

# **GOD'S SABBATH**

**By Cecil N. Wright**

# God's Sabbath

## A Change of Law?

Daniel 7:25 refers to man's changing God's laws – a thing that is wrong. But, if God has changed his own law, that is an altogether different matter – and wrong not to recognize and adjust to it. So, what I wish to do now is to point out that God did make such a change when making Jesus Christ to be our high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and not after the Levitical order of Aaron as he had legislated for priests under the law of which he made Moses mediator and by which he also gave the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai.

### 1. Hebrews (7:11-25) (American Standard Version):

- a. "Now if there was perfection [referring to salvation to the uttermost, v. 25] through the Levitical priesthood (for under it hath the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should arise after the order of Melchizedek, and not be reckoned after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are said belongeth to another tribe, from which no man hath given attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses [through whom God gave the Old Covenant law] spake nothing concerning priests. And what we say is more abundantly evident, if after the likeness of Melchizedek there ariseth another priest, who hath been made, not after the law of a carnal [fleshly] commandment [the Old Covenant law], but after the power of an endless life [of Christ after his resurrection]: for it is witnessed of him, Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek. For there is a disannulling of the former commandment, because of its weakness and unprofitableness (for the law made nothing perfect), and a bringing in thereupon of a better hope, through which we draw nigh unto God. And inasmuch as it is not without the taking of an oath (for they [after the order of Aaron, the Levitical priest] indeed have been made priest without an oath; but he [Christ] with an oath him that saith of him), The Lord sware and will not repent himself, Thou art a priest for ever; By so much also hath Jesus become the surety of a better covenant. And they have been made priest many in number [successively], because that by death they are hindered from continuing: but he, because he abideth for ever, hath his priesthood unchangeable. "Wherefore He Is Able To Save To The Uttermost Them That Draw Near Unto God Through Him, Seeing He Liveth To Make Intercession For Them."

The above passage is saying there is no "salvation to the uttermost" (no eternal salvation) under the Levitical priesthood of the Old Covenant. No one priest, and not even the entire succession of the mortal priest, could provide salvation beyond their lifetime upon earth, for the sacrifices they offered year by year availed for no more than a year at a time – hence, not beyond life on earth. Therefore, even those living under the Old Covenant could have eternal life only through the later and perpetual priesthood of Jesus Christ, the benefit of whose one-time sacrifice of himself for

sins was retroactive to provide their salvation in eternity (noted in c. below in 9:15) – because the blood of animals that the Levitical priests repeatedly offered could not "take away sins" (10:4) to the extent of being "remembered no more," as under the New Covenant (8:12; 10:17-18).

- b. "But now he [Christ] hath obtained a ministry the more excellent, by so much as he is also the mediator of a better covenant [than that of which Moses was the mediator], which has been enacted upon better promises. For if the first covenant had been faultless [that is, had it not been inadequate for 'salvation to the uttermost'], then would no place have been sought for a second. For finding fault with them [the nation of Israel, which had come to be divided into the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah], he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took by the hand to lead them out forth out of the land of Egypt; For they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord [see Jeremiah 31:31-34] ... In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away." (8:6-13)
- c. Already referred to above: "And for this cause he [Christ] is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance ['salvation to the uttermost']." (9:15)

Please read carefully Chapters 7-10 of Hebrews, from which I have taken only excerpts and notice particularly that:

- (a) what occurred under the Old Covenant were types and shadows of "good things to come" (10:1) under the New Covenant, and
- (b) He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. (10:9)

2. Please read also the 2 Corinthians 3 and notice the following:

- a. What is "written, and engraven on stones," namely the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant, containing the Sabbath commandment (Exodus 31:18; 32:15; 34:28), passed away (vs. 4-16).
- b. It is specifically stated that "the Old Covenant... is done away in Christ" (v. 14).

3. Please note Colossians 2:16-17, which reads as follows: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day [all of which pertained to the Old Covenant]: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [casting the shadow, so to speak] is Christ's [literally, 'of Christ,' as in the King James Version]."

### **Are The Ten Commandments Still Binding?**

Now, as to whether "the Ten Commandments are still as true today as nearly two thousand years ago," if you mean they are still as "binding" today as they were then, it depends on whether they were also incorporated into the New Covenant law, or law of Christ. It is freely conceded that all of

them have been thus incorporated, except for the Sabbath command. But in Colossians 2:16-17, cited above, we see it specifically included in the category of things by which we are not to be judged – that is, not to be condemned for not observing them – meaning, therefore, that they are not binding under Christ.

That is basic, and means there has been a change of law by God himself so that under Christ the sabbath command is no longer binding – a conclusion I think is beyond successful contradiction. And, logically, I could stop with that alone.

But I promised to "endeavor to be comprehensive enough to provide a sufficiently detailed overview for a clear and proper perspective of what I believe to be the teaching of scripture on the subject under consideration" -- an enhancement, and further confirmation of divine rational, if you please. And that I now attempt from both Old and New Covenant scriptures, though it means a much, much longer treatment.

### 1. Status of the Sabbath Under New Covenant Law.

In Galatians 4:10-11, the apostle Paul, when writing to Gentile Christians who were being influenced by Judaizing teachers to be circumcised and keep the Old Covenant law of Moses in order to be saved (see Acts 15:1-5), said: "Ye observe days [which would include sabbath days], and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid of you, lest by any means I have bestowed labor upon you in vain." And, in regard to circumcision, which had been required under the Old Covenant, he said: "...if ye receive circumcision, Christ will profit you nothing. Yes, I testify again to every man that receiveth circumcision, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law. Ye are fallen from grace. ... For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:2-6).

The principle seen in the foregoing is this: Under Christ "circumcision" is not commanded, neither is it forbidden if not done to obey Old Covenant law to be saved. But if it is done because required under Old covenant law, and to be justified or saved, that obligates us to keep all that law, yet severs us from Christ and therefore from the grace of God through Christ, without which we cannot be saved. That principle, applying to any command of the Old Covenant not incorporated into New Covenant law, INCLUDES THE "SABBATH" COMMAND, ALREADY NOTED IN Colossians 2:16-17.

And, since in that passage the "sabbath" is listed among items that "are a shadow of things to come" – "the law having a shadow of the good things to come" (Hebrews 10:1) – that is, to come through Christ, who is the mediator of the New Covenant– that makes it important to examine the sabbath more fully under both Old and New Covenants, for a still broader perspective and clearer perception of it.

### 2. The Sabbath in the Old Covenant scriptures: Genesis to Malachi.

- a. First Mentioned (Genesis 2:1-3): "And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them [in the six days of Genesis 1]. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God had created and made."

The Hebrew verb here translated "rest" is *shabath*, meaning to cease, or rest. The seventh day, which marked the cessation of God's work of creation, came to be referred to as the "sabbath" (*shabbath*) or "sabbath day." It marked the end of the first week of the earth's existence, and the beginning of a weekly succession of seventh-days, later spoken of by God as "my sabbaths" (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 19:3, 30; 26:2).

- b. Second Mentioned (Exodus 16): Israel, recently delivered from Egyptian bondage and was in the early stages of its long trek to the promised land of Canaan, had been led into the wilderness of Sin, not far distance from Mt. Sinai, where they would be encamped for a year and receive the Old Covenant law, with its famous Ten Commandments, which included the sabbath legislation with which we are now concerned.

Food had given out in the wilderness of Sin, and the people murmured. "then said Jehovah unto Moses, Behold I will rain bread down from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or not. And it shall come to pass on the sixth day, that they shall prepare that which they shall bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily" (16:4-5).

And on the first sixth day, Moses explained to the people as follows: "This is that which Jehovah hath spoken, Tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy sabbath unto Jehovah: Bake [today] that which ye will bake, and boil that which ye shall boil; and all that remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning" (16:23). And when morning came Moses further said: "Eat that today; for today is a sabbath unto Jehovah: today ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day is the sabbath, in it there shall be none" (vs. 25-26).

Some of the people went out anyhow on the sabbath day to gather but found none. "And Jehovah said unto Moses [to be delivered to the people], How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? For that Jehovah hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you the sixth day the bread for two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day" (vs. 28-39).

That was a prelude to, and a conditioning for, the sabbath command as an especially significant part of the covenant between God and Israel, soon to be made at Sinai.

- c. Third Mentioned (Exodus 20); On the third day after Israel had arrived in the wilderness of Sinai, God awesomely spoke from the summit of Mount Sinai the Ten Commandments that he later

wrote on two tables of stone and delivered to Moses. He began by saying, "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage" (v. 2). The first command was to have no other gods before (or besides) him. And the fourth was: "remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is a sabbath unto Jehovah thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, and hallowed it" (vs. 8-11).

- d. Further Explanatory Scriptures – that emphasize the tremendous significance and importance of the seventh-day sabbath for Israel: Exodus 31:12-17: "Verily ye shall keep my sabbaths: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am Jehovah who sanctified you. ...Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel throughout their generations for ever: for in six days Jehovah made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

The plural, "sabbaths," refers simply to the seventh-day sabbath in its weekly recurrences (each week having a sabbath) – hence, "Verily ye shall keep my sabbaths: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations."

Deuteronomy 4:7-8: "For what great nation is there, that hath a god so nigh unto them, as Jehovah our God is whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" This Moses said in his farewell address to Israel forty years after giving of the law initially at Sinai, which he was now repeating just before his death and their then entering Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15: When Moses had repeated the sabbath commandment of Exodus 20:8-11, requiring rest from labor on the sabbath day even for their "man-servant" and "maidservant," he added: "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence by a mighty hand and outstretched arm: therefore Jehovah thy God commandeth thee to keep the sabbath day" (v. 15).

Ezekiel 20: Centuries later, when elders of Israel had come to the prophet Ezekiel to enquire of Jehovah through him, Jehovah had him to remind them twice of the fact stated above in Exodus 31:12-17, as follows:

- (a) "Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am Jehovah that sanctifieth them" (v. 12); and
- (b) "my sabbaths ... shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am Jehovah your God" (v. 20).

Nehemiah 9:12-15: About another century and half later, after the return of Israel from Babylonian captivity, when in a general assembly in Jerusalem a lone prayer of thanksgiving was addressed to God in which general history of his dealings with Israel were recounted from the call of their ancestor Abraham to the then present time, among other things it was said: "Thou camest down also upon Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and madest known to them thy holy sabbath, them commandments, and statutes, and a law, by Moses thy servant, and gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and commandest them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadest sworn to give them."

Isaiah 66:23-24, now mentioned lastly though chronologically about a century earlier than the text from Ezekiel, is different from all the foregoing, being a prophetic promise to Israel of a time when "all flesh" (all nations) will worship Israel's God "from sabbath to sabbath," as follows: "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith Jehovah, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh [Gentiles as well as Israelites] come to worship before me, saith Jehovah."

By way of summary of the foregoing, we have the following:

- (1) God gave his sabbaths to fleshly Israel as a sign between him and them of the covenant made with them at Sinai as his specially chosen people (Exodus 31:12-17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20), setting them apart from all others. There is no record of human observance of the seventh day of the week as a day of solemn rest unto Jehovah prior to its being given to Israel as such – a period of no less than 2500 years of human history – not before the flood, by Adam, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, or any other – and not after the flood, by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or any other person or people.

However, the word "week" (Hebrew *shabua*, a seven) occurs in Genesis 29:27-28, reporting languages used by Laban in conversation with Jacob more than 250 years before the giving of Jehovah's "sabbath" to Israel at Sinai. So, no doubt the seven-day cycle was derived from the six days of creation plus the day of God's rest from creation on the seventh day – yet without any record of the seventh day being enjoined upon man as a rest unto Jehovah until given to Israel as a sign of the covenant between him and them as his then special chosen people, as stated above.

- (2) No other great nation had such a god or covenant as Israel's God and covenant, and, by implication, no sabbath to keep. (Deuteronomy 4:7-8; 5:12-15) By way of analogy, it was as when a husband gives his wife a wedding ring as a sign of the covenant of marriage between him and her, and them alone, setting her apart from all others. And God himself likened it unto such a

covenant, saying: "which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them" (Jeremiah 31:32).

Moreover, the seventh-day sabbath was especially appropriate as such a sign between God and Israel of the covenant they entered into at Sinai. For his sabbath signified the end of all the work he had done during the six days of creation, and memorialized it (Genesis 2:1-3). And giving his sabbaths to Israel likewise symbolized and memorialized his ending their servitude in Egypt, per Deuteronomy 5:15. This symbolized the fact that the God of creation was now Israel's God, and they were to have no other – just as no other nation shared such in history, or the sabbath to keep as a solemn rest to Jehovah.

- (3) Making known to Israel his "holy sabbath" was one of the events clustering around and upon God's coming down "upon Mount Sinai" and speaking to them from heaven (Nehemiah 9:13-15). And their previous ignorance of it is evidenced by the conduct of some of them when its observance was preliminarily enjoined in the wilderness of Sin in connection with God's beginning to feed them with manna (Exodus 16).
- (4) The reference in (2) above to Israel's breaking the marriage covenant between Jehovah and them, included also their "profaning" the sabbath day, the sign of the covenant between them and him, by not keeping it holy, as a day of rest unto Jehovah. The first mention of such profaning is found in Numbers 15:32-36. But further references are too numerous to recite here.
- (5) Lastly, the prophetic promise in Isaiah 66:22-23 to Israel involving sabbatism on the new earth he would make, does not refer to sabbath keeping on this present earth under the New Covenant of which Christ is the mediator, superseding the Old Covenant of which Moses was mediator, but to the ultimate sabbatism for the redeemed of all nations in the world yet to come. While said promise was couched in the language of the then present sabbatism under the Old Covenant (as coming to worship him "from one sabbath to another," and "from one new moon to another"), it had to be figuratively used though nonetheless expressive of the perpetual sabbatism.

For, as the apostle John saw in his vision on Patmos, of the "new earth," with its "holy city, new Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:1 - 22:5), "the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, And the light thereof is the Lamb" (21:23); "and the gates thereof shall in no wise be shut by day (for there shall be no night there)" (v. 25); "and there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God shall give them light" (22:5).

Moreover, the foregoing three verses are followed by a final verse reading as follows, which, being simultaneous in time, likewise has to be figurative: "And they shall go forth, and look upon the dead bodies of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh" (Isaiah 66:24).

The underscored phrases [for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched] were later employed by Jesus, as recorded in the New Covenant scripture of Mark 9:43-48, as applying to the "worm" and "fire" of "hell" (Gehenna). The latter was literally the Valley of Hinnom, which had come to be used as the city dump on the outskirts of earthly Jerusalem, not only of the garbage but also for unburied carcasses, "where worms gnawed and fires burned" (as expressed in A. T. Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament). But it was employed by our Lord figuratively of "the eternal fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41), – called "the lake of fire" in Revelation 20:14-15 – where the unrighteous "shall go away unto eternal punishment" (v. 26), from the universal judgment when Jesus comes again (Matthew 25:31-46), which is to follow the universal resurrection of the dead and the fleeing away of the present earth and heaven (evidently its atmospheric heaven and possibly the sidereal heavens, but not the abode of God) (Revelation 20:11-15). Surely, however, the lake of eternal fire will not be on the outskirts of, or accessible to the sights of the redeemed inhabitants of, the "holy city, New Jerusalem" (Revelation 21:1 - 22:5).

For such reasons, the passage of Isaiah 66:23-24 regarding the sabbath in the "new earth" which Jehovah would yet "make" seems to be appropriately characterized in Elliott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, as follows: "It lies in the nature of the case that the words never have received, and never can receive, a literal fulfillment. The true realization is found in the new Jerusalem of Revelation 21:22-27 of the perpetual sabbatism of Hebrews 4:9, and even that glorious vision is but a symbol of spiritual realities."

It has been aptly said that the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New is the Old revealed.

So, we now return primarily to the New for the things foreshadowed by the Old. **Observations from New Covenant Scriptures**

1. That the Old Covenant passage of Isaiah 66:22-23 cites us to a perpetual sabbatism that must be the ultimate rest for the people of God, to be enjoyed through Jesus Christ, and foreshadowed but not enjoyed under the Old Covenant, and not before our present earth has been superseded by a new and eternal one, after the second coming of Christ to this earth at the close of its history, is made evident, among other passages, by the following basic ones:

- a. 2 Peter 3:10-13: "But the day of the Lord [the day of his 'coming.' v.4] will come as a thief; in which the heavens [evidently the atmospheric and possibly the sidereal heavens, as already mentioned] shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of person ought we to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which are the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? But according to his promise

[where but in Isaiah 66:22-23?], we look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

- b. Revelation 20:11-15: "And I saw a white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them and I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and the books were opened: and another book was opened. Which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. ... and if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire."

Thus, we have the present "earth and the heaven" fleeing away in connection with the universal resurrection and judgment of mankind, as seen by the apostle John in his visions of the future while exiled on the Isle of Patmos.

- c. Revelation 21:1 - 22:5: Though too much to quote here, it should be carefully read in its entirety. It is a vision of the above being followed by a new heaven and new earth for the righteous of all nations, with the "holy city, new Jerusalem [in contrast with the earthly Jerusalem of Palestine] coming down out of heaven from God" ("the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12:22).

This "new earth" and "the holy city, New Jerusalem," were evidently the "heavenly country" and "the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God," sought after by Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac and Jacob (Hebrews 11:8-16) as the ultimate for them rather than Canaan, which was only a type or "shadow" of that which was to come.

"And these all [including the persons just mentioned, plus many others also cited for their faith], having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise [of the heavenly country and city], God having provided some better thing concerning us [than afforded on this earth], that apart from us they should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40). That is, they will not enter into the perfection of the world to come before the resurrection when Christ comes to earth again, the same as will be true for us.

- d. Hebrews 3:1 - 4:11: Here again we have an extended passage (which please read in its entirety, noting its progression).

Beginning:

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, even Jesus, ... a son over his [God's] house [in the sense of 'household'], whose house are we, if we hold fast our boldness and the glorying of our hope firm unto the end" (3:1-6).

### Continuing:

Reminding the readers of the disbelief and unfaithfulness of so many of fleshly Israel and therefore their never entering the rest intended for them in the earthly Canaan: also exhorting to take warning from this and not miss the rest intended for spiritual Israel in the heavenly Canaan (3:7 - 4:8).

### Concluding:

"There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God. For he that hath entered into his rest hath himself also rested from his works, as God did from his. Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience" (4:9-11). The latter may remind us of Revelation 14:13: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth:

yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works follow with them."

2. For a complete and clear over-all perspective, we need a further survey of relevant events and developments in the New Covenant era, between the first and second comings of Christ, when the Old Covenant "sabbath" was no longer binding, and why not, since all the other commands of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17) were incorporated into the New Covenant law also. So we shall start with why not binding, after the following caution:

CAUTION: The reader may find some of the following to be more tedious and technical than parts of the foregoing, but he needs to know that each item is important to understanding what might otherwise seem to be conflicting bits of information here and there. At one time, in the midst of a series of parables pertaining to his coming kingdom (Matthew 13:1-58; Mark 4:1-34 and Luke 8:4-15), Jesus stated: "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how. The earth beareth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when fruit is ripe, straightway he putteth forth the sickle because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:26-29).

This suggests successive phases of stages of the kingdom, that need to be recognized if we are able to avoid confusion. And elsewhere in the above-mentioned series of parables, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8 - 10), "the word of the kingdom" (Matthew 13:19); and "the harvest is the end of the world" (Matthew 13:39), when the wicked are "severed" from among the righteous, and cast "into the furnace of fire" (vs. 47-50) – which will be at the second coming of Christ (Matthew 25:31-46) – when the righteous shall "inherit the kingdom" (v. 34) and enter "into eternal life" (v. 46), "in the world to come" (Mark 10:29-30; Luke 18:29-30) – their "entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:11) – into "an inheritance incorruptible. And undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you ... a salvation "to the uttermost," as has previously been mentioned from Hebrews 7:25.

In a nutshell, we shall discover

- (1) a preliminary stage and
- (2) a fully-come phase of the kingdom of heaven in this world, between the first and second comings of Christ; and then
- (3) a final stage (or rather the eternal ongoingness of the heavenly phase) in the world to come following the end of the world – the first being probationary, preparatory to entering the third.

We might also think of those entering stage No.1 as being charter citizens of No.2 (if faithful), and then the faithful citizens of the latter as entering and inheriting No.3. in which they will enjoy the "sabbath rest" that remains "for the people of God," as promised in Hebrews 4:9 and noted previously, as distinguished from the "seventh-day" sabbath of Old Covenant law but is not a part of the New Covenant law under Jesus Christ, as already seen.

Notice why the seventh-day sabbath is not a part of New Covenant law before proceeding to other relevant considerations.

- a. As already well documented, the seventh-day sabbath had been given to Israel according to the flesh, and it alone, at Sinai, as a sign of the covenant then being made by Jehovah with the people of Israel, setting them apart and distinguishing them from the rest of the nations of the world (Gentiles)., and was most appropriate historically for that purpose.

But in Christ, that distinction and separation no longer exist. And the Old Covenant making and requiring such has given way to a New Covenant that not only does not require them, but obliterates them —embracing Gentiles as well as Jews, and on identical terms, thus making them all to be one nation, a spiritual Israel (see Ephesians 2:11-22; Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:26-29; 6:16, this last passage specifically calling it "the Israel of God").

Jesus himself had said, "Other sheep [Gentiles] have I [in purpose and prospect] which are not of this [Jewish] fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and they shall become one flock [with Jewish sheep], [having] one shepherd" – or, alternate reading, "there shall be one flock, one shepherd" John 10:21). Also, he had said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men [Jews and Gentiles] unto myself" (John 12:32).

And before his ascension, he commissioned that the gospel be preached to all nationalities alike (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 24:46-47) – which it was, "to the Jew first, and also to the Greek [Gentile]" (Romans 1:16) – beginning in A.D. 34 to the former (Acts 2), and apparently about A.D. 41 to the latter (Acts10-11).

Therefore, to continue to bind the sign of that Old Covenant between God and Israel according to the flesh in the New Covenant era (after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension) would be an anomaly – on par with binding circumcision of the flesh under the Old Covenant as a sign of the descendants of Abraham according to the flesh, which Gentile Christians are not. On the other hand, all the commandments of the Decalogue of the Old Covenant, except for the sabbath

commandment, would be as appropriate for Christians, whether of Jewish or Gentile background, as they were for fleshly Israel under the Old Covenant– and have therefore been incorporated into New Covenant law.

With that highly relevant reason we could again close our study. But we shall continue with relevant events and developments in connection with New Covenant era, between the first and second coming of Christ, when the sabbath command of the Old Covenant law ceased to be binding. For said development and events will give a still better perspective in some respects and help us to avoid some very common errors. (Some repetition, but for different emphasis, may be noticed.)

- b. "The law and the prophets [representing the Old Covenant] were until John [the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus]: from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God [superseding the kingdom of fleshly Israel] is preached, and every man entereth violently into it," said Jesus (Luke 16:16). That is, those who entered do so against much opposition. For, he also said: "Woe unto you lawyers! For ye took away the key of knowledge: and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Luke 11:52); also, "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter" (Matthew 23:13).
  
- c. That "entering," however, was only into the preliminary and preparatory phase of the kingdom on earth, preached first by John and then by Jesus as "at hand" (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:1) – not yet fully come. For that reason Jesus could say to the Pharisees who asked when the kingdom of God would come, "the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), or "in the midst of you," as in the margin of the American Standard Version, or "among you," as the New English Bible and some other versions have it – likely meaning among them in the person of himself, its king-to-be, and maybe also those already described as "entering" into it. Yet he taught his disciple to pray, "Thy kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), because not yet fully come as promised.

Later, however, six days before his transfiguration, Jesus made two significant statements:

- (1) To the apostle Peter, after he had confessed him as "the Christ, the son of the living God," saying, "... upon this rock [evidently the truth Peter had confessed about him] I will build my church; and ... I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:16-19).
  
- (2) Then to all his apostles, saying, "There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste death [but Judas Iscariot would, committing suicide], till they see the kingdom come with power" (Mark 9:1; cf. Matthew 16:28) – which occurred on Pentecost, forty days after his resurrection and about ten days after his ascension (Acts 1:1-9 and Chapter 2), to be noticed more at length later.

NOTE: (1) The "kingdom" spoken of many times interchangeably as "kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven," is also referred to as Christ's kingdom (see Matthew 16:28; Luke 1:31-32; 22:29-30; 23:42; John 18:36-37; Colossians 1:13; 2 Peter 2:11 and Revelation 1:9), and is also called "the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5; cf. Revelation 11:15) – with Christ sitting on "the right hand of God [as co-regent]" (Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 10:12; 1 Peter 3:22 and Revelation 3:21).

- (3) Moreover, the terms "church" and "kingdom," occurring in consecutive verses (Matthew 6:18 and 19), are also used interchangeably because the members of one are the citizens of the other on earth and in that sense are the same. Hence, in Colossians 1:13 the apostle Paul spoke of the "saints" at Colossae (the "body" of Christ's people and therefore his "church" there (1:1, 24) as having been "translated [by God] ... into the kingdom of the Son of his love." And the apostle John, who addressed the Book of Revelation to "the seven churches which are in Asia" (1:4), also describes himself as "your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which are in Jesus" (v. 9).
- d. In the passage first mentioned above, "the law and the prophets" were representatives of the Old Covenant between God and Israel (which was unto God "a kingdom," Exodus 19:6 of whom David was its most nearly ideal king, ruling over the covenant people of God on earth for God, and leading them to victory over their enemies), of which covenant Moses was the mediator and the prophets were among other things, interpreters of its law to the people. On the other hand, "the kingdom of God" or "kingdom of heaven" mentioned in the above and other New Testament texts, represents the New Covenant, of which Christ is the mediator (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and under which He is king, ruling over the people of God for God, and conquering enemies, as his fleshly ancestor David did. His mother-to-be was promised, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob [Israel] for ever, and of his kingdom, there shall be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). (Compare also the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7).
- e. Christ's reign, however, would not be over "Israel after the flesh" (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:18), but over spiritual Israel (cf. Romans 2:17-29; 4:1-12). And it would include all Gentiles as well as all Israelites who would embrace the New Covenant made by God with the "house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Hebrews 8:8-12). That would be after (1) the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been broken down "through the cross" of Christ, in order to "create in himself one new man" as it were (neither Jew nor Gentile according to the flesh, but Christian, constituting spiritual Israel), and (2) nailed it [Old Covenant law, distinguishing and separating Israelite from Gentile] to the cross as it were (see Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 2:8-15). That describes something of the nature of the kingdom that John first and then Jesus preached as being "at hand" (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:1).

- f. As previously mentioned, only six days before his transfiguration, Jesus said to his apostles, "There are some here of them that stand by, who shall in no wise taste death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1; cf. Matthew 16:28) – which occurred on Pentecost after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (see Acts 1:1-9, and Chapter 2). That was approximately six months after the above announcement of Jesus, and he had told the apostle Peter, "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19), after Peter's confession of him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." At that time, Jesus had also said, "upon this rock [evidently the truth Peter had confessed about him] I will build my church" (vs. 16-18).
- g. In harmony with Mark 9:1, mentioned above, in which Jesus had said that some then present would not taste death till seeing "the kingdom of God come with power," Luke in Acts 1:1-9 reports that between "his passion [his suffering and death, followed by his resurrection]" and being "received up [his ascension into heaven]," he charged his apostles "not to depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father [of the Holy Spirit as their comforter or Helper, in his stead, after he had gone from them into heaven (see John 14:16-17)], which, said he, ye heard from me: for John [the Baptist] indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence. ...[and] ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and [being thus empowered] ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The points to remember are:

- (1) Christ's apostles (except for Judas Iscariot) would see the kingdom come;
  - (2) it would come with power;
  - (3) they themselves would receive power when the Holy Spirit had come and they had been "baptized" in it not many days after Christ's ascension. Therefore, when item (3) had occurred, items (1) and (2) would have had their fulfillment.
- h. Accordingly, as recorded in Acts 2, when the day of Pentecost was come, about ten days after the ascension of Christ, and the apostles were all together in one place, the following dramatic events occurred:
- (1) "... suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a rushing mighty wind," filling all the house where the apostles were sitting.
  - (2) "And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and ... sat upon each one of them."
  - (3) "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues [other languages] as the Spirit gave them utterances."
- i. And the apostle Peter, who had been given "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," delivered the keynote address of that beginning day, in the city of Jerusalem, where their first labors would be

for an extended period of time. On that day "about three thousand souls" responded. And from that day "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:27, New King James Version). So, on the Pentecost day the "church" had been established; the "kingdom of heaven" had come. And Peter's Pentecost sermon of Acts 2:22-40 had in it further points relevant to our present study.

- j. In his sermon, the apostle Peter declared that Christ had been "raised up" (from the dead) and exalted to the right hand of God in heaven; that he had received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, responsible for the miraculous manifestations seen and heard that day; and that he would "sit at God's right hand till his enemies are made the footstool of his feet – Jesus having been made "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:22-36).

In 1 Corinthians 15:24-28, the apostle Paul later expanded on the part we have underscored {and that he would "sit" at God's right hand till his enemies are made the footstool of his feet}, as follows "Then cometh the end [that is, of time on the present earth and of the earth itself, and therefore of the earthly phase of the kingdom of heaven, but not of the kingdom itself. For the latter is eternal and its glorious heavenly phase will then be entered by its faithful citizens, per 2 Peter 1:11; cf. Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 14:21-22; 2 Timothy 4:18], when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have abolished all [opposing] rule and authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be abolished is death [by the universal resurrection of the dead (Revelation 20:13-20) and the transforming of the bodies of living saints unto incorruptible and immortal ones (1 Corinthians 15:50-57)]. ... And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all" – as the Father has made the Son to be for the present – with "all authority ... in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18) – "angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1 Peter 3:22).

That does not mean Christ will no longer reign in any sense, for "the throne of God and of the Lamb [Christ] shall be therein [that is, in the 'holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven' to the 'new earth']: and his servants shall serve him; ... and they shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 22:3-5) – they also being co-regents as it were with him, see 3:21; cf. 2 Timothy 2:12). Though he will still be co-regent with the Father as he is now (Revelation 3:21), his reign will not be distinguished then as now by the assigned role of conquering all enemies of the divine rule – that assignment having then already been accomplished.

- k. In his sermon on Pentecost, the apostle Peter also quoted from David in Psalm 16:8-10, and then commented as follows: "Brethren, may I say unto you freely of the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us unto this day. Being, therefore, a prophet [as well as king over Israel], and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins he would set one upon his throne; he foreseeing this spake of the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he ['his soul,' v. 27] left unto Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus did God raise up, whereof we all [Peter and the other apostles] are witnesses. Being therefore by the right

hand of God exalted, and having received of the father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he hath poured forth this, which ye see and hear" (Acts 2:25-33).

In other words, God had raised Jesus from the dead and exhaled him to his own right hand to "set" him on the throne of David, as promised both to David, as per the above, and to Mary, the mother-to-be of his fleshly body (Luke 1:16-33).

If that should seem strange because David reigned on earth, and Christ would reign from heaven, it should be recognized that the authority and not the location is signified by the word "throne". Note the following: "Now David the son of Jesse reigned over Israel. And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned in Jerusalem. And he died in a good old age, ...and Solomon his son reigned in his stead" (1 Chronicles 29:26-28). Also: "Then Solomon sat on the throne of Jehovah as king instead of David his father" (v. 33) – and it was in Jerusalem that Solomon reigned.

Solomon's throne was Jehovah's throne, which he occupied instead of David his father; therefore, David's throne was God's throne, which he sat upon first at Hebron, then in Jerusalem. And the throne Jesus occupies in heaven is God's throne. Which he occupies jointly with him, at his right hand – where "of his kingdom there shall be no end," according to promise to the virgin Mary (Luke 1:33), though the earthly phase of it would end, as already noted.

- I. As Solomon was a son of David and heir to his throne, so was Christ according to the flesh many years later.

The last occupant of David's throne before Christ occupied it was Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8) – also called Jeconiah (1 Chronicles 3:16), and Coniah (Jeremiah 22:24) – who was taken into Babylonian captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar about 597 B.C., where he died about 37 years later. Nebuchadnezzar had replaced him with Zedekiah, a brother but not a son, who later rebelled and was also taken into Babylonian captivity (2 Chronicles 36:10-21). And to the prophet Jeremiah, God said of Coniah: "Write thee this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling Judah" (Jeremiah 22:30).

He was not childless in the sense of having no prosperity, for in captivity he had a son Shealtiel, who was one of the ancestors of Jesus (Matthew 1:12-16); but he was childless in the sense of having no posterity to succeed him "sitting on the throne of David, and ruling Judah." Though Christ evidently succeeded him to the throne of David, in accord with God's decree he did not rule in Judah, but in heaven, and will never return to earth for the purpose of ruling on David's throne in Judah and Jerusalem as many today teach.

- m. Moreover, since Christ was to be a "high priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 6:20), as learned early on (p.2 above), he was to be both king and priest, for Melchizedek was "king of Salem [later called Jerusalem], priest of God Most High" (Hebrews 7:1). And in Zechariah 6:1213,

believed to be prophetic of Christ, it is said that "he shall be a priest upon his throne." However, "if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all" (Hebrews 8:4), and was not made priest before "suffering" on earth (Hebrews 5:7-10) and before entering "within the veil [that is, into heaven itself]" (Hebrews 7:17-20). That means he was not yet king, and therefore not on the throne of David, until after his ascension into heaven – where he still is, and always will be except for his second coming for judgment and to receive his own into eternal glory with himself in the world to come.

- n. That accords with what was foreseen by the prophet Daniel, namely, his ascension and receiving his kingdom, as follows: "I saw in the night-visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like a son of man [cf. Acts 1:9-11], and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14).
- o. It accords also with a parable that Jesus spoke as he was nearing Jerusalem for the last week before his crucifixion, as recorded in Luke 19:11-30, though the latter covers more detail than the foregoing. For he spoke it "because he was nigh unto Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear" – the popular concept being that it would be an earthly kingdom, that Rome would be defeated by the Messiah, who would restore the kingdom to Israel, make it world-wide, and occupy the throne of David again in Jerusalem after more than 600 years as of then, which may have been shared by Christ's own apostles up to the time of his ascension (Acts 1:6).

"He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return would" (vs. 11-12) – (the return not having been included in Daniel's vision); and upon his return, he had a reckoning with both his servants and his enemies (vs. 13-30).

Christ himself was the nobleman, heaven the far country, and the return would be his second coming – described in partially similar parables as after "a long time" (Luke 20:9; Matthew 25:19); also the reckoning upon his return would be final and universal judgment at the end of the world, with reward for the righteous and punishment for the wicked to be experienced in eternity.

The apostle Paul speaks of that as "his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Timothy 4:1) – that is, of his appearing and manifestation of his kingdom in his and its heavenly glory. Matthew states it this way: "But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory [previously received], and before him shall be gathered all nations" (that is, for judgment) – when the wicked "shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life" (25:31-32, 46) – "eternal life" being the experience of the righteous in the heavenly phase of the kingdom, and "eternal punishment" that of the wicked in the lake of fire.

Other scriptures already noticed indicate that the kingdom would be received by Christ shortly upon arrival in heaven after his death, resurrection, and ascension when he would receive "all authority ... in heaven and on earth" as had been promised him (Matthew 28:19), and was indicated on Pentecost after his ascension as having already been accomplished. This means, then, that any references after that to the kingdom as yet future (as Acts 14:23; 2 Timothy 4:1, 18; and 2 Peter 1:11, already mentioned) have to do with it, not on earth between his first and second comings, but to its eternal continuation in heavenly glory in the world to come – when and where "THERE REMAINETH A SABBATH REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD" Hebrews 4:8) – prefigured by the seventh-day sabbath of Israel according to the flesh, but not retained under the New Covenant mediated by Christ for spiritual Israel (consisting of both Jews and Gentiles according to the flesh, who accept it).

### **Final Observations**

#### 1. Christ and the Sabbath till His Death (The Gospels).

Christ lived and died on earth under the Old Covenant law of Moses, and he and his disciples kept the seventh-day, Sabbath of the Decalogue, though at times he and they violated what had come to be the traditional Jewish interpretations of its intended restrictions -- he being divine as well as human, and knowing the divine intent of it, declared himself to be "lord of the sabbath" (Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5).

But as already documented, at his death, the Old Covenant law was abrogated and his shed blood was the blood of the New Covenant, which did not incorporate the sabbath command as it did in the other nine commandments of the Decalogue of the Old Covenant, for reasons that have already been noted. After his resurrection, which occurred on the first day of the week, that day begins to be featured.

#### 2. The First Day of the Week Featured after His Resurrection (Gospels through Revelation).

On resurrection Sunday, the risen Christ appeared to Mary Magdalene, a group of women, the apostle Peter, two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and to all his apostles that evening except for Thomas, who was absent from the others at that time, but was present a week later when Jesus made his next recorded appearance.

The Pentecost day, when the kingdom came that had been preached by John the Baptist and then by Jesus as "at hand," was the first day of the week – occurring fifty days after the sabbath of Passover week (Leviticus 23:15-16). And following that, when about three thousand were baptized and added to the number of Christ's disciples, "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42) – with "the breaking of bread" in the context obviously referring to partaking of "the Lord's supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20), instituted by Christ the night before his death (Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

In Acts 20:6-7, we have a record of Paul and his company, who had arrived seven days earlier in Troas and tarried till "the first day of the week, when we were gathered to break bread, [and] Paul discoursed with them [with the disciples at Troas], intending to depart on the morrow" – implying a weekly practice of meeting together on the first day of the week to "break bread" or partake of the Lord's supper.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, we have the apostle Paul giving directions to the saints in Corinth, as he had given to the churches in Galatia, for a collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem, saying: "Upon the first day of the week [literally, 'of every week'] let each one of you lay by him in store [perhaps more accurately, put into the treasury by itself, that is in a separate fund], as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" to take or send "your bounty unto Jerusalem" – the implication being that their contributions be made on every first day of the week before his arrival, because of the regularly coming together on that day for Christian worship. (See Macknight, Apostolical Epistles, and McGarvey and Pendleton, Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans, with reference to 1 Corinthians 16:2 in particular.)

In Revelation 1:9, likely written about A.D. 96, the apostle John speaks of being "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (*te kuriake hemera*) when having his first vision during exile on the isle of Patmos, understood by early Christians as referring to the first day of the week, also called "the eighth day" – the day following the Jewish sabbath, the seventh day. To them it was a day in memory of the resurrection of Christ, as "the Lord's supper" was a supper in memory of the death of Christ; and they assembled on "the Lord's day" to observe "the Lord's supper" – their "Lord" being Christ, and him alone.

That distinguished Christians

(a) from Jews religiously speaking, whose weekly worship assembly day was Saturday, their sabbath, on one hand,

(b) from pagans on the other hand, who in Egypt and Asia Minor had a similar phrase, *te sebsterma*, for the first day of the month, in honor of the Roman emperor, Caesar, whom they worshipped as divine, employing the Greek word sebaste, a symbol of *kuriake* used instead by Christians of Christ. (See Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. KQ, p.152).

*Sebaste* is the genitive of *sabastos*, from *sebas*, meaning reverential awe, and is a cognate of *sebazomai*, to worship, and *sebasma*, an object of worship. So, in the final analysis, and in particular usage, the two words as applied to Christ and Caesar, respectively, were equivalents. And those who believed in Christ as Lord could not acknowledge Caesar as such, often resulting in the severest of persecution for Christians – which they were beginning to suffer in Asia Minor at the time of John's banishment to the isle of Patmos, where he wrote the Book of Revelation at the behest of Christ for the immediate edification and encouragement of the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (in the western part of Asia Minor, now Turkey).

The following excerpts of quotations from decades of the second Christian century will demonstrate the use of "Lord's day" for the "first day of the week," the day of Christ's resurrection from the dead, and being a weekly assembly day of early Christians – instead of being "the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 34:10), when the Lord Jesus Christ returns at the end of time on earth for the universal resurrection and judgment of mankind, as claimed by some in our day.

DIDACHE: " ... Come together each Lord's day of the Lord, eat bread, and give thanks "(14:1) – late first or early second century A.D.

NOTE: The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. KQ, p. 152, states this, to us, curious wording "seems to mean 'meeting for worship on the Lord's Day – his special day.' In contrast to the sabbath." That interpretation is confirmed by the following considerations:

Although the expression "the Lord's day" in Revelation 1:9 is *he kuriake hemera*, it became common to omit the word day, leaving it to be understood from context, with the adjective "Lord's" actually coming to be used as a noun for "Sunday" or "first day of the week." which is the case in the above quotation from the Didache. "Thus in modern Greek the word for Sunday or the first day of the week is *kuriake*. This usage was well established at an early date, for the Christian Latin word for Sunday was *dominica*, the exact translation of the Greek, 'Lord's.' The word for Sunday in modern Romance languages is derived from this usage – *dominica* (Italian), *domingo* (Spanish), and *dimanche* (French)." (Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak*, p.71.)

IGNATIUS: " ... no longer observing the Sabbath but living according to the Lord's day, in which also our life arose through him ..." (Magnesians 9) – 110 A.D.

BARNABAS: "Wherefore we [Christians] keep the eighth day with joy, on which Jesus arose from the dead and when he appeared ascended into heaven" (15:8f) – about 130 A.D.

NOTE: If the 40 days of Acts 1:3 were exclusive of resurrection and ascension days, which is possible, then his ascension was also on the same day of the week as his resurrection – "eighth" (= "first"), as indicated in the quotation from Barnabas.

### 3. Christians and the Sabbath after Pentecost (Acts through the Epistles).

While Christians observed the first day of the week as their regular assembly day for their own distinctive worship, Jewish Christians usually still lived as Jews as a matter of custom and culture in whatever respects {it} did not conflict with Christian principles. Also, the apostle Paul; conformed in such respects to the customs or culture of whatever people he might be among – whether

(a) Jews or Jewish proselytes, who lived according to the law of Moses, that he might gain them for Christ;

- (b) non-Jewish, who were without that law (though not being without law himself to Christ), that he might gain them also for Christ
- (c) those he called "weak," that he might likewise gain them (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

For example, Paul observed the Mosaic law in regard to Nazirite vows, found in Numbers 6:1-21 (see Acts 18:8; 21:17-26). He circumcised Timothy, a half-Jew, to make him acceptable in Jewish as well as Gentile society (Acts 16:1-3). But he refused to circumcise Titus, a non-Jew, in order not to compromise the gospel when a Jewish faction was attempting to bind circumcision on Gentile converts (Galatians 2:1-5; cf. Acts 15:1-31). Yet he did not teach Jewish Christians not to circumcise their children as a matter of custom (Acts 21:17-26, as already cited) – but did teach that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor un-circumcision; but faith [in Christ] working through love" (Galatians 5:6) – which principle he applied broadly, saying, "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of feast days or a new moon or a sabbath day" (Colossians 2:16), because such were not binding on Christians, as previously discussed more fully.

The gospel was preached first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16). And to Jews, it was first preached in Jerusalem, not only in the temple, by the apostles, but also in the synagogues of the city by others. A notable example of the latter was that by Stephen in the synagogue "of the Libertines, and of the Cyretians, and of the Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and Asia" (a synagogue of Jews outside of Palestine), who disputed with him but could not "withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spake." Yet they succeeded in bringing him into the "council" (Sanhedrin), and getting him stoned to death as the first Christian martyr. It is probable that Saul of Tarsus, who later converted and became the apostle Paul, was of that synagogue, for he was of Cilicia and held the garments of those who did the stoning. (See Acts 6:8 - 8:1; 22:3-21).

After Paul became an apostle to the Gentiles when in a city where there was a Jewish synagogue, he would go to it first (for it was God's will that all Jews as well as all Gentiles have the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel of Christ and thus become Christians, and Gentiles would usually initially be reached through God-fearers attending Jewish synagogue services) – as in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13-51), in Iconium (14:1-7), in Thessalonica (17:1-9), in Berea (17:10-14), in Corinth (18:1-17), in Ephesus, where he left his helpers, Aquilla and Priscilla, until his return (Acts 18:18-19:20). In some instances, Christians continued attending synagogue services as long as allowed to do so, but likely assembling in some member's home for their own Lord's day services (cf. Acts 18:7; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:9 and Philemon 1-2), or some other welcome place, as the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus, where there was daily access (Acts 19:9-10).

So, according to principles involved in what has been noted, if a Jewish Christian as an individual wished not only to observe the first day of the week as the "Lord's day," which was not necessarily a rest day as the sabbath had been under Moses, and in that sense "every day" could be "esteemed alike," but also felt constrained to continue observing the "seventh day as a day of rest and worship, he must not be forbidden to do so, yet he must not attempt to bind its observance on others – with the same thing true in reverse in

regard to meats, which Gentile Christians could eat without reservations of conscience, that the Jewish Christians might still have scruples against though he need not have (Romans 14:1-23) – which principle, however, applies only to matters optional – only to what is permissible, but neither commanded nor forbidden.

On the other hand, if Gentile Christians were allowing themselves to be brought into bondage to (that is, bound to observe) that from which Christ had liberated even the Jews (including the "sabbath day" observance, Colossians 2:16), that was reason for the apostle Paul to be concerned about their salvation – a very insignificant faith (see Galatians 4:8-10; 5:1-8, also exegeted much earlier). The bottom line: "FOR FREEDOM DID CHRIST SET US FREE [in regard to such]: STAND FAST THEREFORE, AND BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN IN A YOKE OF BONDAGE" (Galatians 5:1).

Hence, although Christians ought to have private devotions daily, and may assemble for worship and edification at any time or at various times, or even daily for extended periods, as is possible and may seem expedient, only the first day of the week is featured for them in the New Testament scriptures as a day of regular and general assembly, observed as the "Lord's day," when the "Lord's supper" is a special and added feature of their worship.

Adapted from God's Sabbath, Searching the Scriptures. Cecil N. Wright