

# VERDICT

Vol. 1 No. 5

*An informational service to Verdict contributors*

September 1982

## A Digest of the Sabbath Question

Robert D. Brinsmead

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations  
are from the New International Version.

The following summary presents the principal points of the Sabbatarian question that were considered by Verdict in 1981:

- 1. The New Testament must always remain the Christian's final authority.** That which is declared to us through Jesus and his apostles is God's final word (John 1:1; Heb. 1:1, 2). The Old Testament is also God's word, but it is not his final word. That which was binding under the Old Testament (covenant) age is not necessarily binding under the New Testament (covenant) age.
- 2. Biblical covenants have their special seals or signs.** The rainbow was the sign of the Noachic covenant (Gen. 9:12, 13). Circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:10; Rom. 4:11). The Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic (old) covenant (Exod. 31:16, 17; Ezek. 20:12). The Holy Spirit is the seal or sign of the new covenant (Acts 2:1-4; 19:2; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Nowhere does the New Testament even imply that the Sabbath is the sign which distinguishes God's people under the new covenant.
- 3. The New Testament nowhere commands Christians to observe either the seventh or the first day of the week as a Christian Sabbath.** [1](#)
- 4. There is no biblical record of any command to keep the Sabbath until the time of Moses.** Neither is there any biblical record of people keeping the Sabbath until it was given to Israel.
- 5. Genesis 2:2, 3 simply says that God rested on the "seventh day" after his work of creation had ended.** Since the creation was finished, God's rest was to be ongoing. Thus, the "seventh day" of Genesis 2:2, 3 was open-ended. Unlike the preceding six days, the seventh day was not bounded by evening and morning. [2](#) Genesis mentions no creation ordinance commanding man to rest. [3](#) Neither does it record any instance of man keeping a weekly Sabbath before the Exodus.
- 6. The creation ordinances of marriage and dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-30) were repeated to Noah, the new father of the postdiluvian world (Gen. 9:1-11).** It is significant that Noah was given no command to keep the Sabbath--further evidence that Sabbath observance was not a creation ordinance. From ancient times the Jews called the commandments given to Noah the "Noachian commandments." They considered these commandments binding on all men. Usually listed as seven, the Sabbath commandment was never included among them. [4](#)

**7. When God made a promissory covenant with Abraham, God gave him the sign of circumcision.** Deuteronomy 4:13 and 5:2, 3 state that the Ten Commandment covenant (with its Sabbath sign) was not given to the fathers of the Hebrew nation. This covenant came 430 years after God first announced his covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:17).

**8. The Sabbath was given to Israel** (Neh. 9:13, 14). Although it was patterned after the creation model, this twenty-four-hour rest was obviously not identical to God's permanent rest which followed a finished creation (Gen. 2:2, 3; Heb. 4:3, 4, 10). The Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic, Sinaitic or old covenant (Exod. 31:16, 17; Ezek. 20:12). Most scholars now agree that there is no evidence of a Sabbath institution outside Israel.<sup>5</sup>

**9. The Old Testament nowhere indicates that Gentile nations should keep the Sabbath.** Although the sins of Gentile cities and nations are often specified by the prophets, only Israel was ever chided for breaking the Sabbath. Paul appears to follow this Old Testament tradition in Romans 1. Although he lists about twenty-two Gentile sins, he does not mention Sabbath-breaking.

**10. Orthodox Judaism, both before and after Christ, taught that Gentiles should keep the Sabbath only if they were Jewish proselytes.** <sup>6</sup>(See also Isa. 56:6, 7.) Both ancient and modern Judaism have consistently taught that while the Noachian commandments were for all men, the Torah (including the Sabbath) was for Israel alone.<sup>7</sup>

**11. As a Jew, Jesus lived under the institutions of the old covenant.** He was circumcised and generally <sup>8</sup>kept the Sabbath, the Passover and the other old-covenant festivals. He even told a healed leper to offer the sacrifice commanded in the Law (Luke 5:14). Nothing in the entire Law could cease to be binding until Jesus fulfilled it all by his death on the cross (Matt. 5:17-19;

John 19:30; Rom. 3:21-25). But on the even of his death Jesus instituted the new covenant and sealed it by his sacrificial death (Matt. 26:27, 28; Luke 22:20). It took the new-covenant community some time under the leading of the Holy Spirit, however, before it could grasp the full implications of life under a new covenant (see John 16:12-15).

**12. Scholars today have reached a remarkable consensus in reconstructing the developing history of the church in apostolic times.** <sup>9</sup> The following historical points are a summary of this broad consensus:

- a. The first Christian community arose in Jerusalem and was composed of Aramaic-speaking Jews. They continued their Jewish way of life -- i.e., they worshiped at the temple, circumcised their children and kept the Jewish festivals (including the weekly Sabbath) <sup>10</sup> Although their adherence to the Law commended them to their fellow Jews (Acts 2:46, 47), it made any Gentile mission impossible. As long as the Jewish Christians adhered strictly to the Law, they were a shut-door community with respect to non-Jews.

b. The Hellenist Jewish Christians, however, were not as conservative. [11](#) Apparently following the more radical thought of the martyr Stephen, they ventured to take the gospel beyond Jewry [12](#) -- first to the Samaritans, then to the Ethiopian eunuch, and finally to the Gentiles. In order to take such steps, these Christians had to ignore the Jewish customs. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Peter also ignored the Jewish customs by associating with Gentiles in the home of Cornelius (Acts 10; 11:2, 3). A flourishing community of Gentile believers was soon established at Antioch (Acts I 1). These Gentile Christians lived without reference to the Jewish Law. [13](#) From a Jewish standpoint there was nothing improper or unorthodox about this, for it was a well-established tradition in Judaism that pious Gentiles should only be expected to keep the Noachian commandments. [14](#) Believers were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26) because their Torah-free existence identified their religion as something separate from Judaism. [15](#)

c. After the Gentile mission had flourished at Antioch for about ten years (even to the point of becoming a base for Paul's worldwide mission), some of the Jewish Christians from the mother church at Jerusalem became apprehensive about the Torah-free Gentile mission. They began to urge that Gentile Christians should become Jewish proselytes - meaning that they should be circumcised and thereby undertake to keep the Torah (Acts 15:1, 5). [16](#)

The move to compel Gentile believers to be circumcised and to keep the Torah Law was a great step backward. It was contrary to the leading of the Holy Spirit for the previous ten years. It even contradicted an established tradition that Gentiles need only keep the Noachian commandments. [17](#) But these Jewish Christians wanted to confine Christianity within Judaism. Had they succeeded, the church would have remained (or died) as a mere sect of Judaism.

The issue, however, was decided at the Jerusalem conference about A.D. 49 (see Acts 15). The apostle recognized the Holy Spirit's *fait accompli*. Hence it was not necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised or to keep the Torah Law. They need only observe the Noachian commandments or a few regulations from the Torah Law which would make it easier for Jewish believers to fellowship with them. Scholarly opinion is divided on whether the three or four requirements imposed on the Gentiles by the Jerusalem council were Noachian commandments or a compromise of minimal Mosaic requirements. [18](#) Nevertheless it is clear that the Jerusalem conference officially recognized the Law-free Gentile mission. [19](#)

d. It was Paul who gave theological justification for the Torah Law-free mission to the Gentiles--i.e.:

(1) In Galatians Paul showed that the age of Moses and the Torah Law had been superseded by the age of Christ and the Spirit. The Law had acted as a custodian and a guardian until the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19, 24, 25; 4:1-4). Now that Christ had come, God's people were no longer under the supervision of the Law (Gal. 3:25; 5:18). Instead of living under the Law of Moses, the Galatians should live under the law

of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

(2) In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul showed that the Ten Commandment covenant had been superseded by the more glorious ministration of the Spirit under the new covenant.

(3) In Ephesians 2:14, 15, Paul said that the Torah Law with its commandments and regulations acted as a dividing wall of partition and caused hostility between Jew and Gentile. But Christ had abolished this barrier by his death on the cross.

(4) In 1 Corinthians 9:20-23, Paul declared that he did not live under the Torah Law (except in a voluntary way), yet he was still subject to God's law in the sense that he lived under the law of Christ.

e. The three requirements which particularly characterized a Jew living under the Torah were circumcision, the food laws and the Sabbath.<sup>20</sup> In the Pauline letters there is evidence that Paul was in conflict with Jewish Christians who were urging Gentiles to practice these requirements. Paul was vehemently opposed to those who wanted to impose these regulations on the Gentiles.

(1) In Colossians 2:16, 17, he declared:

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.

(2) To the Gentile Christians he wrote:

You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.--Gal. 4:10, 11.

(3) To the churches in Rome, which were composed of both Jews and Gentiles, Paul wrote:

One man [context: Jewish Christians whose faith is weak] considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.--Rom. 14:5.<sup>21</sup>

Except for a few Sabbatarians, scholars today are agreed that these three scriptures address the matter of Sabbath-keeping. This was also the unanimous position taken by the early church fathers and the Reformers.

f. Paul never wrote to the Gentile churches about Sabbath-keeping except in a negative way. Paul's silence on the matter of urging the young churches to keep the Sabbath cannot be regarded as an indication that he or his converts took the obligation for granted. The new Gentile communities had no background in Sabbatarianism. How astonishing it would be for Paul to write so many letters with so much practical instruction on living the Christian life and not mention Sabbath-keeping if it were an obligation for Gentile Christians! How strange that these new converts were warned against committing all kinds of sins (e.g., Paul

lists fifteen sins in Galatians 5:19-21, eighteen sins in 2 Timothy 3:2-4 and many more in other places) but Sabbath-breaking is never mentioned!

g. In an age when the Roman world had no weekly rest day, there is no historical evidence that Christians suffered hardship or persecution because of the Sabbath. Many Christians were slaves who had to work every day of the week. [22](#)

**13. According to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, God's people in the age of the new covenant would be identified by loyalty to Christ** (Acts 11:26; Rom. 10:9), possession of the Spirit (Acts 19:2; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; 5:18) and love for one another (John 13:34).

**14. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two Christian ordinances or sacraments that have been universally identified with Christianity.**

**15. The New Testament is not concerned with *holy days* any more than it is concerned with *holy places*** (see John 4:19-24) or "clean" food (Mark 7:19; Rom. 14:1-5, 14, 20; 1 Cor. 8:8; 10:23-27; Col. 2:16, 17; 1 Tim. 4:3-5). To emphasize these questions is to distort the spirituality and ethical concerns of the New Testament (see Matt. 25:31-46; Gal. 5:6).

**16. Under the old covenant God sanctified a particular nation for service, a particular place for worship, particular food as "clean" and particular days for rest.**

Under the new covenant there is a catholicizing or universalizing of the particular. No longer are people from one nation designated as holy (Acts 10:28, 34); no longer is one geographical site set aside for the worship of God (John 4:19-24); no longer is there a distinction between religiously "clean" and "unclean" food (Mark 7:19; Rom. 14:14, 20); and no longer is there a distinction of days (John 5:16, 17; Rom. 14:5; Col. 2:16, 17). Christ does not desacralize people, places, food and time, but he redeems all and asserts his Lordship over all (1 Cor. 10:26).

The idea of designating one day as holy is just as irrelevant in this new age of the Spirit as designating one place as holy. Such particularism belongs to the old-covenant age and is contrary to the catholic spirit of the Christian age.

**17. Christ and his apostles imposed no regulations on the church universal which would create unnecessary hardships or erect unnecessary barriers for people in any place or time.** The New Testament commandments are not addressed to a single nation living in Palestine. They are adapted to the needs of people living in a wide diversity of nations and cultures. They reach across the span of millennia and are

practical in a modern, space-age society. The gospel must reach all these people where they are--slaves in the Roman empire, soldiers then and now, people in government service then and now, airline pilots, policemen, multitudes of people in essential services and those who must live in cultures not oriented to a particular rest day. The Christian faith must be livable any time or place. Those who experience hardship because of Sabbath regulations are doubtlessly sincere in their desire to serve God, but they are ill-informed and bear burdens that God has not laid on the universal church.

**18. The Gentile Christians were free to choose their time of common assembly.**

They were not bound by Old Testament commandments in this matter. Certainly, no New Testament commandments were imposed upon them in respect to the observance of days (Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10, 11; Col. 2:16).

Evidence suggests that the Gentile Christians chose the first day of the week for their time of common assembly probably quite early in the first century (Acts 20:7). By the end of the first century Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, wrote quite naturally about Christians meeting for common assembly on the first day of the week. [23](#) Likewise, *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (c. A.D. 80-120) [24](#) *The Epistle of Barnabas* (c. A.D. 120-150) [25](#) Pliny's letter to the Emperor Trajan (c. A.D. 111-112) [26](#) and Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (c. A.D. 155) [27](#) all testify to the general practice of Christians assembling on the first day of the week. These documents bear no evidence of any recent innovation in this assembling, but they all suggest a well-established practice. There is no evidence that the practice of meeting on the first day of the week was initiated in Rome. [28](#) Rather, it is more likely to have begun at Antioch early in the Gentile mission. [29](#) From Antioch the practice spread to Rome and to the entire Catholic church.

**19. The fathers of the early church--from Ignatius to Augustine--may have disagreed on some things, and their authority is certainly not canonical, but their unanimity on the Sabbath question is quite striking.**

a. All were united in believing that the Old Testament Sabbath institution was abolished along with circumcision and the sacrifices. These were regarded as shadows of Christ and his benefits (Col. 2:16, 17; Heb. 10:1-3).[30](#)

b. Just as spiritual circumcision replaced the physical, and spiritual sacrifices were offered in place of animals, so the fathers taught that Christians enter the better rest of Hebrews 4:3, 9-11 and therefore keep the perpetual Christian Sabbath.[31](#)

c. The first day of the week was unanimously accepted by the fathers as the day of common assembly.[32](#) We should also remember that these were the same men who decided what books should be included in the New Testament canon. They fought Gnosticism, opposed Arianism and preserved the doctrine of the Trinity. It is true that some errors and distortions crept into the church through their teachings, yet we should be reluctant to oppose those points on which there was unanimity, for such unity is generally a sign of the Holy Spirit's leading.

**20. It was only after the concept of a perpetual gospel rest began fading from the church that the idea of a Sunday Sabbath was gradually introduced by the Roman Church,** beginning in the fourth century and continuing to the twelfth century. Making Sunday into a Christian Sabbath was a kind of Christian Judaism. [33](#)

**21. In summary, the primitive Jewish Christians at Jerusalem continued to keep the Sabbath** (on this point all notable Protestant, Catholic and Jewish historians are now agreed); the Gentile Christians did not. [34](#)

**22. When the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) acknowledged that Gentile Christians were free from the Law, the same freedom was implicitly given to Jewish Christians.** [35](#) The subsequent history of Jewish Christianity is a vital key in the task of discerning the face of the primitive church. Jewish Christianity divided into what one scholar calls "Judaic" and "Judaistic" Christianity. [36](#)

a. "Judaic" Christians were the orthodox Jewish Christians like the Jerusalem church, which was sympathetic to the Gentile mission in spite of initial misgivings. After their flight from Jerusalem to Pella in A.D. 62, and after they began to be expelled from Jewish synagogues (c. A.D. 70), [37](#) these Jewish Christians were more inclined to identify with Gentile Christianity. [38](#)

b. "Judaistic" Christians were those Jewish Christians who developed the notoriously heretical Jewish Christianity of the second century. These clung tenaciously to the Torah Law as necessary for their salvation and, by so doing, became increasingly isolated and, finally, completely cut off from the great church. [39](#) Yet in Judaistic Christianity a distinction must be made between two branches:

(1) Some Jewish Christians continued to keep the Law, including the Sabbath, as necessary for themselves but not necessary for Gentile Christians. These were called the Nazarenes. Justin Martyr (A.D. 114-165) was prepared to recognize that the Nazarenes were Christians, although he admitted that some Gentile Christians would not. **The Nazarenes, like all who remained Jewish Christians, were strongly apocalyptic and held a defective Christology.** They increasingly became a pitifully weak sidestream of the Christian movement. [40](#)

(2) There were also Jewish Christians who not only kept the Law and the Sabbath themselves, but insisted that all Christians must do the same. These were known as Ebionites. Their hero was James; their enemy, Paul. **They were ascetic (vegetarians, teetotalers) and apocalyptic, and they denied the divinity of Christ.** They combined Gnostic ideas with their Judaistic tendencies. They were denounced by the church fathers and were regarded as outside the bounds of the Christian church. **The Ebionite movement finally became lost in history, and its remnants were absorbed into Islam.** [41](#)

**23. The history of Jewish Christianity demonstrates the futility of a synthesis between Judaism (adherence to the Torah Law) and Christianity.** In the end Jewish Christians were more Jewish than Christian--in fact, not Christian at all.<sup>42</sup>

**24. The apocryphal gospels of Jewish Christianity in the second century advocated the keeping of the Law and the Sabbath, while the apocryphal gospels of Gentile Christianity (including those of a Jewish background who had joined the great church) denounced the keeping of the Law and the Sabbath.**<sup>43</sup> Paul was also denigrated by Jewish Christians because he was held responsible for freeing the Christian movement from the Torah Law.<sup>44</sup>

The study of Jewish Christianity starkly reveals that while heretical Jewish Christianity remained Sabbatarian, the Gentile church was decidedly non-Sabbatarian. The notion that early Gentile Christianity was ever Sabbatarian is inexcusable in light of the historical evidence available today.

**25. In view of the biblical data and the evidence of early church history, we can make the following summary of Sabbatarianism:**

**a. Those who have traditionally advocated Sunday Sabbatarianism or Sunday sacredness have been wrong on two counts:**

(1) They have been wrong in claiming that the first Christian community or its apostles in Jerusalem abandoned the ancient Sabbath in favor of a Sunday Sabbath. No creditable scholar will accept that thesis today.

(2) They have been wrong in claiming that the Bible designates Sunday as a Christian holy day or Sabbath. This is contrary to the principle enunciated in Romans 14:5, Colossians 2:16 and Hebrews 4:3, 9-11, and it also contradicts the historical evidence on primitive Gentile Christianity.

**b. Those who have advocated that Christians should observe the ancient Jewish seventh-day Sabbath have also been wrong on two counts:**

(1) They have been wrong in claiming that all early Christians kept the seventh-day Sabbath, for it is clear that the Gentile church was never Sabbatarian.

(2) They have been wrong in claiming that Christians began meeting on the first day of the week only after the church fell into the great apostasy.

Both forms of Sabbatarianism erred in presuming that the primitive Christians had a uniform pattern of worship. We now know that there was great diversity between Jewish and Gentile Christianity. Christians were forbidden to judge and condemn one another in respect to their diversity in forms of worship. It was sufficient that



they be united in their faith in Christ, their Redeemer and Lord. ***The gospel was the only genuine testing and uniting truth in apostolic Christianity.*** [45](#)

***"If anywhere the day [Sabbath] is made holy for the mere day's sake, if anywhere any one sets up its observance on a Jewish foundation, then I order you to work on it, to ride on it, to dance on it, to feast on it, to do anything that shall remove this encroachment on Christian liberty"***

***(Martin Luther, Table Talk, quoted in Bampton Lectures, p. 166, by Dr. Hessey).***

## **Recommended Reading**

We recommend to our readers a new book entitled *From Sabbath to Lord's Day.' A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*. Written by seven Christian scholars and edited by one of them, D. A. Carson, this work is already regarded by many as the definitive and probably classical work on the subject. It has decided the convictions of many former ardent Sabbatarians, providing a decisive treatment of this important topic.

### **Notes and References**

1. Luther's comment is therefore unchallengeable: "Throughout the New Testament we do not find a single place where we Christians are commanded to celebrate the Sabbath" (Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: An Anthology* [Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959], 3:1329).
2. The open-ended nature of the "rest" of Genesis 2:2, 3 is now widely acknowledged by biblical scholars. See G. C. D. Howley, gen. ed., *A Bible Commentary for Today: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1979), p. 136. See also D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, eds., *The New Bible Commentary Revised* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 83.
3. Gerhard Von Rad therefore comments on Genesis 2:1ff: "To talk of an 'institution' of the Sabbath would be a complete misapprehension of the passage. For there is no word here of this rest being imposed on man or assigned to him" (Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, *The*

*Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions* [Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1962], pp. 147-48).

4. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says: "LAWS, NOACHIAN: Laws which were supposed by the Rabbis to have been binding upon mankind at large even before the revelation at Sinai, and which are still binding upon non-Jews. The term Noachian indicates the universality of these ordinances, since the whole human race was supposed to be descended from the three sons of Noah, who alone survived the Flood .... Basing their views on the passage in Gen. ii. 16, they declared that the following six commandments were enjoined upon Adam: (1) not to worship idols; (2) not to blaspheme the name of God; (3) to establish courts of justice; (4) not to kill; (5) not to commit adultery; and (6) not to rob .... A seventh commandment was added after the Flood--not to eat flesh that had been cut from a living animal (Gen. ix. 4). Thus, the Talmud frequently speaks of 'the seven laws of the sons of Noah,' which were regarded as obligatory upon all mankind, in contradistinction to those that were binding upon Israelites only .... He who observed the seven Noachian laws was regarded as a domiciled alien .... as one of the pious of the Gentiles, and was assured of a portion in the world to come" *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Isidore Singer, managing ed. [New York: KTAV Publishing House, n.d.], 7:648-49). See also W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 4th ed., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 113-16; F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 185-86.

5. "No real traces of the Sabbath can be found outside Israel" (H. L. Ellison, art. "Sabbath," *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, J. D. Douglas, gen. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Corp., 1974], p. 870).

6. W. D. Davies says that it was always recognized "by Judaism that the whole of the Law should not be demanded of the Gentiles" (Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 348). Alfred Edersheim points out that although a small group of Jewish extremists contended that Gentiles must keep the Law in the Messianic age, this was not the teaching of the orthodox rabbis. They taught that it was sufficient for Gentiles to keep the Noachian commandments (see Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Part I [reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971], pp. 764ff).

7. *The Book of Jubilees* (a Jewish pseudepigraphal work of the second century B.C.) says that "the Creator of all things.., did not sanctify all peoples and nations to keep Sabbath thereon, but Israel alone" ("The Book of Jubilees," in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, ed. R. H. Charles, vol. 2, *Pseudepigrapha* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913], p. 15). The historic position of Judaism is that "the Sabbath is a sign between God and Israel alone" (*The Jewish Encyclopedia*, 5:623). Some rabbis have even taken the position that "a Gentile observing the Sabbath deserves death" (p. 623).

Berger and Wyschogrod have given an example of modern Jewish theology: "The Torah and its 613 commandments are intended only for Jews .... The Talmud speaks of the laws that are binding for gentiles as the Noachide commandments, basing itself on Genesis 9:1-17. ... Judaism believes that a gentile who obeys the Noachide commandments has a place in the world to come" (David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod, *Jews and "Jewish Christianity"* [New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1978], pp. 60-63).

8. We say "generally" because Christ asserted his authority above the laws of Moses (see Matt. 5). As Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), he was free to ignore Sabbatical regulations in the interest of the kingdom of God (see John 5:17, 18).

9. This has been one of the most exciting areas of biblical research in the latter half of the twentieth century. In his definitive work Jean Daniélou comments "how marvellously it has become possible in the last ten years [writing in 1964], after seventeen centuries of obscurity, to begin to discern once again the features of the unknown face of the Primitive Church" (Jean Daniélou, *A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea*, vol. 1, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964], p. 5).

The subject of Jewish Christianity in the early church has been a particularly fruitful area of research and has been vital to an understanding of the New Testament. See C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), p. 165.

This vital information on Jewish Christianity has only been recovered in recent years. This information has an important bearing on the question of Sabbatarianism. The old Sabbatarian arguments were based on the faulty historical premise that there was a monolithic unity in the forms of worship in the primitive church. For example, in their book, *History of the Sabbath and First Day of the Week*, Part 2, *The Sabbath in History*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Assn., 1912, p. 445), J. N. Andrews and L. R. Conradi deny that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians existed as separate parties in the early church. These authors built their case for Sabbatarianism on the myth of an ideal primitive church in which only one ideal pattern of worship existed. That myth is now forever exploded, for it is well documented that great diversity existed in the primitive Christian movement. See Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, pp. 153-55; James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 1-7; F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1971); Robert L. Wilken, *The Myth of Christian Beginnings: History's Impact on Belief* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1971).

The recovered history of early Christianity, and especially of Jewish Christianity, illuminates the Sabbatarian debate and calls many of the old arguments into question. We suggest that it is impossible to review the available historical evidence of the early church and conclude that the New Testament supports any kind of Sabbatarianism.

10. On the broad consensus that the primitive Jewish Christians in Jerusalem continued to keep the Sabbath, see Bruce, *New Testament History*, p. 289; Bruce, *Paul*, p. 64; Joseph B. Tyson, *A Study of Early Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973), p. 278; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, ed. and tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 7:30, 33; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, pp. 127, 238; J. Morgenstern, art. "Sabbath," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:135; *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, James Orr, gen. ed. (1956; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 4:2631; Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, p. 18; Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 8; Jakob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ: The Relationship between Church and Synagogue*, 3rd

ed. (1970; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 152, 157-58; Leonhard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (1970; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 56, 204.

11. The distinction between Grecian Jewish Christians (Hellenists) and Aramaic Jewish Christians first appears in Acts 6:1. The difference was not merely a difference of language. It was a difference of culture. The Hellenist Jews were largely the Jews of the Dispersion and had been significantly influenced by Greek culture.

12. Stephen was one of the leaders of the Hellenists (see Acts 6). In recovering the history of the primitive church, scholars have emphasized Stephen's contribution:

"It would be strange if Jesus' radical attitude to the law and religious tradition in general had not survived at all among his followers. Survive it did, and remarkably enough (so far as our records provide information), among the Hellenists rather than among the Hebrews. The Hellenists in the primitive church of Jerusalem soon came to be recognized, by themselves and by the Hebrews, as a distinct group within it, on both economic and theological grounds. We are imperfectly informed about them, but we have some knowledge of two of their early leaders, both exceptionally gifted men--Stephen, outstanding in theological debate, and Philip, active as an evangelist. Stephen attracted attention by his critical attitude to the temple. At a time when the leaders of the church were attending its services daily, he took seriously Jesus' prediction of its downfall, and maintained that such a permanent structure was no part of the divine plan for a pilgrim people. The ideal was rather a movable tent-shrine such as the ancestors of Israel had in the wilderness, not fixed to one specially sacred locality. He further maintained that the coming of Jesus had profoundly changed the status of the Mosaic law .... His trial and execution gave the chief-priestly establishment an opportunity to launch a thorough-going campaign of repression against the church. The general populace of Jerusalem were as much shocked by an attack on the temple as their ancestors had been when Jeremiah delivered one over six centuries before. The apostles still enjoyed popular favor to such a degree that no action against them was possible, but many members of the church, and in particular those who were most nearly associated with Stephen, were compelled to leave Jerusalem and, indeed, the whole area in which the writ of the Sanhedrin ran. Two results of this dispersion were: first, that the gospel was carried by those Hellenists to territories outside Palestine; secondly, that the church of Jerusalem became much more uniformly Hebrew in its composition and outlook. But it is this campaign of repression that first brings Paul into close involvement with primitive Christianity" (Bruce, *Paul*, pp. 67-8).

"The 'Hellenists' put forward the offensive claim that the significance of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel essentially superseded that of Moses in the history of salvation: the gospel of Jesus took the place of the Jewish gospel of exodus and Sinai as God's concluding, incomparable eschatological

revelation. They understood their authority to make this criticism as a gift of the spirit, which they saw as a sign of the dawning of the eschatological age. The Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians had a more restrained -- one might almost say more conservative -- attitude towards the Law. They remained more deeply rooted in the religious tradition of Palestine, which from the time of the Maccabees inevitably regarded any attack on Torah and Temple as sacrilege .... Suppression and persecution forced the Hellenists to emigrate and at the same time to extend their mission outside the holy city and Judaea" (Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], pp. 73-4).

"Stephen's wholesale dismissal of the temple, and, by implication, of the law, and his condemnation of the people of Israel, were not embraced by the church, which found his attitude too radical, and the problem of the relation between law and gospel too complex, to be thus summarily solved. This problem emerged fully only later, when numbers of Gentile converts entered the church" (W. D. Davies, art. "Law in the NT," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 3:98).

13. "According to Acts 11.20, the Jewish Christians driven out of Jerusalem, who first used Antioch as a base from which to embark deliberately on a mission to the Gentiles which took no account of the Jewish law, came from Cyrenaica and Cyprus, areas which from the time of the Ptolemies on had a large and completely Hellenized Jewish Diaspora .... Thus the 'Hellenists', driven out of Jewish Palestine, were gradually forced to go beyond the circle of full Jews and also to turn to Gentiles who were interested in Judaism; in other words, they paved the way towards a mission to the Gentiles, which in the end had to mean disregarding the law .... Antioch was the first great city of the ancient world in which Christianity gained a footing .... The complete breakthrough to an open mission to the Gentiles first took place in the freedom and openness of the capital, and as a result of the stimulus provided by the Hellenists who had been driven out of Jerusalem and were not completely at home there, so that from now on the observance of the Torah was of virtually no significance at all. Now a mission to non-Jews became an independent task and no longer happened sporadically in particular isolated cases; it was not limited to the 'godfearers', but in a fairly systematic way was now directed towards all the Gentiles .... The universalist christology of the 'Hellenists', who now saw the risen and exalted Jesus as the Lord of all men, rather than as the exclusive Messiah of Israel, exercised pressure towards a universal mission without the limitations of the law .... The programme of a mission to the whole 'world' put forward by Paul in Rom. 10.18 and 15.7ff., by Mark in 13.10, by Luke in Acts 1.8 and in the missionary command of Matthew 28.18f. was gradually developed from the 'Hellenist' mission in Antioch which was carried on apart from the law" (Hengel, *Earliest Christianity*, pp. 71, 75, 99-100, 104-5, 110). "As well as the Church in Israel whose path we have pursued up to this point, a Church arose remarkably early outside the Jewish nation, a Church which no longer kept the Mosaic Law. Just as the former emerged from Jerusalem so the latter emerged from Antioch on the Orontes, at one time the capital city of the Seleucid Kingdom. This magnificent Hellenistic city had approximately 300,000 inhabitants, 30,000 of whom were Jews. It was here, according to Acts xi.19-21, that several of the Hellenists who had fled from Jerusalem turned directly to the Gentiles with the Gospel and brought them to faith .... They baptized the believing Gentiles without circumcising them and were able to live together with them by ignoring the objectionable regulations of the Law .... After the conversion of the Samaritans, who were already circumcised, there follows the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch who could not be circumcised and thus could not be accepted into Israel (Acts viii.36; Deut. xxiii. 1), of Cornelius an uncircumcised 'God fearer', and finally of the Gentiles in Antioch. They all came to faith, and on the basis of their faith the

missionary had to grant them participation in the eschatological salvation just as Jesus once had done for the Centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt. viii.10; xv.28). They were accepted by means of baptism as members into the redeemed community, without circumcision and without subjection to the Law" (Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, pp. 61, 69).

14. "The church virtually followed Judaism at this point, because the presence of Gentiles in many synagogues had long involved the mother faith in the same problem, and it had dealt with it in terms of the Noachian commandments" (Davies, "Law in the NT," p. 98).

15. "The fact that the members of the new messianic community in Antioch were given the peculiar Latin-type designation *Christianoi/Christiani* (Acts 11.26; cf. I Peter 4.16), presumably by the Roman authorities there, indicates that they had become an independent organization over against the Jewish synagogue community. To the outsider, the successful messianic sect could now appear as a group on its own, which had detached itself from Judaism. It was given its own name, the independent character of which made it fundamentally, different from earlier designations like 'Galilean' or 'Nazorean' (Acts 24.5), which had referred to Jewish groups" (Hengel, *Earliest Christianity*, p. 103).

16. It was well understood that circumcision was a sign of submission to the entire Law. See E. P. Sanders, ed., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. 2, *Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), pp. 122-27; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 31.

17. See notes 4, 7, 14.

18. "In Gentile churches obedience to the law was not observed--the uncircumcision was the field of Paul (Gal. 2:7-8). This approach to the law was virtually ratified in the Council of Jerusalem, and, either at this council or slightly after, the conditions on which there could be actual intermingling of Gentile and Jewish Christians were laid down (Acts 15:1-30). The exact significance of these conditions has been variously assessed, either as a minimal ethic to be observed by all (but the nature of the conditions, and the Jewish attitude toward the law as a unity, are against this), or as a safeguard against Gnostic influences (a vague phrase which does not take us very far), or as the Noachian commandments which Judaism laid upon all men--this is the most probable interpretation" (Davies, "Law in the NT," p. 98). See also Jocz, *Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, p. 69; Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 287, 289.

19. "The measure of clarity reached thus far was simply that purely Gentile Christian churches were free from the Law with the consent of the primitive community, and purely Jewish Christian churches should keep the Law with the consent of Paul" (W. Gutbrod, art. "Law," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, ed. and tr. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4:1066). "Conversely, Jerusalem acknowledged the Gospel free from the Law as an expression of the one true Gospel. In this manner the two branches of Christianity current at that time were brought together into an ecclesiological fellowship in spite of all the differences in their way of

life .... Were the Jewish Christians in the mixed congregations allowed to give up the Law and to have fellowship with the Gentile Christians in both daily life and table-fellowship? In the Church of Antioch it had apparently been so from the very beginning. Even Peter joined them when he came to Antioch, probably shortly after the Apostolic Council, but when the men sent from James raised an objection to this, Peter, together with all the other Jewish Christians, broke off the table-fellowship. As soon as this came to Paul's attention, he reprimanded them sharply, for in his opinion it followed that if the Gentiles were free from the Law, then all believers were by this very fact free. James, however, did not want this conclusion to be applied to the Jewish Christians, and Peter wavered between the two points of view .... Jewish believers in Pauline churches on the whole had probably from the very beginning stopped circumcising their children and living in accordance with the Mosaic ordinances cited in Acts xxi.20f. Paul had given them the freedom for this without forcing such conduct on them" (Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, pp. 77-9).

20. The Jews' inflexible adherence to the Sabbath and to their food laws was so notorious in the Roman world that they were exempted from military service and were unpopular as slaves. See Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967), pp. 9-13. See also William Barclay, *The Ten Commandments for Today* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), pp. 31-2; Werner Forster, *Palestinian Judaism in New Testament Times* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), p. 72; Eduard Lohse, art. "Sabbath," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 7:9.

21. "The problem of the daily fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, which was settled for Syria and Cilicia by the Apostolic Decree, reappeared in the Pauline congregations probably in terms of the tension between the 'weak' and the 'strong' (I Cor. viii-x; Rom. xiv. 1-15, 13). As far as we can tell, the weak were a group of Jewish Christians whose faith was not strong enough to free them entirely from the bonds of Jewish customs" (Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, p. 79).

22. "In Gentile societies there was no weekly free day, only the pagan festivals at irregular intervals" (Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, p. 18). Judaism was an established religion, and the Jews' inflexibility in regard to the Sabbath was so well known that throughout the Roman world they were granted freedom to keep the Sabbath. This dispensation, however, did not apply to Gentile Christians. Since they were not circumcised, they could not, indeed, did not claim to be Jews. "Whereas circumcision would have been practicable for Gentile converts, Sabbath observance simply was not. Unless they came inside the Jewish ghetto, where there was an ordered life adjusted to the cessation of work on the Sabbath, they could not earn their living or subsist while observing the Sabbath. If they were slaves, Gentile masters would not release them from work; and if they were independent and earning their own living, they would still have had to pursue their trade on a Sabbath. It was no doubt because circumcision was a practical possibility for Gentile Christians as the Sabbath was not that it was the centre of controversy" (Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, p. 49).

If Gentile Christians had been Sabbatarian, their refusal to work on the Sabbath would have provoked continual persecution. There is no evidence, however, that Gentile Christians were ever discriminated against or persecuted because of the Sabbath. This stubborn piece of historical evidence not only refutes the claim that Gentile Christians kept the Jewish Sabbath, but it refutes the claim that the early Christians kept Sunday as a holy day of rest.

Pliny's famous letter to Trajan (c. A.D. 111-112) is also

clear evidence that early Christians had no free day of rest. They met for worship early in the morning (probably on the first day of the week), and then they went to work. See Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 423-24.

"In the early centuries of the Church's history down to the time of the Emperor Constantine it would, in any case, not have been practicable for Christians to observe Sunday as a day of rest, on which they were obliged, for the sake of principle, to abstain from work. The reason for this was simply that no one in the entire Roman Empire, neither Jews, nor Greeks, nor Romans, stopped work on Sunday" (Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968], pp. 154-55).

Rordorf also explodes the myth that early Christian meetings on the first day of the week had anything to do with the worship of the sun. The connection between the cult of the sun and the first day of the week did not develop until many years after Christian meetings on Sundays had been well established in the church. See Rordorf, *Sunday*, pp. 181ff.

23. See "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians," chap. 9 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 1:62.

24. "But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions'" ("The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," chap. 14 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 7:381).

25. See "The Epistle of Barnabas," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:137-49.

26. See "Pliny to Trajan," in Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 423-24.

27. See "Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:194-270.

28. Samuele Bacchiocchi has carefully documented that the Christian practice of common assembly on the first day of the week was found in Rome in the early second century. But he is wrong in trying to infer that this proves that the practice originated in Rome. In fact, his evidence actually shows that the practice appeared in Rome as an already well-established observance. There is no controversy on this issue, and there is no evidence that Sunday assembly appears in Rome as a recent innovation. See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

29. The Christians in Antioch lived apart from the Torah Law, ignoring circumcision, the food laws and the Sabbath--the great identifying features of being Jewish. The Gentile mission spread from its base in Antioch. As Goppelt says, "The Hellenistic Church rejected the observation of the Sabbath along with the Jewish feasts as being part of Judaism (Gal. iv.10; Col. ii.16; Ignatius, *Magn.* ix.1)" (Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, p. 204).

30. The striking unanimity of the early fathers on the Sabbath/Sunday question is amply documented by C. Mervyn Maxwell in his syllabus, *History of Sabbath and Sunday* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University, n.d.).

31. See *ibid.*

32. See *ibid.*

33. "This stress on the Lord's Day was not based on the Third Commandment until the fourth century" (Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, p. 204). "Eusebius's exposition of Ps. 91(92), written after 330, represents 'the first real attempt to find the relationship between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday'. Although it builds on traditional elements, the failure of so many



earlier writers, many of whom in numerous works were concerned to emphasize Christianity's fulfilment of the Old Testament order, to produce a single explicit account of the Lord's Day as the Christian fulfilment of the sabbath, is the most prominent feature of the patristic evidence. And where pre-Constantinian writers hint at a correlation between sabbath and Sun-day, the connection lies in their character as day of worship, as festival and as shadow of eschatological rest rather than as cessation from work. The last seems not to have appealed to early Christians except in so far as it afforded freedom for worship, certainly not as providing physical relaxation and recreation or because labor was somehow wrong on Sunday. The sabbatarian approach to Sunday has been a cherished tradition of much modern evangelicalism. The questioning of its biblical, patristic and Reformation roots is bound to prove disturbing to some, but, for all their thoroughness and learning, I judge that Beckwith and Stott have not succeeded in holding the fort on their two fronts" (D. F. Wright in *The Evangelical Quarterly* 54, no. 1[Jan.-Mar. 1982]: 60).

"In the pre-Constantinian Church we do not find any such direct equation of sabbath and Sunday, for the simple reason that the Sunday rest had not yet been introduced ....A glance into the history of Christian legislation about Sunday shows us that through the centuries the Church has been living on the heritage of the post-Constantinian period. Even today we still live in it: even today we still have the Sun-day rest, and even today the sabbath commandment plays an important part in the theoretical and practical justification by Christians of the rest from work on Sunday ....

We shall have to ask whether we are to be bound for ever in the future to this heritage. We should not forget that this heritage does not derive from pre-Constantinian Christianity, and it was.., explicitly disavowed by the reformers" (Rordorf, *Sunday*, pp. 169, 173)."And now we come to the influence of two famous men, influence which altered the whole emphasis and influence which lasts to this day. Alcuin (A.D. 735-804) was the first to identify the Sabbath and the Lord's Day. All work on the Lord's Day became a breach of the fourth commandment. This was a complete reversal of the position of the early Church. The early Church had again and again distinguished between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, and now Alcuin--and it is perhaps not too much to say fatally--identified them. The matter was taken beyond recovery when Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-74) did exactly and explicitly the same. 'The Sabbath is changed into the Lord's Day' (*Summa* 2.1, question 103, article 3). It was not long before the Church was drawing up as detailed Lord's Day prohibitions as ever the Pharisees did. The Sabbath came to be more and more glorified. Iangels, with the grounding of the ark on Ararat, with the Exodus, with in medieval times there circulated a so-called 'Letter from Heaven' which associated the Sunday with all kinds of things, with the creation of the the baptism of Jesus, with his greatest

miracles, with his Ascension, with Pentecost. The entanglement of the Lord's Day with the Sabbath had begun, and it has never been fully unravelled ....With the Reformers we reach a new stage, and the interesting and significant thing is that the position of the Reformers was almost the same as the position of the early Church. The Reformers were unanimous that the Lord's Day and the Sabbath were not the same day, and they were equally unanimous that the fourth commandment, like the rest of the Jewish law, was for the Christian abrogated. Luther's position was quite clear. In the *Larger Catechism* he insists that serving men and maids must have a day of rest and refreshment, a day when they can gather to hear God's word, and to praise and pray. But in principle it is of no importance what day it is. It is not necessarily a fixed day as it was for the Jews, for in itself one day is no better than another. Calvin is equally clear (*Institutes* 2.8.32, 34). The Sabbath is abrogated. 'It being expedient to overthrow superstition, the Jewish holy day was abolished, and as a thing necessary to retain decency, order and peace in the Church, another day was appointed for that purpose.' The observance of days among us is a free service and void of all superstition'" (Barclay, *The Ten Commandments for Today*, pp. 34-5).

34. "As concerns the understanding of the Law in the normative circles of primitive Christianity, it may thus be said that they regarded the Law as the obedience to be rendered by Jewish Christians. They were also conscious of being under this obligation for the sake of winning the Jewish world for the Gospel. They did not believe that by achieving this obedience man could attain to righteousness before God. They were prepared to extend brotherly fellowship to Gentile Christians even though the latter did not keep the Law. In mixed congregations Gentile Christians were obliged to observe such points as would make the fellowship of Jewish Christians with them defensible in the eyes of the Jewish world" (Gutbrod, art. "Law," p. 1069).

"The Hellenistic Church rejected the observation of the Sabbath along with the Jewish feasts as being part of Judaism (Gal. iv.10; Col. ii.16; Ignatius, *Magn.* ix.1), whereas Jewish Christianity living in accordance with the Law kept the Sabbath rest in keeping with their surroundings (Matt. xxiv.20)" (Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, p. 204).

"The *sabbath* was to Jewish Christians a sacred obligation and priceless privilege; to gentile. Christians a novel idea resembling pagans' days of ill omen--at worst, a remnant of legalism" (R. E. O. White, *Biblical Ethics* ] Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979], p. 181).

35. See Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, pp. 77-9. See also note 18.

36. See Jocz, *Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, pp. 170-74.

37. After the outbreak of the Jewish-Roman wars, Jewish Christians were increasingly branded as traitors because they did not join in the conflict against Rome.

38. "'Judaic' Christianity, following the signification given by F. J. A. Hort, we identify with that section of the Jerusalem Church which, from the beginning, held a liberal outlook concerning the Law. It inclined to the Pauline view with regard to the Gentiles; it found itself in opposition to the Jewish authorities; it was compelled to take refuge in Pella, and in the Diaspora it united with the main body of the Catholic Church. These Jewish Christians soon lost their identity through intermarriage, as there were no barriers to separate them from the Gentile Church .... A proportion of the Hebrew Church, even prior to the Destruction of Jerusalem, was swallowed up by Catholic Christianity. This Jewish element was steadily reinforced by means of conversion and intermarriage, especially after the Fall of Jerusalem. It is usually held that the Jewish element within the Catholic Church was numerically insignificant. But this is difficult to ascertain. Their influence, however, upon the Gentile Church was of the greatest possible importance. Gentile Christianity owes to those Jewish Christians the handing on of the primitive tradition, the emphasis upon the moral aspect of religion, the exegetical understanding of the Old Testament; but above all, the Old Testament itself. It is doubtful whether the Gentiles, without the insistence of Hebrew Christians, would have retained the Old Testament canon. The importance of this cannot be overestimated" (Jocz, *Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, pp. 174, 198).

"Jewish believers in Pauline churches on the whole had probably from the very beginning stopped circumcising their children and living in accordance with the Mosaic ordinances cited in Acts xxi.20f. Paul had given them the freedom for this without forcing such conduct on them" (Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times*, p. 79).

39. "Harnack puts the question: who is a Hebrew Christian according to Justin? He answers: 'A Jewish Christian is only such a Jew who believes in Christ and observes the Law. If he does not observe the Law he is as little a Jewish Christian as a Jew is a Jew who has emancipated himself from the Law.' In a footnote, Harnack adds: 'Reversely, a circumcised Gentile who observes the Law is a full-blooded Jew.' . . . Thus *Judaistic* Christianity, which tenaciously adhered to the Law for the sake of the *people*, became isolated from the rest of the Church. A part of it drifted back to Judaism" (Jocz, *Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, pp. 171, 174).

"Jewish Christian groups clung to the Sabbath and appealed to Jesus Himself in support. He is said to have taught that only by lasting can one find entry into the kingdom of God .... As the Christian community parted from the Synagogue on the question of the Sabbath, so the Catholic Church parted from heretical Jewish Christianity which clung to the Sabbath" (Lohse, art. "Sabbath," pp. 32, 34).

40. See Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 22, 56; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 240; Jocz, *Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, pp. 171, 173, 192-94. Jocz labels the Nazarenes of the second century as "the more conservative branch of the heretical sect" (p. 193). Like all who remained Jewish Christians, the Nazarenes were hostile to Paul--for obvious reasons.

41. See Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 55-64; Jocz, *Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, pp. 172-73; 194-98; Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, pp. 240-45.

42. "Heretical Jewish Christianity could claim a direct line of continuity with the most primitive form of Christianity. It could certainly claim to be more in accord with the most primitive faith than Paul, say. If the earliest church is the norm of orthodoxy, then Ebionism measures up pretty well; if primitiveness means purity, then Ebionism can claim to have a purer faith than almost any other. But Ebionism was rejected--why? Because its faith did not develop as Christianity developed. It clung to an expression of Christian faith which was acceptable at the beginning of Christianity in a context of Judaism. In the wider environment of the second and third centuries, with the formative documents of Christianity already written, the simple Jewish messianism was no longer adequate. In short, *heretical Jewish Christianity was a form of stunted, underdeveloped Christianity*, rigid and unfitted to be the mouthpiece of the gospel in a new age . . . . Jewish Christianity was counted unacceptable when it *began to regard strict observance of the law as more important than the spontaneity of love*. More clearly, second, Jewish Christianity was counted unacceptable when it *persisted in clinging to a limited view of Jesus and his role*. It could claim support for this conservatism from some of the earliest expressions of Christian faith. But since the spread of Christianity outside Palestine and the controversies of the first few decades caused these early, more fluid and provisional formulations to be left behind as inadequate, *the Jewish Christianity of the second and third centuries represents in the end a reactionary attempt to restrict the Christian estimate of Jesus within the limitations and confines of Jewish thought and practice*. Third, Jewish Christianity was counted unacceptable when it *failed to develop*, when it hardened the inchoate expressions of the earliest days into a system, when it lost the flexibility and openness to a new revelation which questions of law and mission demanded in a developing situation, when it became rigid and exclusive. *One of the earliest heresies was conservatism!* In short, the failure of heretical Jewish Christianity was that it neither held to the unity (the exaltation of Jesus showing Jesus to be the unique expression of God) nor allowed for the diversity (of developing Christianity)" (Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, pp. 245, 265-66).

"Hebrew Christianity detached from its native soil had only two alternatives--back to the Synagogue, which entailed denial of Jesus the Messiah, or fellowship with the Gentile Church, which meant denial of the Jewish national heritage. The dilemma was a specifically Jewish one; the Gentiles were in a different position. For them the choice was entirely within the sphere of religious life; for the Jews it was both a *national* and a *religious* problem. Ebionism reveals an effort to find a compromise or to evade the issue. It went half-way in both directions, but history has proved that its path ended in a *cul de sac*. Schoeps attributes its disappearance from history partly to chiliastic disappointment. This may have been a contributory factor. But the real cause must be sought in its contradictory position--a halfway house between Church and Synagogue" (Jocz, *Jewish People and Jesus Christ*, p. 200).

"One of the most persuasive views of its [the Epistle to the Hebrews'] purpose regards it as written to a 'house-church' or synagogue of Jewish Christians in Rome who found themselves out of sympathy with the prevalent trend of Roman Christianity, stimulated as it had been to fresh endeavour in the Gentile mission by Paul's recent stay in the city, and began to wonder if they might not have been too precipitate in committing themselves to a new order which involved an increasing breach with the cherished traditions of their old religion. The old religion enjoyed the protection of Roman law, but

it was becoming more and more difficult to try to keep a foot in either camp. They would soon have to declare for the one or the other; and declaration for the gospel would mean burning their boats and entrusting themselves to the dangerous uncertainties of a new way of life in company about which they did not feel completely happy. The old familiar environment exerted a strong attraction. To them in this predicament came this letter, urging them to cut loose from their old attachments and face the unknown with Christ, gladly accepting the stigma that adhered to the Christian name for the sake of the prize that lay before them. This way of faith was the way chosen by their forefather Abraham, who 'went out, not knowing where he was to go' (Heb. 11:8). The old order with all its dear and hallowed associations was in any case obsolescent and on the point of disappearing; the future lay with Christ and with those who followed him" (Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 398-99).

"The Judaizing elements eventually led to Jewish Christianity, which demanded the observance of the law from all Christians, and to the Nazoreans, who held fast to the law for Jewish Christians only" (Davies, art. "Law in the NT," p. 98).

43. See Lohse, art. "Sabbath," pp. 31-3; Maxwell, *History of Sabbath and Sunday*, pp. 148-64.

44. See Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p. 240; Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, pp. 60, 63.

45. "For Judaism, the keeping of the Law, loyalty to the divine Wisdom, was believed to be the ultimate test on the day of judgment; and for the extreme Judaistic wing of Christianity itself, Jesus was only one stone in the building: the Law, circumcision, and the rest were equally vital; 'justification'--that is, a right relation with God--might be *either* by Law or by faith. But for Christians such as Paul and John, Jesus was the supreme and unique test: he was the keystone of the building, the only door into the sheepfold; and the one decisive test was loyalty to him and trust in him" (Moule, *Birth of the New Testament*, p. 42).