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THE SABBATH

The beneficent Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts.

With God, Adam and Eve explored their paradise home. The scenery was breathtaking, beyond description. As the sun slowly set on that Friday, the sixth day of Creation, and the stars began to appear, "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Thus God finished His creation of "the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them" (Gen. 2:1).

But as beautiful as was the world He had just completed, the greatest gift God could give to the newly created couple was the privilege of a personal relationship with Him. So He gave them the Sabbath, a day of special blessing, fellowship, and communion with their Creator.

The Sabbath Throughout the Bible

The Sabbath is central to our worship of God. The memorial of Creation, it reveals the reason why God is to be worshiped: He is the Creator, and we are His creatures. "The Sabbath, therefore, lies at the very foundation of divine worship, for it teaches this great truth in the most impressive manner, and no other institution does this. The true ground of divine worship, not of that on the seventh day merely, but of all worship, is found in the distinction between the Creator and His creatures. This great fact can never become obsolete, and must never be forgotten." It was to keep this truth forever before the human race that God instituted the Sabbath.

The Sabbath at Creation

The Sabbath comes to us from a sinless world. It is God's special gift, enabling the human race to experience the reality of heaven on earth. Three distinct divine acts established the Sabbath:

1. God rested on the Sabbath.

On the seventh day God "rested and was refreshed" (Ex. 31:17), yet He did not rest because He needed it (Isa. 40:28). The verb "rested," shabath, means literally "to cease"

from labor or activity (cf. Gen. 8:22). "God's rest was the result of neither exhaustion nor fatigue, but a cessation from previous occupation."

God rested because He expected humans to rest; He set an example for human beings to follow (Ex. 20:11).

If God finished the Creation on the sixth day (Gen. 2:1), what does Scripture mean when it says that He "ended His work" on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2)? God had finished the creation of the heavens and the earth in those six days, but He had yet to make the Sabbath. It was by resting on the Sabbath that He made it. The Sabbath was His finishing touch, ending His work.

2. God blessed the Sabbath.

God not only made the Sabbath, He blessed it. "The blessing on the seventh day implied that it was thereby declared to be a special object of divine favor and a day that would bring blessing to His creatures."

3. God sanctified the Sabbath.

To sanctify something means to make it sacred or holy, or to set it apart as holy and for holy use; to consecrate it. People, places (such as a sanctuary, temple, or church), and time (holy days) can be sanctified. The fact that God sanctified the seventh day means that this day is holy, that He set it apart for the lofty purpose of enriching the divine-human relationship.

God blessed and sanctified the seventh-day Sabbath because He rested on this day from all His works. He blessed and sanctified it for humanity, not for Himself. It is His personal presence that brings to the Sabbath God's blessing and sanctification.

The Sabbath at Sinai

The events following the Israelites' departure from Egypt show that they had largely lost sight of the Sabbath. The rigorous requirements of slavery seem to have made Sabbath observance very difficult. Soon after they gained their freedom, God strongly reminded them, through the miracle of the manna and the proclamation of the Ten Commandments, of their obligation to observe the seventh-day Sabbath.

1. The Sabbath and the manna.

One month before He proclaimed the law from Sinai, God promised the people protection against disease if they would diligently give attention to "His commandments and keep all His statutes" (Ex. 15:26; cf. Gen. 26:5). Soon after making this promise God reminded the Israelites of the sacredness of the Sabbath. Through the miracle of the manna He taught them in concrete terms how important He considered their resting on the seventh day.

Each weekday God gave to the Israelites enough manna to meet their needs for that day. They were not to save any till the next day, for it would spoil if they did (Ex. 16:4, 16-19). On the sixth day they were to gather twice as much as usual so that they would have enough for their needs on both that day and the Sabbath. Teaching that the sixth day was to be a day of preparation and also how the Sabbath was to be kept, God said, "Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning" (Ex.

16:23, NIV). Only on the seventh day could the manna be kept without spoiling (Ex. 16:24). In language similar to that of the fourth commandment, Moses said, "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none" (Ex. 16:26).

For the forty years, or more than 2,000 successive weekly Sabbaths, that the Israelites were in the wilderness, the miracle of the manna reminded them of this pattern of six days of work and the seventh day of rest.

2. The Sabbath and the law.

God placed the Sabbath command in the center of the Decalogue. It reads as follows: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8:11).

All of the commandments of the Decalogue are vital, and none are to be neglected (James 2:10), yet God distinguished the Sabbath command from all others. Regarding it, He commanded, "Remember," alerting humanity to the danger of forgetting its importance.

The words with which the commandment begins—"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"—show that the Sabbath was not first instituted at Sinai. Those words indicate that it was originated earlier—in fact, at Creation, as the rest of the commandment reveals. God intended that we observe the Sabbath as His memorial of Creation. It defines the time for rest and worship, directing us to contemplate God and His works.

As the memorial of Creation, Sabbath observance is an antidote for idolatry. By reminding us that God created heaven and earth, it distinguishes Him from all false gods. Keeping the Sabbath, then, becomes the sign of our allegiance to the true God—a sign that we acknowledge His Sovereignty as Creator and King.

The Sabbath commandment functions as the seal of God's law. Generally, seals contain three elements: the name of the owner of the seal, his title, and jurisdiction. Official seals are used to validate documents of great import. The document takes on the authority of the official whose seal is placed upon it. The seal implies that the official himself approved of the legislation and that all the power of his office stands behind it.

Among the Ten Commandments, it is the Sabbath command that contains the vital elements of a seal. It is the only one of the ten that identifies the true God by giving His name: "the Lord your God;" His title: the One who made—the Creator; and His territory: "the heavens and the earth" (Ex. 20:10,11). Since only the fourth commandment shows by whose authority the Ten Commandments were given, it therefore "contains the seal of God," attached to His law as evidence of its authenticity and binding force.

Indeed, God made the Sabbath as "a reminder or sign of His power and authority in a world unspotted by sin and rebellion. It was to be an institution of perpetual personal

obligation enjoined by the admonition 'remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy' (Ex. 20:8)."

This commandment divides the week into two parts. God gave humanity six days in which to "labor and do all your work," but the seventh day "you shall do no work" (Ex. 20:9,10). "'Six days,' says the command, are work days, but 'the seventh day' is a rest day. That 'the seventh day' is uniquely God's rest day is made evident in the opening words of the command: 'Remember the sabbath [rest] day, to keep it holy.'"

Although human beings require physical rest to refresh their bodies, God bases His command that we rest on the Sabbath on His example. Since He rested from His activities of the world's first week, so we are to rest.

3. The Sabbath and the covenant.

As God's law was central to the covenant (Ex. 34:27), so the Sabbath, located in the heart of that law, is prominent in His covenant. God declared the Sabbath a "sign between...[you] and Me, that...[you] may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies...[you]" (Eze. 20:12; cf. Eze. 20:20; Ex. 31:17). Therefore, He said, Sabbathkeeping is a "perpetual covenant" (Ex. 31:16). "Just as the covenant is based on God's love for His people (Deut. 7:7,8), so the Sabbath, as the sign of that covenant, is a sign of divine love."

4. The annual sabbaths.

In addition to the weekly Sabbaths (Lev. 23:3), there were seven annual, ceremonial sabbaths scattered through Israel's religious calendar. These yearly sabbaths were not directly related to the seventh-day Sabbath or the weekly cycle. These sabbaths, "beside the Sabbaths of the Lord" (Lev. 23:38), were the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Day of Pentecost, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the first and last days of the Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Lev. 23:7,8,21,24,25,27,28, 35,36).

Because the reckoning of these sabbaths depended on the beginning of the sacred year, which was based on the lunar calendar, they could fall on any day of the week. When they coincided with the weekly Sabbath, they were called "high days" (cf. John 19:31). "While the weekly Sabbath was ordained at the close of Creation week for all mankind, the annual sabbaths were an integral part of the Jewish system of rites and ceremonies instituted at Mount Sinai,...which pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah, and the observance of which terminated with His death on the cross."

The Sabbath and Christ

Scripture reveals that, as truly as the Father, Christ was the Creator (see 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:1,2; John 1:3). So He was the One who set the seventh day apart as a day of rest for humanity.

In time Christ associated the Sabbath with His redemptive as well as His creative work. As the great "I AM" (John 8:58; Ex. 3:14) He incorporated the Sabbath in the Decalogue as a forceful reminder of this weekly worship appointment with the Creator. And He added another reason for the observance of the Sabbath: The redemption of His people (Deut. 5:14,15). So the Sabbath marks those who have accepted Jesus as Creator and Saviour.

Christ's twofold role as Creator and Redeemer makes it obvious why He claimed that as the Son of Man, He "is also Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). With such authority, He could have disposed of the Sabbath if He had wanted to, but He did not. On the contrary He applied it to all human beings, saying, "The Sabbath was made for man" (verse 27).

Throughout His earthly ministry Christ exemplified for us faithful Sabbathkeeping. It was "His custom" to worship on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). His participation in Sabbath services reveals that He endorsed it as a day of worship.

So concerned was Christ for the sacredness of the Sabbath that when He spoke about the persecution to take place after His ascension, He counseled His disciples regarding it. "Pray," He said, "that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath" (Matt. 24:20). This clearly implied, as Jonathan Edwards noted, "that even then Christians were bound to a strict observation of the Sabbath."

When Christ finished His work of Creation—His first great act in world history—He rested on the seventh day. This rest signified completion and accomplishment. He did much the same at the end of His earthly ministry, when He completed His second great act in history. On Friday afternoon, the sixth day of the week, Christ finished His redemptive mission on earth. His last words were "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Scripture emphasizes that when He died, "it was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin" (Luke 23:54, NIV). Following His death, He rested in a tomb, thus symbolizing that He had accomplished the redemption of the human race.

So the Sabbath testifies to Christ's works of Creation and redemption. Through observing it His followers rejoice with Him over His accomplishments for humanity.

The Sabbath and the Apostles

The disciples greatly respected the Sabbath. This was evident at the time of Christ's death. When the Sabbath arrived, they interrupted their burial preparations and "rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment," with plans to continue this work on Sunday, "the first day of the week" (Luke 23:56; 24:1).

As had Christ, the apostles worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath. In his evangelistic travels Paul attended the synagogue on the Sabbath, and preached Christ (Acts 13:14; 17:1,2; 18:4). Even the Gentiles invited him to preach the word of God on the Sabbath (Acts 13:42,44). In localities where there was no synagogue, he searched for the place customary for Sabbath worship (Acts 16:13). As Christ's participation in Sabbath services indicated His acceptance of the seventh day as the special day for worship, so did Paul's.

This apostle's faithful observance of the weekly Sabbath stood in sharp contrast to his attitude towards the annual ceremonial sabbaths. He made it clear that Christians were under no obligation to keep these yearly rest days because Christ had nailed the ceremonial laws to the cross (see Chapter 18 of this book). Said he, "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:16,17). Since "the context [of this passage] deals with ritual matters, the sabbaths here referred to are the ceremonial sabbaths of the Jewish annual festivals 'which are a shadow,' or type, of which the fulfillments were to come in Christ."

Likewise, in Galatians Paul remonstrated against the observing of the requirements of the ceremonial law. He said, "You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain" (Gal. 4:10,11, RSV).

Many are under the impression that John was referring to Sunday when he stated he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). In the Bible, however, the only day referred to as the Lord's special possession is the Sabbath. Christ stated, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God" (Ex. 20:10); later calling it "My holy day" (Isa. 58:13). And Christ called Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). Since, in the Scripture, the only day the Lord calls His own is the seventh-day Sabbath, it seems logical to conclude that it was the Sabbath to which John was referring. Certainly there is no Biblical precedent to indicate he would apply that term to the first day of the week, or Sunday.

Nowhere does the Bible command us to observe any weekly day other than the Sabbath. It declares no other weekly day blessed or holy. Nor does the New Testament indicate that God has changed the Sabbath to any other day of the week.

On the contrary, Scripture reveals that God intended that His people should observe the Sabbath throughout eternity:

"As the new heavens and the new earth which I will make will remain before me,' says the Lord, 'so shall your descendants and your name remain....From one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says the Lord" (Isa. 66:22,23).

The Meaning of the Sabbath

The Sabbath has broad significance and is filled with deep and rich spirituality.

1. A perpetual memorial of Creation.

As we have seen, the fundamental significance the Ten Commandments attach to the Sabbath is that it memorializes the creation of the world (Ex. 20:11,12). The command to observe the seventh day as the Sabbath is "linked inseparably to the act of Creation, the institution of the Sabbath and the command to observe it being a direct consequence of the act of Creation. Furthermore, the entire human family owes its existence to the divine act of Creation thus memorialized; accordingly, the obligation to comply with the Sabbath command as a memorial of the creative power of God devolves upon the entire human race." Strong calls the Sabbath "a perpetual obligation as God's appointed memorial of his creating activity."

Those who observed it as a memorial of Creation would be doing so as a grateful acknowledgment "that God was their Creator and their rightful Sovereign; that they were the works of His hands, and the subjects of His authority. Thus the institution was wholly commemorative, and given to all mankind. There was nothing in it shadowy, or of restricted application to any people." And as long as we worship God because He is our Creator, so long will the Sabbath function as the sign and memorial of Creation.

2. A symbol of redemption.

When God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, the Sabbath, which was already the memorial of Creation, became a memorial of deliverance as well (Deut. 5:15). "The Lord

intended that the weekly Sabbath rest, if properly observed, would constantly release man from the bondage of an Egypt not limited to any country or century but which includes every land and every age. Man today needs escape from the bondage that comes from greediness, from gain and power, from social inequality, and from sin and selfishness."

It is when we view the cross that the Sabbath rest stands out as a special symbol of redemption. "It is the memorial of the exodus from the bondage of sin under the leadership of Emmanuel. The greatest burden we carry is the guilt of our disobedience. The Sabbath rest, by pointing back to Christ's rest in the tomb, the rest of victory over sin, offers to the Christian a tangible opportunity to accept and experience Christ's forgiveness, peace, and rest."

3. A sign of sanctification.

The Sabbath is a sign of God's transforming power, a sign of holiness or sanctification. The Lord declared, "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Ex. 31:13; cf. Eze. 20:20). The Sabbath, therefore, also is a sign of God as the Sanctifier. As people are sanctified by Christ's blood (Heb. 13:12), the Sabbath is also a sign of the believer's acceptance of His blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Just as God has set the Sabbath aside for a holy purpose, so He has set His people apart for a holy purpose—to be His special witnesses. Their communion with Him on that day leads to holiness; they learn to depend not on their own resources but on the God who sanctifies them.

"The power that created all things is the power that re-creates the soul in His own likeness. To those who keep holy the Sabbath day it is the sign of sanctification. True sanctification is harmony with God, oneness with Him in character. It is received through obedience to those principles that are the transcript of His character. And the Sabbath is the sign of obedience. He who from the heart obeys the fourth commandment will obey the whole law. He is sanctified through obedience."

4. A sign of loyalty.

As Adam and Eve's loyalty was tested by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil placed in the midst of the garden of Eden, so every human being's loyalty to God will be tested by the Sabbath command placed in the midst of the Decalogue.

Scripture reveals that before the Second Advent the whole world will be divided into two classes: those who are loyal and "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus," and those who worship "the beast and his image" (Rev. 14:12,9). At that time God's truth will be magnified before the world and it will be clear to all that the obedient observance of the seventh-day Sabbath of Scripture gives evidence of loyalty to the Creator.

5. A time of fellowship.

God created the animals to be humanity's companions (Gen. 1:24,25). And for a higher level of companionship God gave the man and woman to each other (Gen. 2:18-25). But in the Sabbath God gave humanity a gift offering the highest form of companionship—companionship with Him. Human beings were not made just to associate with the animals, nor even with other humans. They were made for God.

It is on the Sabbath that we can especially experience God's presence among us. Without the Sabbath all would be labor and sweat without end. Every day would be alike, devoted to secular pursuits. The arrival of the Sabbath, however, brings hope, joy, meaning, and courage. It provides time to commune with God through worship, prayer, song, the study of and meditation on the Word, and through sharing the gospel with others. The Sabbath is our opportunity to experience God's presence.

6. A sign of righteousness by faith.

Christians recognize that through the guidance of an enlightened conscience non-Christians who honestly search for truth can be led by the Holy Spirit to an understanding of the general principles of God's law (Rom. 2:14-16). This explains why the nine commandments other than the fourth have been, to a degree, practiced outside of Christianity. But that is not the case with the Sabbath commandment.

Many people can see the reason for a weekly day of rest, but they often have a difficult time understanding why work that, when done on any other day of the week would be right and commendable, is a sin when done on the seventh day. Nature does not offer any ground for keeping the seventh day. Planets move in their respective orbits, vegetation grows, rain and sunshine alternate, and beasts carry on as if every day were the same. Why, then, should humans keep the seventh-day Sabbath? "To the Christian there is only one reason, and no other; but that reason is enough: God has spoken."

It is only on the basis of God's special revelation that people understand the reasonableness of observing the seventh day. Those who keep the seventh day, then, do so out of faith and implicit trust in Christ, who has enjoined its observance. By observing the Sabbath, believers reveal a willingness to accept God's will for their lives instead of depending on their own judgment.

In keeping the seventh day, believers are not trying to make themselves righteous. Rather, they observe the Sabbath as the result of their relationship with Christ the Creator and Redeemer. Sabbathkeeping is the product of His righteousness in justification and sanctification, signifying, that they have been delivered from the bondage of sin and have received His perfect righteousness.

"An apple tree does not become an apple tree by bearing apples. It first has to be an apple tree. Then the apples come as a natural fruitage. So the true Christian does not keep the Sabbath or the other nine precepts to make himself righteous. Rather, this is the natural fruitage of the righteousness Christ shares with him. He who keeps the Sabbath in this way is not a legalist, for the outward keeping of the seventh day betokens the believer's inner experience in justification and sanctification. Hence, the true Sabbathkeeper does not refrain from forbidden actions on the Sabbath in order to win God's favor but because he loves God and wants to make the Sabbath count for the most for closer fellowship with [Him]."

Sabbathkeeping reveals that we have ceased depending on our own works, that we realize that only Christ the Creator can save us. Indeed, "the spirit of true Sabbathkeeping reveals a supreme love for Jesus Christ, the Creator and Saviour, who is making us into new persons. It makes the keeping of the right day in the right way a sign of righteousness by faith."

7. A symbol of resting in Christ.

The Sabbath, a memorial of God's delivering Israel from Egypt to the rest of the earthly Canaan, distinguished the redeemed of that time from the surrounding nations. In a similar way the Sabbath is a sign of the deliverance from sin to God's rest, setting the redeemed apart from the world.

All who enter into the rest to which God invites them "have ceased from...[their] works as God did from His" (Heb. 4:10). "This rest is a spiritual rest, a rest from our 'own works,' a ceasing from sin. It is into this rest that God calls His people, and it is of this rest that both the Sabbath and Canaan are symbols."

When God completed His work of Creation and rested on the seventh day, He provided Adam and Eve, in the Sabbath, an opportunity to rest in Him. Though they failed, God's original purpose of offering that rest to humanity remains unchanged. After the Fall the Sabbath continued as a reminder of that rest. "The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath thus testifies not only to faith in God as the Creator of all things, but also to faith in His power to transform the life and qualify men and women for entering that eternal 'rest' He originally intended for the inhabitants of this earth."

God had promised this spiritual rest to literal Israel. Despite their failure to enter it, God's invitation still stands: "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9, NIV). All who desire to enter that rest "must first enter, by faith, into His spiritual 'rest,' the rest of the soul from sin and from its own efforts at salvation."

The New Testament appeals for the Christian not to wait to experience this rest of grace and faith, for "today" is the opportune time to enter it (Heb. 4:7; 3:13). All who have entered this rest—the saving grace received by faith in Jesus Christ—have ceased every effort to achieve righteousness by their own works. In this way, observing the seventh-day Sabbath is a symbol of the believer's entering into the gospel rest.

Attempts to Change the Day of Worship

Since the Sabbath plays a vital role in the worship of God as Creator and Redeemer, it should not be surprising that Satan has waged an all-out war to over-throw this sacred institution.

Nowhere does the Bible authorize a change from the day of worship God made in Eden and restated on Sinai. Other Christians, Sundaykeepers themselves, have recognized this. Catholic Cardinal James Gibbons once wrote, "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.T. Lincoln, a Protestant, admitted that "it cannot be argued that the New Testament itself provides warrant for the belief that since the Resurrection God appointed the first day to be observed as the Sabbath." He acknowledged: "To become a seventh-day Sabbatarian is the only consistent course of action for any one who holds that the whole Decalogue is binding as moral law."

If there is no Biblical evidence that Christ or His disciples changed the day of worship from the seventh day, then how did so many Christians come to accept Sunday in its place?

The Rise of Sunday Observance

The change from Sabbath to Sunday worship came gradually. There is no evidence of Christian weekly Sunday worship before the second century, but the evidence indicates that by the middle of that century some Christians were voluntarily observing Sunday as a day of worship, not a day of rest.

The church of Rome, largely made up of Gentile believers (Rom. 11:13), led in the trend toward Sunday worship. In Rome, the capital of the empire, strong anti-Jewish sentiments arose, becoming even stronger as time passed. Reacting to these sentiments, the Christians in that city attempted to distinguish themselves from the Jews. They dropped some practices held in common with the Jews and initiated a trend away from the veneration of the Sabbath, moving toward the exclusive observance of Sunday.

From the second to the fifth centuries, while Sunday was rising in influence, Christians continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath nearly everywhere throughout the Roman Empire. The fifth-century historian Socrates wrote: "Almost all the churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this."

In the fourth and fifth centuries many Christians worshiped on both Sabbath and Sunday. Sozomen, another historian of that period, wrote, "The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria." These references demonstrate Rome's leading role in disregarding Sabbath observance.

Why did those who were turning from worship on the seventh day choose Sunday and not another day of the week? A major reason was that Christ was resurrected on Sunday; in fact, it was alleged that He had authorized worship on that day. "But, strange as it may seem, not one writer of the second and third centuries ever cited a single Bible verse as authority for the observance of Sunday in the place of the Sabbath. Neither Barnabas, nor Ignatius, nor Justin, nor Irenaeus, nor Tertullian, nor Clement of Rome, nor Clement of Alexandria, nor Origen, nor Cyprian, nor Victorinus, nor any other author who lived near to the time when Jesus lived knew of any such instruction from Jesus or from any part of the Bible."

The popularity and influence that the sun worship of the pagan Romans accorded Sunday undoubtedly contributed to its growing acceptance as a day of worship. Sun worship played an important role throughout the ancient world. It was "one of the oldest components of the Roman religion." Because of Eastern sun cults, "from the early part of the second century A.D., the cult of Sol Invictus was dominant in Rome and in other parts of the Empire."

This popular religion made its impact on the early church through the new converts. "Christian converts from paganism were constantly attracted toward the veneration of the Sun. This is indicated not only by the frequent condemnation of this practice by the [Church] Fathers but also by significant reflexes of Sun worship in the Christian liturgy."

The fourth century saw the introduction of Sunday laws. First Sunday laws of a civil nature were issued, then came Sunday laws of a religious character. The emperor Constantine decreed the first civil Sunday law on March 7, A.D. 321. In view of Sunday's popularity among the pagan sun worshipers and the esteem with which many Christians regarded it, Constantine hoped that, by making Sunday a holiday, he could ensure the support of these two constituencies for his government.

Constantine's Sunday law reflected his background as sun worshiper. It read: "On the venerable Day of the Sun [venerabili die Solis] let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits."

Several decades later the church followed his example. The Council of Laodicea (c. A.D. 364), which was not a universal council but a Roman Catholic one, issued the first ecclesiastical Sunday law. In canon 29 the church stipulated that Christians should honor Sunday and "if possible, do no work on that day," while it denounced the practice of resting on the Sabbath, instructing that Christians should not "be idle on Saturday [Greek sabbaton, "the Sabbath"], but shall work on that day."

In A.D. 538, the year marked as the beginning of the 1260-year prophecy , the Roman Catholic Third Council of Orleans issued a law even more severe than that of Constantine. Canon 28 of that council says that on Sunday even "agricultural labor ought to be laid aside, in order that the people may not be prevented from attending church."

The Change Prophesied

The Bible reveals that the observance of Sunday as a Christian institution had its origin in "the mystery of lawlessness" (2 Thess. 2:7), which was already at work in Paul's day. Through the prophecy of Daniel 7 God revealed His foreknowledge of the change of the day of worship.

Daniel's vision depicts an attack on God's people and on His law. The attacking power, represented by a little horn (and by a beast in Revelation 13:1-10), brings about the great apostasy within the Christian church (see chapter 12 of this book). Arising from the fourth beast and becoming a major persecuting power after the fall of Rome (see chapter 18), the little horn attempts to "change the times and law" (Dan. 7:25).

This apostate power is very successful at deceiving most of the world, but at the end the judgment will decide against it (Dan. 7:11,22,26). During the final tribulation God will intervene on behalf of His people and deliver them (Dan. 12:1-3).

This prophecy fits only one power within Christianity. There is but one religious organization that claims to possess the prerogatives of modifying divine laws. Note what, throughout history, Roman Catholic authorities have claimed:

About A.D. 1400 Petrus de Ancharano asserted that "the pope can modify divine law, since his power is not of man, but of God, and he acts in the place of God upon earth, with the fullest power of binding and loosing his sheep."

The impact of this astonishing assertion was demonstrated during the Reformation. Luther claimed that the Holy Scripture and not the tradition of the church was his guide

in life. His slogan was *sola scriptura*—"The Bible and the Bible only." John Eck, one of the foremost defenders of the Roman Catholic faith, attacked Luther on this point by claiming that the authority of the church was above the Bible. He challenged Luther on the observance of Sunday in place of the Bible Sabbath. Said Eck, "Scripture teaches: 'Remember to hallow the Sabbath day; six days shall you labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath day of the Lord your God,' etc. Yet, the church has changed the Sabbath into Sunday on its own authority, on which you [Luther] have no Scripture."

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), convened by the pope to counter Protestantism, Gaspare de Fosso, archbishop of Reggio, brought the issue up again. "The authority of the church," he said, "then, is illustrated most clearly by the Scriptures; for while on the one hand she [the church] recommends them, declares them to be divine, [and] offers them to us to be read,...on the other hand, the legal precepts in the Scriptures taught by the Lord have ceased by virtue of the same authority [the church]. The Sabbath, the most glorious day in the law, has been changed into the Lord's day.... These and other similar matters have not ceased by virtue of Christ's teaching (for He says He has come to fulfill the law, not to destroy it), but they have been changed by the authority of the church."

Does that church still maintain this position? The 1977 edition of *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* contains this series of questions and answers:

"Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

"A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

"Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

"A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday."

In his best-seller, *The Faith of Millions* (1974), the Roman Catholic scholar John A. O'Brien came to this compelling conclusion: "Since Saturday, not Sunday, is specified in the Bible, isn't it curious that non-Catholics who profess to take their religion directly from the Bible and not from the Church, observe Sunday instead of Saturday? Yes, of course, it is inconsistent." The custom of Sunday observance, he said, "rests upon the authority of the Catholic Church and not upon an explicit text in the Bible. That observance remains as a reminder of the Mother Church from which the non-Catholic sects broke away—like a boy running away from home but still carrying in his pocket a picture of his mother or a lock of her hair."

The claims to these prerogatives fulfill prophecy and contribute to the identification of the little-horn power.

The Restoration of the Sabbath

In Isaiah 56 and 58 God calls Israel to a Sabbath reform. Revealing the glories of the future gathering of the Gentiles into His fold (Isa. 56:8), He associates the success of this mission of salvation with keeping the Sabbath holy (Isa. 56:1,2,6,7).

He carefully outlines the specific work of His people. Though their mission is worldwide, it is especially directed to a class of people who profess to be believers but who have in reality departed from His precepts (Isa. 58:1,2). He expresses their mission to those professed believers in these terms: "You shall raise up the foundations of many

generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of Streets to Dwell In. If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord" (Isa. 58:12-14).

The mission of spiritual Israel parallels that of ancient Israel. God's law was breached when the little-horn power changed the Sabbath. Just as the downtrodden Sabbath was to be restored in Israel, so in modern times the divine institution of the Sabbath is to be restored and the breach in the wall of God's law repaired.

It is the proclamation of the message of Revelation 14:6-12 in connection with the everlasting gospel that accomplishes this work of restoring and magnifying the law. And it is the proclaiming of this message that is the mission of God's church at the time of the Second Advent (see chapter 12 of this book). This message is to arouse the world, inviting everyone to prepare for the judgment.

The wording of the summons to worship the Creator, "Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water" (Rev. 14:7), is a direct reference to the fourth commandment of God's eternal law. Its inclusion in this final warning confirms God's special concern to have His widely forgotten Sabbath restored before the Second Advent.

The delivering of this message will precipitate a conflict that will involve the whole world. The central issue will be obedience to God's law and the observance of the Sabbath. In the face of this conflict everyone must decide whether to keep God's commandments or those of men. This message will produce a people who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Those who reject it will eventually receive the mark of the beast (Rev. 14:9,12).

To successfully accomplish this mission of magnifying God's law and honoring His neglected Sabbath, God's people must set a consistent, loving example of Sabbathkeeping.

The Observance of the Sabbath

To "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex 20:8), we must think of the Sabbath throughout the week and make the preparations necessary to observe it in a manner pleasing to God. We should be careful not to so exhaust our energies during the week that we cannot engage in His service on the Sabbath.

Because the Sabbath is a day of special communion with God in which we are invited to joyously celebrate His gracious activities in Creation and redemption, it is important that we avoid anything that tends to diminish its sacred atmosphere. The Bible specifies that on the Sabbath we should cease our secular work (Ex. 20:10), avoiding all work done to earn a living and all business transactions (Neh. 13:15-22). We are to honor God, "not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words" (Isa. 58:13). Devoting this day to pleasing ourselves, to being involved in secular interests, conversations, and thoughts or to be engaging in sports would detract from communion with our Creator and violate the sacredness of the Sabbath. Our concern for the Sabbath command should extend to all who are under our jurisdiction—our children, those who

work for us, and even our visitors and animals (Ex. 20:10), so that they also may enjoy the blessings of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday evening and ends at sunset Saturday evening (see Gen. 1:5; cf. Mark 1:32). Scripture calls the day before the Sabbath (Friday)--the preparation day--(Mark 15:42)--a day to prepare for the Sabbath so that nothing will spoil its sacredness. On this day those who make the family's meals should prepare food for the Sabbath so that during its sacred hours they also can rest from their labors (see Ex. 16:23; Num. 11:8).

When the holy hours of the Sabbath approach, it is well for family members or groups of believers to gather together just before the setting of the sun on Friday evening to sing, pray, and read God's Word, thus inviting the Spirit of Christ as a welcome guest. Similarly they should mark its close by uniting in worship toward the close of the Sabbath on Saturday evening, requesting God's presence and guidance through the ensuing week.

The Lord calls upon His people to make the Sabbath a day of delight (Isa. 58:13). How can they do this? Only as they follow the example of Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath, can they ever hope to experience the real joy, and satisfaction that God has for them on this day.

Christ regularly worshiped on the Sabbath, took part in the services, and gave religious instruction (Mark 1:21; 3:1-4; Luke 4:16-27; 13:10). But He did more than just worship. He fellowshipped with others (Mark 1:29-31; Luke 14:1), spent time outdoors (Mark 2:23), and went about doing holy deeds of mercy. Wherever He could, He healed the sick and afflicted (Mark 1:21-31; 3:1-5; Luke 13:10-17; 14:2-4; John 5:1-15; 9:1-14).

When criticized for His work of alleviating suffering, Jesus replied, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:12). His healing activities neither broke the Sabbath nor abolished it. But they did terminate the burdensome regulations that had distorted the meaning of the Sabbath as God's instrument of spiritual refreshment and delight. God intended the Sabbath for humanity's spiritual enrichment. Activities that enhance communication with God are proper; those which distract from that purpose and turn the Sabbath into a holiday are improper.

The Lord of the Sabbath invites all to follow His example. Those who accept His call experience the Sabbath as a delight and a spiritual feast—a foretaste of heaven. They discover that "the Sabbath is designed by God to prevent spiritual discouragement. Week by week the seventh day comforts our conscience, assuring us that despite our unfinished characters we stand complete in Christ. His accomplishment at Calvary counts as our atonement. We enter His rest."