

Sabbathkeeping (Part 3)

The Sabbath, the Bible, the Israel of God

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 04-Sep-99; Sermon #411

I began this series on the Sabbath in the first sermon, attempting to put the Sabbath into its proper context. We saw from Ezekiel 20 that, from God's perspective, Sabbath-breaking and idolatry were the major reasons why God sent Israel into captivity. Ezekiel's concern throughout the book there in the 20th chapter was that Sabbath-breaking destroys holiness—meaning that it is no minor matter at all. Sabbath-breaking is just as immoral as murder, adultery, stealing, lying, and coveting.

In the second sermon, I think we established that Sabbath-breaking has its roots in idolatry through the desire to do one's own thing rather than what God has simply commanded. We left off in that sermon with Isaiah 58:13-14, which says:

Isaiah 58:13-14 If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: Then shall you delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it.

The key here is, "*If you will cease from your own pleasure.*" **Pleasure** is what the King James Version has translated that Hebrew word into. *Pleasure* is following our own desire rather than God's will. Today, that word "*pleasure,*" might, more literally, be translated "*business*"—not doing your own business—with the emphasis on **your**. *Business* here really means "**busy-ness**"—that which keeps you occupied; what you are concerned about the other six days.

Business does not have to mean the way in which one produces money. It includes it, but it doesn't have too. For a homemaker, "busy-ness" would mean the keeping of the home—the cooking and cleaning responsibilities. It's just that which keeps one busy the other six days of the week. The very strong implication in these two verses is that the Sabbath is to be time used for *God's* business—for *His* pleasure, not for ours.

It is with that simple directive that the possibilities of idolatry—in our choices regarding keeping the Sabbath—lie. It behooves us to know what God's pleasure is, so that we can do it. Added to this is the term "delight," and that indicates the attitude that God expects that we have toward the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is obviously *holy* ground. You understand that Moses had to take off his shoes because he was on holy ground. After Moses, Joshua had to take off his shoes when he was in the presence of Jesus Christ just as they were about to enter into the land. The reference shows we are not to step on—tread upon—the Sabbath by doing the things that keep us busy the other six days of the week. God expects us to honor Him in our keeping of it.

The term "*honor*" shows that proper Sabbath keeping is an outward expression of loyalty to the covenant responsibilities imposed upon us in order to complete God's purpose.

Branching off from this concept is another important understanding. That is, the *true rest* is a spiritual blessing from God, which He confers upon us, as the fruit of our seeking Him and using the day as He intends.

I know that I'm giving you a lot here in the way of definitions. I will not be building upon them in this sermon. But, I am giving them to you because I want them to be in your mind so when I get to the next sermon we can expand upon these very concepts. They form the foundation of how a person is to keep the Sabbath.

The fourth commandment does not say a great deal about how to keep the Sabbath. It only says to stop working, and to give those who are your responsibility the same time off—to do the same thing. Isaiah 58:13-14 has

the *terms* upon which God expects Sabbath-keeping to be built upon. We will now begin branching away from the foundation that is laid in the fourth commandment.

God intends that we use the day to come to know Him even better—for the purpose of developing the relationship that He has called us into, in order that we might be in His image.

Toward the end of that second sermon in this series, I read to you a portion of Psalm 84. That psalm has special application to anybody who is on the pilgrimage like we are. It shows how important it is to use that day in a right way.

Thus the Sabbath is imposed upon us as a break from the normal day-to-day "busy-ness" in order that we have unfettered time to pursue eternal and spiritual things, things that are truly refreshing and liberating. These are things we can't devote much time to on the other six days because we are busy with the normal activities of earning a living, taking care of a home, raising our families, and so forth.

God is our Deliverer. The Sabbath is a day of freedom. God is our Liberator, and it is He who delivers us from weariness of the spirit. He liberates us from the hopelessness that this world imposes upon us—simply by us being here.

He gives hope. He frees our spirit to soar in the hope of the things that He has laid out for the future. The Sabbath is intended to be a refreshment of those things week by week. It is in fellowship with Him that the true rest and refreshment come.

That finishes another section of putting the Sabbath into its proper context.

At this point, I'm going to begin a rather long review of another aspect of putting the Sabbath into its correct context. I'm doing this because it is so easy for those of us reared in this Catholic/Protestant culture to dismiss the Old Testament instruction as being less important than the New. There is a

subtle inclination working against us to think that it is less applicable to the church—to think the Old Testament's only concern is about the history of ancient Israel or the prophecies of what *will* happen to Israel in the future.

We will begin by laying a foundation in Matthew 4:4. Jesus is answering Satan here.

Matthew 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

This verse is important to you and me within the context of this sermon on the Sabbath because the Father and the Son are our primary examples. "It is written," Jesus said. The source of Jesus' instruction on how to conduct *His* life was the Old Testament. Do you understand the importance of that?

God in the flesh looked to the Old Testament, not the New, because it didn't even exist. He looked to the Old Testament as to how He was to live His life. He understood by this time that He was going to set the example for all who followed Him as disciples. So His instructions, in setting the example for all of mankind, came out of the Old Testament. He gave no indication that He considered the Old Testament to be a pious fraud. He didn't indicate that it is less important than the New Testament, or secondary in importance to any other writing.

Unfortunately, there are some of us who are moved to dismiss much of the Old Testament because we don't like to think much about ritual, customs, and ceremonies. We don't like to think much about priests in ceremonial garb, altars with burning meat on them, an incense altar and laws that regard ritual cleanliness, or about how we are to dress, treat disease, or even be clean. People will dismiss these things as mere legalism or externalism.

Maybe you have not thought deeply upon this at all. But, for those of you who have come out of Worldwide, and have read their literature—you ought to understand that toward the end—by *end* I mean 1994/1995, which became the end for many who left when United [Church of God] formed—they were saying that the Sabbath day was merely ceremonial. They had grouped it with all of these things that I have just mentioned: ritual, custom, ceremony,

priests in ceremonial garb, altars with burning meat offering, incense. So they dismissed the Sabbath as being mere legalism. They might have called it "externalism."

Wait a minute! Let's reason for just a little bit here. The Bible is the most important book ever written. The Scripture says that it is *God-breathed*. God is the author of it—using men, without a doubt, but He is the author of it. He is the author of the most important book ever written. In it, God addresses the most important things to our relationship with Him—things that are important to Him that we understand and do, as a part of His purpose, as a part of our relationship with Him.

When you look at the Bible and compare it to the libraries of books that are all over the world, the Bible is a pretty small book. Yet, it contains the most important things in life, to every individual who will ever be born. It contains the things that God considers most important.

We are the apple of His eye. We are the focus of His attention. And if there is anybody, on earth, that He wants to understand what is important to Him—it is us. It is the church.

Now listen to this. I did not figure this out, but some Protestant researcher did. There is almost as much written in the Bible—the most important book that has ever been written—about ceremonies as there is about Jesus Christ. What the man meant was: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. When you total all of the words in those four books that are written about Jesus Christ, and then total all of the words in the Old Testament about ceremonies, they are almost equal.

Consider the importance to God about Old Testament ceremonies. Pretty important. But people want to dismiss that kind of thing as mere formalism—as though somehow or another through evolution we have outgrown it. To Jesus, the Old Testament had authority to tell Him how to live His life.

Turn now to Luke 24:25-26, 44. This episode here took place after Jesus' resurrection, when He was walking on the road to Emmaus. Emmaus was

about seven miles from Jerusalem. So He was apparently with these two men for a fair amount of time as they were walking along there, and they had quite a conversation. It was a very revealing conversation.

Luke 24:25-26 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me.

"Slow of heart to believe *all* that the prophets have spoken." This was a strong rebuke aimed directly at His disciples. I don't think that I would want to have the resurrected Christ say that to me—that I don't believe all that is written in the Old Testament. To a disciple, the Old Testament should be the unquestioned expression of God's mind and will.

Do you see what Jesus was expressing here? He was expressing that His disciples simply were not taking the Old Testament seriously.

Just as surely as all things regarding His first coming were fulfilled, so will all the other things be fulfilled as well. God does not give anything in vain, and He certainly didn't give any indication here in Luke 24 that anything was done away—as being somehow less important. Notice that Jesus referenced all three sections of the Bible: The Law, The Prophets, and The Writings.

Now Satan—our thoughts going back to Matthew 4 again—did not twist any New Testament Scriptures in his attempt to trip up Jesus. Jesus, in responding said, "It is written," but in one sense the thought continues right on into Matthew 5:17-18.

Matthew 5:17-18 Think not that I am come to destroy the law [where a great deal is written about ceremonies], or the prophets: I

am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

Jesus, on the contrary, in the remainder of this chapter gives every indication that the Old Testament—if anything like this is possible—is more binding than it ever was before.

In John 5:39 Jesus is speaking to an assembly of Jewish people, and He says:

John 5:39 Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

That's not quite the way it appears in Aramaic or Greek. He said to the Jews, "*You are searching the Scriptures.*" It was not a command. They were in the process of doing it. Now put yourself into that. Are you searching the Old Testament Scriptures because you believe that, in them, you have eternal life? The answer to that is: they were doing the right thing.

What I want to connect this to is the concept "in them you think you have eternal life." That is a true statement. Do you understand that there is sufficient instruction from God in the Old Testament that the New Testament is not really even needed? There *is* eternal life in the pages, in the words, of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Let's not lose track of the context here. The context is the Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath is part of that way of eternal life, and Jesus kept the Sabbath. The Old Testament contains the truth in regard to which day God wants us to keep. The command is in the Old Testament. The foundation of *how* God wants us to keep it is in the Old Testament—in the book of Isaiah—and our Savior Jesus Christ, who was God in the flesh, kept the day. It's all in the Old Testament.

Look at John 10:35.

John 10:35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came [the Old Testament came] and the scripture cannot be broken.

The Old Testament is the ultimate touch-stone of truth. It is on the same level as the New Testament.

Go now to II Timothy 3:16. We're touching on these things because they are important to the proper context for the Sabbath.

II Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

The Old Testament is Scripture on the same level as the New Testament. Again, when the Old Testament was written, there was no New Testament. It became New Testament. This is New Testament confirmation that the Old Testament is on the same level as the New Testament. Without the Old Testament we will not be thoroughly furnished toward doing good works. It is no less inspired than the New Testament, and it is no less important to the Christian than the New Testament. The Old Testament makes a person wise to salvation.

Let's go back to Luke 4:16, and we'll touch on Jesus' example again.

Luke 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up for to read.

There is no argument in the world of religion over which day the Old Testament reveals Israel was to keep. Jesus kept it. Now what is one supposed to think—that God goes to all the trouble to record all that information regarding the Sabbath in the Old Testament, and then after four thousand years He has second thoughts and changes one of His royal laws? There is no other law of that rank that He changed. Why that one? That demands an answer—especially since God in the flesh kept it.

If there was anybody who knew how to live life in a way that would please God, it was His Son Jesus Christ, who never committed a sin. He kept the Sabbath. It was His custom, not only to keep it, but it was also His custom to fellowship with His fellow Israelites, and to read and expound and explain Scriptures to them.

Now what kind of an unstable God would that be? How can one have faith, fearing that God might have changed something, and you don't know?

Brethren, the truth about those ceremonies and rituals and so forth is not done away. Jesus' own testimony is there in Matthew 5:17-18, where He said, "Not one jot or tittle will pass from the law." Those ceremonies are still in effect. They are lifted yet higher to their spiritual application. So brethren, the Head of the church, the One whose example in all things His disciples are to follow, kept the Sabbath as His custom. He didn't keep the Sabbath because He was a Jew. He kept it because the word of God—the Old Testament—instructed Him to do so, and He set His followers an example.

We're going to apply this yet further. Turn to Romans 15:4. Remember the point from which Paul wrote this. There was no New Testament.

Romans 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime [the Old Testament] were written for our learning, [for Christians' learning] that we [Christians] through patience and comfort of the scriptures [Old Testament] might have hope.

Our hope is in the Old Testament as well.

Herbert Armstrong used to make a statement from time to time that the Bible was written for the church. I think that many did not fully grasp what he was saying. Many thought what he was saying was that the Bible is not written for these other groups calling themselves "Christian." That was most certainly included in what he meant, but what many did not grasp, is that the overwhelming majority of the people written about in the Bible itself never *saw* the Bible.

Able never saw it. Enoch never saw it. How about Noah—did he ever see it? How about Abraham? I don't think so. How about Moses? Now we're beginning to get to the place in history where Scripture is beginning to be written, and we might say honestly that Moses saw a part of it because he wrote it, and he delivered it to the people as "the word of God."

How about Samuel who came along a couple hundred years after Moses? He saw a small portion of it. How about David? He probably saw just a little bit more of it than Samuel did. I think you know what I'm getting at here. It's entirely possible that none of the apostles—except the apostle John—ever saw the entire Bible, because Revelation was not written until decades after all of the other apostles had died.

No Israelite, about whom much is written in the Bible, ever saw it in its entirety. This is a major reason why God spoke directly to a few people like He did to Abel, to Enoch, to Noah, and to Abraham. There was no Bible. There was no word of God for them to read, and so He came to them directly. And they got the word of God right out of His mouth. But there was no Bible, as far as we know, for them to sit down and read.

Brethren, we cannot even be sure that every synagogue in the time of Jesus had a complete scroll of the Old Testament. Even though it was about four hundred years roughly from Malachi to Jesus, the making of a set of scrolls of the Bible was a cumbersome and a very slow job, so we don't know for sure whether every synagogue had one.

I think that we can say that not every household had a Bible. Every household did not have a complete set of scrolls to the Old Testament. It was not until the fifteenth century AD—the 1400s—when Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press with movable type that the possibility of having an entire Bible in one's own possession became a possibility.

But even then, it was not until the 20th century, with the advent of the machine age and the availability of worldwide mass distribution, that the reality of a Christian actually having a complete Bible in his home—maybe even several of them, or several translations of it—became a reality.

That is why Herbert Armstrong said that the Bible was written for the end-time church. Finally a generation came along where it was possible for every man, woman, and child to have a copy of it in his own possession.

This has profound ramifications for the end-time church—regarding being held responsible—because we *have* the word. And we are responsible—in terms of keeping the Sabbath. God made it available to us so that we can be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Now, that the Bible is primarily written for the end-time church becomes even more evident when it is combined with yet another factor. The New Testament shows that the church *is* Israel—"the Israel of God," as Paul calls it.

Turn with me to Ephesians 2:11. Remember that Paul is writing to a church that was struggling with its unity. Because it was in a Gentile city, it was predominately Gentile, but there were enough Jews within it that they were having problems because of the conflict of pride. So writing to the Gentiles at this point, Paul says:

Ephesians 2:11-13 Wherefore remember, that you being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh [the Jews] made by hands; that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: but now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.

Paul is telling these Gentile Christians that the covenants of promise pertained only to Israel, and that they had to become part of Israel—be grafted into Israel—to be *of the seed of Abraham* for them to be *included* within the benefits promised by God to Abraham.

Please understand this. Bend your mind to it. All of the promises are given to Abraham and his children. On the surface they are Israelites—the nation of Israel. You'll understand why I said "on the surface" in just a little bit.

Turn now to Galatians 6:15-16.

Galatians 6:15-16 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision [being a Jew] avails anything, nor uncircumcision [being a Gentile. Neither one of those means much. Both of them are neutral.], but a new creature [creation]. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

If you ever want to do a little bit of research and look into a commentary regarding these verses, you might find that occasionally they say that "the Israel of God" refers to Jewish-Christians. Most commentaries, I can guarantee you, will say nothing. Those that say this phrase refers to Jewish-Christians are only partly right at best. They are also partly wrong; but they are mostly wrong, not mostly right.

Romans 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly [that is, of the flesh]; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Most commentaries will interpret these verses correctly. It is so obvious what Paul means, because he clearly explains what he means. Much of the Bible is written in what I will, at this point, call "different levels." There is a physical and spiritual level to ceremonies.

Remember I mentioned just a little while ago the ceremonies are not done away with, but rather they have been raised—elevated—to their spiritual application from the physical application. There is a physical and there is a spiritual level to ceremonies. There is a physical level, and a spiritual level to this subject that we are talking about now—"the Israel of God."

Many names, many words, carry a literal meaning as well as a symbolic meaning, implying a spiritual application is also intended by God. Jesus used many parables in this way quite effectively. Many prophecies have both a literal *former* fulfillment and a final *latter* fulfillment.

God's promise to Abraham has both "a race" and "a grace" aspect to its fulfillment. So Abraham's *physical* descendants—Israel—are greatly blessed

with physical wealth. But all of mankind is *spiritually* blessed through Abraham's one descendant—Jesus Christ—and thus the grace aspect is gradually being fulfilled, as each judgment unfolds.

In Romans 2:27-28, Paul is using " *Jew* " in its spiritual sense. In this sense, " *Jew* " includes any converted person—even a Gentile. It indicates *the church*—the body of Jesus Christ—when this is added to Hebrews 7:14—"It is evident that our Lord was of the tribe of Judah." He—Jesus Christ—was a Jew. What Paul is saying here in Romans 2:27-28 is that " *Jew* " includes any converted person—even the Gentiles. Therefore, since Jesus was a Jew—He sprang out of Judah—and we are "*part of the body of Jesus Christ*" in the Bible's imagery—each of us is part of that body, and therefore we are Jews. And because we are Jews, we are Israelites.

It doesn't matter whether you are red, yellow, black or white. If you are converted, you are a Jew in the eyes of God because you are part of Christ's body. That is the spiritual application. If you are a Jew, you are an Israelite, and because the promises were given to Israel, the descendants of Abraham, the promises then apply to you.

Do you understand what we are dealing with here? The Bible is showing us that this sort of interpretation is not only valid—it is indeed absolutely necessary for proper understanding, especially of the Old Testament. Paul used the same type of application in Galatians 6:16. He made a spiritual application to the term "Israel." I'm going to read Galatians 6:16 from a modern translation. This is from the *Revised English Bible*.

Galatians 6:15-16 [*Revised English Bible*] Circumcision is nothing. Uncircumcision is nothing. The only thing that counts is the new creation. All who take this principle for their guide, peace and mercy be upon them, the Israel of God.

Now let's analyze that a little bit—mostly the last phrase. The last phrase, "the Israel of God" is simply a definition of the "all who take this principle" phrase that precedes it. It means that the pronoun *them* is modifying that phrase.

"All who take this principle" refers to those who accept the understanding that "*the most important thing in life is to be part of the new creation* ." *THAT*, Paul is saying, is what should guide our conduct in everything. What should guide our conduct—is using the time we have now—understanding, *knowing* absolutely that we are part of the "Israel of God." We are part of the body of Jesus Christ. We are Israelites, and we are to be prepared for the Kingdom of God so that we can receive the promises made to Abraham.

Consider this: The old creation—the physical re-arranging of the earth, by God, to be mankind's environment—ended on the sixth day of creation at sunset. As God rested and was refreshed, the Sabbath was created, and the *NEW* creation of man into God's spiritual image began. "Let us make man in our image."

The *Revised English Bible* has translated Galatians 6:15-16 I think about as well as it can be done. It was done properly. These two verses mean that all of those who are part of the new creation that are being created in Christ Jesus, having Christ formed in them—the body of Christ; the church—are the Israel of God. It is for *them* that the Bible is written.

So there is a physical Israel, and there is a spiritual Israel. That phrase "the Israel *of* God" —indicates possession. There is an Israel that is possessed by God. This is pretty clear evidence; a pretty strong statement that there is an Israel that belongs to God, and there is an Israel that does NOT belong to God. Remember, Jeremiah 3 says that God divorced Israel. She no longer belongs to Him.

When we speak of our mate, our husband, our wife, our children, we say "*my*." We say: *my* wife, *my* children, *my* husband. We are indicating possession. When God divorced Israel, they no longer belonged to Him. He cut her loose. And now, the Israel that belongs to God, is "the Israel of God."

A further clarification of this appears in Romans 9:1-8, where Paul says:

Romans 9:1-3 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that

myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

It's interesting that he did not say that he was related to them spiritually, but only according to the flesh.

Romans 9:4-6 Who are Israelites; to whom pertains the adoption [Here we have an echo of Ephesians 2:11-12] and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. Not as though the word of God had taken none effect. [Here begins a very telling section.] For they are not all Israel which are of Israel.

What in the world is he saying there? He explains.

Romans 9:7-8 Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but in Isaac shall your seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are NOT the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

And so the promises that God made to Abraham cannot be confined to those who are physically descended from Abraham. Ishmael was Abraham's child by natural descent. Isaac was Abraham's child by a miracle—a gift, a promise. It was an act of grace on God's part. It was by God's election that Abraham was given Isaac, and in that sense—it pushed Ishmael aside in favor of Isaac. But that was God's choice, and that's what Paul was getting at. Paul nailed this in verse 8 by saying, "They which are the children of the flesh, the physical descendants of Abraham; these are *not* the children of God."

Romans 9:12-13 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. [This is Rebekah.] As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

Paul is illustrating again how God made a choice, and it was God's choice to do this.

"Esau have I hated" does not mean God had a temperamental fit against Esau. Indeed God poured out many blessings on Esau, in many ways. This has to be understood in the context—we are not to hate our families temperamentally—following Jesus' remarks in Luke 14:26.

Luke 14:26 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

What Paul is saying here as Luke recorded in Luke 14:26 is simply another way of saying that Esau was not the object of God's election. Jacob was. Paul is saying that God is sovereign. It is *His* creation, and *His* purpose. God elected to work out His purpose through Jacob, through Isaac—not Ishmael or Esau. The Sovereign God elected to count the children of promise as the seed—the true descendants of Abraham—you! And you, and you, and you!

Romans 11:7 What then? Israel [the physical nation] has not obtained that which he seeks for; but the *election* have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.

The elect have obtained sonship, and physical Israel, which no longer belongs to God, was blinded. So "the Israel of God" is counted as "the *seed*." "The Israel of God" is "the *elect*." The church of God is "the Israel of God." It is the *elect*. It is the *temple*. It is *the household of God*. It is *the body of Christ*. It is *Jerusalem*. It is *Zion*. It is *the bride of Christ*. It is *the daughter of Zion*. It is *the vineyard*. It is *branches* on a vine. It is *a flock*. It is God's *field*.

There's probably a dozen more code names scattered throughout the Scriptures. But there is a similarity running through them, and that is that they, in some manner, show a relationship between God and us, and a circumstance within some given context.

Do you understand that in order to get the most and the best from Scripture in reference to the church, and its individual members, and to understand

what the church is experiencing at any given time—this is the way that the Scripture must be studied?

The Sabbath, brethren, applies to us more than it ever applied to the physical descendants of Israel, because the Bible is written to us—to the children of God. God inspired the Bible to be written in such a way that it has two levels of application. It has the physical/national level, and the spiritual/church level. The Bible will be true, regardless of what time in history one reads it, because there are some things in life—indeed in the whole history of man—that never change.

In the Old Testament, God caused the patterns that He experienced in His relationship with Israel to be recorded so that later, when He was working much more intimately with the church and its members in spiritual development, they would be able to see the patterns and to use them as a source of instruction for what was going on in their lives.

We might self-righteously think, "I would never do anything like Israel did—like break the Sabbath." Oh? If those things about breaking the Sabbath would never happen with God's spiritual children, and God wrote the Bible for the end-time church primarily, why did He write them? I'm going to read a verse to you that is really interesting.

You see, brethren, some things never change. God never changes. "I am God. I change not." "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." Satan never changes. Human nature never changes, and we still have human nature. God's purpose never changes. God's faithfulness never changes. His promises never change. His laws never change. That is six things—right off the top of my head—that never change. See—names, dates, and places change—but those six things never change.

The physical precedes the spiritual, in terms of time, and that should be easily understood simply because the nation was created and developed by God first. And then it was from this relationship with them under the Old Covenant that the material that makes up the Old Testament came. But the spiritual precedes the physical—in terms of importance to God's purpose—

because the spiritual permanently and indelibly impresses His character, His image, upon those called, elected, and chosen to participate, and to be judged at this time.

When the Old Testament says "Zion," we have to think church. We have to think of the spiritual application first. So when it says "temple," we have to think of church and the spiritual application first. When it says "Israel," we have to think of church, and the spiritual application first. This does not mean that these Scriptures have no relationship to the physical nation. But in this judgment—judgment is now on the church of God—the Bible was written primarily for the church.

Now here comes that Scripture. I want to read to you I Corinthians 10:11-13 from the *Living Bible*, where they have paraphrased it and expanded it about a bit.

I Corinthians 10:11-13 [*The Living Bible*] All these things happened to them [Israel] as examples, as object lessons to warn us against doing the same thing ["Now wait a minute! I would never do that." Oh, no?]; they were written down so that we could read about them and learn from them in these last days as the world nears its end. So be careful, if you are thinking, "Oh, I would never behave like that." Let this be a warning to you, for you too may fall into sin. But remember this, the wrong desires that come into your life aren't any thing new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you, and no temptation is irresistible. You can trust God to keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it, for He has promised this, and will do what He says. He will show you how to escape temptation's power so that you may bear up patiently against it. So dear friends, carefully avoid idol worship of every kind.

Sabbath breaking is idolatry.

Brethren, do we understand that when God wrote these things in the Old Testament, using Israel as the nation as the backdrop, He was in reality writing about us and our relationship with Him under the New Covenant?

And we, because of human nature, fall into the same sort of behavior patterns individually, and as a church, as Israel did. That includes idolatry in different forms, and Sabbath breaking.

And just because we have the Holy Spirit, this does not make us immune to the same weaknesses. It does however make us more responsible, and it removes much of the justification we might give ourselves for either being ignorant, without guidance, or too weak.

The important thing as far as this sermon series is concerned is that when we study the Bible, Old or New Testaments, we realize that we are studying the patterns of the church's relationship with God, just as surely as we are reading the history of ancient Israel. The names, the dates, and the places have changed, but the behavior is very similar.