

Biblical Foundations for Responding to Hebrew Roots Sabbatarianism

by Joel Tetreau¹

In recent years, a movement has been growing in various places within North America as well as around the globe.² Quietly yet persistently, there has been a steady increase in the number of individuals who meet around its specific view of biblical belief and experience. The name of this unorganized and decentralized religious philosophy is called the Hebrew Roots Movement (HRM). Often meeting on Friday nights, an expansive network of “Shabbat” fellowship groups has developed. Because there are few published materials on this movement and because the HRM is vast and varied, it is a challenge to explain its beliefs and priorities accurately. A few of the common characteristics include (1) Sabbath worship; (2) a love for and emphasis on OT culture and customs; (3) a renewed appreciation for Passover and other Jewish feasts, and celebrations; (4) some return to Mosaic practices such as a restricted diet based on OT teaching or tradition; (5) a preference for Hebrew language and culture over English and Greek; and (6) a general sense of distrust for the traditional church. The HRM contains everything from evangelicals who continue to be faithful in their evangelical churches and who are simply adding a Friday night Shabbat group to their weekly routine to non-evangelicals who have rejected Jesus, biblical authority, and a view of salvation that is consistent with grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. In many cases, individuals in the HRM have essentially converted to strains of Judaism. Because the variety of beliefs is so vast, it seems helpful to examine the HRM by analyzing what is common to most or all of the groups. If there is an element that brings the HRM together, it is a shared commitment to Sabbatarianism.

Historically, Christians have gravitated to three views regarding the Sabbath.³ *Sabbatarianism* is the view that Christians must continue to worship on and honor the Sabbath, just as it is found in the OT text. *Semi-Sabbatarianism* views Sunday as something of a Christian Sabbath. In this mediating position, many (if not all) of the laws concerning the Sabbath are carried over to the first day of the

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² See Kent and Jodi Smith, *Not Under the Law: Paul and the Truth* (n.p.: Rock Foundation Ranch, 2015). Other HRM advocates include Tim Hegg, *Ten Persistent Questions* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2009); idem, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Tacoma, WA: TorahResource, 2007); J. K. McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah* (McKinney, TX: Messianic Apologetics, 2012); idem, *Torah in the Balance, Volume 1: The Validity of the Torah and Its Practical Life Application* (Richardson TX: TNN, 2003). Compare Patrick McGuire, “Rebuttal to ‘Dangers of the Hebrew Roots Movement written by Tim Chaffey on March 17, 2018’” (March 26, 2018), <http://beityeshua.com/about-us/html>, 5.

³ See Myron Houghton, *Law & Grace* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist, 2011), 169–72. Compare Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, Perspectives Series (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), which includes discussion of Martin Luther’s distinctive view.

week. *Non-Sabbatarianism* in the main suggests that the NT believer and the NT church are not under the OT obligation to “keep the Sabbath.” Thus, the Lord’s Day, while rightly dedicated to corporate worship, does not function as a Sabbath for the NT believer.

This article surveys key biblical passages related to the Sabbath as a foundation for evaluating HRM Sabbatarianism. One must ultimately place these texts within their biblical-theological context. Biblical theology is largely dependent on understanding the progressive nature of revelation. As John Murray writes,

It must be understood that in speaking of progressive revelation, and of “Biblical Theology” as based upon the revelation, the standpoint . . . is to be regarded as the disclosure to man on the part of God of his mind and will; and progressive revelation means that revelation has a history of increasing and accumulating disclosure until it reaches its finale in the manifestation of the Son of God and the inscripturation embodied in the completed New Testament cannon.⁴

In this regard, the overall response to the HRM is simply that while revelation and covenant truth increased from Adam to Noah, and Noah to Abraham, and Abraham to Moses, the giving of revelation did not stop with Moses. It continued from Moses to David, from David to the kings and prophets of the divided nation, and then to a whole new age as God’s people transitioned from the era of Israel to the age of the church after a pause of some 400 years. The HRM as a whole would have us throw the epistemological anchor out the back of the boat with Moses. The problem is that God did not do that.

The literature on the Sabbath frequently mentions two prominent OT passages—Genesis 2:2–3 and Exodus 20:8–11. Additionally, it is difficult to treat the question of the OT Sabbath and the NT church without addressing to some degree the question of OT law and NT living. Primary texts on this topic include Matthew 5, the whole of Galatians, and Colossians 2. On more than one occasion Scripture teaches that if one violates one aspect of the law, all of it is broken (e.g., Jas 2:10). What is also evident from Scripture is that there is an ongoing “law of Christ” that is not directly attached to the law of Moses.⁵ One example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 7:19: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts.”⁶ Gordon Fee explains the shock and awe this would cause a Jewish believer because “not only did circumcision count, it counted for everything.”⁷ One cannot imagine Moses saying anything like that because Moses would *not* say

⁴ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1957), 8.

⁵ See further, Paul Hartog, “The ‘Law of Christ’ in Pauline Theology and New Testament Ethics,” *DBSJ* 26 (2021): 81–101.

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from THE HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1984 by International Bible Society, www.ibs.org. All rights reserved worldwide. Circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic Covenant as well as a requirement of the Mosaic law (Lev 12:3). Joshua instructed all males to be circumcised because “all the people that came out had been circumcised, but all the people born in the wilderness during the journey from Egypt had not” (Josh 5:5). Eric A. White, “Comparing and Contrasting the Sinaitic and New Covenants in the Old Testament” (ThM thesis, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006), 23. More broadly, see Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013).

⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 313.

anything like that. Yet Paul is saying that what matters is keeping a law of God that is higher than circumcision, which was itself one of the most important parts of the Mosaic law. The biblical-theological trajectory moves toward such a perspective of the OT law in the NT age.

Genesis 2:2–3

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

The OT concept of “Sabbath” is connected to the etymology of the verb שָׁבַת, which means “to cease” or “to pause,” as illustrated in Genesis 2:2.⁸ Dressler says that referring to God’s resting on the seventh day as a “creation ordinance” is “not particularly helpful.”⁹ Dressler continues, noting that this verse is the terminus to the section beginning in Genesis 1:1.¹⁰ As opposed to a creation mandate, it is more likely that the Sabbath is a Moses mandate. Schreiner notes, “What is clear is that the command to rest on Sabbath was first given to Israel under the Mosaic Covenant (Exod 20:8–11; 31:12–17; Lev 23:3; Deut 5:12–15).”¹¹

The original Sabbath has more to do with the finished work of God’s creation than his setting up an institutional day of rest. When one reads about God resting on the seventh day, however, it has everything to do with God and nothing to do with man. To state the exegetically obvious, man did nothing; God did everything. Technically, God did everything by doing nothing. Sailhamer notes, “The reader is left with a somber and repetitive reminder of only one fact: God did not work on the seventh day. While little else is recounted, it is repeated three times that God did not work. The author surely intends by this to put the emphasis on God’s ‘rest.’”¹² That will become significantly different under Moses. Israel will do much, by way of not doing much, while keeping the Sabbath.

Various views of the Sabbath as well as the Lord’s Day tie a principle of rest to the idea that God “sanctifies” the last day of the week as something of a creation ordinance. While this writer does not see this as a universal law per se, Genesis 2 does seem to suggest a significant principle of God for those who bear his image. The wisdom of rest seems consistent with Mark 2 (discussed below): “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (v. 27).

⁸ W. Stott, “Sabbath, Lord’s Day,” *NIDNTT*, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter, Devon, UK: Paternoster, 1978) 3:405.

⁹ Harold H. P. Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (1982; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999), 28.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, “Good-bye and Hello: The Sabbath Command for New Covenant Believers,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 162.

¹² John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:38–39.

Exodus 20:8–11

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The technical name for the Sabbath as a holy celebration first appears in Exodus 6:22–30.¹³ The children of Israel had been exposed to a ten-day week while in Egyptian captivity.¹⁴ God explains that Sabbath for them would include an emphasis on “rest” (no doubt reflective of a faith dependency on Yahweh) as well as a “sabbatical celebration.”¹⁵ The Sabbath regulation is then captured in the fourth commandment within the Decalogue of Exodus 20.

Yet Exodus 20 does not exhaust the significance of the Sabbath. For example, Deuteronomy 5:15 makes the Sabbath a memorial of the exodus.¹⁶ More broadly, the Pentateuch portrays an organic connection between a whole system of Sabbaths—not only the weekly Sabbath—and Israel’s calendar that includes various feasts and celebrations.¹⁷ Kurtz explains that the feasts were “expressed formally” by the number seven and “materially by their being separated from the labours, toils, and cares of everyday life for the sanctification and consecration of the whole man to purposes of religion and worship of God.”¹⁸ Kurtz goes on to demonstrate how the feasts were expressed in a threefold expression of the number seven and the concept of Sabbath rest:

The first was by the transference of rest (*mutatis mutandis*) from every seventh day to every seventh year, or the so-called *sabbatical year*, and from that still further to the *jubilee year*, which occurred every *seven times seven years*. . . . In the *Sabbath of days* it was man and beast that were to rest after six periods of labour, and keep sabbath during the seventh. In the *Sabbath of years* it was the field that rested; for what a period of day and night is to man and beast, that a whole year with its summer and winter in the field. In the *Sabbath of weeks of years* it was the altered condition of property, that had been occasioned by the commercial activity of the past jubilee period, which once more returned from a state of fluctuation to one of rest, *i.e.*, from the strange holder to its original possessor.¹⁹

¹³ Dressler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” 24.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Exodus,” in *EBC*, 2:424.

¹⁷ See J. H. Kurtz, *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (1863; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998): 341–48.

¹⁸ Ibid., 342.

¹⁹ Ibid., 342–43.

Kurtz shows how the Sabbath system was especially connected to Passover (which he calls Easter), Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths).²⁰ It also is manifested in the presence of seven annual feasts. The manifestation of the commitment to the Sabbath included not only the above-mentioned rest from work for man and beast but also a doubling of the two daily burnt offerings (Num 28:9–10).²¹ It becomes impossible to separate the weekly Sabbath from this larger Levitical system of law and feasts. All of these laws stand or fall together.

As it relates to corporate worship under the law of Moses, the Sabbath had a clear development throughout the OT. The main theological focus was sacrifice for the expiation of sin connected to the making of atonement.²² In the wilderness, wandering Jews worshipped in the Tabernacle.²³ Eventually, once Israel regained the ark of the covenant, under the preparation of David and the construction of Solomon, Israel had the Temple. As a result of God's people being taken to places far removed from the Temple and Jerusalem, the synagogue system developed. In time the synagogue would exist as a parallel institution to that of the Temple after the exile.²⁴ All of this was foundational to the development of later Judaism after Jerusalem's fall in AD 70.

Leviticus 23 highlights the Feast of Tabernacles, celebrated on the first day of the week after Sabbath (vv. 33–36). The Book of Zechariah ends with the Messianic festival of Tabernacles anticipating the gathering of all nations into Jerusalem to worship God (Zech 14).²⁵ This sounds far more like a multiethnic millennial gathering than merely the corporate worship regulation of a single nation. Concerning the application to the church, Kaiser argues:

The Christian church is required to observe the morality of *time* by setting aside one day in seven to the LORD, but it has chosen to change the *ceremonialization* of that day from the seventh to the first (cf. the early church's use of "the Lord's Day," i.e., a day belonging to the Lord [Rev 1:10] or "On the first day of every week" [1 Cor 16:2]). The sanctity of the first day in honor of God's new deliverance, which the Lord Jesus accomplished in his death and finally in his resurrection, was already signaled in the symbolism of the feasts in Leviticus 23—"the day after the Sabbath" (v. 15); "on the first day hold a sacred assembly" (v. 7); "the first day is a sacred assembly ... on the eighth" (vv. 35–36). Indeed, these were the very feasts [which] pointed forward to the very same event Christians now celebrate on Sunday!"²⁶

²⁰ Kurtz, *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the Old Testament*, 355–81.

²¹ Ibid., 353–54.

²² William D. Barrick, "The Mosaic Covenant," *TMSJ* 10 (1999): 232.

²³ For a description of the construction, organization, and development of the Tabernacle, see Kurtz, *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the Old Testament*, 39–51.

²⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *A Brief History of Sunday: From the New Testament to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 6.

²⁵ Charles L. Feinberg, *The Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1948), 343–44.

²⁶ Kaiser, "Exodus," in *EBC*, 2:424.

Exodus 31:12–17

The Lord commanded Moses to tell the people of Israel, “Keep the Sabbath, my day of rest, because it is a sign between you and me for all time to come, to show that I, the Lord, have made you my own people. You must keep the day of rest, because it is sacred. Whoever does not keep it, but works on that day, is to be put to death. You have six days in which to do your work, but the seventh day is a solemn day of rest dedicated to me. Whoever does any work on that day is to be put to death. The people of Israel are to keep this day as a sign of the covenant. It is a permanent sign between the people of Israel and me, because I, the Lord, made heaven and earth in six days, and on the seventh day I stopped working and rested.

As one considers the instruction given to Israel concerning the Sabbath in Exodus 31, he finds perhaps the clearest indication that the Sabbath was uniquely connected to the Old Covenant. Both Kurtz and Sailhamer mark the section including Exodus 31 as beginning in Exodus 24 with the instruction on the building of the Tabernacle.²⁷ The section starts with Moses and company going up the mountain. It ends when they come off the mountain. Sailhamer sees theological parallelism between the Creation account in Genesis 1–2 and the building of the Tabernacle in Exodus 25–30.²⁸ He especially sees a tie between the Tabernacle and the Garden of Eden.²⁹ At the end of both the Genesis and Exodus accounts, God speaks to the Sabbath.³⁰ Sailhamer ties this together when he suggests,

The analogy between God’s work of Creation and Israel’s construction of the tabernacle is made explicit by the reference to the Sabbath at the close of the narratives. We are reminded that God did his work in six days and rested on the seventh day; now Israel is to do likewise. Though it is clear that this pattern is taken up for all future generations (v.16), in this specific context within the Pentateuch the focus is on the building of the tabernacle. Just as God made the world, so Israel is to make the tabernacle. Like God’s work, it is to be a holy work, and is to be carried out by observing the holy times. . . . As such, the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness is a paradigm

²⁷ See Kurtz, *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the OT*, 39–40; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 298–309.

²⁸ Ibid., 298–99.

²⁹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 299. Also see Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden Story,” in *“I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood”: Ancient Near Eastern Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David T. Tsumura, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 399–405; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2004), 60–66; T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 123–26; For a constructive critique of the cosmic-temple imagery idea, see Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to the New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd, 3–29 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013). Some of the parallels between Creation/Eden and the Tabernacle/Temple include entrance from the east, guardian cherubim, Yahweh “walking about” in its midst, the tree of life (cf. the menorah), God’s representatives, “serving” and “keeping” (Gen 2:15; Num 3:7), and the outflow of life-giving water.

³⁰ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 299.

of all of Israel's work. By setting apart the Sabbath as a sign, the whole of their work was marked as a holy task.³¹

Even if one does not see the same amount of intertextual connection as Sailhamer does in Exodus 31 in relationship to Genesis 1–2, there is no doubt that a unique tie is found between the Sabbath for God's people Israel and the corporate worship practice of the Tabernacle and eventual Temple. A question for those who would insist on a contemporary carry-over of the Sabbath is the real absence of the rest of the section. Where is the Tabernacle? Where are the offerings for the Tabernacle, the ark, the table, the lampstand, the burnt sacrifice, the courtyard, the Levites and their holy garments?

Matthew 5:17–20

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

This passage is one of the most highlighted in discussions that deal with the relationship between the Christian and the Mosaic law.³² That Jesus designated the OT to include the authority of "The Law and the Prophets" was important for a variety of reasons. Lenski and Nolland maintain that a real issue was the presence of Samaritans (and others) who accepted only the five books of Moses as authoritative.³³ Jesus was being accused of not being loyal to the OT in large part because he did not support the legalistic expansions of the OT that were common amongst the religious leaders of his day.³⁴ Lenski and France both assert that Jesus was accused of being something of a minimalist (like the Samaritans) as it relates to the OT.³⁵ Lenski goes on to show that to make the focus of Jesus the Mosaic law as opposed to the whole of the OT Scriptures is to miss the clear point of the passage.³⁶

³¹ Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 309.

³² D. A. Carson highlights three debates within this single text that impact one's view of what the passage means and how it is applied. See "Matthew," in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:141. See also Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 56–57; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 215–26; Grant Osborne, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 179–85; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 177–90.

³³ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 205; Nolland, *Matthew*, 218.

³⁴ Lenski, *Matthew*, 218; France, *Matthew*, 182.

³⁵ Lenski, *Matthew*, 218; France, *Matthew*, 182.

³⁶ Lenski, *Matthew*, 208–9.

A key part of the discussion is found in the latter part of verse 17, where Jesus notes that he did not come to “abolish but fulfill.” Carson says that an example of the idea to “fulfill” is found in Genesis 15:6. Here the OT text remains partially “empty” until Abraham and his actions “fulfill” it.³⁷ It would do injustice to the text to break out the Mosaic law or parts of the Mosaic law. This means that if one believes this text is requiring the continued practice of all the Mosaic law’s teaching on the Sabbath, he will also be required to obey all the Mosaic law in the same way in its civil and ceremonial actions. In other words, one must be willing to stone his rebellious teenager. If one is unwilling to stone his rebellious teenager, he does not believe the law of Moses continues exactly as it was. Lenski explains well the essence of verse 19 as being that all of God’s instructions are part of God’s Word and therefore important: “Some requirements are supreme and essential; others, secondary; and still others least.”³⁸ Keener notes the ultimate target Jesus is pursuing is character, not regulation.³⁹

At the time of Jesus’ ministry, despite all of the stipulations on the Mosaic law down to the smallest detail, it was still a legitimate ordinance. This observation is not surprising when one considers that Jesus was “born under the law” (Gal 4:4). Furthermore, if he was to satisfy the holy demands of a righteous God, Jesus would need to fulfill every aspect of the Mosaic law.⁴⁰ What was not legitimate was the extra man-added stipulations laid on the law by groups such as the Pharisees.⁴¹ This passage says nothing concerning whether or when the Mosaic law would be abrogated.⁴² As other passages indicate, the Mosaic code as a single system would indeed be abrogated based on the fact that Jesus fulfilled it.⁴³ This passage then is simply showing that Jesus did not come to throw out the OT but to obey every command and fulfill every promise.⁴⁴

In the words of Schreiner, “The notion that Matthew emphasizes only the continuity in his view of the law should be rejected.”⁴⁵ Matthew states simply that at this point Jesus had not come to abrogate the OT. Instead of abrogating or doing away with the OT, he fulfilled the OT. In many ways, the OT as a reflection of the Old Covenant would be abrogated. A clear indication that some of the moral components of the Mosaic law are similar to moral components of the New Covenant is the six illustrations that follow in Matthew 5.⁴⁶ The point of the passage is very much a prohibition of antinomianism.

³⁷ Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC*, 8:143.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 57.

⁴⁰ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 163.

⁴¹ France, *Matthew*, 180–81.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Nolland, *Matthew*, 218–19.

⁴⁴ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 57.

⁴⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, 40 Questions Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 161.

⁴⁶ Tasker shows that these six illustrations are not to be taken in complete antithesis between Jesus and Moses, or even Jesus and those who expanded Moses. These are merely showing that the standard of righteousness is even beyond Moses and those who would add to Moses. R. V. G. Tasker, *Matthew*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 64–66.

Jesus is saying that the Law and the Prophets (in other words, God's Word as found in the OT) will always be God's Word down to the smallest pen stroke.⁴⁷ He also is explaining that none of that, including the smallest instructions, must not be brushed aside. This instruction is limited to the immediate dispensation and cannot mean the age of the church because of the legion of passages that teach otherwise.⁴⁸ To make the other passages concerning the law's abrogation fit this passage that admittedly has a complex interpretation is to do injustice to a foundational teaching of hermeneutics, namely, we interpret the unclear passages in light of the challenging ones. Those who insist on interpreting clear passages in the light of unclear passages easily end up violating biblical orthodoxy.⁴⁹

Mark 2:23–28

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

This episode from the life of Jesus is instructive on how Jesus viewed and believers should view the Sabbath.⁵⁰ Jesus and his disciples are traveling on the Sabbath, and as they do so, they pluck the heads of grain and eat their gleanings on the way to their destination. Moore places this event sometime after Jesus' second Passover celebration during his Galilean ministry.⁵¹ The Pharisees accuse Jesus and his disciples of harvesting on the Sabbath. Stein explains that the rub was with Jesus and his disciples "rubbing away the chaff to eat the kernels" consisting of work or harvest on the Sabbath.⁵² In his response, Jesus explains a higher standard of righteousness than the Sabbath.⁵³ This is Jesus himself ("Son of man"), who fulfills the Sabbath and is, in fact, "Lord of the Sabbath" (v. 28).⁵⁴ Jesus, first of all, demonstrates the Kingdom of God and its version of the law is higher than the twisted interpretation of the Pharisees. Moore explains:

⁴⁷ Tasker, *Matthew*, 67.

⁴⁸ Turner, *Matthew*, 167.

⁴⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 193–98.

⁵⁰ Some textual critics believe this passage was somewhat redacted as an apologetic for the early church practice of Sabbath. Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 143.

⁵¹ Mark E. Moore, *The Chronological Life of Christ, Volume 1: From Glory to Galilee* (Joplin, MO: College, 1996), 150.

⁵² Stein, *Mark*, 145.

⁵³ Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 144–46.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Eating out of someone else's grain field was permissible according to OT law (Deut. 23:25). Furthermore, nothing in the OT Sabbath commands would prohibit such an innocent act. The Pharisees' complaint against Jesus' disciples was based on the Oral Law, not written law. According to these traditions the disciples were guilty on a number of counts. By plucking the grain they were guilty of reaping; by rubbing the grain they were guilty of threshing (cf. Exod. 34:21, m. Shabb. 7.2).⁵⁵

Jesus then demonstrates that the "ideal ethic" law is even higher than the actual law of Moses.⁵⁶ He does this by explaining that indeed David violated the letter of Moses as recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1–6.⁵⁷ Jesus' treatment of David and his treatment of the Pharisees demonstrates that not only is the twisted and legalistic pharisaical version of the law not his standard, but even Moses is not the ultimate standard.⁵⁸ Jesus is the new standard. He perfectly fulfills Moses in Sabbath law but takes the Sabbath and becomes "Lord of the Sabbath." Jesus demonstrates how the "ideal ethic" law is much more important and eternal than Moses by healing the man with the withered hand (Mark 3:1–5). The violation of the Sabbath as the leaders of his day viewed Sabbath was the last straw. Mark 3:6 and following note that the Pharisees begin to plot with the Herodians how they might destroy him.

Acts 15

The Bible student who knows passages directly connected to the Sabbath might be surprised that the text of Scripture outlining the Jerusalem Council would be listed. The significance of the Jerusalem Council is not only what the final findings were for the early church leadership of Antioch and Jerusalem, but what they were not.⁵⁹ Significantly, both circumcision and Sabbath-keeping are left out of the continued obligations for these early church saints.⁶⁰ As the apostles, elders, and leaders of the early church deliberate, their verdict for the church now comprising both Jew and Gentile is powerful. No circumcision. No Sabbath, even though Sabbath is mentioned in connection with the practice of preaching Moses in every synagogue in Acts 15:21. The absence of Sabbath as an ongoing imperative for these Gentile believers is stark.⁶¹

Several realities arise from the text as it relates to the Jerusalem Council and its decision on the role of the Mosaic law for an NT congregation that was a known mixture of Jew and Gentile. The

⁵⁵ Moore also notes the clear comparison between Jesus and David. David, king of Israel, provided for his servants, and King Jesus in the line of David also provides for that which is greater than the Temple. *Chronological Life of Christ, Volume 1*, 150.

⁵⁶ Cf. different views on the nature of law in reference to Mark 2 and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew A. Postiff, "An Investigation of the Transitional Nature of the Sermon on the Mount," Fellowship Bible Church (December 12, 2002), <https://www.fbcaa.org/BibleStudies/doctrinal/322SystematicTheologyISermonOnMount.pdf>, 6–9.

⁵⁷ Walter W. Wessel, "Mark," in *EBC*, 8:638.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 365–67.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Gentiles wanting to know more about Torah would have been able to learn more about the Sabbath at the synagogue. F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 312.

Mosaic law was discussed as a single unit largely represented by circumcision. A violation of one law was the same as violating all the law. Metzger notes:

There is a clear understanding that to violate one law is to violate the whole law, which is what James later said in James 2:10, referencing Leviticus 19:18, which was the law that Yeshua referenced in Matthew 22:39 and Paul referenced in Galatians 5:14. Notice as well that James asks why would we want to put a yoke (the Moses law) on the necks of these Gentile believers when even our fathers were not able to bear it?⁶²

As one reads the back and forth at the Jerusalem Council, it is easy to see in the text and around the text the reality that many Jewish believers, especially those who had spent time as Pharisees, had a certain understanding of what salvation meant. No doubt, many of these Jewish believers could explain that there was no hope of salvation without the work of the Messiah. They still had a view of a life of faith that began with circumcision, however.⁶³ James Boice says it well: “If it was necessary for the Gentiles to keep the law of Moses to be saved, then faith is not enough.”⁶⁴

It may well be that the believers who had a Pharisaic background looked at Gentiles coming to faith as if they were coming to a Jewish OT faith. Gentiles who wanted to partake of the covenant community essentially had to act at least part Jewish. But now God wants to call some from every kindred, tribe, and country. The Jerusalem Council then concludes that Gentiles coming to faith in Christ will look nothing like the “proselyte model” of Gentile conversion that was clearly tied to the Mosaic law in the OT.⁶⁵ In the end, those who wanted to demand more conformity to the Mosaic law were told to back off and not “trouble” these Gentile believers. It would be good for modern Hebrew Roots people to consider seriously this instruction. Hebrew Roots followers who degrade evangelicals who do not follow Jewish diet laws, who do not practice Passover, and who do not gather on Friday night are not inferior in their faith or commitment to Christ.

Romans 14:5–6

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Romans is an immensely challenging epistle, especially in the realm of theology. Romans 14 is not the only important passage that deals with the questions of the church and Israel, and the law and the gospel. A significant passage that the writer almost included was Romans 9–11. Concerning these

⁶² John B. Metzger, *The Law, Then and Now: What About Grace?* (Larkspur, CO: Grace Acres, 2019), 95.

⁶³ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 262.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ William J. Larkin, “Acts” in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2006), 12:518–19.

chapters, Schreiner rightly introduces both the complexity and implication of the passage to the salvation of both Jew and Gentile.⁶⁶ In a pivotal passage that takes the reader through some of the same theological ground, the Apostle Paul notes in Romans 14:5–6, “One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special does so to the Lord.” This then answers the accusation by Hebrew Roots Sabbatarians that those worshipping on Sunday are violating the Sabbath as an ongoing creation ordinance.⁶⁷ If indeed the Sabbath was an ongoing creation ordinance, it would continue to be uniquely sacred.⁶⁸ Here the text is clear that one day is not more sacred in the NT economy than the other.⁶⁹ Paul could not say what he says if God’s view were the same as those holding to HRM Sabbatarianism.

Knox Chamblin clarifies the issue when he identifies the one who “considers one day more sacred than another” as a Jewish Christian who “observes special days (including the sabbath) as prescribed in the Mosaic Law.”⁷⁰ This individual is different from the Gentile believer who “considers every day alike.”⁷¹ In a powerful comparison, Paul explains to Jewish Christians that while the Sabbath was set apart under the law of Moses, every day is set apart under the law of Christ.⁷² Murray (who leans Sabbatarian) demonstrates that the text upholds the reality that “these ritual observances were abrogated with the passing away of the ceremonial institution.”⁷³ Chamblin goes on to identify the Jewish Christian whose conscience demands a kind of OT ritual worship as “weak.”⁷⁴

The result here is that Christians may choose to participate in some aspect of a ritual that was under the law of Moses, but they must not demand or press other believers to the same ethic.⁷⁵ This is an important corollary to the doctrine of Christian liberty as explained in Romans 14:1–23 and 1 Corinthians 10:23–33.⁷⁶ Metzger notes, “The biblical basis for this freedom to keep the law is evident in the actions of Paul. . . . His vow in Acts 18:18 is based on the Law of Moses as set out in Numbers 6:2, 5, 9, and 18. His desire to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost in Acts 20:16 is based on Deuteronomy

⁶⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 460–65.

⁶⁷ Hegg represents the HRM position on the Sabbath being a universal and binding creation ordinance. See Tim Hegg, *Ten Persistent Questions*, 37–54.

⁶⁸ Frank Thielman, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 632–33.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Knox Chamblin, “The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton: Crossway, 1988), 196.

⁷¹ John Murray does a masterful job of demonstrating that the category of different “days” is linked to the category of different “foods.” John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 177–78. Even though Murray may prefer a form of Sabbatarianism, he does not mandate it as universal and binding.

⁷² Thielman, *Romans*, 632.

⁷³ See arguments against continued Sabbath imperative for the new economy in Murray, *Romans*, 178.

⁷⁴ Chamblin, “The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ,” 196.

⁷⁵ Metzger, *The Law Then and Now*, 259.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Cf. Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 475–91. Fee shows the clear scope of the 1 Corinthians 10 passage and how Christian liberty is connected to a right view of “everything is permissible” while at the same time being aware of how liberty must never undermine that which is “beneficial.”

16:16.”⁷⁷ This does not mean that the law of Moses becomes a norm. A clear example is the eating of meat among the Corinthian believers. Fee notes that “Paul’s ‘rule’ for everyday life in Corinth was simple, ‘eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience.’”⁷⁸

1 Corinthians 5:7–8

Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

While this passage does not deal squarely with the Sabbath, it does take in the whole Sabbath system as it relates to Passover. HRM believers will suggest that Paul defends the idea of a universal church practice of Passover in 1 Corinthians 5:7. The problem is that Paul uses Passover as a metaphor.⁷⁹ The context of the passage deals with the presence of sin (fornication) that should be purged out (like leaven was for Passover). There is nothing here that connects this directly to the day of Passover celebrated as seen in the OT (Exod 12:6–19; Josh 5:10; Ezek 45:21). The attachment is symbolic.⁸⁰ Keener explains:

Paul argues that the Corinthians should remain unleavened, just as bread does during the Passover season. . . . Paul writes some time before Pentecost (16:8), fifty days after Passover, so Passover could well be fresh on his mind. Jewish people understood the Passover lamb as a sacrifice in this period. . . . Paul believes that the Messiah has come, and that the Messiah was himself the new paschal lamb.⁸¹

Morris notes, “The Christian does not observe the feast according to the standards of the old life he has left. . . . By contrast the Christian’s perpetual festival is kept with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Paul is not referring to Passover as a ceremonial festival that he expects the Corinthians to follow. The point of the metaphor is that Christ himself is our Passover.”⁸² Lowery notes that if there was a meal at all that is connected to this passage it would be the NT cup and bread of communion.⁸³ Fee notes the other aspect of the metaphor is a general call to holiness.⁸⁴ Lenski

⁷⁷ Metzger, *The Law Then and Now*, 259.

⁷⁸ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 480–81.

⁷⁹ Note the treatment of the nature of this Passover metaphor by Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 89–90.

⁸⁰ W. Harold Mare, “1 Corinthians” in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 10:218.

⁸¹ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 470.

⁸² Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 89.

⁸³ David K. Lowery, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1983), 514. Also see Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 218–20.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 220. Also see Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 114–15.

demonstrates how the use of the independent subjunctive connected with other grammatical elements points to the figurative use of “let us keep the feast.”⁸⁵ In other words, the grammar of the text does not naturally point to Christians keeping a literal Passover feast in perpetuity.⁸⁶

Galatians 3:23–25

Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

James Boice calls Galatians the “Magna Carta of Christian liberty.”⁸⁷ Paul will challenge the Galatian believers to help spiritual siblings carry a burden (no doubt in large connection with an entangled sin from the verse before) and so fulfill the law of Christ. Why not the law of Moses? It will be evident that the Apostle Paul is concerned that the Galatian believers were placing their faith in the law of Moses for the sake of sanctification (Gal 3:3).⁸⁸ There is no power in the law of Moses to make even God’s children holy. If there was one passage to answer the HRM view that NT saints while not being justified by the law of Moses are sanctified by the law of Moses, they need not search any further than this epistle to the Galatians.⁸⁹ The HRM defendants turn this passage upside down trying to explain away the clear application to the Mosaic law in general and the regulations of Sabbath in particular.⁹⁰ Moo explains that Paul was concerned for a kind of Christian faith that begins rightly with Christ alone but shifts to a completion by way of the law of Moses.⁹¹ What is needed is the Holy Spirit of God giving life through a different kind of law: the law of Christ.

There is a clear tie between what Luke captures in Acts 15 and what Paul writes in the epistle to the Galatians. The initial reception and conversion to Christianity in Galatia largely by those who had come out of paganism was remarkable. Paul was clearly troubled when he learned that many Galatian believers were swinging into Judaism. Boice notes:

Conservative Jewish teachers who were legalizers had arrived from Jerusalem claiming to be from James, the Lord’s brother, and had begun to teach that Paul was wrong in his doctrine. They contended that Gentiles had to come under the law of Moses to be saved. It was not enough for them to have Christ; they must have Moses too. To grace must be added circumcision.⁹²

⁸⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 222–23.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ James Montgomery Boice, “Galatians” in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10:409.

⁸⁸ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 528–29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ J. K. McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah*, 705.

⁹¹ Douglas Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 184.

⁹² Boice, “Galatians,” in *EBC*, 10:410.

In Galatians, Paul answers essentially three attacks from those who are demanding a return to Mosaic law. First, Paul gives answers to his authority as an apostle.⁹³ Second, Paul explains that the gospel apart from the law of Moses is indeed the right gospel.⁹⁴ Third, Paul explains that the gospel, apart from the law of Moses, leads to a certain moral ethic, namely the law of Christ.⁹⁵ The church is not antinomian. Instead of depending on the law of Moses for holiness via externalism, in this Church age the Holy Spirit produces internal fruit of righteousness (Gal 5:22–23). This kind of internal integrity of the heart was true of both OT and NT saints.

The key passage that explains the temporary role of the Mosaic law is found in Galatians 3:23–25. Explaining this passage, Moo says that the law was a benevolent custodian, and now under grace, we are no longer under the guardianship of Moses.⁹⁶ Campbell adds that in this text Paul uses two images in describing the law of Moses.⁹⁷ First, Paul likens the law to a prison. Second, he uses the “child-custodian relationship” to explain the relationship the law had to the OT believer. Campbell suggests that the NASB rendering of “tutor” is a helpful one in that it captures well the word *paidagōgos*. He notes that this word “is difficult to render into English since there is no exact parallel to this position in modern English.” Another suggested translation is “a strict governess.” Campbell adds, “The pedagogue here was not a ‘schoolmaster’ (KJV) but a slave to whom a son was committed from age six or seven to puberty.”

This single passage in Galatians 3:23–25 is part of a larger argument that Paul is making as to why the Mosaic law is not binding on Galatian believers in the same way it was on those under the Old Covenant.⁹⁸ Campbell sums this up by saying, “It is better then to understand that the Law did not lead us to Christ but that it was a disciplinarian until Christ came. Thus the reign of Law has ended for faith in Christ has delivered believers from the protective custody of the prison and the harsh discipline of the pedagogue.”⁹⁹

The implication then to the HRM is that the Sabbath was a specific part of the “guardian system” that, according to Paul, is no longer in place. Clear proof that the Sabbath requirements were a part of that which is now over is captured in the fact that some Sabbath violations resulted in a death penalty. This then is clearly connected to the law of Moses, which “held captive under the law, imprisoned” (v. 23). In the New Covenant, no one gets stoned for missing church services. Also, in the New Covenant, a “guardian” is not needed in the form of the HRM, neither is it needed in the form of the law of Moses. The Church has Christ. He is sufficient.

⁹³ Boice, “Galatians,” in *EBC*, 10:411.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Moo, *Galatians*, 240–44.

⁹⁷ Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 599–600.

⁹⁸ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 532.

⁹⁹ Campbell, “Galatians,” 600.

Colossians 2:14–17

Having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The believer in Jesus has been rescued through Christ's cross-work from two debts. The first is the spiritual guilt that was charged to our spiritual account because of both the imputation of Adam's sin and our own transgressions.¹⁰⁰ The second liability was a direct assault from the enemy (and his kingdom) against our soul.¹⁰¹ The Cross dispatched the two of them equally. Wright explains, "God not only 'canceled' this 'written code,' he *took it away*, (by) *nailing it to the cross*."¹⁰² Vaughan notes that the interpretation of verse 15 is a disputed one.¹⁰³ The writer believes that the "powers and authorities" dispatched at the Cross are a reference to Satan and his demonic host. This view fits well with Paul's epistle to the Ephesians when he explains, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12).¹⁰⁴

It is unfathomable that the next verses (Col 2:16–17) would appear in the Scriptures if it were God's will for his NT church to meet together on Sabbath. Paul clearly explains that no portion of the church can judge any other portion of the church in relationship to Moses' regulations on diet, festivals, or Sabbath. Paul explains these were merely functioning as a "shadow." Schreiner notes, "The word for 'shadow' (*skia*) that Paul uses to describe the Sabbath is the same term the author of Hebrews used to describe Old Testament sacrifices. . . . The argument is remarkably similar to what we see in Colossians: both contrast elements of the law as a shadow with the 'substance' (*soma*, Col 2:17) or the 'form' (*eikona*, Heb 10:1) found in Christ."¹⁰⁵

Some within the HRM argue that "Sabbath" in Colossians 2:16 is not a reference to the weekly Sabbath gatherings but to the wider Sabbath calendar. Hegg understands that Sabbath here refers to the extra demands made by the false teachers being addressed in Colossians.¹⁰⁶ McKee claims that to apply this passage as has been understood by the majority of expositors is to take the passage out of context.¹⁰⁷ He goes on to argue that the judging is actually happening by those who insist that they

¹⁰⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 166.

¹⁰¹ David W. Pao, *Colossians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 170–74.

¹⁰² N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 113.

¹⁰³ Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:202.

¹⁰⁴ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 229–35.

¹⁰⁵ Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, 212.

¹⁰⁶ Hegg, *Ten Persistent Questions*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah*, 459.

are not under obligation to OT food, Sabbath, and feast laws.¹⁰⁸ But to cite Schreiner again, “The most prominent day in the Jewish calendar was the weekly Sabbath. . . . Perhaps sabbatical years are included here, but the weekly Sabbath should not be excluded, for it would naturally come to the mind of both Jewish and Gentile readers.”¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, Lincoln demonstrates this passage is communicating that a significant “transition has taken place from an old economy to the new.”¹¹⁰ He continues, “That Paul without any qualification can relegate Sabbaths to shadows certainly indicates that he does not see them as binding and makes it extremely unlikely that he could have seen the Christian first day as a continuation of the Sabbath.” Concerning Colossians 2:16–17, Strickland points out:

Paul discusses the controversy in the church surrounding Sabbath observance several times and never prescribes obedience to the Sabbath command or even to Sunday as the recipient of the Sabbath shift (Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10–11; Col. 2:16–17). Not only is it not repeated, but the church does not observe the seventh day of the week. Very early in history the church worshiped on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). It is argued that the permanent obligation of Sabbath observance stems from the fact that conformance was prescribed at the creation. Specifically, the Sabbath was instituted by the example of God himself and is one of the creation ordinances prescribed for people. Appeal to an “ordinance” is based on Genesis 2:2–3. Yet these verses do not prescribe or command adherence to the Sabbath for rest. Thus the principle of weekly Sabbath rest cannot be based on the so-called creation ordinance. Further, the institution of the Sabbath rest comes with the travel to the promised land (Ex. 16:23) and the Sinai legislation (Ex. 20:11).¹¹¹

Verses 16–17 are tied to verses 14–15 by “therefore.” Vaughan explains, “In light of what Christ did, the Colossians were to let no one ‘judge’ their standing before God based on their observance or nonobservance of the regulations of the Mosaic law.”¹¹² Vaughan continues, “In such matters the principle of Christian liberty comes into play (cf. Gal 5:1).”¹¹³ To safeguard using liberty in a way that is careless to others with hard backgrounds or an extra sensitive conscience, “Paul insists that under some circumstances Christian freedom should be voluntarily limited by one’s respect for the tender conscience of a weaker brother (cf. Rom 14:11ff.; 1 Cor 8:1ff.).”¹¹⁴

Once again, the HRM levels judgments on individuals and congregations that do not agree with its view of diet, festivals, and Sabbath. When local churches are privileged to receive into the

¹⁰⁸ McKee, *The New Testament Validates Torah*, 459–60.

¹⁰⁹ Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, 212.

¹¹⁰ A. T. Lincoln, “From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 367.

¹¹¹ Wayne G. Strickland, “Response to Willem A. VanBemeren,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel*, Counterpoints: Bible & Theology, ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 81. Strickland is representing a common dispensationalist view of the law and the gospel, and VanGemeran a common Reformed view.

¹¹² Vaughan, “Colossians,” in *EBC*, 11:203.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

membership Christian believers who come from a Jewish background, the teaching of Colossians and Romans should result in patience as these dear converts work through the Hebrew traditions they grew up with. It is as equally a violation of Christian liberty to demand an immediate abandonment of participating in Passover as it is to expect that NT Christians in an instant give up a Christmas or Easter Sunday celebration.

Hebrews 7

Various passages in Hebrews relate to the Sabbath issue. For one, Hebrews 4:1–11 urges believers to enter God’s rest. As VanDrunen says, “Hebrews 2 and 4 portray human beings as created not to work indefinitely in this world but to image God by working and then joining him in his kingly rest.”¹¹⁵ Yet Hebrews 4 presents the believer’s rest not as a weekly Sabbath but as a permanent rest in Christ.¹¹⁶

Additionally, in Hebrews 7:11–12 the writer puts an explanation to the reality that the Levitical code and priesthood were temporary: “If perfection could have been attained through the Levitical priesthood—and indeed the law given to the people established that priesthood—why was there still need for another priest to come, one in the order of Melchizedek, not in the order of Aaron? For when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also.” Keener explains, “The new and superior priesthood clearly promised in Scripture makes the old priesthood obsolete.”¹¹⁷ To make the point one step clearer, Hebrews 7:18 declares, “The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect).” So, this new priesthood (of Melchizedek) is connected to a new law (the law of Christ) that sets aside the old priesthood (Aaron) and the old law (Moses).

The point here is that when one does not have Aaron and his priesthood (and we do not have Aaron or his priesthood—we have Jesus as the Priest-King), then he does not have Moses. Without Moses, there is no Sabbath. The Sabbath was connected to God’s covenant with Israel (Exod 31:16–17; Ezek 20:12; Neh 9:14) through the law of Moses and the priesthood of Aaron. Dressler notes, “As a sign of the covenant the Sabbath can only be meant for Israel, with whom the covenant was made. It has a ‘perpetual’ function, i.e., for the duration of the covenant and derives its importance and significance from the covenant itself.”¹¹⁸

Schreiner explains, “The Sabbath was given to Israel as a covenant sign. . . . The sign of the Noahic covenant is the rainbow (Gen. 9:8–17) and the sign of the Abrahamic covenant is circumcision (Gen. 17).”¹¹⁹ Upon retrospect, one notes in Exodus 34:27–28 that the Mosaic Covenant was made with Israel in the Sinai. This section is immediately followed up with the specific instruction of the Sabbath for Israel and only Israel. As this is the second giving of the Decalogue, it is instructive that the details

¹¹⁵ David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 74.

¹¹⁶ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 161.

¹¹⁷ Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 650.

¹¹⁸ Dresler, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” 30.

¹¹⁹ Schreiner, *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*, 209.

are even more “heavily balanced towards proper worship practices.”¹²⁰ The eternal and universal covenant is not expanded to include the church until the New Covenant.¹²¹

Conclusion

In case after case, the Hebrew Roots view of the Sabbath has to explain away the straightforward implications of the key passages noted above. The Sabbath was embedded directly in the law of Moses. The law of Moses was connected to the priesthood of Aaron. NT saints are not connected to the Levitical high priesthood but rather to Jesus, whose priesthood is of the Melchizedekian order. The Sabbath, circumcision, and the rest of the law were merely a shadow that would be fulfilled in Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath. The NT saint, because he has been released from the law of Moses as a “tutor,” has been released from the Sabbath regulations.¹²² In the words of VanGemenen, “The Mosaic administration, therefore, was never intended to be an end to itself. It prepared people for the coming of Jesus Christ. ‘If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me’ (John 5:46).”¹²³ Instead of following the Old Covenant Sabbath laws, New Covenant Christians can rest and worship based on conscience.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 118.

¹²¹ Compton argues for a similar view outside of progressive covenantalism. See Bruce Compton, “Dispensationalism, the Church and the New Covenant.” *DBSJ* 8 (2003): 3–48.

¹²² Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 107–9, 198–218.

¹²³ Willem A. VanGemenen, “The Non-Theonomic Reformed View,” in *Five Views of Law and Gospel*, 27.

¹²⁴ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 118.