

The Case for the Sabbath

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Introduction

The overwhelming majority of Christians today observe in some way the first day of the week (Sunday) in place of the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday). Some observe Sunday only as a special day for public worship and family activities and do not regard it, or any other day, as the Christian Sabbath (e.g., Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutheran Christians). Other Christians observe Sunday as the replacement of the seventh-day Sabbath (most Protestant traditions, although most today do not treat the entire day as a Sabbath). A small minority of Protestant Christians observe the seventh day of the week (Saturday) as the Christian Sabbath (most notably Seventh-day Adventists). This paper explores the reasons for the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) being regarded as the Christian Sabbath and answers the major objections that are usually used in argument against that view.

Arguments for Seventh-Day Sabbath Observance

There are at least nine different arguments for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath as the Christian Sabbath. The first part of the paper will discuss these arguments.

Genesis 2:1-3

According to this passage God did three things on the seventh day of Creation week: (1) He rested; (2) He blessed the day; and (3) He sanctified, or made holy, the day. Concerning His resting, the Hebrew word for *rested* in verses 2 and 3 is the word from which the word *Sabbath* is derived. In the context, His resting was the obvious thing to do after He *finished* or *ended* His work of Creation (vv. 1-2). Of course, God does not need to rest, so His resting must have been an example for human beings to rest weekly so they too may enjoy His creation.

The fact that God *blessed* the seventh day means that He placed something in that day that would be a blessing for mankind, for God needs no blessing since He is the Source of all blessing. The only thing that can be placed into a day to bless it would be His divine presence. This conclusion is confirmed by the final thing He did on that day.

Verse 3 says that God *sanctified* the seventh day. The word *sanctified* means *to set something apart for holy use*. Again, God does not need to separate Himself apart for holy use because He

is holiness personified, so His action here must have been for mankind. This holy use must refer to dedicating the seventh day to God and will give a blessing to people, thus confirming that the blessing is His special spiritual presence in the day.

Based on this passage, each seventh day is a day that God's people should rest (the word *Sabbath* means *rest*) from their ordinary labors (as God did from His) in order to focus entirely as possible on God and thus receive the special blessing that comes from His special presence.

Many object to the implication that this passage teaches the sanctity of every seventh day on two grounds. First, a few scholars insist that the fact that the seventh day of Creation week is not explicitly said to be an *evening* and a *morning* as the other six days are (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) means that the seventh day here refers to an indefinite period of time rather than to a literal 24-hour period. However, the Fourth Commandment given in Exodus 20:8-11 specifically states that the seventh-day Sabbath was instituted because God rested, blessed, and sanctified that day at the end of Creation week (Exodus 20:11). Regardless of how one views the Sabbath of Exodus 20, it is obvious that it must have been based on the fact that the seventh day of Creation week was a regular 24-hour day or else no one could be commanded to keep it.

Much more common is the objection that Genesis nowhere explicitly commands people to keep every seventh day as the Sabbath. This did not happen until the time of Sinai in Exodus 20, when the Sabbath commandment was given to the Hebrew people only. It is true that the first *recorded* command to keep the Sabbath is in Exodus 20. However, the book of Genesis, as its very name implies, is a book of origins or beginnings. Nevertheless, in Genesis 26:5 the Lord commends Abraham for having *obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws*. Therefore, God's commandments or laws must have been known at least to some people. Furthermore, the very things God did on that first seventh day meant that He intended for people to keep it or otherwise He would not have given them an example of rest or blessed and sanctified the day for them. Significantly, the Sabbath was given to all mankind for their benefit long before even Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, was born. Jesus said the same thing in Mark 2:27, when He declared that the *Sabbath was made for man*. Just because remembering that God delivered Israel from Egyptian slavery was an additional reason for the Israelites to keep the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:15) does not mean that the Sabbath ceased being a memorial of Creation for everyone.

Isaiah 56:1-8

In Isaiah 56:1-8 the Lord declares that Gentile converts to Himself will keep the Sabbath, which no one denies was the seventh day in the Old Testament. Three times in this passage He mentions that they will keep the Sabbath (vv. 2, 4, 6). This implies that the seventh-day Sabbath was never

intended to be only for the Hebrew or Jewish people to observe, but that all peoples of the earth should observe it.

Isaiah 66:22-23

In Isaiah 66:22-23 the Lord announces that even after He makes the new heavens and the new earth, He will still have His people (v. 22). And in that era *All flesh* will worship God *from one Sabbath to another*. Plainly, the words *All flesh* refers to all people on the earth, whether Jew or Gentile. Therefore, if Gentile converts in Old Testament times kept the seventh-day Sabbath, and all the people on the new earth will keep it, then it is difficult to successfully argue why God's people should not keep it now in the Christian era.

Luke 23:50-24:1-7

The Wednesday Crucifixion—Saturday Resurrection Theory

In this New Testament passage, Luke records the burial of Jesus and His subsequent resurrection. Some scholars believe that Jesus was crucified on a Wednesday afternoon and resurrected on the following Saturday afternoon. Although the vast majority of scholars maintain a belief in the Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection, we will briefly examine this question before proceeding to analyze Luke's account in chapters 23 and 24. This belief in the Wednesday crucifixion and Saturday resurrection of Jesus is based on three texts: (1) Matthew 12:40; (2) John 19:14, 31; and (3) Matthew 28:1-6.

In Matthew 12:40 Jesus predicts that *just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*. The assumption is that when the words *days* and *nights* are employed it refers to a literal period of 24 hours. Since Jesus was crucified and actually died late in the day (Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46), He would have risen from the dead three full days, or 72 hours, later (late in the day).

This interpretation ignores an important fact. The Scriptures and Jewish rabbis both used what is called inclusive reckoning in which any portion of a day was considered to be one day. This inclusive reckoning is obviously used with reference to Jesus' resurrection because Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:34 tell us that Jesus would rise after *three days*, while Matthew and Luke say that He would rise on the *third day* (Matthew 16:31; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 18:33).

In John 19:14 the day of Christ's crucifixion is called *the Preparation Day of the Passover*, and the Sabbath in verse 31 is called a *high day*. Then on the basis that the Old Testament referred to certain ceremonial days as Sabbaths (Leviticus 23:24, 39), it is understood that this particular

Preparation Day was associated with the ceremonial Sabbath at the time of the Passover and that the high day here was Passover day itself. Thus they identify this Preparation Day as a Tuesday and Passover Day as Wednesday and a ceremonial Sabbath. That would mean Jesus died late on Wednesday afternoon and was resurrected on late Saturday afternoon, 72 hours later.

However, we reject this interpretation of the Preparation Day and the high day as referring to the day before the Passover Sabbath and that Sabbath itself, respectively. Mark 15:42 refers to the day of Christ's crucifixion as the *Preparation Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath*. This is a translation of two Greek words, one meaning *preparation* and the other meaning *Sabbath-eve*, so that it literally reads, *Preparation, Sabbath-eve*. These two words together, as in this text, was a well-known term among the Jews at that time as referring to the day before the weekly Sabbath (our Friday). And the term *high day*, although never referred to as the weekly Sabbath in the Bible, is also never employed to designate any of the ceremonial Sabbaths. However, rabbinical tradition does identify the weekly Sabbath as a *high day* when it falls on either the first or second day of the Passover festival. [Note: Passover began on the evening after sunset, so two days after Thursday night would be Saturday night, thus making this weekly Sabbath fall on the second day of Passover and making it a *high day*.]

Finally, Matthew 28:1-6 is understood to be the conclusive evidence that Jesus was resurrected on a Saturday. Verse 1 states that *after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn* two women came to Jesus' tomb and were told by an angel that Jesus had risen from the dead. The dawning of the first day of the week is understood to mean as it was growing dusk on Saturday evening (thus being the beginning of Sunday on the basis of Genesis 1's references to each day of Creation week being *the evening and the morning* (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Since the women arrived at the tomb as the Sabbath was ending and discovered that Jesus had already been resurrected, He must have been resurrected on Sabbath (Saturday) afternoon. Thus, counting 72 hours backward takes you to the crucifixion having occurred on Wednesday afternoon.

We also reject this interpretation for two reasons. First, the Greek word for *dawn* in Matthew 28:1 never means *to grow dusk* but *to grow dawn* or *to grow light*. Second, Mark's gospel tells us that the women went to the tomb *when the sun had risen* (Mark 16:2; cf. Luke 24:1). John 20:1 says that Mary Magdalene went there early, while it was still dark. But when compared with Mark and Luke, it still means that she went there just before dawn on the first day of the week, which would be early Sunday morning.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, we reject the Wednesday-crucifixion and Saturday-resurrection theory. Therefore, we stand with Christian tradition that Jesus was crucified on a Friday afternoon and was raised on Sunday morning, which would be three days by inclusive reckoning (part of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday).

Returning to Luke 23:50-24:1-7

Therefore, when Luke says that Jesus was crucified and buried on *the Preparation* (Luke 23:50-54), he means that the crucifixion and burial occurred on a Friday. Then He spent all of the next day in the tomb, which was a Saturday (Sabbath), because He was then resurrected on the next day, which was early Sunday morning (24:1). What is of great significance in Luke's record is that He said the women did not finish the burial preparation on Friday (23:56) but returned on Sunday morning to complete the process (24:1). The reason Luke gives for this is that *they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment* (23:56), obviously referring to the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). This statement is significant for two reasons. The first reason concerns the identity of the author of Luke's gospel. What do we know about this author?

We know there was a Gentile physician by the name of Luke who sometimes traveled with Paul (Colossians 4:10-11, 14; II Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24). Among the Gentiles who sometimes traveled with Paul, he names only four, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Luke, and Demas (Philippians 2:25; Colossians 4:10-12, 14), and Demas left the faith altogether (II Timothy 4:10), leaving only Luke as Paul's foremost traveling companion (4:11). Luke, therefore, appears to be the most reliable and frequent companion of Paul. We also know that the author of Luke was the same author who also wrote the book of Acts (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-2). And in Acts, the author often uses the word *we* to indicate that he traveled with Paul (Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16), especially in Paul's later travels. Therefore, the author Luke and Acts is probably Luke. Finally, early Church writers are unanimous in identifying this author as the Luke mentioned in the New Testament. With a Greek name (Luke), this Gentile is almost certainly Greek.

Here is what is significant about Luke's statement that the women *rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment* (Luke 23:56). First, he was a Gentile, specifically a Greek. Second, he probably wrote his gospel around A.D. 60 or so because he ended his second book (Acts) with Paul still in prison. It is remarkable that a Gentile Christian writing thirty to thirty-five years after the death and resurrection of Jesus spoke of the seventh-day Sabbath as being *according to the commandment*. If the Sabbath had been abolished or changed, surely he would have described it as the Jewish Sabbath or the Jewish commandment or in terms as according to the custom of the old Sabbath (or something like that). But he simply says that it *was the Sabbath according to the commandment*. This is strong evidence that the first-century Church believed that the seventh-day Sabbath was the Christian Sabbath.

Paul's Practice in the Book of Acts

In the book of Acts, which describes about the first thirty years or so of the Christian Church, Paul preached in synagogues on the Sabbath and preached the gospel to both Jews *and* Greeks (Acts 13:42, 44; 17:1-4; 18:4). If the seventh-day Sabbath had been abolished or changed, we should

expect that Paul would have met with the Gentiles on Sunday instead. But the fact that he met with both groups of people on the seventh-day Sabbath strongly suggests that he and the early Church believed that it was the Christian Sabbath.

Hebrews 4:9-10

In Hebrews 3:7-19 the author speaks about the failure of ancient Israel to enter into Canaan because of their unbelief. In verse 18 he refers to entrance into Canaan as entering God's *rest*. Then he says a *promise remains of entering* His rest (4:1). Of course, eventually Israel entered Canaan, so now the author is speaking of a spiritual rest in the gospel (4:2). He then compares this spiritual rest to God resting on the seventh day of Creation week, quoting from Genesis 2:2 and Exodus 20:11 (4:4).

Finally, he states that *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God* (4:9). The Greek word for *rest* in that verse is a compound word literally meaning *Sabbath-rest*. This reference to rest is not simply to a spiritual rest in the gospel because verse 10 says that *he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His*. Thus, the author is teaching that to really enter into God's gospel rest requires physical rest on the seventh-day Sabbath, that is, keeping it.

This is a very significant statement in this book, for even a cursory reading of Hebrews informs us that it was written to Jewish Christians in an attempt to move them away from the Jerusalem sanctuary, earthly priesthood, and animal sacrifices and toward the heavenly sanctuary, the priesthood of Jesus, and His once-for-all sacrifice for sins. To use the seventh-day Sabbath as a symbol of the spiritual rest in the gospel would be odd in such a book *if* the Sabbath had been abolished or changed to Sunday. Therefore, Hebrews 4:9 is a validation of the seventh-day Sabbath for Christians.

Revelation 1:10

In this verse, the apostle John tells us when he received his vision, specifically on *the Lord's day*. This expression has been interpreted in three different ways. Unfortunately, the expression only occurs here in the Holy Scriptures. Some have understood it as a reference to *the day of the Lord*, a frequent designation for end-time events culminating in judgment and the Second Coming of Christ (Joel 2:31; I Corinthians 1:8; 5:5; II Corinthians 1:14; I Thessalonians 5:2; II Peter 3:10). The idea is that John was taken in vision to *the day of the Lord*. However, there are at least two good reasons to reject this interpretation. First, the text does not say he was taken *to* the Lord's day in vision but that he was in a vision *in* or *on* the Lord's day, with the word *on* making the most sense. The natural way to understand this is to see it as a particular day that John was in vision. Second,

the book of Revelation's vision includes much more than *the day of the Lord*. It would be totally inadequate to describe what he saw in vision.

Another way, one that is the most common, is to understand *the Lord's day* as a reference to Sunday, so that the text is understood to say that John received his vision on Sunday. In support of this view two statements written in the first half of the second century by Christian authors are employed. However, both of them omit the Greek word for *day*, so the translator must supply a noun. In the context, though, the noun supplied should be doctrine/commandment (in *Didache* 14:1) or *life* (in *Epistle to the Magnesians* 9:1). The earliest documented evidence for the Lord's day as Sunday is found in the apocryphal *The Gospel According to Peter*, verses 35 and 50, written in the very late second century. That author was clearly referring to Sunday because he is talking about the very day on which Christ was resurrected. This indicates that by that time the Lord's day must have been a common expression for Sunday as referring to the Lord's resurrection, as it still is today.

But is the practice of calling Sunday the Lord's day in the late second century prove that the apostle John's use of the Lord's day in Revelation 1:10 refers to Sunday? It is not good scholarship to conclude that the later meaning of an expression must have the same one for the better part of a century earlier. Therefore, we should look to the Scriptures, while not using the same expression elsewhere, to determine if they speak of a day belonging to the Lord. There is just one day of the week that is said in Scripture to belong to God, and that is the seventh-day Sabbath. For example, the Sabbath Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) calls the seventh day of the *week the Sabbath of the Lord your God*. In Isaiah 58:13 the Sabbath is called *My holy day and the holy day of the Lord*. Likewise, the New Testament teaches that Christ is *the Lord even of the Sabbath* (Matthew 12:8; cf. Mark 2:28). Therefore, we conclude that *the Lord's day* here refers to the Sabbath and that John received his vision on that day. It is fair to ask the question why John used such a unique term for the Sabbath. In this context, having been taken prisoner to Patmos for refusing to acknowledge Caesar as *Lord* (according to Christian tradition), John appears to have used a play on words to express his defiance against Caesar as Lord by declaring symbolically that Christ is Lord instead and that He has a day dedicated to Him.

Strong Church tradition says that the apostle John had his vision and wrote the book of Revelation at some point during the A.D. 90s and that he was the last apostle to die. Therefore, this is very strong evidence that the seventh-day Sabbath was still viewed by the first-century Church as the Christian Sabbath.

The Absence of Controversy over the Sabbath

The absence of evidence is not usually regarded as good evidence for something. But in this case, the absence of any controversy in the New Testament over the Sabbath in the early Church speaks

volumes. There, of course, was controversy over the Sabbath in the gospels, where Jewish scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus and His apostles for how they kept the Sabbath. Jesus showed them that it should be kept according to Biblical principles related to the origin and purpose of the Sabbath, and in a joyful spirit, rather than in the cold formalism and according to man-made traditions of the Pharisees. But there was never any controversy over which day was the Sabbath.

In the early Church after the ascension of Jesus back to heaven, there is no mention of controversy over the Sabbath at all. Apparently, Jesus' teaching and example of Sabbath-keeping in His public ministry had settled the issue of how to keep the Sabbath holy. If Jesus and/or His apostles had abolished or changed the day of the Sabbath, we would expect that it would have aroused much passion and opposition, especially from Jewish believers. If there was a sufficient amount of controversy over circumcision that a Church Council was required to resolve the issue (Acts 15), how much more would a council and other efforts have been necessary to resolve a conflict over the abolition or change of the Sabbath! The absence of any controversy over the Sabbath at all is therefore very strong evidence that the early Church continued to believe throughout the first century that the seventh-day Sabbath applied to Christians.

Church History Supports the Sabbath

Before the middle of the second century, the churches in Rome and Alexandria (in Egypt) made a dramatic shift away from the seventh-day Sabbath and to Sunday observance. From the testimony we have from some of the early Church Fathers, a major part of the motivation appears to be anti-Semitism. Jewish rebellions in Palestine against Roman rule were increasing, and the famous Bar-Kochba (or Cocheba) Revolt had taken place (132-135). After this revolt, Jews were forcibly removed and banned from Jerusalem, which the Romans rebuilt and renamed. About the same time Emperor Hadrian issued a decree prohibiting Jews from observing the Sabbath and from practicing circumcision. Therefore, in order to avoid being identified with the Jews, from which Christianity had arisen, church leaders in those two cities took pains to separate themselves in the Romans' minds from Judaism. Abolishing the Sabbath and replacing it with Sunday observance was the most important way they attempted to do this. The leaders in Rome even commanded its members to fast on the Sabbath and to feast on Sunday in order to emotionally promote Sunday as a day to honor the resurrection of Jesus.

The Church at Rome took the lead in promoting Sunday observance and the Sabbath fast, as well as to Easter Sunday, the annual Christian replacement it offered to the Jewish Passover that most believers were still observing. The Roman Church met resistance to all three of these efforts, but by or before the end of the second century the local churches in the Western part of the Roman Empire were especially following Rome's lead in changing the Passover's emphasis on Christ's death to Rome's Easter emphasis on His resurrection. Though controversies continued, especially

between Western and Eastern churches over the exact calculation for when to celebrate this Christian festival, Easter Sunday was increasingly adopted by the Church as a whole.

Accompanying the rise of the annual Easter celebration was the rise of some kind of Sunday observance. Before the end of the second century, almost all churches were conducting worship services on Sunday morning in addition to continuing the holy observance of the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. In the same time frame Sunday became known as the Lord's day in honor of the resurrection.

In the fourth century Roman Emperor Constantine was "converted" to Christianity and legalized it in 313 in his Edict of Milan (or Edict of Toleration). Then seeing that the empire was facing a coming crisis, he sought a way to unite his subjects religiously. Noticing that both his Christian subjects and his Mithraite subjects honored the day of the sun (or Son), he proclaimed world history's first Sunday Law in 321, commanding all non-agricultural work to cease and for people to rest on that day insofar that it was possible. In the Council of Laodicea (ca. 364), the Church bishops assembled there officially called on all Christians to stop resting (it used the term *Judaizing*) on the Sabbath and to work on that day instead. There was major resistance to this effort on the part of Church leaders to abandon the seventh-day Sabbath, and even as late as the fifth century, one Church historian wrote the following:

The people of Constantine, 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. [The Fathers of the Church, www.newadvent.org/fathers, "Sozomen," *Ecclesiastical History*, bk. 7, ch. 19]

Nevertheless, increasing pressure from Church leaders and the competition of two weekly days for public worship increasingly led to the abandonment of the Sabbath in favor of Sunday observance. Although Sabbath observance was never completely lost, it eventually faded into obscurity until today the vast majority of Christians view Sunday observance as a genuinely Christian institution. Some, like the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutheran churches, view Sunday as primarily a day of public worship, believing that there is no Christian Sabbath per se. Others, like the majority of Protestant churches, have traditions that view Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, the replacement of the so-called Jewish Sabbath.

How could the Church have either abandoned the seventh-day Sabbath or add a public worship service on Sunday, calling it the Lord's day, by or before the end of the second century? And what does this mean for the veracity of the Sabbath? There are really only three theoretical options to answer this question. One option is that the Church failed to understand that Jesus and/or His apostles had actually abolished or changed the Sabbath or added the Lord's day observance to Sabbath observance in the first century. However, Church history tells us that most of the apostles

lived through most of the first century and John, the last apostle to die, did not do so until near the very end of that century. With the apostles still living, surely they would have corrected the Church if it falsely believed that no change in the weekly day of worship had been made.

A second option is that the first-century Church did move away from Sabbath observance in favor of some kind of Sunday observance. But then in the second century, the Church forgot this Sunday observance, with some rediscovering that truth and then urging the rest of the Church to make the change. However, if there had been a long continuity of Sunday observance throughout most of the first century, it is not reasonable to believe the Church could then have forgotten it so soon in the next century. The only reasonable explanation for this Church history is that the Church made the change on its own authority, apart from the New Testament teaching and practice.

We already dealt with the rise of Church tradition via its acceptance of apostolic succession, the idea that the bishops of the Church are the successors to the apostles and thus have their apostolic teaching authority, in our paper entitled “The Case for Christianity.” There we refuted the whole notion of apostolic succession. Therefore, the Church has no authority to supersede the Scriptures and to abolish or change the Sabbath. This means that Church history actually supports the view that Saturday was the Christian Sabbath for the New Testament Church.

Earth’s Final Crisis over Worship

Our final argument to support the seventh-day Sabbath is that it will be the center of controversy in the final crisis over worship that will involve the whole world. We will defend this understanding by explaining the mark of the beast discussed in Revelation 13.

There are a few things of a general information that should be understood before attempting to decipher the exact meaning of the mark of the beast mentioned in Revelation 13:16-17. First, the mark of the beast will become a global issue just before the Second Coming of Christ. This is deduced from the fact that Revelation 14:9-11 says that those who receive that mark (i.e., worship the beast) will be eternally lost. Furthermore, immediately after the mark of the beast issue in chapter 14 is a picture of the Second Coming (14:14-20) that reflects Christ’s parable concerning a harvest at the end of the world in Matthew 13 (vv. 24-30, 36-43).

Second, the mark of the beast cannot be a literal or physical mark, as is commonly believed, because those who receive it will be eternally lost (Revelation 14:9-11). God, whose character is revealed in the Scriptures, is not a God who would cause someone to be eternally lost simply because they could not physically prevent someone from placing a mark on their body. There may be some literal devices that will be used in the enforcement of the mark, but the mark itself will not be literal. Therefore, the mark of the beast is a figurative rather than a literal mark.

Third, we note that those who receive the mark of the beast do so either on their *right hand or on their foreheads* (Revelation 13:16). Hands symbolize the actions of people because they are the principal instruments that people use to accomplish most physical things. And most people are right-handed. On the other hand, the forehead would symbolize the conscious decisions of people because the frontal lobe is immediately behind the forehead and is the part of the brain which people use to make conscious decisions and moral judgments. These facts indicate that those who receive the mark of the beast on their right hand signify those who will go along to get along without actually agreeing that it is the morally right thing to do. By contrast, those who receive the mark on their *forehead* represent those who will consciously agree that the right thing to do is to receive the mark. In this way, we can see how those who are not even Christians will receive this mark that comes from a Christian power.

In the following paragraphs are the step-by-step clues that will enable the precise nature of the mark of the beast to be identified:

- *The Mark of the Beast involves Worship.*

A variation of the word *worship* occurs five times in Revelation 13 (twice in v. 4, and once in vv. 8, 12, 15). Then it occurs two additional times in 14:9, 11 in connection with the beast. It can be further noticed that Revelation alludes to two different Old Testament showdowns between true and false worship. First, Revelation 13:13 echoes the Old Testament story in the days of Elijah when fire fell from heaven and consumed his sacrifice on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:20-40, especially v. 38). Second, Revelation 13:14-15 recalls the story of the image set up by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, when the three Jewish friends of Daniel refused to bow down and worship it, and they were miraculously spared in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). There can be no question that the mark of the beast, then, involves a global showdown over the issue of worship.

- *The Mark of the Beast involves God's Law.*

Interestingly, like two bookends, reference is made to *the commandments of God* being kept by His people immediately before and after the actual references to the mark of the beast (Revelation 12:17; 14:12). This juxtaposition around the mark of the beast references seems more significant by the fact that these are the only two certain references to *the commandments of God* in the entire book. Some Bible versions use the reading *that do His commandments* in Revelation 22:14. However, textual evidence is quite significant for the reading *wash their robes*. In Greek, the key words are fairly similar, which almost certainly explains how a scribal error could be made. Since the heavenly sanctuary scene introducing this major section in Revelation puts the focus on the ark of the covenant, where the Ten Commandments were placed in Old Testament times, reference to *the commandments of God* must have special reference to the Ten Commandments (11:19).

- *Logic Narrows it to the Third or Fourth Commandment.*

It is difficult to see how the final worship crisis could be a test of loyalty regarding the First Commandment (Exodus 20:2-3), for having no other gods before God could probably only be tested in a literal way via an image or idol. Image worship is forbidden in the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). Revelation 13 alludes to two different worship showdowns in ancient Israel (1) to fire coming from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice on Mt. Carmel (v. 13), and (2) to the image and fiery furnace story in Daniel 3 (Revelation 13:14-15). Since both are alluded to, the final worship showdown cannot be like either of them; they are mentioned only as examples of previous worship showdowns. That narrows the final worship showdown to concern the Third (Exodus 20:7's not taking the Lord's name in vain) or the Fourth (Exodus 20:8-11) Commandment.

- *The Sabbath Commandment is Referenced in this Section of Revelation.*

The only one of the Ten Commandments to be referred to in this section of the book of Revelation is the paraphrase of the last part of the Sabbath Commandment in Revelation 14:7, as follows: *and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water* (cf. Exodus 20:11). This seems to narrow the issue to the Fourth Commandment.

- *The Number 666 (Revelation 13:18)*

The number 666 associated with the sea beast (Antichrist) in Revelation 13:18 is usually taken to mean the total number reached when using the *letters* of his name or title as representing certain numbers. But on that basis, an almost infinite number of conclusions can be reached, a fact which hardly fits the precision of Bible prophecy. There is another way to understand the number. Revelation 13:17 identifies the mark of the beast as *the number of his name* (v. 17). In contrast, those who choose *not* to receive the mark of the beast have the name of God the Father on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1). Note that reference to the Father's name on the saints' foreheads immediately follows the statements about the number of the beast's name on the foreheads of the wicked, whose number is identified as 666 (13:17-18). This juxtaposition of the two different *names* suggests a deliberate contrast pointing to God's name and the beast's name. In Scripture, the significance of names is that they represent character. For example, when Moses asked to see God's glory, the Lord replied that He would *proclaim the name of the Lord before you* (Exodus 33:18-19). He then identified His name with His character as being *gracious* and having *compassion* (33:19).

When Revelation 13:18 calls the beast's name *the number of a man*, the Greek could just as easily be translated as *the number of mankind* or *the number of man*. Man's number is 6 because he was created on the sixth day of Creation week (Genesis 1:24-31). All acknowledge that God's number

is seven for that number signifies perfection. In light of this information, the number 666 would represent as a failure the claim of the beast to represent God on earth. As he repeats this claim by his actions, his human number keeps repeating the number six and never moves to number seven. Some have objected to this interpretation of the number 666 on the grounds that the text reads *six hundred and sixty-six* and not *six, six, six*. However, the link in this prophecy (13:14-15) to the story of the worship of the image in Daniel 3 allows us to see that the number six plays a part in that story too. Daniel 3:1 tells us that the image was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide. These are both factors of six; the important factor seems to be the number 6. The beast's number in Revelation 13 (666) is also a factor of six. Moreover, when the number 666 is written in numeric form, it appears as three consecutive sixes. Therefore, we dismiss the objection.

We have every right to ask what it is that reminds us that no human being or institution can equal God or His divine authority. In Scripture, that is the Sabbath because it reminds us that God is the Creator and we are the creatures (Exodus 20:8-11). Therefore, the creature can never reach the perfection or authority of the Creator. Thus, one of the Ten Commandments—namely, the fourth one—is what the final global showdown over worship will be about.

Summary and Conclusion

We have learned that the seventh-day Sabbath was created by God Himself at the end of Creation week. As such, it was never designed *only* for the Jews or the Hebrew people but for all mankind. We should expect, on this basis alone, that the Sabbath should be observed by all peoples in all ages. This is reinforced by the fact that even Gentiles (non-Jews) who became part of the covenant community of God were expected to keep the Sabbath and that this holy day will be kept even in the new earth.

It should therefore come as no surprise that the New Testament Church continued to keep the seventh-day Sabbath, as testified to by Luke, Paul, and John in the books of Luke, Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation. The absence of any controversy in the first-century Church over the Sabbath and the way in which the Church in the second century (after the last apostle had died) moved away from it both testify as to its abiding validity for Christians from the Biblical perspective. Finally, this same Sabbath will be a test of loyalty to God in the final global crisis over worship at the end-time. Therefore, we are obligated to conclude that the seventh-day Sabbath remains for the Christian people of God to keep holy.

Objections to the Seventh-day Sabbath

Under Genesis 2:1-3 we discussed and refuted the objections to the Creation origin of the seventh-day Sabbath. Therefore, we will not discuss them here. That leaves six major objections to the Saturday Sabbath observance to be covered in this major section of the paper.

The Sabbath a Sign of the Old Covenant with Israel

Opponents of the seventh-day Sabbath take the position that it was given to the nation of Israel at its covenant ceremony with God at Mt. Sinai at the time of Moses (Exodus 19:3-20:21) as a sign of that covenant relationship (Exodus 31:16-17; Leviticus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:15). Thus the Sabbath became a symbol of the old covenant. But Christians live under the new covenant (II Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:7-13), not of the letter of the law but of the Holy Spirit, not written and engraved on stones but on tablets of the heart (II Corinthians 3:3, 6-7). The latter is a reference to the Ten Commandments that were written on stone tablets (Exodus 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; 34:1; Deuteronomy 4:13; 10:1-2). Therefore, it is argued, the Ten Commandments as a specific codified body of law does not apply as such to Christians. However, nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in various forms in the New Testament (under the new covenant) and should be kept for that reason. The Sabbath, as a sign of Israel's old covenant, is the one commandment that is not repeated in the New Testament.

We reject this reasoning based on the old covenant for several reasons. First, we have already established that the seventh-day Sabbath was instituted at Creation week long before any Israelites or the nation of Israel existed. This means it was given to mankind of all races and nationalities. Second, when Moses repeated the Ten Commandments in his closing address to Israel and said that they should keep the Sabbath because God had freed them from slavery in Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15), he was adding another reason to keep the Sabbath in addition to the fact that it was a memorial of Creation. An additional reason for something does not invalidate or replace the original reason.

Third, the new covenant was actually based on a promise of God made originally to ancient Israel. In Jeremiah 31:31-34, God says that He will make a new covenant with Israel in that He will write His laws in their minds and hearts. This is also the point that the apostle Paul makes regarding the new covenant (II Corinthians 3:6) as applied to the Church. He says that the old covenant was a *ministry of death* (v. 7; cf. v. 6) because Israel was *blinded* in that they failed to see that the covenant was to lead them to Christ (vv. 14-16). In other words, by viewing the covenant as a matter of external obedience to the law (written externally on tablets of stone, v. 3), Israel failed to understand that one purpose of the law was to point them to a Savior. But note that the issue is the location of the Ten Commandments—only on tables of stone *or* on the heart—not the content of those commandments. Therefore, the Ten Commandments still apply to all people who join the new covenant. In this way, the old covenant was called old because it was the original, inappropriate experience of Israel. The only actual law that was changed under the new covenant was the law of the priesthood (Hebrews 7:12), abolishing the Levitical priesthood in favor of the priesthood of Christ (Hebrews 7:14-16, 23-24) and thus ending the sacrificial system and significance of the earthly sanctuary in favor of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 9:28; 10:12) and His heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 8:2; 9:11).

The continued validity of the Ten Commandments applying to all peoples is seen in the fact that God Himself wrote them on stone (Deuteronomy 4:13), thus indicating their permanent nature. Even today we speak of things being written in stone or not being written in stone to indicate whether something cannot or can be changed. Finally, the Ten Commandments is a transcript of God's character, as illustrated by the fact that what is said of the commandments is also said of God:

| <u>God</u> | <u>Character</u> | <u>Ten Commandments</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|
| Psalms 99:9; I Peter 1:15 | Holy | Romans 7:12 |
| Isaiah 45:21; Romans 3:26 | Just | Romans 7:12 |
| Nahum 1:7; Luke 18:19 | Good | Romans 7:12, 16 |
| Matthew 5:48 | Perfect | James 1:25 (cf. vv. 10-12) |
| I John 4:8, 16 | Love | Romans 13:8-10 |

Since God's character is consistent and unchangeable (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), the transcript of His character must therefore also be unchangeable. The Ten Commandments, then, remain valid for all people in all ages, and the theory that they no longer are in force as a codified body of law per se is invalid. Besides, the allegation of the opponents of the seventh-day Sabbath that the Sabbath Commandment is the only one not mentioned in the New Testament is just plain wrong. We have already demonstrated that it is referred to positively in Luke 23:56 and is said to remain for God's people in Hebrews 4:9-10. In fact, the only one of the Ten Commandments not repeated in the New Testament is the Third Commandment warning people not to take the name of God in vain (Exodus 20:7). But no one argues that this means it is acceptable to take God's name in vain because we are living under the new covenant.

One Day in Seven

The large majority of Christian leaders follow, either implicitly or explicitly, the understanding of the Sabbath Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) that Thomas Aquinas promoted. Some do it in order to maintain the dignity of the Ten Commandments as a specific body of law still applicable to Christians, while others adopt it as simply a justification for making a change to the seventh-day Sabbath. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was an Italian scholar in the thirteenth century considered by most Roman Catholics to have been their greatest theologian and philosopher. Thomas Aquinas divided the Sabbath Commandment into two parts, a moral or permanent part, and a ceremonial or temporary part. He identified the moral or permanent part of the commandment to be that *one*

day in seven should be set aside in some way for God each week. Then he said that the ceremonial or temporary part was that it must be on *the* seventh day of each week.

Some Christian scholars, like Thomas Aquinas himself, teach that Sunday replaced the seventh-day Sabbath only as a day dedicated to the Lord in public worship without it being viewed as a Christian Sabbath. Traditionally, this includes, but is not limited to, the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopalian, and most Lutheran Churches. John Calvin, one of the foremost Protestant Reformation leaders of the sixteenth century, essentially adopted this position, although the churches coming out of this Calvinistic tradition (chiefly, the Puritans and Presbyterians) adopted the tradition that Sunday was the Christian Sabbath. This change is taught either as the result of what the apostles did in the New Testament (especially Lutherans) or as what the Church did on its own authority (especially Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox Churches). Often it is understood that Jesus fulfilled the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath when He made it possible for His followers to enter into the *spiritual rest* of the gospel (Hebrews 4:1-3), something that is entered into continually and not just once a week.

Other Christians insist that Sunday replaced the seventh-day as the new Christian Sabbath and that the change was made by the apostles in the New Testament. This includes the traditions of the large majority of Protestant churches. It must be acknowledged, however, that modern Christians from this tradition no longer keep Sunday as 24 hours of holy time. In other words, in practice they treat Sunday just like the other Christian tradition does. In any case, both sides insist that Sunday is the best day of the week to replace the seventh-day Sabbath because (1) Jesus was resurrected on a Sunday and (2) the Church launched its official work on the Day of Pentecost, which at that time was on a Sunday. [Note: *Pentecost* means *fiftieth* and is the Jewish spring festival of harvest, also known as the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Harvest (Exodus 23:16; 34:22; Numbers 28:26; Deuteronomy 16:10). Leviticus 23:15-16 says that Pentecost comes on the fiftieth day after the waving of the grain sheaf (cf. v. 11), which in turn occurred the day after the first ceremonial Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (v. 11), which was the day after Passover (vv. 5-7). Since we know that Passover was on the Friday that Jesus died, then the Sabbath of the Passover was on a weekly Sabbath that year. Sunday would have then been the waving of the grain sheaf (or Feast of the Firstfruits, v. 10). Fifty days, or seven weeks (v. 15), from this Sunday, reckoned according to the inclusive reckoning method, also fell on a Sunday. Therefore, we know that the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 occurred on a Sunday.]

We reject all the views based on Thomas Aquinas' artificial division of the Sabbath Commandment into two parts. The very reason that *the* seventh day of each week is given as the Sabbath in the commandment is because of what God did in resting, blessing, and sanctifying *the* seventh day of Creation week. To disconnect *the* seventh day from the Sabbath Commandment is to undermine the very reason for the Sabbath in the first place. We would add that replacing the seventh-day Sabbath with the non-Sabbath Sunday (used only as a day for public worship) is also

not permitted by the commandment itself. It says nothing about public worship, although that is provided for in Leviticus 23:3. It calls for resting from one's labors (Exodus 20:10) as the way to experience the blessing and setting apart (*sanctified* or *hallowed*, v. 11) of the day. While we agree that Jesus opened the door to entering into the spiritual rest of the gospel, Hebrews 4:9-10 says that this experience is accompanied (*remains*, present tense, v. 9) by keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. Finally, the facts that Jesus rose on a Sunday and that the Church launched its official beginning on a Sunday (Day of Pentecost in Acts 2) do not mean that Jesus thereby instituted any form of weekly Sunday observance.

Jesus Signaled a Change in the Sabbath

This argument states that Jesus broke the Sabbath in His public ministry in order to signal that a change in that commandment was coming. While Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of breaking the Sabbath, are we to accept their word for that? After all, they also accused Him of being a drunkard and a glutton also (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34). We think it is better to examine the evidence and thus determine whether or not He actually broke the Sabbath.

Jesus was accused on at least five occasions of breaking the Sabbath because He healed someone on that day. In Matthew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, and Luke 6:6-11, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand who was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. When Jesus read their thoughts against Him, He rhetorically responded by in effect saying that it was *lawful* to do *good* and to *save life* on the Sabbath. In Luke 13:10-17, Jesus healed a woman who could not straighten her back up who was in the synagogue on the Sabbath. When the ruler of the synagogue became angry because Jesus healed someone on the Sabbath, Jesus replied with rhetorical questions pointing out that since they would all help an animal on the Sabbath, it was acceptable for Him to heal on that day.

In Luke 14:1-6, Jesus noticed a man with dropsy (had excessive bodily fluids) on the Sabbath and this time approached the Pharisees in this house about the issue of healing on the Sabbath. When they could not answer Him, Jesus healed the man, again with the suggestion that if they would help a distressed animal on the Sabbath, then surely He could heal people on that day. Again, in John 5:1-15, Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath. This time it was at the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. A man was there who had been unable to walk for thirty-eight years, and Jesus simply told him to rise up, take his bed, and walk (v. 8). Jewish leaders saw the man and began plotting to kill Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. But Jesus replied that He was *working* just as His Father had been working, implying that He was doing His Father's business. Finally, in John 9:1-7 Jesus gave a man blind from birth his sight, declaring that He *must work the works of Him who sent Me* (v. 4). Verse 16 tells us that the Pharisees who talked to this healed man concluded that Jesus had broken the Sabbath by healing him on the Sabbath.

On another occasion Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath when He and His disciples, walking through a grainfield, stopped and His disciples ate some of the grain (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). Some Pharisees saw this and protested that Jesus' disciples were breaking the Sabbath. Jesus responded by reminding them that a person's hunger is more important than even good rules with references to two Old Testament facts. First, he referred to the incident when David and his men were given by a priest some of the showbread to eat (I Samuel 21:1-6). Second, He reminded them that the priests work on the Sabbath in the temple, which would otherwise be desecrating it on that day. Yet He implies that they are guiltless.

In all of these encounters with the Pharisees over the Sabbath, Jesus denied that He was breaking the Sabbath. Unless we want to accuse Him of lying too, we must conclude that Jesus did not break the Sabbath by healing or by eating a small amount of grain from a field on that day. Instead, Jesus was showing us that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). In other words, the Sabbath was made for man's benefit, not to enslave Him. The Pharisees considered their oral tradition (called the Oral Law) to be part of Moses' law and just as mandatory. It was these laws that Jesus violated, obviously because He did not think they were valid laws. See Matthew 15:1-20 and Mark 7:1-23 for a non-Sabbath violation of the Oral Torah that Jesus defended.

Since Jesus did not actually break the Sabbath, He could not have been signaling that a change was coming to that day.

The Jerusalem Council

Acts 15 records the only Church Council session in the New Testament Church. It was a response to certain Jewish believers who taught that Gentile converts should essentially become Jewish in order to join the Church. That council's decision was an emphatic *no*. Instead, its decision only required them to observe four things from the Mosaic Law, to abstain from (1) food offered to idols, (2) food strangled, (3) blood, and (4) sexual immorality (vv. 20, 29)—the same four things that Moses required of Gentiles who lived among the nation of Israel (Leviticus 17-18). Since the Sabbath was not included in the decision, it is argued that Gentile Christians do not need to keep it.

The only *specific* issue mentioned in the record of the Jerusalem Council is circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5). Did male Gentile converts have to be circumcised in order to become members of the Church? Reference is also made to the necessity of keeping *the law of Moses* (v. 5). In Peter's address to the council, he insisted that they should not place *a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we are able to bear* (v. 10). Obviously, God had not placed a burdensome yoke on anyone via His laws. Therefore, this reference to the *law of Moses* must be

to the Jewish Oral Law which they considered to be part of Moses' law and which Jesus Himself viewed as placing a burden on the people (see the previous section).

Because this was a delicate matter that apparently threatened the unity of the Church, the decision of the council was to require only what Moses had required of Gentiles who lived among the Israelites in order for peace to exist among them and the Hebrew people. In other words, it was a diplomatic decision. For those who wished to actually become a part of the covenant community, Sabbath-keeping was required (Isaiah 56:2, 4, 6). Surely, these converts were already keeping the Ten Commandments or otherwise there would have been a great outcry about that issue and great opposition to the decision of the Jerusalem Council if they had understood that decision the way modern opponents of the seventh-day Sabbath understand it. In this way, then, the Jerusalem Council said nothing about keeping the Sabbath, or any of the other commandments for that matter, because the Sabbath was not an issue. Therefore, the silence of this council's decision about Sabbath-keeping does not imply that Gentile believers do not have to keep it.

The New Testament Teaches that the Sabbath is Unnecessary

It is insisted by opponents of seventh-day Sabbath-keeping that the New Testament also explicitly declares that the Saturday Sabbath is no longer necessary. Three passages are cited: (1) Romans 14; (2) Galatians 4; and (3) Colossians 2. We will address them in that order below.

Romans 14:5-6

Romans 14:5-6 addresses a conflict between believers at Rome over the observance of certain days. Paul advises not to make a major issue out of this disagreement when he wrote, *One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.* In verse 1 he had told them to accept those who are *weak in the faith* (the ones who esteem certain days over others) and *not to disputes over doubtful things*. A better translation is *but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions* (NASB). Opponents of the seventh-day Sabbath believe that Paul here says that if a believer wishes to observe the seventh-day Sabbath he should be allowed to do so but that no one should force anyone else to do it. In this way, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath is not required in the Church.

We reject this objection for a couple of reasons. First, remember also that Paul is discussing personal opinions, not matters of doctrine (v. 1). If the issue had been over which day to observe the Sabbath, and the Sabbath had been changed or abolished, Paul would not have regarded the issue with such deference to one's personal opinion. It should also be noted that Paul counts himself as among the *strong* members in Romans 15:1, and regardless of how one interprets his

reasons for doing so, there can be no doubt that Paul observed quite a number of Sabbaths in the book of Acts.

Second, most of the chapter is concerned with members' dietary habits. Nine verses deal with eating (vv. 2, 3, 7, 14, 15, 17, 20, 21, 23) and two with days (vv. 5, 6). It should be noted that the food issue is not over the Levitical rules determining which animals are clean or unclean for food because the word for *unclean* in verse 14 is not the same Greek word the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses for *unclean* in Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14. Furthermore, verse 2 identifies the issue as vegetarianism, with the weaker members apparently insisting on it. And there is nothing in the Old or New Testaments commanding vegetarianism. The nature of the issue over food, especially since it dominates Paul's discussion here, supports the idea that the issue over days was not over the Sabbath either.

The juxtaposition of days with eating suggests the probability that Paul is talking about which days are allegedly better for fasting (at least from meat-eating) than others, although the reference to clean and unclean may also point to an issue of ceremonial cleansing as in Matthew 15:1-20 and Mark 7:1-23. Unfortunately, we cannot be certain of the exact nature of the conflict. All that we can know for certain from what Paul says is that he is not talking about which day should be observed as the Sabbath or whether any day should be so observed. Besides, the users of this passage against the seventh-day Sabbath go too far and get trapped in their own making, for if Paul is here teaching that it is only a matter of personal opinion as to what day is the Sabbath, then those who view Sunday as the Sabbath cannot defend Sunday as a command of the apostles either. In addition, if he then left it up to each member to decide, some would meet on Saturday and others on Sunday, and the unity of the churches would be greatly disrupted. And that would also not have been something Paul would have taken as lightly as he did this conflict.

Galatians 4:9-10

In Galatians 4:9-10 the apostle Paul takes a much stronger position against the practices in this church from what he did in his message to the Roman church (see previous section). In mentioning the observance of *days and months and seasons and years*, he accused these members of returning to *the weak and beggarly elements* (v. 9) of their pagan days (v. 8) that once again put them back into *bondage* (v. 9). This is often understood to refer to some of their past pagan religious practices along with Jewish observances. Therefore, the word *days* would include the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. The argument is that this passage, then, is including the so-called Jewish Sabbath as that which returns people to bondage and should therefore not be kept.

Note the context of the entire book concerns warnings against false gospels (1:6-9) and their teachers among the Church, and those seeking to bring Paul and his companions into *bondage* (2:4-5), particularly those who teach justification by works (3; 4:21-31) and bondage to

circumcision and justification by law (5:1-6). In this context, we must surely understand the return to the observance of days in the context of their pagan past to be some kind of pagan concepts and/or practices in connection with the observance of Jewish *days* (weekly and ceremonial Sabbaths) and *months* (new moon) and *years* (annual feast days). We say Jewish days because it was Judaizers who promoted justification by works in the Church. Whatever the precise nature of the heresy, there is sufficient data in the context to conclude that if the seventh-day Sabbath is involved, it is a perversion of the Sabbath that he condemns. A perversion of the truth does not invalidate the truth. Therefore, this objection to the seventh-day Sabbath also has no merit.

Colossians 2:16-17

In this passage, Paul admonishes believers to *let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon, or Sabbaths* (v. 16). Because the reference to times here moves from the annual to the weekly, the word *Sabbaths* is understood to be the seventh-day Sabbath. Then because Paul tells the believers there not to let anyone judge them regarding the Sabbath, he is thereby declaring that observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is not required for the Christian. Sometimes the reason given for this is that Christ allegedly nailed the Ten Commandments as a specific codified body of law to the cross (v. 14) and that these things (the Jewish annual, monthly, and weekly festivals) are only valid if they are repeated in the New Testament, which they allegedly are not. [See the section entitled “The Sabbath a Sign of the Old Covenant with Israel” for a discussion on the theory of the Ten Commandments being abolished as an actual codified body of law and need to be repeated individually in the New Testament in order to be valid for the Christian.] Others correctly identify that was the certificate of indebtedness because of our sins what was nailed to the cross. This fits the context that what was nailed to the cross brought those who accept Christ’s sacrifice forgiveness of their sins (v. 13).

First, we concur that the sequence of *a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths* (plural in the Greek) denotes a progression from the annual to the monthly to the weekly. Some defenders of the seventh-day Sabbath interpret this word as referring to the six annual ceremonial Sabbaths in the Jewish calendar. However, this not only breaks the sequence just described, but it ignores the fact that the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) always uses the expression *Sabbath of Sabbaths* with regard to the annual ceremonial Sabbaths. Therefore, the seventh-day Sabbath may well be what is referred to in verse 16.

Second, the context of Paul’s counsel in Colossians 2 concerns false teachings that he identifies with *philosophy and empty deceit* (v. 8), *the tradition of men* (v. 8), *the basic principles of the world* (vv. 9, 20), and *the commandments and doctrines of men* (v. 22). Specifically, this context includes *false humility and worship of angels* and being *vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind* (v. 18). Apparently these things were used to bring a more complete standing with God, for Paul

emphasizes in verses 9-10 that *in Him [Christ] dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him.*

Whatever the exact nature of the heresy in the church at Colosse, Paul is condemning a perversion of the truth. Proper Sabbath-keeping does not involve anything like what Paul was describing in his condemnation. Once again, a perversion of the truth does not negate the essence of that truth. Therefore, this passage does not tell us that Christians should no longer keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

The New Testament Church Observed Sunday

The last argument against the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is that the New Testament teaches that the early Church observed Sunday as either the new Christian Sabbath or at least as the new weekly day for public worship. The following four passages are cited to support this interpretation: (1) John 20:19; (2) Acts 20:7; (3) I Corinthians 16:2; and (4) Revelation 1:10.

John 20:19

Sometimes this text is used to support the early adoption of Sunday worship by the early Church because the disciples are assembled on the first day of the week. The apostle John says that the disciples were together in one place on the *evening* of the first day of the week. This was the same Sunday that Jesus had been resurrected (20:1), although they did not yet know this. The text says nothing at all about worship, but it says they were there with the doors shut for *fear of the Jews*. Apparently, after their Master had been crucified, they were afraid they might be the next target of the Jewish leaders. Even if they did meet for worship, a Sunday evening worship is not an example for a Sunday morning worship service. Of course, the fact that they did not know that Jesus had been resurrected yet would not have been put them in a mood for worship. And it certainly would not have been to honor the resurrection of Jesus since they did not know that He had even been resurrected.

Given the evidence in the text itself, we can be confident that the apostles did not here inaugurate a new day of worship.

Acts 20:7

Acts 20:7 begins the description of a meeting of the church at Troas by stating that *on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread....* This is understood by most expositors to mean that the weekly observance of Sunday had begun in the New Testament Church.

To reach this conclusion, one must make three assumptions. First, it must be assumed that the meeting here on the first day of the week refers to a Sunday morning worship service. Second, it must be assumed that the church met on the first day of the week as a regular habit. Finally, it must be assumed that the breaking of bread refers to a Holy Communion service.

Although Luke was a Greek (see the section “Luke 23:50-24:1-7”), the evidence from his gospel and the book of Acts shows that he used the Jewish reckoning in referencing time. Of course, this method is also the Biblical method of referring to time, so it is not unusual that even a Gentile Christian would use it. This means that each day begins with the night portion first and followed by the daylight portion, as in each day of Creation week being referred to as the evening and the morning was the first day and so on (Genesis 1:2, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Acts 20:8 tells us that there *were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together* and that Paul preached until midnight and eventually even until daybreak (vv. 7, 11). The use of the Biblical understanding of a day combined with the reference to *many lamps* means that this meeting was on what we call a Saturday night. This is hardly suggestive of a Sunday morning worship service.

As a Saturday night service, this particular meeting was probably not a habitual meeting for the church. This seems confirmed by the statement in verse 7 that Paul was getting ready to depart the next day. Thus, this meeting was apparently a special meeting because the apostle Paul was getting ready to leave the city, which also explains why he preached for such a long time.

Regarding the expression *to break bread* (v. 7), in later usage among Christians it did indeed become a reference to the Holy Communion service. However, fourteen times in the New Testament (excluding Acts 20:7) the word *bread* is associated with the verb *to break*. Five of them refer to the Holy Communion service (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 10:16; 11:20-34) while the other nine simply refer to a regular meal (Matthew 14:19; 15:36; Mark 8:6, 19; Luke 24:30, 35; Acts 2:42, 46; 27:34-38).

To understand this text to mean the early Church was regularly worshiping on Sunday mornings requires that Luke used the Roman method of reckoning days (from midnight to midnight) and that Paul actually started preaching that morning (Sunday morning by Roman reckoning) and continued, perhaps on and off, until dawn on Monday morning. That would make Paul preach for almost 24 hours. This is highly unlikely. Therefore, we conclude that the weight of the evidence is that this was indeed a special meeting held on what we call Saturday night because Paul was getting ready to leave Troas the next day. This text, then, says nothing about the Church regularly worshiping on Sunday mornings.

I Corinthians 16:2

In I Corinthians 16:2 the apostle Paul urged the church members at Corinth to lay something aside *on the first day of the week* for the financial assistance of the saints (vv. 1, 3; Romans 15:26-27; Galatians 2:10, cf. v. 1) at Jerusalem. In this way, the church will not have to take up a collection when he comes to visit them (v. 2). This is believed to mean that an offering will be taken up each Sunday, implicitly meaning that the church was regularly worshiping on Sunday instead of the seventh-day Sabbath.

However, a careful examination of the verse does not teach that. The instruction directs the church to *let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper* (v. 2). The Greek text reads, *let each one of you lay by himself something aside*. This underscores the idea that this was something that each individual did by himself, and that it was thus not something done in a meeting. Apparently Paul urged members to this each Sunday because, as the first day of the week, it would set the budget for the entire week. Not only does this not imply regular Sunday worship, it is actually good evidence that the believers were not meeting on Sunday for worship, or else Paul should have advised them to put their weekly contribution into the church at the Sunday morning worship service.

Revelation 1:10

In Revelation 1:10 the apostle John says that he received his vision *on the Lord's day*. The Lord's day is understood to be a reference to a Sunday, thus implying that the early Church was already worshiping on Sundays rather than the seventh-day Sabbath.

Review the evidence discussed under the previous section entitled "Revelation 1:10" that points to the Lords' day as being the seventh-day Sabbath. For that reason, it obviously cannot also mean Sunday. Therefore, Revelation 1:10 cannot properly be used to support the conclusion that the early Church had replaced Sabbath observance for the first day of the week.

Keeping the Sabbath Holy

Having established the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath for Christians, we should examine *how* one should keep that day holy. We start with the time for the Sabbath. Leviticus 23:32 instructed Israel to keep the Day of Atonement's ceremonial Sabbath on the evening of the *ninth day of the month, from evening to evening*. Verse 27 tells us that the Day of Atonement falls on the tenth day of the seventh month, so that when verse 32 says to observe it beginning at evening of the ninth day, it assumes that the day begins at the evening portion of the day. Mark 1:32 defines *evening* as when the sun sets. This is in harmony with the account of Creation week, where each day is referred to as *the evening and the morning are the first day* and so on (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23,

31). Therefore, as with every day, the Sabbath begins at sunset on our Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday.

As to how to keep the Sabbath holy (Exodus 20:8), we return to the origin of the Sabbath in the Creation account (Genesis 2:1-3). We learned under that section that people should physically rest from their regular labors (cf. Hebrews 4:9-10) in order to experience the blessing and holiness (*sanctified*, Genesis 2:3) of the seventh day. Exodus 20:8-11 confirms that this resting is physical rest from our labors, for the Sabbath Commandment declares that the first six days of the week are for work but that *no work* should be performed on the Sabbath (vv. 9-10).

The word *sanctified*, describing what God did on the seventh day (Genesis 3:3), means *to set apart for holy use*. This means that our resting from our regular work on that day is in order for us to use the Sabbath for a holy use. This holy use would of necessity be to focus our thoughts, words, and deeds on God in an exclusive way not possible on the other six days, in which we need to be engaged in our work habits. Therefore, except when we are sleeping, we should dedicate the entire Sabbath as holy time and not just a day for public worship. Public worship is, of course, one way to focus our attention on God and is therefore required on that day according to Leviticus 23:3 (cf. Isaiah 66:23). [Note: The *holy convocation* on that day means a holy *meeting*.] Finally, the context in Genesis 2:1-3 suggests that spending time in nature or in the study of nature is another acceptable activity on the Sabbath since it is a memorial of Creation (or a kind of weekly birthday of the world).

A summary of what it means to keep the Sabbath holy is found in Isaiah 58:13-14. First, we should not do our *own pleasure* or our *own ways* or speak our *own words* on the Sabbath (v. 13). Second, on the positive side, we are to *call the Sabbath a delight* (v. 13). This means three basic things. First, we should refrain from the everyday topics in our conversations on the Sabbath and from entertainment, recreation, and other secular activities. Second, on the positive side, we should speak of spiritual things in our conversations on that day and engage in activities that enhance our relationship with the Lord. Finally, we should be joyful in our demeanor because the Lord is our delight.

Nehemiah 13:15-21 speaks to one general area of secular activity that we should avoid, and that is to refrain from business transactions, deals, and buying and selling. In other words, we should avoid shopping, banking, and in engaging in discussing or finalizing business deals, unless there is a medical or humanitarian emergency (Matthew 12:11; Luke 13:15; 14:5). This would include eating out in a restaurant or buying or selling anything on the Sabbath. All of this should follow from the prohibition against secular activities, but it is specifically mentioned in Nehemiah because it was a specific problem among God's people in Jerusalem in his day.

Some have thought that no meal preparation like cooking should be done on the Sabbath. It is true that cooking on that day was prohibited in the Old Testament (Exodus 35:3). However, the reason was that kindling a fire was definite work. In our modern society, cooking is a simple matter of turning on the stove. Nevertheless, the prohibition against cooking in the Old Testament means that we should avoid heavy cooking and the baking of things like bread, cakes, pies, and the like. And anything that can be prepared on Friday should be prepared on that day.

We should also remember that Jesus frequently healed people on the Sabbath. See Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; and John 5:1-15. In this way, we can deduce that visiting the sick and those in nursing homes is an acceptable Sabbath activity, as is actively helping them as nurses and doctors. A caution should be given, however, that a medical professional not allow himself or herself to use their profession to engage in it to an excess on the Sabbath and thus interfere with attending Sabbath worship services too often.

Those families with children ought to give careful consideration and planning to make the Sabbath as delightful for their children as possible within the principles of Sabbath-keeping outlined here. Perhaps a special Sabbath meal with their favorite foods could be eaten on the Sabbath, with the provision that all of the work of preparing that meal that can be should be done on Friday. Nature walks when weather permits (the Sabbath is a memorial of Creation) and the playing of Bible games or watching of nature or Bible videos are also interesting ways to spend the Sabbath. Of course, nothing should be done that would prevent the regular attendance at the public worship service on Sabbath because that is a vital part of Christian nurturing and maturing.

Finally, we should remember that Jesus ignored the extra rules for Sabbath-keeping that the Pharisees had developed as part of the Oral Torah, as we demonstrated earlier. This, in addition to the fact that the Sabbath should be a delight (Isaiah 58:13), means we should avoid thinking about Sabbath-keeping as the following of a list of rules. Rather, we should concentrate on the basic principles of Sabbath-keeping and seek to apply them instead.

Lent, Easter, Halloween, and Christmas

The question about whether Christians should observe Lent, Easter, Halloween, or Christmas often arises, especially in light of the fact that most of them have pagan connotations attached to them. Let us briefly examine these issues.

Lent

The word *Lent* comes from the Latin word meaning *fortieth* and is a period of 40 days in commemoration of the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness just before beginning His public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). The method of observing Lent

differs among the churches which observe it, but fasting from something is the common denominator for all of them in preparing believers for Easter Sunday, so it occurs in the late winter into the spring each year. Such fasting is often of certain foods, but not always, and is something the individual believer voluntarily chooses to give up for the Lent season. Other work of preparation includes praying, repentance, and almsgiving. The major Christian churches that practice Lent include the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches. The last week of Lent is called Holy Week, which begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Holy Saturday, the day Jesus spent in the tomb. The Friday before Easter is called Good Friday, commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus. The focal point of Lent is Easter Sunday, the annual celebration of the resurrection of Jesus.

The 40 days of Lent are calculated differently by different Christian traditions. The Roman Catholic tradition begins Lent on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Thursday evening before Easter Sunday. This consists of a total of 44 days, although Sundays are excluded from the fast days, which are 40 in number. The Eastern Orthodox Church calls this season Great Lent, and it includes the Sundays in this period of 40 total days. In most of the Protestant churches that observe Lent, it begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on the evening of Holy Saturday, a total of 46 days, although usually the six Sundays are excluded from the fast.

Ash Wednesday is traditionally only observed in the Western churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant (Anglicans, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists), where it marks the beginning of Lent. Its name is derived from the practice of putting “repentance ashes,” usually made from burning palm leaves from the previous year’s Palm Sunday celebration. The ashes are placed on the heads of worshipers by a priest, either by being sprinkled (combined with holy water) on their heads or by being marked in the form of a cross on their foreheads. Various forms and degrees of fasting are required on Ash Wednesday. Finally, Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter, celebrates Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem at the beginning of the week on which He was crucified (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19). In most churches that celebrate Palm Sunday, palm branches (or the branches of other trees if palm trees are not grown in the area) represent the palm branches that the Jerusalem crowd laid down before Jesus as He entered the city.

The practice of Lent has its origin in the Church at Rome before the middle of the second century, when that church abandoned the Sabbath and instituted Sunday worship in its place. In order to wean its members off of the Sabbath, the church leaders commanded their members to fast on the Sabbath, out of sadness that Jesus was dead in the tomb on that day, and to enjoy the feasting on Sunday all the more. Another motivation, as reflected in the writings of some of the Church Fathers favorable to the Roman Church, was to distinguish themselves from the alleged gluttony of the Jews, who celebrated by feasting on the Sabbath. Therefore, anti-Semitism was one important factor in the rise of the Saturday fast. Eventually, this weekly fast was extended to the

40-day period before the annual Easter Sunday and became known as Lent. The Roman Church then took the lead in attempting to get other churches to fast on the Sabbath. They were much more influential on Western churches than they were on Eastern churches during the early period of Christianity.

Given that the weekly Sabbath had been identified as a *feast* (Leviticus 23:3), a word that indicates a *joyful* as well as a solemn occasion, it is incongruent that the Sabbath be designated as a fast day. The anti-Semitic attitude that also underlined the practice of the weekly Sabbath fast that began in Rome only adds to the reason to reject the Sabbath fast. Therefore, that this weekly Sabbath fast was the basis for the annual season of fasting in preparation for the joyful occasion of Easter Sunday adds another reason to reject the observance of Lent. Finally, there is no command to fast on any particular day in Scripture, so the fast of Lent is obviously an invention of the Church, which it sought (successfully) to enforce on Christianity as a whole. For all of these reasons, we reject the entire concept on which the season of Lent is based.

Easter

Easter occurs every spring and celebrates the resurrection of Jesus. It appears to have developed from the fact that pagans in the Roman Empire celebrated the newness of life that occurs in the spring after the death of winter. In fact, the word *Easter* apparently is derived from a pagan goddess of dawn, as in the rising of spring. The church at Rome began to promote this annual day to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus in order to discourage Christians from celebrating the Jewish Passover. This occurred about the same time as their campaign promoting the observance of the weekly Sunday, before the middle of the second century. In fact, the Italians call the weekly Sunday the *little Easter*.

The idea was to adopt the general time of the Passover but change its Christian emphasis on the death of Jesus to the theme of His resurrection instead. Partly to do this, the Roman Church determined that Easter should always fall on a Sunday, the day of the week on which Jesus rose again. This was codified by the Church in the decision of the Council of Nicea in 325.

Eventually, several pagan customs became identified in the Church with Easter. For example, the egg was apparently the ancient symbol of the pagan goddess of spring for which Easter derives its name. Eggs were especially associated with the arrival of spring because they represented new life. The origin of eggs as symbols of the resurrection of Jesus, and the idea of coloring them, appears to have been in thirteenth-century England.

The use of hot cross buns also seems to have been borrowed from ancient Saxons, who worshiped the goddess of spring. They made hot cross buns marked with a cross, representing the four phases of the moon, and offered them to the spring goddess. English Christians in the twelfth century

apparently began the practice of making these sweet-bread buns with a cross either etched into or frosted on them, representing the cross of Jesus. The spices inside the bun represented the spices used in the burial preparation of Jesus' body.

Finally, rabbits were also a symbol among some ancient pagans of the pagan goddess of spring, undoubtedly because female rabbits usually have large litters. The use of the bunny at Easter time seems to have been introduced by German Lutherans in the sixteenth century and then made popular in America during the eighteenth century by German immigrants. These pagan symbols appear to have been introduced in order to appeal to pagans. With all of these pagan associations with Easter's symbols, the Christian should avoid their use even if he decides to observe Easter itself.

We certainly believe in the historicity and importance of the resurrection of Jesus. Without it, a dead Savior would be no Savior at all. Unlike the birth of Jesus, we do know that Jesus died and rose again in the spring at the time of the Passover (Matthew 26:17-28:8; Mark 14:12-16:8; Luke 22:1-24:12; John 13:1-20:10). But how should we feel about celebrating this annual festival?

First, the Holy Communion service is the Christian replacement of the Jewish Passover. We denote that from the fact that Jesus instituted it via His formal presentation of the bread and wine at or near the close of the Passover meal that He ate with His apostles (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-20) and that the apostle Paul tells us that this service is a memorial of Jesus' death (I Corinthians 11:26). Second, the New Testament sets no date or frequency for the observance of Holy Communion, only declaring that when we celebrate it we *proclaim the Lord's death till He comes* (v. 26). From these facts, we deduce that the New Testament does not mandate an annual celebration of the Lord's death or of His resurrection. Therefore, Holy Communion is not the manner in which Christians celebrate Passover but a replacement of Passover.

An annual celebration of the resurrection of Jesus does not violate any commandments or other instructions in the Scriptures. It would seem, then, to be an acceptable practice. At the same time, Easter comes tainted from the Church that promoted the elevation of both the weekly and annual Sunday at the expense of the Sabbath. Its origin from an anti-Jewish and anti-Sabbath bias and the fact that it perverted the meaning of the Passover from a commemoration of Christ's death into a celebration of His resurrection means that Easter should not be observed. Moreover, Christ's resurrection is celebrated by the Feast of the Firstfruits, so if a believer wishes to observe an annual day in honor of the resurrection, he or she can observe the latter festival.

Halloween

Halloween is celebrated on the evening of October 31 and means *All Hallows' evening*, which is the reason that it is sometimes called *All Hallows' Eve* or *All Saints' Eve* (*hallows* is another name

for *saints*). It is the evening before All Saints' Day on November 1 and two evenings before All Souls' Day on November 2. This entire three-day season is a time dedicated to pray for the souls who have died but not yet left purgatory for heaven, and to honor the saints and martyrs of the Church.

Various customs became associated with Halloween, but their origins are clouded in mystery. But regardless of whether they were of pagan origin or not, those Christians who do not believe in purgatory or praying for the dead should have nothing to do with this holiday on purely theological grounds. Moreover, it is difficult to see how the displaying or wearing of costumes of ghosts and other forces of the dark are not foreign to Christian conduct. We should not be playing with the devil or his demonic forces. Besides, the playing of pranks and telling ghost stories are not Biblical practices. Finally, the practice of trick-or-treating is very unchristian, for it literally threatens people or their property if they do not give the person a treat. This is the essential meaning of blackmail. Even though all of these things are done in fun, we find it objectionable to all things Christian.

Perhaps Halloween time is a good occasion to organize children to collect canned goods to give to the poor or some other charitable project. This is a worthy pursuit and diverts the children's minds from the evils of Halloween.

Christmas

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus as God incarnated into human flesh. The early Church of the first, second, and most of the third centuries did not celebrate Christ's birthday at all. But the idea of doing so began late in the third century, although the date of December 25 was in no way significant at that time. The first church to celebrate Christ's birth on December 25 was the church at Rome in the year 336 under the Roman Emperor Constantine (306-337). Then Pope Julius I (337-352) officially set the date of December 25 as the day to celebrate His birthday. The name *Christmas* literally means *Christ's mass*, referring to the Catholic custom of conducting a mass (Holy Communion or the Eucharist) at midnight on Christmas Eve (December 24).

This solidification of December 25 as the date for Christmas coincided with the general era when Emperor Constantine was looking for a way to unite his pagan and Christian subjects in order to prevent the empire from falling apart. For example, that was the same century in which the Church actually decreed that Christians should elevate Sunday by commanding believers to work on the seventh-day Sabbath (Council of Laodicea in ca. 364). Most pagans already celebrated each December 25 as the birth of the sun or sun god. Of course, Christians worshiped the Son of God, also called the Sun of Righteousness in Malachi 4:2. Therefore, it seemed natural to celebrate Christ's birthday on December 25, even though we know He was not born on that day since

shepherds did not take their flocks into the distant pastures overnight during the winter (see Luke 2:8-20).

Through a gradual process during the Middle Ages, other customs like Christmas trees, decorations, mistletoe, and the giving of gifts (especially to children) came to be practiced.

What can be said about the observance of Christmas? First, we can definitely say that if it were important to celebrate Christ's birthday then the Lord would have allowed us to know what that date was. Second, we may note that there also is no prohibition against celebrating birthdays of anyone, although certain Christian traditions like the Puritans thought they were pagan. Certainly the incarnation of Jesus, the combining of the divine with the human, is worth celebrating, for without it we would never have had a Savior. Third, we see no inherent conflict with celebrating His birthday even on December 25 because doing so does not violate any commandment or other instruction in the Scriptures. Therefore, we have no problem with celebrating Christmas. The only thing to note is to remember that we should keep our focus on Jesus and thus avoid the over-commercialization of the holiday.

Santa Claus, the modern secular focal point of Christmas, was based partly on a real-life Greek bishop of Myra in what is now southwest Turkey on the Mediterranean coast. This Bishop Nicholas, later canonized by the Church as a saint (thus Saint Nick), lived in the early fourth century (ca. 270-343) and was said to be a legendary giver of gifts, especially to children. In addition to Bishop Nicholas, Christmas legends were also apparently derived from various pagan deities. All of these developed gradually into the legends around Santa Claus, such as that he lives at the North Pole, where he has a workshop at which elves make toys for children, travels in a sleigh drawn by flying reindeer, goes down chimneys to deliver toys to children, and only gives gifts to children who deserve them by their good behavior throughout the year. To the extent that Santa Claus represents a real historical bishop, we have no problem with Santa Claus. However, legends revolving around the North Pole, elves, and flying reindeer should be avoided in stories, decorations, and the teaching of children about Christmas. Certainly the idea that only good children deserve Christmas gifts gives the wrong idea that we earn God's blessings and gifts, a concept that is the opposite of Biblical teaching. While the giving of gifts is never a bad idea, care should be taken that Christmas not be a time when children are spoiled by giving them whatever they want. Foremost, we must remember that Christmas is about the birth of Jesus, the divine-human Savior of the world.

Some have objected to the decoration of Christmas trees on the basis of Jeremiah 10:3-4, which prohibits the Gentile practice of cutting down trees and decorating them with silver and gold. But the context of verses 1-4 clearly shows that the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah is talking about fashioning idols out of trees, for verse 5 emphasizes that we should not be afraid of them because they cannot speak or do anything on their own. So this passage cannot properly be used against

the use of Christmas trees. The idea of putting lights on Christmas trees appears to have been the inspiration of Martin Luther, the German Protestant Reformer and founder of the Lutheran Church in the sixteenth century. One night he saw starlight peeking through an evergreen tree and was reminded of the angels who visited the shepherds with their light. This apparently also led to the tradition of putting an ornamental angel or star on the top of a Christmas tree. There is no theological reason to deny the joy of placing lights, stars, angels, or other decorations on Christmas trees.