

Question #11

Question: A nationally acclaimed pastor of a large church stated in his national radio message that “the Sabbath is for the Jew, and Sunday is for the Christian.” This seems to be very popular thinking. How can I be sure about this?

Answer: If you check the dictionary, this is how it is stated: *The seventh-day Sabbath is kept by Jews; and Sunday, the first day of the week, is observed by Christians.* Is this possibly where the above pastor referenced his statement? The dictionary is only speaking of prevailing practice. It is not a theological expression of Bible teaching as we are searching for here.

Let's begin with the Jews.

Through the centuries, orthodox Jews have kept the Sabbath that Jesus practiced—the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment, which is Saturday in our weekly cycle. What do Jews believe? Do they teach that the Sabbath is exclusively Jewish—that the fourth commandment is required only of people of Jewish ethnicity?

Here is what Jewish authors say about this question, which is widespread thinking among orthodox Jews:

First century Jewish author—Philo of Alexandria:

“But after the whole world had been

completed according to the perfect nature of the number six, the Father hallowed the day following, the seventh, praising it, and calling it holy. For the day is the festival, not of any one city or one country, but of all the earth; a day which alone it is right to call the day of festival for all people, and the birthday of the world.”

Twentieth century celebrated Jewish author, Abraham Heschel, has reasoned that since “time” comes to everyone, the Sabbath is not to be observed only by one nation, sect, or class. Rather, its blessings and obligations are universal and ageless.

The beginning of Sabbath

The Sabbath was established at the end of Creation week, the seventh day. This is the origin of the weekly cycle. Adam and Eve (non-Jews, by the way) and the antediluvians who respected God would have been the first Sabbath-observing people. The Jew (Israelites) originated with Abraham possibly two thousand years after Creation. The Jewish people are the best link in the long history of the seventh-day Sabbath. It was through the Hebrew people that the Messiah would come—the very Creator Himself who spoke the Sabbath into existence.

Man's Maker called the Sabbath “the holy day of the Lord honorable” (Isaiah 58:13). Prior to this, the Sabbath had been preserved perpetually as holy Law in the Ten Commandments stated verbally by God and later imprinted by God's finger in stone tablets on Mount Sinai.

Some Christian teachers believe the Ten

Commandments and the Sabbath weren't known prior to Mount Sinai, but notice what Genesis says about Abraham who lived 600 years before Moses:

“. . . by your descendents all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed Me and Kept My charge, My commandments, My statues and My laws.” Genesis 26:4, 5. In fact, the language of the text implies that these commandments (including the fourth commandment) were meant to be shared with the non-Jewish nations of the world. Was not Israel to be God's messenger to all the world, a light to the Gentiles? (Isaiah 49:6)

How did Jesus view the Sabbath?

Jesus was Jewish; He is also considered, among Christians, to be the divine Son of God. He is the imminent spokesman for all that is true regarding our world. In His pre-existence, Christ spoke to Abraham and led Israel in the desert. As He walked the paths of Judea and Galilee in human form, did Jesus show that He viewed the Sabbath as being exclusively Jewish?

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus over Sabbath practices, this was His reply:

“Jesus said to them [the Pharisees], the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27 (NASB)

Notice how these modern versions interpret “man” [*anthropos*, in the Greek] in Mark 2:27:

(NRSV) New Revised Standard Version:
“The Sabbath was made *for mankind*.”

(GNT) Good News Translation: “The Sabbath was made for the good of *human beings*.”

(TLB) The Living Bible: “it was made to benefit *man*.”

(EB) Expanded Bible: the Sabbath was “made to help *people*.”

(NLT) New Living Translation: It was “made to help *people*.”

(CEV) Contemporary English Version: “The Sabbath was made for the good of *people*.”

Implied in Jesus’ declaration that the Sabbath was made for “man” (all human-kind) is God's intention that, as long as humanity inhabits planet Earth, the Sabbath, as a day in time, will be an on-going reality and an obligation for every human at whatever time they live on planet earth.

The best evidences that Jesus intended the Sabbath to flourish in the New Covenant era are the six different miracle healings that He purposely performed on the Sabbath.

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, one or more of these Sabbath healings is included by each of the Gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Jesus could have waited to perform all of these healing miracles on any other day of the week. But it appears that Jesus purposely and intentionally performed them on the Sabbath. Why do all of the Gospels record these Sabbath healing miracles?

Answer: A Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would

“magnify the law and make it honorable.” Isaiah 42:21. This Jesus did for the fourth commandment Sabbath by His Sabbath healings when He brought renewed purpose, restoration, joy, and praise to the Sabbath experience.

These intentional healings on the Sabbath were in sharp contrast with the man-made, nonsensical, legalistic regulations of the ruling class of Jesus' day. As a reformer, Jesus was inaugurating a revitalized appreciation and understanding of the Sabbath experience, which He intended for the new church era that would follow His resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Jesus portrayed the Sabbath as a revitalizing oasis in the weekly cycle. As intended, the seventh day is a monument in time, reminding humans of their noble origin and that their human frame was made in the “image” of their magnificent Maker.

Did Jesus Christ expect this Sabbath reminder to fade away following His resurrection and ascension to Heaven? Would He remove such a vivid celebration of humanity's origins that ever protects the human family against the empty ideas of false theories of origins such as evolution? Did He authorize a change of venue from Saturday to Sunday, thereby breaking the cycle He began at Creation?

As we have seen, the biblical record suggests just the opposite. As a Sabbath reformer, Jesus laid the foundation for a restored and rejuvenated Sabbath experience linked with the original in Eden, endorsed by Jesus' personal earthly ministry, and predicted to be celebrated by all the redeemed in the earth made new—
“from one Sabbath to another shall *all flesh*

come to worship before Me” (Isaiah 66:22, 23).

Is Sunday Made for the Christian?

Since the Dark Ages of Christian history, Sunday rather than the Sabbath has been practiced by the majority of the world's Christians as the day of assembly and worship.

However, many who observe Sunday in the 21st century do so in good faith, believing that it was legitimately initiated after Christ's resurrection from the grave. But most Christians, even pastors and teachers, are unaware of, or are knowingly ignoring the historical “baggage” that Sunday observance brings to the 21st century believer.

Consider the following points at issue:

#1 The Sabbath—a divine prerogative

The Saturday Sabbath was specifically originated by the Creator in the Creation account (Genesis 2) before the entrance of sin. It was more specifically restated by God Himself in moral law in the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). In both instances, the seventh day of the week is stipulated as being “holy” time or time initiated by divine authority. For humans to tamper or alter “sacred time” is to dismantle the handiwork of the Creator and to disrupt a Creation foundation made by God.

At the time of Jesus and the Jerusalem church, there was no divine declaration ever stated, or even hinted, that the Sabbath had come to an end, completing its purpose. For a change of venue for this God-originated institution, only God would have the authority to make such an alteration.

If Sunday was to replace the Saturday Sabbath for the purpose of honoring Christ's resurrection from the grave, where is the biblical evidence for this? All New Testament writers wrote 30 to 40 years after the resurrection. Was this not enough time for God's spoken declaration of a change?

It was Jesus who authored and inaugurated the Lord's Supper to memorialize His death by crucifixion. This was not a human invention.

A change of venue from the seventh-day to the first day of the week to honor the resurrection of Jesus would rightly require the authoritative voice of Jesus alone. The seventh day of Creation week was openly declared by divine fiat as sacred time. It was restated verbally to all Israel by divine action and then written by the finger of God in tables of stone, designating endless perpetuity. Where do we find any such divine designation for the cancellation of the Sabbath and its subsequent replacement by Sunday?

This question lingers—*How could the change of a Creation foundation—the seventh day—be left for any human to decide?*

Bible believers must consider these additional questions: Why is it necessary to discard the seventh-day Sabbath (which honors Jesus) in order to honor the resurrection of Jesus from the grave? Why must the one cancel out the other? Are they not both the transcendent handiwork of humankind's Maker?

If humans take responsibility for altering a Creation foundation such as marriage or the seventh-day Sabbath, would it not be correct to

conclude that humans have arrogantly usurped the authority of God?

#2 Absence of a pattern of first-day assembly

Following the resurrection of Jesus, the New Testament writers record no evidence showing a pattern of first-day assembly among Christian believers. Without any evidence, Sunday advocates have continued to insist that Sunday was early celebrated. Is this not a case of reading into the New Testament that which is not there? Here is a statement made by a respected voice to illustrate this point:

For millennia, Jews set aside the seventh day for worship. After Jesus' resurrection, Jewish followers of Christ suddenly began to worship on the first day of the week. Why? Nothing other than the Resurrection, a monumental event that took place on the first day of the week, can account for this rapid alteration from such a long and tenaciously held belief. (Dr. D. James Kennedy, *Impact* newsletter, April, 2003, p. 8)

(Note that Dr. Kennedy referenced no biblical or historical source for his statement. This is called “conjecture”—a statement that is unverified.)

Church historians and Christian authors record the following statements, which harmonize with first century New Testament reality:

Augustus Neander, noted church historian:

The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far

from the intentions of the apostles to establish a Divine command in this respect, far from them, and from the early apostolic Church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday . . . (Augustus Neander, *The History of the Christian Religion and Church*, [New York: Sanford and Swords, 1848], Rose's translation, 1843, p. 186)

M. Max B. Turner, professor of New Testament Studies at the London School of Theology:

We must conclude that it is barely imaginable that first-day Sabbath observance commenced before the Jerusalem Council. Nor can we stop there; we must go on to maintain that first-day Sabbath observance cannot easily be understood as a phenomenon of the apostolic age or of apostolic authority at all. (*From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, Theological Investigation*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982, D. A. Carson, editor, pp. 135, 136)

Because of the lack of biblical evidence, Sunday defenders are only able to pass along centuries-old traditions that, over time and continued repetition, have progressed to be widely accepted as historically accurate.

#3 Who openly claims to have changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday?

For all Bible-loving Catholic and Protestant Christians throughout the world who seek an answer to this question, here is a strait-forward explanation from Father John A. O'Brien in his book *The Faith of Millions*, published by Our Sunday Visitor Inc. Huntington, Indiana, 1974, pp. 400, 401.

But since Saturday, not Sunday, is specified in the Bible, isn't it curious that non-Catholics who profess to take their religion directly from the Bible, and not from the Church, observe Sunday instead of Saturday? Yes, of course it is inconsistent; but this change was made fifteen centuries before Protestantism was born, and by this time the custom was universally observed. They have continued the custom [of Sunday observance], even though it rests upon the authority of the Catholic Church and not upon an explicit text in the Bible. That observance remains as a reminder of the mother Church from which the non-Catholic sects broke away—like a boy running away from home but still carrying in his pocket a picture of his mother or a lock of her hair.

Since Father O'Brien's book went through 27 additional editions, it is fair to say that no small number of readers are aware of these claims. However, historical documentation to verify Father O'Brien's conclusions have been slow to reach the public's attention.

For instance, Eusebius—early 4th century church historian, biographer to Emperor Constantine, adviser in church affairs, and considered the Bishop of Rome—recorded this admission that the Sabbath had been altered by humans:

. . . all things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the sabbath, these we [the church] have transferred them to the Lord's day, as being more authoritative and more highly regarded and first in rank, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath. (Eusebius, Bishop of Rome [310-311], *Commentary on the Psalms*, on Psalm 91 [92]:2, 3, in J.-P. Migne, *The Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 23, col. 1172. Greek.)

Early 4th century leader of the Church of Rome, Pope Sylvester (314—336), also gave evidence of the dramatic change in attitude toward the seventh-day Sabbath:

If every Sunday is to be observed joyfully by the Christians on account of the resurrection, then every Sabbath on account of the burial is to be regarded in execration [denouncing] of the Jews.

(Quoted by S. R. E. Hubert, *Ad versus Decorum Calumnies 6*, in J. -P. Migne, *The Patrologia Latina*, vol. 143, col. 937. Latin.)

Many Christians in the Roman Empire were continuing to observe the Sabbath irrespective of Rome's change to Sunday as the day of sacred assembly. Rome would then take more stern action against those who, under her sphere of influence, refused to honor Sunday. A church council favoring Rome met at Laodicea (A.D. 365) and took the following action against those who chose to honor the biblical Sabbath.

Canon #29

Christians shall not Judaize and be idol on Saturday [Greek, *sabbaton*, "Sabbath"] but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day [Sunday] they shall especially honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out [Greek, *anathema*] from Christ. (Translated in Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1876, vol. 2, p. 316)

The historical documentation for the emergence of Sunday in place of the Sabbath does not originate from first century Christianity or the New Testament. Rather, an institution of the church,

Sunday observance came from the human ecclesiastical displacement of the Sabbath in the early fourth century. Historically, Sunday appears to be a political/religious compromise in Rome, divorced from biblical authority, even as Father O'Brien stated. While displacing the Creation Sabbath, Rome's Sunday comes cloaked with the rationale that it was instituted to honor the resurrection of Jesus.

Most Protestants and many Catholic believers are unaware of these historical developments of Sunday's human, clerical origin. That a strong element of antisemitism, apparent in the tone of the above statements, was an underlying issue in the Sabbath to Sunday history is a surprise to many Christ-followers.

Does antisemitism yet exist over the Sabbath to Sunday issue in mainstream Christianity today? Does not the language of the radio pastor, "The Sabbath was made for the Jew, and Sunday for the Christian," have an undertone of antisemitism? What will the response be when these facts regarding the Sabbath to Sunday change become individually and collectively known to a wider audience in the Christian community?

Back to the 21st Century

In the reality of the proclamation made by Jesus that "the Sabbath was made for man," who in the 21st century is willing to embrace the words of Eusebius, Pope Sylvester, and the Council of Laodicea as stated above? Is this not the uncomfortable historical baggage that has come to the current Christ-centered believer of our church era? How will today's God-fearing believer respond? Who will step forward with the courage of reform to restore the honor due to the Creator of Genesis?

As this invitation is given to return honor to the Christ of the seventh-day Sabbath, there are

currently 30 million Jesus-followers around the world in nearly every nation who embrace the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. They do so with love and devotion to the Lord Jesus whose example they wish to follow. Currently, every 24 hours—on average—3,000 people make the decision to observe God's holy day. This is the equivalent of adding a 3000-member church every day of the year.

Is there a reason for you to delay?

Indeed, it is still true: “The sabbath was made for man. . .”

With love,

JESUS!

Answer prepared by Daniel Knauft, author of *Sacred Time unRemembered—How the Original Sabbath Was Lost and Why It Matters*, (2014). This Q & A was edited by Kevin L. Morgan. (1/3/19)

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