My contribution entails two limitations with respect to the Sabbath in the New Testament. It focuses on Sabbath laws, therefore disregards other aspects of the Sabbath, such as liturgical or theological ones; and it is limited to the Gospels, thus leaving out possible references to the Sabbath in other parts of the New Testament. However, since the New Testament is not a law code, I wish to add that I am not only looking for Sabbath laws but also for legal practice that may or may not conform to any set of rules, sometimes called “halakah,” as known from the various ancient Jewish sources. I am not primarily interested in Jesus’ historical stance vis-à-vis the Sabbath here but rather in how the topic is represented in the relevant texts. However, after looking at the texts in synchronic perspective, with an eye to their legal issues, I shall also try and view these legal issues in their historical contexts, and this entails asking for possible growth of texts, including the question whether a tradition derives from Jesus’ historical ministry. I am aware that in some areas it is impossible to simply take the Gospel evidence and shed light on it by “adducing” comparative material from ancient Jewish texts, since the Gospel texts are themselves the earliest, and at times even for long the only, witness of a specific detail of halakhah and practice. While Second Temple Jewish sources remain extremely important due to their date relative to the Gospels, rabbinic texts should in my view not be generally discarded as “irrelevant because late.” Apart from the possibility of asking for earlier strata and logical development of rabbinic halakhah, more often than not we shall see that a stance comparable to a rabbinic view is already presupposed in the New Testament.

1 For both areas see now Weiss, *Gladness*.—The present article updates and, where necessary, corrects my treatment of the relevant text and issues in Doering, *Schabbat*.
2. Plucking Ears of Grain on the Sabbath

2.1. Mark

In Mark, the incident of the disciples’ plucking ears of grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23–28) is to be found in a series of controversies on various issues of Jesus’ and the disciples’ practice (Mark 2:1–3:6). The pericope itself can be classified as a “controversy story” or, as R. Tannehill has proposed, “objection story.” As such, it belongs to the “apophthegms” (R. Bultmann) or, in Tannehill’s terminology, the “pronouncement stories.” Like the preceding pericope about fasting, it deals with the disciples’, not Jesus’, practice, but it is Jesus who is questioned about it. While he is passing through (παραπορεύεσθαι) the cornfields, his disciples began “to make (their) way, plucking the ears of grain” (ὁδὸν ποιεῖν τίλλοντες τοὺς στάχυας, v. 23). “The Pharisees” complain to Jesus about this behaviour: “Look, why are they doing on the Sabbath what is forbidden” (ἴδε τί ποιοῦσιν τοῖς σάββασιν ὃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν, v. 24). The Greek wording in Mark is famously ambiguous and makes it difficult to establish what the point of the Pharisees’ complaint exactly is. However, none of the textual features is sufficient to suggest that what we have here is not an infringement of Sabbath law, but rather the creation of a path through a cornfield, which is always forbidden for ordinary people but counted amongst the privileges of the king (see m. Sanh. 2:4). Inter alia, this is also rendered unlikely by the clear reflection on the institution of the Sabbath in verses 27f.

Let us study this in greater detail. While ὁδὸν ποιεῖν can mean “to build a path,” it can as easily be taken here in the sense of “to make a journey”—either as a Latinism (iter facere) or as an active voice vari-