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# ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH

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THEME

*Shabbat and  
Christian practice*



## THEME

# Shabbat and Christian practice

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Israel and the Church is a journal for Biblical and theological reflections concerning Israel and the Church in God's plan for this world in the light of His coming Kingdom.

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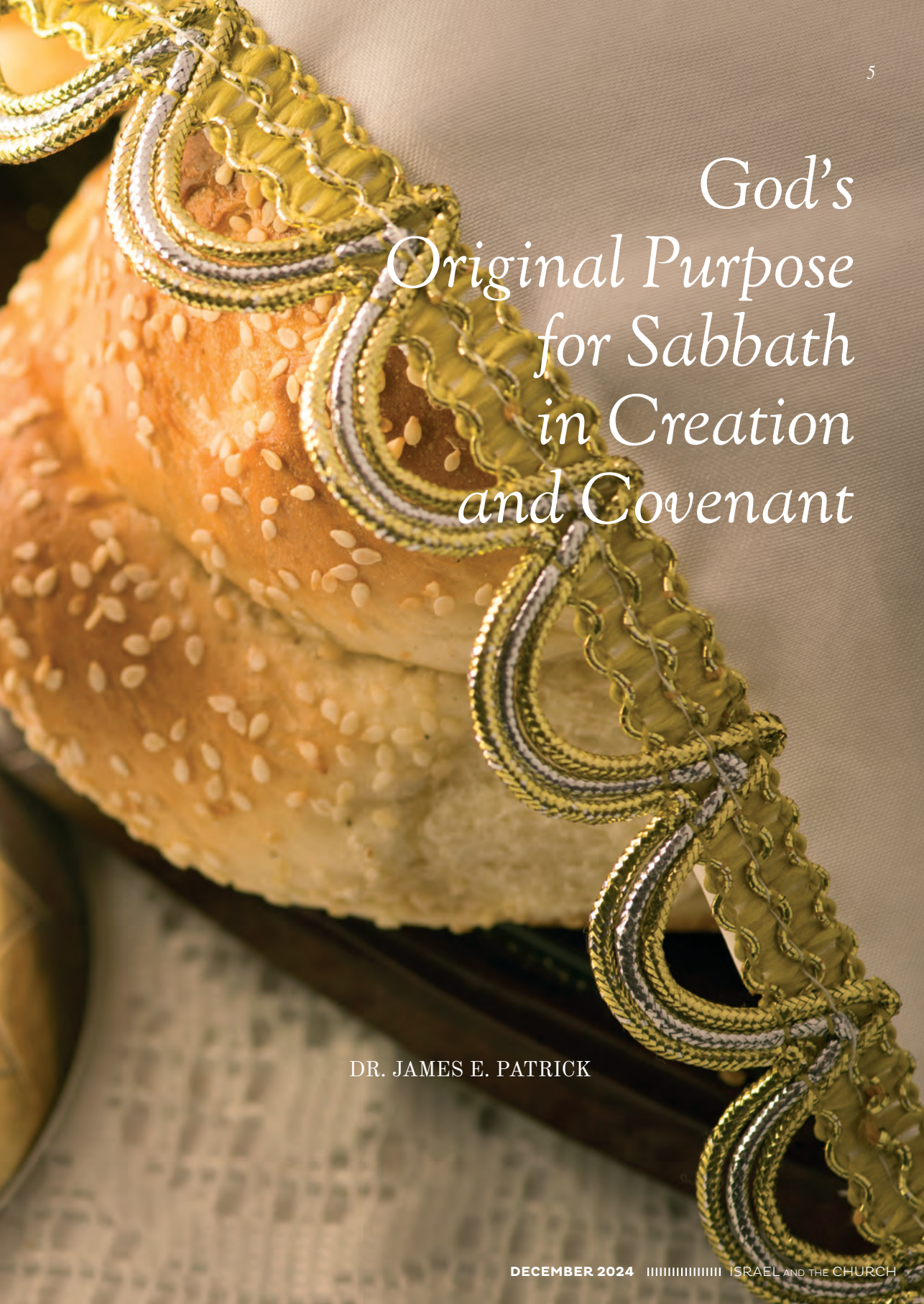
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*God's  
Original Purpose  
for Sabbath  
in Creation  
and Covenant*

DR. JAMES E. PATRICK

**Have you ever wondered why today is a Saturday, rather than a Monday or a Thursday? And why are there only seven days in the week? Are weeks even necessary? After all, atheist regimes have tried alternatives.**

**The revolutionaries in France had a ten-day week, or *décade*, from 1793 to 1802. The Soviets instead tried rotating cycles of five-day weeks between 1929 and 1931, when they moved to a collective six-day week, only to return to the seven-day week in 1940.**

**In ancient times, nearly all cultures managed without weeks, instead relying on nature's cycles of the moon and sun to divide time into 29.5-day periods and 365-day periods, but neither of these fit with our current seven-day cycle ( $7 \times 4 = 28$ ,  $7 \times 52 = 364$ ).**



week-long festival. In either case, that day is celebrated as a festival of barley first-fruits (*re'shiyt*), and fifty days later the festival of wheat first-fruits (*biquiryim*) will occur on the same day of the week (23:10, 17). These were both Sundays on the year Jesus rose again (compare Mark 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:20-23). In the autumn, the rest-day of the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:24) is called a *shabbaton*, and the Day of Atonement (23:32; also 16:31) is a 'shabbat shabbaton'. The Feast of Tabernacles (23:39) has a shabbaton twice, on the first and eighth day, similar to Passover. Whether it was a weekly Sabbath or a special shabbat(on), these days of rest all involved sacred gatherings for worship.

Apparently, the king was expected to participate in gatherings in the temple on the Sabbath(s) (Ezekiel 46:1-5), which would explain the Sabbath canopy built in the Temple presumably for his use (2 Kings 16:18, unclear Hebrew; compare 2 Chron. 9:4, KJV / NASB). Sabbaths marked the end of one week and start of another, so both in the palace and in the temple this was the day for the changing of the guard after a week on duty. The cunning priest Jehoiada therefore chose a Sabbath to reveal the boy-king Joash, so that there could be twice as many armed guards present for the mutiny against Queen Athaliah (2 Kgs. 11:5-9; 2 Chron. 23:4-8). Later, Nehemiah posted guards at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath to enforce Sabbath laws against traders trying to sell produce (Neh. 13:19-22). By contrast, Ezekiel's vision describes the east gate of the temple being opened only on the Sabbath (46:1), presumably to recall God's own entry into the temple after returning from Exile (43:1-5), and the 'prince' also enters through the porch of that gate on the Sabbath to worship.

Sabbaths involved a change-over not just outside the temple with the guards, but also inside the temple with the holy showbread. A fresh batch of twelve large loaves was baked every Sabbath, and the old loaves were replaced with the new (Lev. 24:8) by the Kohathite priests or Levites (1 Chron. 9:32). For this reason, we know that David's secret visit to the high priest Ahimelech at the tabernacle in Nob happened on a Sabbath (1 Samuel 21:1-6). He was allowed to take five of the week-old sacred loaves just removed by Ahimelech, on the condition that he and his men were ritually clean. Jesus referred to this event to defend the actions of His own disciples who were 'harvesting' and 'threshing' and 'grinding' grain on the Sabbath with their hands and teeth (Matt. 12:1-8). Jesus' argument seems to be that David was obeying a higher law in his secret mission from King Saul, which superseded the law of Sabbath customs (and even the laws of priests). In the







equates ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’ with not ‘profaning the sabbath’ or ‘doing any evil’. He then makes special promises to both childless eunuchs and foreign proselytes, that if they ‘keep my sabbaths’ or ‘keep from profaning the sabbath’, which is equivalent to ‘hold fast my covenant’, they will be welcomed and honoured within His temple. Two chapters later, Isaiah again summarises what God considers acceptable worship, in two ways: the first is to care and defend the poor (Isa. 58:1-12), and the second is to honour the Sabbath (58:13-14). But sadly the nation is completely trapped in sin, needing God’s own Saviour to come personally to their rescue and put His Spirit upon them in a new covenant (59:1-21).

But why was the Sabbath so important for Israel that it could be treated as a summary of the whole Law? Why did God care so much about them choosing not to work on one day every week? To understand this, we must look back to the origin of the Sabbath command, both in creation and in the covenant that He made with Israel through Moses.

## 2. SABBATH AS MEMORY IN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Sabbath is the fourth of Ten Commandments given at Mount Sinai, found in Exodus 20:8-11 as well as 23:12, and then repeated when the broken covenant was re-made in 34:21. In this first version of the Ten Commandments, the specific reason given for Israel to rest on the Sabbath is that God had set an example for them by resting on the seventh day after six days of work to create the world. Because the LORD ‘blessed the seventh/Sabbath day and made it holy’ (Genesis 2:3; Exod. 20:11), the people of Israel must ‘Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy’ (Exod. 20:8). This echo of Creation is also mentioned in the Sabbath command given at the end of God’s plans for how to build the Tabernacle (Exod. 31:13-17), so Moses duly repeats this Sabbath command to the people before telling them how to bring materials to create the Tabernacle (Exod. 35:2-3). They too will need to rest while making it. There is clearly a connection here between God creating the universe, and Israel creating a place for the Creator to

dwell among them. However, although they will be able to create a pleasing space for Him if they follow His careful instructions, they cannot create a new time apart from the one He had already created for enjoying rest. They could only enter into His own Sabbath day, and join God Himself in His rest (see Hebrews 3:11; 4:9-11).

Israel is told to ‘remember’ the Sabbath day, which may go all the way back to the very first Sabbath – Adam and Eve had already been created the day before, on the sixth day of creation, so Israel could ‘remember’ it on behalf of all humanity. We often assume that the first Sabbath would have been a time of blissful fellowship with God in the Garden of Eden, but that is never described in Genesis 2-3. Instead, Jewish tradition (Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer 19) as well as traditional Christian interpretation (e.g., Jean Calvin’s commentary on Genesis 3:6) understood that Adam and Eve sinned before the end of the day on which they were created. This would explain why they heard the sound of God walking in the garden ‘in the breeze of the day’, when the shadows lengthen (Gen. 3:8; compare Song of Songs 2:17; 4:6). From a Jewish perspective, the late afternoon of the sixth day, Friday, is always a time to prepare for the Sabbath starting at sunset, so God Himself had come for the same reason. However, He found His children hiding in the bushes, so He quickly had to deal with the problem and expel the sinners from the garden, so that the seventh day could be kept ‘holy’. If this is the case, the call to ‘Remember’ the Sabbath day might also be a solemn reminder from Adam and Eve about the importance of personal holiness on that blessed day.

The other meaning of ‘Remember’ would have referred to something much more recent for the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Less than a month earlier, on their journey from the Red Sea toward the mountain, God had responded to His people’s hunger by sending manna for them in the desert (Exod. 16:13-30). From that point on, and throughout their forty years in the wilderness, God Himself chose not to send manna every seventh day, so the people had no choice but to rest. There was no harvesting or cooking to be

done, even if they had wanted to. But that would not be the case when they got to the land of Canaan and the manna stopped. The Law given at Mount Sinai could only be observed properly when they were in the land (hence the various agricultural laws in Exod. 22:5-6, 29; 23:10-19), so at that point they would need to 'remember' to keep the Sabbath voluntarily. By ceasing from work on that day, they would also be 'remembering' the faithfulness of God to provide all that they needed during their wilderness travels, trusting God to be equally faithful in Canaan also.

Forty years after Mount Sinai, on the edge of the promised land, Moses repeated the whole Law to the people of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy. This time there were certain differences in the Sabbath command within the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:12-15). When it is compared with Exodus 20, we see that an extra line at the end of verse 14 repeats the detail about male and female servants needing to rest as well as their masters. Then, instead of the reminder of creation, there is an instruction to 'remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt' and because of the LORD's mighty Redemption, He 'commanded you to observe the sabbath day' (5:15). The emphasis has shifted here to the Israelites' previous experience of slave labour without any days of rest. The fact that God freed them from slavery also implies that they are now free to rest on at least one day of the week. Not only that, but their own experience of slavery should help them appreciate the need for their own servants to have days of rest too. It is the responsibility of free men to make sure that others they care for who have less freedom and autonomy – children, servants, cattle, resident foreigners – should all have legal protections ensuring a day of rest for them also. Sabbath is a day to 'remember' that only slaves work seven days a week, so God's freed people must choose to rest and remember their new identity, giving thanks for it to their Redeemer.

This combination of remembering both Creation and Redemption is reflected throughout the book of Revelation. Chapter 4 worships the holy Creator who is worthy because of His act of creation at the beginning and ongoing creation of 'all things' throughout time. Chapter 5 then worships the Lion-Lamb, the worthy Redeemer who 'purchased for God with Your blood those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation' who are to be 'a kingdom and priests to our God... on the earth' (echoing the language of Mount Sinai – Exod. 19:6). The same image of 'reigning priests' is found in chapter 20, and it is not surprising that this takes place for 'a thousand years' on earth. The standard teaching of Judaism in the time of Jesus and ever since (e.g. b. Sanh. 97a;



b. 'Abod. Zar. 9a; b. Rosh HaSh. 31a), as well as the consistent teaching of the early church (e.g. Epistle of Barnabas 15.3-8; Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 5.28.3) has been that earth history will continue for six divine 'days' of a thousand years each (Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8). After 6,000 years, a seventh millennium of 'Sabbath rest for God's people' (Heb. 4:9) will complete the first 'week' of creation for the world. This is not the place to go into more details. But Revelation demonstrates that the 'remembering' of God as Creator and Redeemer in heavenly worship every Sabbath (chs. 4-5) will eventually be fulfilled in an experience of Sabbath rest on earth with the Creator-Redeemer (ch. 20).

### 3. SABBATH AS A HOLY COVENANT

The Ten Commandments emphasise Israel's unique responsibility to 'Remember / Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy' (Exod. 20:8 / Deut. 5:12), because 'it is holy to you' (Exod. 31:14). The very first thing in Scripture and in history to have been 'sanctified' or 'made holy' by God, out of all His creation, was the Sabbath (Gen. 2:3; see Exod. 16:23). After that, the next biblical references to something 'holy' to God are not until the 'holy ground' of Mount Sinai (Exod. 3:5; 15:13; 19:23), the firstborn of humans and animals in Israel (which reflects the firstborn status of Israel itself – Exod. 13:2; 4:22-23; Num 3:12-13), and the whole nation of Israel (Exod. 19:6, also 10, 14). The connection between the 'holy' Sabbath and the 'holy' nation of Israel is made explicit in Exodus 31:13-14 – 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you; therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you'. A little later, He repeats, 'It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel for ever'

(31:17). It is because Israel is God's holy nation that they are expected to live according to God's original cycle of holy time, and their observance of Sabbath manifests their holy identity in the sight of all nations.

For this reason, even before the Sabbath was commanded at Mount Sinai, it had been granted to Israel as a special gift – 'See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day' (Exod. 16:29). Israel kept the Sabbath because it was a holy nation, not in order to become a holy nation. Out of its holy identity flowed its holy behaviour, so the act of remembering the Sabbath was also a reminder of Israel's special identity with God. In that way, observing the Sabbath does represent the entire Law, because all the many works of the Law can begin after Israel has rested in the joy of its holy identity.

The laws given through Moses at Mount Sinai are known as a 'covenant' (Exod. 19:5), sealed in blood (Exod. 24) and written on stone 'tablets of the covenant' to be placed within the 'ark of the covenant' (Deut. 9:9-11, 15-17; 10:1-5; 31:9). Because the Sabbath command is found within the Ten Commandments it is obviously part of this wider covenant, but it also seems to have its own unique covenantal status for Israel – 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to keep the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant' (Exod. 31:16).

Similarly, circumcision was included within the laws of Moses, but it was actually a special sign of the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:9-14; Lev. 12:3; John 7:22). Sabbath is therefore not just an old-covenant law, now passing away with the fading glory of letters engraved on stones (2 Cor. 3:6-11; Heb. 8:7-13). It belongs to the enduring promises of God.

**The very first thing in Scripture and in history to have been 'sanctified' or 'made holy' by God, out of all His creation, was the Sabbath**



It is for this reason that Sabbath was designed as the final day of the creation week, so that it also becomes the ultimate purpose for time and history as a whole. Sabbath is a perfect picture of the future age of Messiah, when God and His people take delight in one another. All of history is leading towards the seventh 'day', and for that reason, every Sabbath is an enactment of the future, just as the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Jesus' eventual return (1 Cor. 11:26).

Here it is interesting to remember that sometimes the first day of a new cycle was also celebrated with a shabbaton or festival of complete rest, such as the eighth day of Tabernacles or the fiftieth day of Pentecost, which are both effectively the first days of a new week. These ideas are combined in the unique occasion of the Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-17). After counting off seven 'sabbaths' (weeks) of years, the fiftieth year Jubilee is announced on the Day of Atonement when shofars are blown (as on the Feast of Trumpets) to proclaim liberty throughout the land. Maybe this idea of an eighth-day 'Sabbath' influenced the early church in its additional observance of 'the Lord's day' for holy assembly (Acts 20:7-11; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rev. 1:10), since Jesus' first-day resurrection signified the inbreaking of the age to come.

We are told by Isaiah that in the time of 'the new

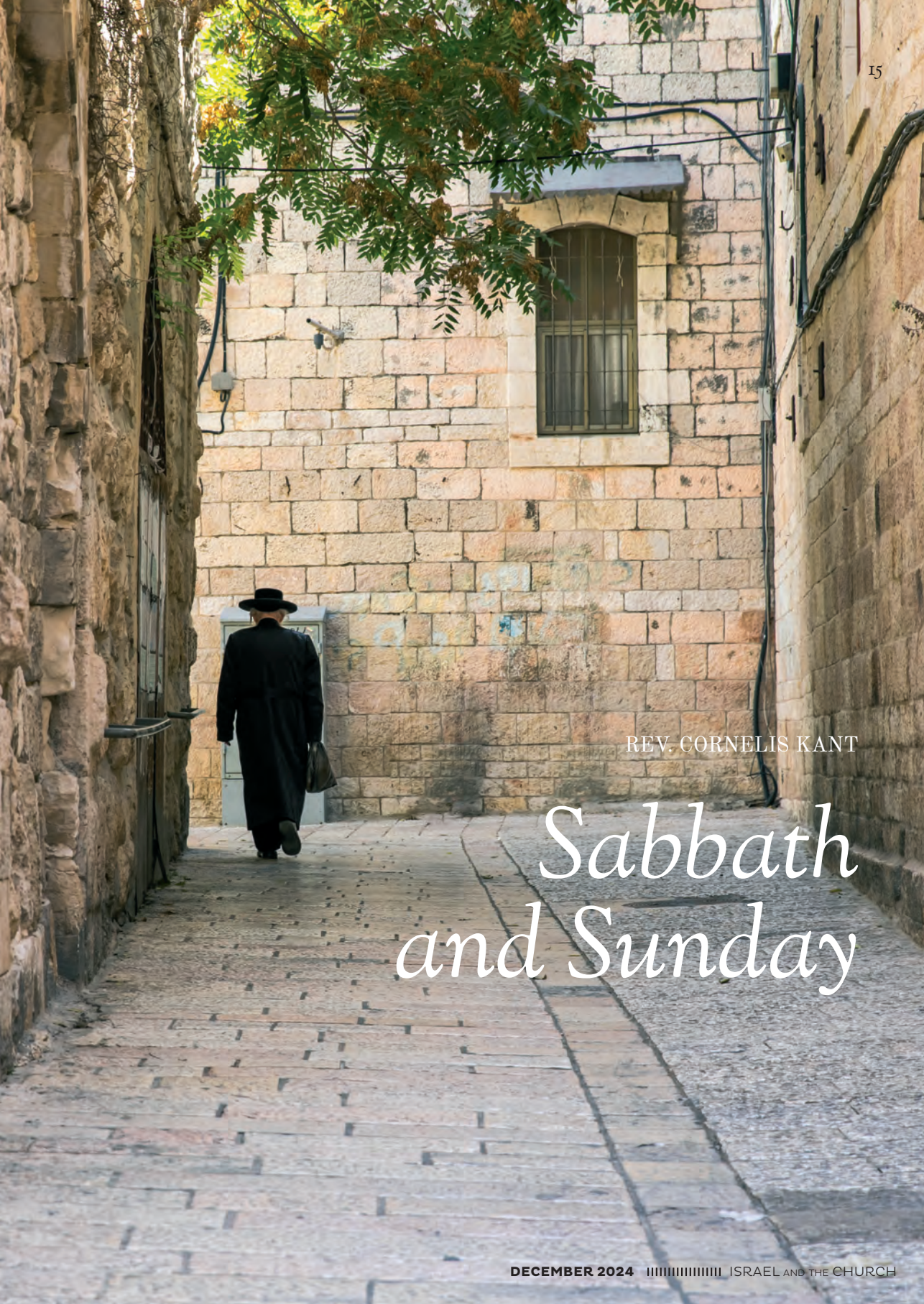
heavens and the new earth', 'all flesh will come to bow down before' the LORD 'from sabbath to sabbath' as well as at the start of every lunar month (Isa. 66:22-23). This suggests that the sun and moon will still function (see Isa. 30:26), but they will be 'ashamed' in comparison to the glory of God shining within Jerusalem (Isa. 24:23; 60:1-2), so bright that in the holy city there will be no need of moon or sun (Rev. 21:23-25; 22:5). In fact, that was part of the reason God created the world over seven days at the very beginning,

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rather than instantaneously. He first set in motion the dark-light cycles of 24-hour days by using His own light source to define time (Gen. 1:1-5; Ps. 104:1-2a), and not until Day Four did He delegate responsibility for regulating daily cycles to the sun and moon (Gen. 1:14-19).

Time itself depends on God alone, not only for days but also for weeks. Observing a continuous cycle of seven-day weeks

is to march by a rhythm entirely independent from the created order of lunar and solar cycles, especially for those who celebrate God's faithfulness on the seventh-day Sabbath. This also teaches us that time itself will continue at God's direction 'unto ages of ages' (Rev. 22:5), longer than the sun endures and even when 'the moon is no more' (Ps. 72:5-7, 17). The righteous will continue to flourish and yield fruit in old age, for ever declaring the praises of our Creator (Ps. 92).



REV. CORNELIS KANT

# *Sabbath and Sunday*



**For Jews, keeping the Sabbath is to this day, next to circumcision, one of the most fundamental commandments in the Torah. In the New Testament, we read that the first Christians came together on the first day of the week, which is Sunday. What role of significance does the Sabbath play in the New Testament?**





ple, which is holy and good. Later in the book of Acts we can even read: ‘how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law’ (Acts. 21:20).

Tensions arose especially in Jerusalem between Jews who believed in Jesus and the other Jews. We even read in Acts about persecutions of Jews who believe in Jesus. Consider Stephen who was stoned, and Saul who persecuted believers in Jesus with great zeal. It was therefore important for those early congregations to gather on a different day and time to meet, encourage, and break bread together. Obviously, that became the first day of the week. For on that day their Lord had risen from the dead, and appeared to His followers. The resurrection from the dead, the victory over death, is an important foundation of Christian faith.

#### **JEW AND GENTILE SIDE BY SIDE**

The apostles themselves, even after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, still continued to observe the Jewish law and thus the Sabbath. The members of the first congregation in Jerusalem met with one mind in the temple every day and had favor with all the people (Acts 2:46). If they had disregarded the Torah and the Sabbath commandment, they certainly would not have had favor with all the people. Peter and John continued to live as Jews according to Old Testament traditions. They still continued to go to the temple during the prayer hour even after Pentecost (Acts 3:1). Torah remained as important as ever for the Jews who believed in Jesus as Messiah.

This is evident from the fact that many of them believed that Gentile believers should be circumcised and live according to Torah: ‘Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren: ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’

(Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas opposed this view and wanted to distinguish within the congregation between Jewish believers and believers from the Gentiles. A special apostles’ meeting is set on this issue and all the apostles travel to Jerusalem for this purpose. All of Acts 15 is dedicated to this. It is decided unanimously there, under the leadership of James, that the law of Moses should not be imposed on believers from the Gentiles, except for a few basic provisions concerning pagan sacrificial meat, blood and fornication. Had the coming of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit removed the Torah from Jewish believers, this discussion would never have occurred. The apostles’ decision makes clear that there are both Jewish believers and Gentiles side by side in the Christian congregation. For Jewish believers in Jesus, the Torah keeps its value as a command for life given by God to His Jewish people. This also implies that observing the Sabbath remains a commandment for Jews who believe in Jesus. And that Gentile believers are not bound by the Sabbath.

The apostles’ decree in Acts 15 did not end the internal debates. Paul’s letters show that the debates continue. Time and again, there are Jewish believers

in the congregation who consider the Torah as so holy and of such great importance that they believe the Gentile believers should also observe it. For them, living in communion with the God of Israel, through faith in Jesus Christ, is unthinkable without observing the Torah. Paul, on the other hand, emphasises that Gentile believers do not have to be circumcised. This therefore also applies to the other Torah provisions, such as the Sabbath: ‘One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God’ (Ro-

## **The Sabbath, as a holy day to God, is a fundamental commandment in the Torah for all the Jewish people**





REV. WILLEM J.J. GLASHOUWER

# *A Sabbath Rest for Planet Earth*

**‘Therefore, since the promise  
of entering His rest still stands...  
There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest  
for the people of God...  
Let us, therefore, make every effort  
to enter that rest.’**

**(Hebrews 4:1, 9 and 11 NIV)**

**V**ery early in Church History, the Church lost the Biblical perspective on the coming of the Kingdom of Peace and Righteousness on earth. She exchanged it for the Greek-philosophical concept of immortality of the soul in Heaven. The question arose: 'Why should we expect the resurrection of the body when our souls go to Heaven anyway?' What is the purpose of it? And what do you mean: resurrection of the body?

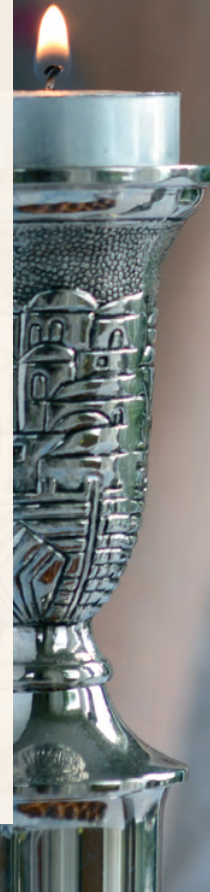
To answer these questions let us look at the resurrection body of Jesus. He rose from the dead with a fantastic resurrection body. What attributes and properties did it apparently have? He could cross over during forty days between His Resurrection and His Ascension into the Heavenly realms. By the way: what about Heaven? Where is Heaven? At the end of the Universe? Apparently all around us, but in other dimensions that we cannot see unless our eyes are opened to it, 2 Kings 6:15-17 and Acts 7:55-60. What future are we on planet earth heading for? What future for mankind and the world, Israel and the Christian Church, the nations and planet earth, even Creation itself and eventually the Universe can we expect? Is there hope for the future? Or are we at the brink of an all-destructive Third World War, which will make and end of the world with A(tomic), B(iological) and C(hemical) weapons?

### COVENANT

The Sabbath can be seen as the 9th conditional Covenant – within the context of the Covenant of the Law. Exodus 31:16-17: 'The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the 7th day He abstained from work and rested.' 'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on My holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.' The mouth of the LORD has spoken.' (Isaiah 58:13-14)

### KINGDOM ON EARTH FROM ISRAEL

Psalms 2 speaks of the Kingship of the Messiah. 'He said to Me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of Me, and I will make the nations Your inheritance, the ends of the earth Your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; You will dash them to pieces like pottery.' And in Revelation 2:26-27 the Risen and Glorified Christ says to His Church





[in Jerusalem] and He will rule over the house of Jacob [= Israel, with the 2 tribes of the house of Judah and the 10 tribes of the house of Israel united, Ezekiel 37:15-28].

## HOPE OF THE JEWISH PAUL'S FUTURE PROSPECT

### HE MUST REIGN AS KING

Maybe Paul's life motto can be summarized as follows in this statement about Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15:25: 'For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.' 'The Creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One Who subjected it, in hope that the Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God', we heard Paul say in Romans 8:19-21.

What does he mean by the 'revealing' of the sons of God? 'To be revealed' comes from the Greek verb that means 'to unveil'. For example the last book of the Bible is called 'the Apocalypse / the Revelation of Jesus Christ as He showed / unveiled it to the Apostle John'. Apocalypse – Unveiling. That is what Paul eagerly is looking forward to. To that future. If that one day will come true for 'all Creation': how much more so for us human beings – and therefore also for the apostle Paul himself? What is his desire since he met with the risen and glorified Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus? Through this encounter 'Saul' became 'Paul': from Christ-hater to Jesus-preacher. The name 'Paul' comes from Latin and means: 'small'. Made 'small' by falling on his knees for Jesus. And raised up again by Him to minister to Him as an apostle to the Gentiles. From Christian-hater to Jesus-preacher.

### IN LIFE AND DEATH

Overwhelmingly rich is that outer and inner experience. That is why Paul lives from that moment on. That is why he is willing to die from that moment on. In Philippians 1:21-24 he says: 'For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean

fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body." Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I (still) live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.'

And in chapter 3:4b-11 he describes the difference as a sincere, Law-abiding Jew, member of the orthodox party of the Pharisees and now as a member of that small, despised group of Jewish believers in Christ: 'If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the Church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.'

Being in Heaven with God and with the Lamb and with the millions and millions of Heavenly creatures and with the redeemed human beings who have gone before us, is not the ultimate goal that Paul longs for. How wonderful that reality may be, and shall be for those who die [or fall asleep] in Jesus, 1 Thessalonians 4:14. Yet the ultimate goal is the resurrection of the body. The complete redemption of spirit, soul and body. And eventually the renewal of all things, even that of Creation itself. Romans 8:20-22: 'For the Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the One who subjected it, in hope that the Creation itself will



be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole Creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.'

Creation has to wait for that to happen until first the glorious freedom of the children of God takes place. The bodily resurrection! 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: 'May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The One who calls you is faithful and He will do it.' In that same letter he explains in more detail how that will be. In answer to the fact that the Christian congregation in Thessaloniki started to worry about the fate of the brothers and sisters who had already died – who, after all, died before Christ had come back in Glory to planet earth – and who had apparently missed that glorious Coming of Christ being alive, Paul writes in chapter 4:13-17 that they even have an advantage!

'Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep [died], or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep [died] in Him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the Coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.'

Each in his own turn! That is how Paul writes it in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28: 'But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resur-



rection of the dead comes also through a Man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.'

### FROM GLORY TO GLORY

Christ must reign. His Kingdom has come and will come. Paul knew it with certainty: 'For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.' The Kingdom of God is where Jesus reigns and is in full control. And soon He will come to sit on the throne of His father David to rule worldwide on planet earth in the midst of Jacob = Israel. Then Peace will go forth from Jerusalem and cover the earth and the nations will not train for war anymore: the third phase of the Kingdom of God on planet earth.

Finally Creation itself will be included in that as well, so that in the end there will be new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness will exist forever, and God will be all and in all. Since Jesus' coming on the earth the Kingdom on earth will know no end, but it will continue to unfold, from glory to glory to glory and that for all eternity! The final phase of the Kingdom of God on planet earth!

All of this is inextricably connected to Israel. The angel Gabriel says to His mother Mary in Luke 1:30-33 KJV: 'And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: And He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.'

God is faithful to His Covenants with Israel. The miracle happened. We have seen it with our own eyes. On May 14, 1948 David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the independent Jewish State of Israel! And after 19 years of Jordanian occupation, in 1967 Jerusalem became the undivided capital again of the independent Jewish State of Israel. In 2023 it celebrated its 75th Anniversary. And now Israel is on its way to its rest. For 'body, soul and spirit'. God's Spirit will one day be poured out on all of them there, in Israel, according to the prophecy of Zechariah 12:1-14. Then finally 'all Israel' gets to see Who Jesus truly is. Then Israel will dwell safely in the midst of the earth and be a blessing for all nations. For God has not chosen Israel for the sake of Israel, but so that He could bless the world through Israel. And He will not abandon the works of His hands.

Someday in the future the Kingdom of Peace and Righteousness on earth will have arrived on planet earth for sure. Because then also the King of that Kingdom of Peace and Righteousness will have come. The Messiah of Israel, the 'King of kings and the Lord of lords', Revelation 19:11-16: Jesus Christ. Yes, in the end in 'the restoration of all things' (Acts 3:19-21) the whole Universe will be full of the Glory of the Lord and glow with eternity! Likewise our mortal bodies! Looking at this glorious future we can indeed say 'Amen' to Hebrews 4:1, 9 and 11 NIV: 'Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands...There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God...Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest...'



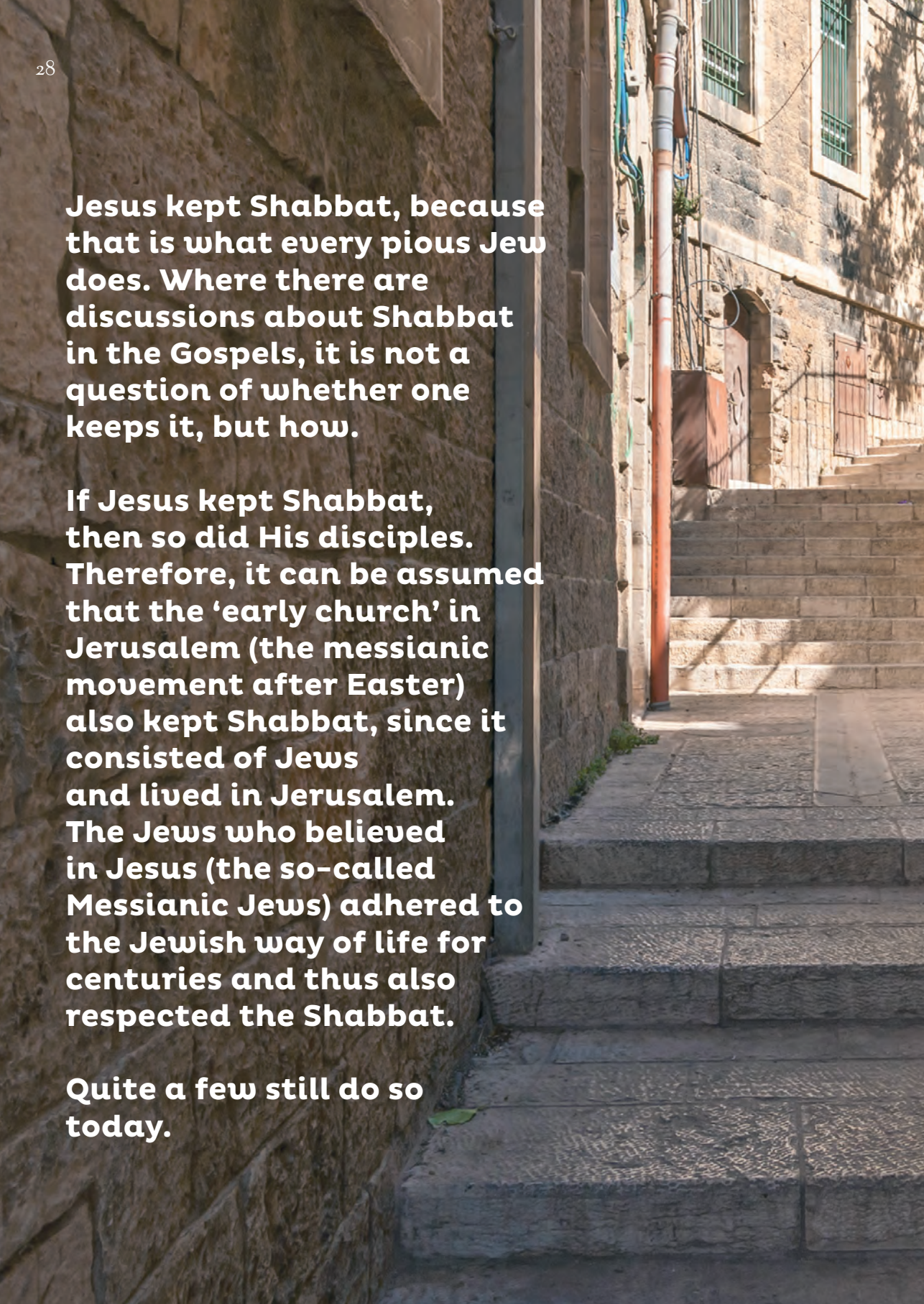
DR. TOBIAS KRÄMER

*Shabbat,  
Lord's Day, Sunday:  
Insights into early  
Christianity*

**Jesus kept Shabbat, because that is what every pious Jew does. Where there are discussions about Shabbat in the Gospels, it is not a question of whether one keeps it, but how.**

**If Jesus kept Shabbat, then so did His disciples. Therefore, it can be assumed that the 'early church' in Jerusalem (the messianic movement after Easter) also kept Shabbat, since it consisted of Jews and lived in Jerusalem. The Jews who believed in Jesus (the so-called Messianic Jews) adhered to the Jewish way of life for centuries and thus also respected the Shabbat.**

**Quite a few still do so today.**





observed. The Epistle of Barnabas, however, uses this passage to argue against the Shabbat and thus arrives at its goal: 'Therefore we observe the eighth day...?', that is, the Lord's Day (Barn 15:8f). Instead of Shabbat.

Until the fourth century, church leaders and bishops such as Origen or Chrysostom polemicised against the celebration of Jewish festivals and the observance of the Shabbat. From this we can see that this was still widespread practice in Christendom. At the same time, there was a strong trend to distance oneself from Judaism, to develop one's own religion (Christianity) and to position oneself against the Jews. In other words, some cultivated roots in Judaism, others pursued detachment from it.

#### **SHABBAT, LORD'S DAY AND SUNDAY**

A new stage of development was reached in the fourth century. In 321, Emperor Constantine issued two decrees in which he declared the day of the sun (*dies solis* = day of the sun) to be a day of rest in the Roman Empire. The day of the sun was the first day of the week, i.e. the Christian Lord's Day. This had a linguistic impact. In the Roman languages, the first day of the week is called 'Lord's Day' (Latin *dies dominica*, from *dominus* = lord, French *dimanche*, Italian *domenica*), while other languages follow the Roman solar tradition (English Sunday, Dutch *zondag*, German *Sonntag*). Christian theologians combined both traditions by emphasising that the Lord is also the Light of the world (the sun). Constantine's Sun Day and the Christian Lord's Day thus merged easily - state and church shook hands.

Whether Constantine had Christian or even anti-Jewish motives for establishing the Sunday as a day of rest is difficult to say. He was probably interested above all in stabilising his empire. In any case, in his law of 321 he decreed that professional activity should rest 'on the venerable day of

the sun'. A Christian component was only added later, when church services were celebrated at the imperial palace on Sundays, soldiers were allowed or required to attend religious services and pagan sacrifices were banned. In 380, Christianity became the state religion in the Roman Empire, so that the official day of rest and the Christian Lord's Day finally coincided and became firmly institutionalised.

The Church reacted to this situation by giving Sunday a theological value and demanding that it be sanctified - like the Shabbat in the Old Testament. Rest from work on Sunday was now justified by the Old Testament commandment of Shabbat. Later, the desecration of Sunday was even made a punishable offence. Eusebius aptly states that the essence of Shabbat had passed over to Sunday. Thus the Jewish Shabbat had finally been replaced by the Christian Roman day of rest.

### CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Should this development be seen as a blessing or a curse? The fact that Constantine introduced a day of rest and that it was spiritually filled by the Church is undoubtedly a blessing for all who keep it. What is painful, on the other hand, is that this day off did not fall on Shabbat but on Sunday. In this way, Sunday replaces Shabbat. There is also an anti-Jewish moment in this. This process fits into the development of the pre-Constantinian period - away from the Jewish roots, towards replacement theology - that one also replaced the Jewish Shabbat.

Of course, it will not be possible to turn back the wheel. As friends of Israel, we will not be able to persuade either the churches or the governments to go back from Sunday to Saturday. And that is not absolutely necessary either. In fact, it makes perfect sense to let the Jews have their Shabbat. For an important function of the Shabbat in the Old Testament is to distinguish

the people of the Jews from the nations of the world. The worldwide Christian Sunday makes it possible for the Jews to continue to use the Shabbat as a distinguishing feature.

Another argument: according to Genesis 2:1-4, the Shabbat is already anchored in creation. For God himself designated the seventh day as a day of rest for humanity. By resting on the seventh day, we use this day as God also used it, namely as a day of rest. That is good. Now it is interesting that Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day and immediately encountered the day of rest, which began on the same evening. So for them, the day of rest was at the beginning of their week, on the first day. Is the choice of Sunday all right then?

I would like to say that the fact that we have Sunday as a worldwide day of rest thanks to Constantine is a cultural asset for which we can be grateful. The rhythm of seven days seems to me to be more important than the choice of the day of the week, and placing the service on this day makes perfect sense. In this perspective, perhaps keeping Sunday today could also count as "Shabbat sanctification" - setting aside the seventh day for the Lord. Personally, at any rate, I would rather fight for the preservation of Sunday than for the shift to Saturday.

At this point, however, it is noticeable that many nations have not only one day of rest, but two: Saturday and Sunday. So it is perfectly possible today to celebrate Shabbat on Saturday but attend services on the Lord's Day - similar to what many Messianic Jews did in the first century. This is an option that is used profitably by some Israel lovers.

However, the day of rest is a gift from God, and to observe it spiritually is a blessing. We should not let either - the gift and the blessing - be taken away from us.

## The day of rest is a gift from God, and to observe it spiritually is a blessing

# *The Messianic Sabbath*

THE LATE REV. JAAP DE VREUGD

**Isaiah 66:23:  
'From one New Moon  
to another  
and from one Sabbath  
to another,  
all mankind will come  
and bow down for me,  
says the LORD.'**





biblical practices from the Jewish people, but rather to enhance and share their own destiny with the people who are considered to be the 'apple of God's eye'

### READING THE PROPHET ISAIAH

The ending of the book of Isaiah (66:18–24) is fascinating. In the grand finale of history, the glory of God is revealed in a surprising way over Israel and the nations. The previous verses speak of the peace that God brings to Jerusalem, but also about the fire of judgment with which the Lord will conduct a trial with all flesh. And then the grand finale will come: there are those who escape the judgment of the nations, and from them God will send ambassadors to all known parts of the world to proclaim His glory.

So when the Eternal One will gather the nations for judgment, He will set a sign that will alert the nations to His glory. In the end He will not punish, but offer escape and therefore send some escapees to the distant nations who have not heard of Him. But not only do they bring the tidings of God's glory as ambassadors to the world of nations, they also bring the Jewish exiles back to God's holy mountain, to Jerusalem as a sacrifice to the Lord. A beautiful idea that we often encounter in prophecy: the nations bring the children of Israel back home. In other words, there is a movement in the world of nations towards Zion and a movement of Israel back home. And all this takes place in the 'new heaven and the new earth', or the messianic kingdom that will reveal itself in relation to all these events. It is surprising how all kinds of prophetic lines in the book of Isaiah come together here. I also particularly think of the prophecy of the suffering Servant in Isaiah 53, for example verse 10: 'When His soul is made a guilt offering, He will see His offspring (seed), He will prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.'

The new heaven and the new earth are the fruit of the work of the Messiah: while 'the seed of Israel' will stand before the Eternal, 'all flesh' will also gather there to bow down before Him and every New Moon and Sabbath they will go up to Jerusalem. We find similar thoughts in Isaiah 56:1–8, where the gathering of God's people to-

gether with the foreigners who join the God of Israel is announced with reference to the Sabbath and is realized here in Isaiah 66 in the manner of a vision. Not to mention more, I also think of the beautiful vision of Isaiah 2: 'And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, [...] and all the nations shall come and say 'Come let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths. The law will go out from Zion, the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'

### SABBATH AND SUNDAY

In the kingdom of the Messiah the Sabbath will be observed again, just as in the beginning the creation of heaven and earth resulted in the Sabbath. Until now, the observance of the Sabbath had been commanded only to Israel, so the creation of the new heaven and the new earth will come to completion when 'all flesh' will keep the Sabbath and bow down before God. We can therefore expect that in the Messianic kingdom the Sabbath and the Biblical festivals will have their place according to God's intention (for example, Zechariah 14 speaks about the annually celebrated Feast of Tabernacles).

During the early centuries of Christianity, the church 'lost' the Sabbath or deliberately abolished it and replaced it with the Sunday, and in the 4th century this was fully achieved: Sunday became the Christian Sabbath, and some churches went so far as to transfer aspects of the Jewish Sabbath observance to the Sunday. In the New Testament, there is no 'commandment' to do so. There is every reason for the church of Christ to gather on the day of the resurrection, the first day of the week – but that is not a Sabbath. In recent years there have been quite a few Christians who have started celebrating the seventh day, Saturday, as the Sabbath, especially in so-called Messianic churches. Nekrutman also gives suggestions on this. I believe it is better to wait for the Sabbath of the Messianic age, although I have (not entirely consistent perhaps) preached in such congregations quite often in recent years. In any case, we look forward with great anticipation to the Kingdom of the Messiah!



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