those, none and neither” are Demonstrative Pronouns that substitute nouns when the nouns they replace can be understood from the context.


15. The *Talmud* is a huge collection of Jewish religious traditions consisting of the *Mishna* (the written version of the oral interpretations of the Tanakh in general) and the *Gemera*, the rabbinic commentaries on the Mishna. So the sacred writings of Judaism consist of Tanakh/Torah and the collected interpretation/commentary upon it, the Talmud. The Talmud in turn is composed of the Mishna and the Gemera.