A STUDY IN SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY

THE SABBATH

to

SUNDAY

WHEN? WHO? WHY? HOW?

Creation · Redemption · Restoration

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THE

SABBATH TO SUNDAY

WHEN? WHO? WHY? HOW?

Creation • Redemption • Restoration



Contending for the faith once delivered to the saints

THE SABBATH TO SUNDAY

Published by Yovel Publications.

"Contending for the faith once delivered to the saints."
Jude 3

Scripture quotations generally follow the King James Version,
with capitalisation standardised for consistency.

Contents

Who Changed the Day?	1
1. The Day God Blessed	3
2. Lord of the Sabbath	6
3. Where Is the Command?	9
4. What Did Paul Abolish?	12
5. So When Did Sunday Appear?	15
6. Passover to Easter - Sabbath to Sunday	19
7. Did Constantine Change the Sabbath?	22
8. The Christian Sabbath	24
9. By What Authority?	26
10. There Remains a Sabbath	28
11. Remember	30
Selected Historical Witnesses	32
Yovel Publications	33

Who Changed the Day?



"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." — 1 Thessalonians 5:21

There are some things in the Christian faith that we inherit so naturally that we rarely think to ask where they came from. For most Christians, Sunday is one of them. It is the day associated with church, with the resurrection, and with what has long been called the Lord's Day. To question it can therefore feel almost like questioning Christianity itself.

But there is a remarkably simple question which deserves an answer: **when did the Sabbath become Sunday? Who changed it? Why was it changed?** And, perhaps most importantly, **where is that change found in Scripture?**

These questions need not be asked in hostility. Millions of sincere believers have worshipped God on Sunday, loved Jesus, served Him faithfully and never thought to question the tradition they inherited. This booklet is not concerned with judging them. It is concerned with examining the tradition.

The seventh day occupies an extraordinary place in Scripture. Before there was an Israel, before Sinai, before Moses and before the giving of the Ten Commandments, there was the seventh day. At Creation God rested upon it, blessed it and sanctified it. Centuries later He commanded His people, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Jesus Himself kept the Sabbath. It was His custom to enter the synagogue upon it. He taught upon it. He healed upon it. He proclaimed liberty upon it. And He called Himself **"Lord of the Sabbath."**

So before we ask why Christians eventually came to worship on Sunday, we must first understand what it was that Christianity left behind. For the Sabbath

is much more than a disputed day of the week. It tells a story. It looks backward to Creation, remembers Redemption, speaks of Sanctification, and looks forward to the coming Kingdom of God.

The Sabbath reaches from Genesis toward the world to come. The question is therefore deeper than which day Christians attend a service: Why did God set apart the seventh day, and did He ever set another day apart in its place? Let us begin at the beginning.

CHAPTER ONE

The Day God Blessed



"And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." — Genesis 2:3

The story of the Sabbath does not begin at Mount Sinai. It begins at Creation. When the six days of Creation were complete, Scripture records something remarkable: God rested on the seventh day, blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. Three things therefore distinguish this day from the others. **God rested on it. God blessed it. God sanctified it.**

There is no Israelite nation in Genesis 2. There is no Mosaic covenant. There is simply God, mankind and Creation. The seventh day enters the biblical story as holy time. That matters, because God did not make the seventh day holy because Israel later kept it. Israel was later commanded to keep it because God had already made it holy. The holiness came first.

When the Sabbath eventually appears within the Ten Commandments, Israel is not being introduced to something new. They are told to remember. Something was already there to be remembered.

In Exodus the commandment points backward to Creation. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh He rested. Every Sabbath therefore bore witness that the world did not create itself, that man did not create himself, and that the heavens and the earth belong to their Maker.

There is something profoundly humbling in that weekly pause. For six days we can easily imagine that the world depends upon us. We work, buy, sell, build, plan, produce and achieve. Then comes the Sabbath, and we stop. Yet the sun still rises. The earth still turns. God remains God. The Sabbath quietly declares that the LORD is Creator and we are His creation.

When Moses repeats the commandments in Deuteronomy, another meaning comes into view. Israel is told to remember Egypt. They had been slaves. Their labour was not their own. Their lives belonged to Pharaoh. But the LORD brought them out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, He says, keep the Sabbath.

The Sabbath had become a memorial of freedom. Every seventh day a former slave ceased working because he was no longer Pharaoh's possession. Nor was this freedom reserved for the powerful. The command extended rest to sons and daughters, servants and strangers, even to the animals. The whole household stopped because the God of Israel was not merely the Creator. He was the Liberator.

The Sabbath is therefore not merely about resting from work. It is about release from bondage. Creation and Redemption have come together.

There is still another dimension. The LORD says of His Sabbaths that they are a sign between Him and His people, "that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you." The God who made them is the God who delivered them, and the God who delivered them is the God who sanctifies them. The same day therefore bears witness to **the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier**.

And the Sabbath looks in more than one direction. It remembers the completed Creation behind us. It gives present release from ordinary labour. **Yet it also points forward.** The weekly Sabbath, the sabbatical years and the Jubilee all speak the language of release, restoration, inheritance and freedom. **The day is not only a memorial; it is prophetic.**

This is why the Sabbath cannot be understood merely as an arbitrary regulation. It is a sign written into time. It tells us who God is, what He has done, and what He intends yet to do. Creation, Redemption and Restoration are already contained within its rhythm.

The prophets also refuse to confine the blessing of the Sabbath to ethnic Israel. **Isaiah 56** looks forward to foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, love His name, take hold of His covenant and keep the Sabbath. Significantly, the foreigner is explicitly told not to say, **"The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people."** He is not kept at a distance; he is welcomed to the LORD's holy mountain and into His house of prayer. The Sabbath is therefore placed within a horizon wider than Israel alone — a sign of worship and covenant blessing reaching toward the nations, not by erasing Israel, but by welcoming the stranger to the God of Israel.

ISAIAH 56:3, 6–7

"Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people ... Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD ... every one that keepeth the Sabbath ... even them will I bring to my holy mountain."

ISAIAH 56:3, 6–7

Isaiah returns to the same universal horizon in his vision of the restored Kingdom to come: **"from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me"** (Isaiah 66:23).

And when Messiah appears, this hidden meaning begins to shine with astonishing clarity.

CHAPTER TWO

Lord of the Sabbath



"The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." — Mark 2:28

One statement of Jesus ought to stop us before we go any further: "The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath." He did not call Himself Lord of Sunday. He did not announce that another day had replaced the seventh. He did not say the Sabbath was meaningless. He declared Himself its Lord.

Immediately before this He had said, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The Sabbath was a gift. It was made for mankind's good. The problem Jesus confronted was therefore not the Sabbath itself, but what men had made of it. A gift had become a burden. A day intended for liberation had become surrounded by regulations. The Lord of the Sabbath began to reveal what His day was really about.

At Nazareth He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, "as His custom was." The scroll of Isaiah was placed into His hands. He read of good news to the poor, healing for the broken-hearted, liberty to the captives and freedom for the oppressed. He proclaimed "the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He sat down and declared, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

The language is the language of release, of the sabbatical year and of Jubilee. The Sabbath had always spoken of freedom, and now Messiah stood in their midst proclaiming the ultimate liberation toward which it pointed.

Then Jesus began to demonstrate it. The Gospels preserve a remarkable series of healings upon the Sabbath: the invalid at Bethesda, the demoniac in the synagogue, Peter's mother-in-law, the man with the withered hand, the man born blind, the woman bent double for eighteen years, and the man with

dropsy. These are not random details of chronology. The day itself becomes part of the sign.

The woman bent double for eighteen years perhaps explains them all. Jesus saw her, called her to Himself and released her. The ruler of the synagogue was indignant because the healing had taken place on the Sabbath. There were six other days upon which such work could be done, he protested.

Jesus answered by pointing out that even an ox or donkey is loosed from its stall on the Sabbath and led to water. Then He asked, "Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

Bound. Loosed. Sabbath. The language is deliberate. The woman had been enslaved. Messiah released her. The ruler saw a rule being broken; Jesus saw a woman being set free. For the ruler there could hardly have been a worse day to heal her. For the Lord of the Sabbath **there could hardly have been a better one.**

The scene reaches back to Nazareth. "Liberty to the captives" has become visible. It also reaches forward to the Kingdom, when the whole creation will be released from bondage. The Sabbath is not being discarded. Its Messianic meaning is being unveiled.

The same pattern appears in John. At Bethesda Jesus tells the invalid to rise, take up his bed and walk. In John 9 He makes clay and gives sight to a man blind from birth. In both cases His enemies interpret His actions as Sabbath-breaking. Yet Jesus's answer is not that the Sabbath has ceased to matter. His answer is that the Father's work of salvation continues and that He, the Son, is doing the works of the Father.

The Sabbath rest of God is not divine inactivity. Creation was completed, but redemption is still being worked. The Father delivers, heals and restores; therefore the Son does the same. Saving work does not violate the Sabbath. It reveals its purpose.

This helps us hear another saying of Jesus with new ears: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The Lord of the Sabbath is Himself the giver of the rest to which the day points.

Creation, freedom, healing, redemption and rest: Jesus was not destroying the sign; He was unveiling its meaning.

And that leaves us with a question which can no longer be avoided. If God blessed the Sabbath, sanctified it, and Messiah called Himself its Lord and used it as a sign of redemption, what happened to it?

CHAPTER THREE

Where Is the Command?

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." — Psalm 119:105

If the Sabbath stood at Creation, if it was written into the Ten Commandments, and if Jesus revealed its redemptive meaning, then surely any change of such magnitude ought to be easy to find. We might reasonably expect to read that the seventh day was no longer holy, or that the first day had been sanctified in its place, or that the apostles commanded the churches to observe Sunday instead of the Sabbath.

No such statement exists.

That fact is more important than it first appears. The New Testament certainly mentions the first day of the week. The empty tomb was discovered on the first day, and Jesus appeared to His disciples. Paul once met with believers during a first-day gathering. He also instructed the Corinthians to make provision for a collection on the first day. But mentioning a day is not the same thing as sanctifying it, and gathering upon a day is not the same thing as transferring to it the holiness of another.

The question is not whether Christians ever met on the first day. Of course they did. Christians met on many days. The question is much more precise: where does Scripture transfer the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first?

Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 16 is often presented as evidence of a regular Sunday service: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." But Paul is arranging a collection for believers in need. Each person is instructed to set something aside so that the money will already be prepared when Paul arrives. Nothing in the passage calls the first day holy. Nothing identifies it as the Sabbath. Nothing speaks of rest.

Nothing describes a worship service. It is evidence of orderly giving, not of a transferred commandment.

Acts 20 is more interesting. Paul had been in Troas for seven days. Luke tells us that on the first day of the week the disciples came together to break bread, and Paul spoke to them because he intended to depart the following day. The meeting continued late into the night. Eutychus fell from the upper window, was restored to life, and the gathering continued until daybreak.

This is certainly a Christian gathering associated with the first day. Yet Luke never tells us that the Sabbath has been changed. He does not call the first day holy. He does not call it the Lord's Day. He does not command Christians everywhere to imitate the gathering at Troas. The circumstances are plainly extraordinary: Paul is leaving, the meeting runs through the night, and the meal takes place after midnight.

"Breaking bread" is also not a technical phrase restricted to the Lord's Supper. Acts uses it for ordinary fellowship meals. Luke's travel narrative is filled with chronological markers, and the mention of the first day fits naturally among them.

There is, moreover, an intriguing possibility. If Luke is using the biblical reckoning in which a new day begins at sunset, then the first day began as the Sabbath ended. The gathering would therefore fall on what we would call Saturday evening. Jewish communities later marked this transition with Havdalah, the ceremony of separation between Sabbath and the ordinary week, involving light, wine and fellowship. Acts mentions "many lights" in the upper room. We need not insist that Acts 20 describes a formal Havdalah service, but a Sabbath-ending setting is at least worthy of consideration.

The important point is simpler: **Acts 20 records a gathering. It does not record a change of the Sabbath.**

We now come to the verse which has carried more weight than any other: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." For generations Christians have read

Revelation 1:10 and assumed that "the Lord's Day" means Sunday. But where did John tell us that? He did not.

Whenever the first day appears elsewhere in the New Testament, it is called the first day of the week. John himself uses that expression in his Gospel when describing the resurrection morning and Jesus's appearances. Yet in Revelation he suddenly uses a different expression: the Lord's Day.

Revelation is not an ordinary letter. John is on Patmos. He is "in the Spirit." A voice like a trumpet sounds behind him. He sees the glorified Son of Man. Immediately before this John has spoken of Jesus coming with clouds, when every eye shall see Him. The entire atmosphere is prophetic.

The phrase "the Day of the LORD" already had a long biblical history. The prophets used it for the climactic intervention of God in judgement and redemption. The apostles continued to use that language for the coming Day of Messiah. Revelation itself repeatedly turns toward that great day.

The strongest clue may be John's own repeated expression, "in the Spirit." In Revelation 4 John again hears a trumpet-like voice. He is told, "Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter." Then, "Immediately I was in the Spirit." The parallels are striking: a trumpet-like voice, John in the Spirit, a vision of heavenly glory, and explicitly in chapter 4 a vision of things yet to come.

It is therefore possible that Revelation 1:10 is not telling us on which weekday John received the vision at all. It may be telling us where the Spirit carried him prophetically: into the great Day of the Lord. Even if a reader ultimately chooses another interpretation, one fact remains. **Revelation 1:10 never says, "Sunday is the Lord's Day."** That meaning has to be supplied.

If the transfer of the Sabbath rests upon passages such as these, we must ask whether the foundation is as strong as tradition has led us to suppose.

CHAPTER FOUR

What Did Paul Abolish?



"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid." — Romans 3:31

For many Christians, Paul appears to settle the matter. Did he not warn believers about observing days? Did he not speak of Sabbaths as shadows? Did he not say that something had been nailed to the cross? Romans 14, Galatians 4 and Colossians 2 therefore deserve careful attention, because all three concern something much larger than a weekly calendar. They concern the very nature of salvation.

Romans 14 describes believers disagreeing over eating. One person eats all things; another eats vegetables. One person esteems one day above another; another treats days alike. Paul's command is not that one side destroy the other. His command is that believers do not judge one another. Each is to act unto the Lord.

The surrounding discussion concerns food, abstinence, conscience and personal scruples. There is no mention of the Sabbath commandment, no discussion of Creation and no debate over whether the seventh day has been changed. The particular dietary behaviour Paul describes, including vegetarian abstinence and abstaining from wine, is not commanded by the Torah as a general rule. The "days" therefore sit naturally alongside questions of eating and fasting rather than as an announcement that the fourth commandment has been annulled.

Whatever Romans 14 is addressing, **it never says, "The seventh day is abolished."** And **it certainly does not say, "Therefore keep Sunday."**

Galatians sounds stronger. Paul rebukes his readers because they "observe days, and months, and times, and years." But these are Gentiles. Before

knowing God, they had been enslaved to powers which by nature were not gods. Paul asks why, now that they know God, they would turn back again to the "weak and beggarly elements." The language of returning is significant. How could Gentile pagans be returning to biblical Sabbath observance if that had not been their former religion?

Paul's concern is bondage. The Galatians were being drawn into a religious system in which observances had become connected with justification and spiritual status. The problem was not that a calendar existed. The problem was that religious works were being made part of the basis upon which men sought acceptance before God. Paul will allow no rival to the sufficiency of Messiah.

Colossians 2 has often been treated as the decisive text. Paul speaks of a written record being taken away and nailed to the cross. He then writes, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

It is easy to understand how this came to be interpreted as the abolition of the Sabbath, but the wider chapter deserves attention. Paul is warning against a philosophy involving human traditions, ascetic regulations, severe treatment of the body, the "elements of the world," angelic worship and commands such as "Touch not; taste not; handle not." This is not a straightforward exposition of the Mosaic Law. The word law is conspicuously absent from the controversy itself. The problem is a religious system competing with the sufficiency of Messiah.

And what exactly was nailed to the cross? The Greek word cheirographon can describe a written certificate of debt. Paul's image is wonderfully evangelical. Our guilt stood against us like an accusation. Messiah took that record away. He nailed the charge against us to the cross. The passage is about forgiveness, not about God crucifying His own moral instruction.

Then comes the famous statement: these things "are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Notice the tense. Paul does not say they were shadows. He says they are a shadow of things to come. A shadow is not the enemy of the body. It exists because something substantial casts it. The danger is not in seeing the shadow; the danger is in embracing the shadow while missing the One to whom it points.

Passover points to Messiah. Unleavened Bread speaks of sincerity and truth. Pentecost speaks of the Spirit. The Sabbath speaks of the rest, redemption and Kingdom of God. **The shadow does not replace Messiah**, and **Messiah should not be used to make the shadow meaningless.**

There is another question which should trouble us. If Paul had really announced the abolition of the Sabbath and the establishment of Sunday, where is the controversy? Paul's ministry generated enormous controversy over circumcision. His opponents accused him of teaching against Moses. Acts records disputes over Torah, Gentiles, circumcision and Temple practice. Yet nowhere do we find the great argument one would expect: "Paul has abolished the seventh day and commanded Christians to keep the first."

Instead Acts shows Sabbath activity among Jews and Gentiles alike. At Pisidian Antioch Paul preached on the Sabbath; when Gentiles asked to hear more, "the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together" (Acts 13:14, 42, 44). In Thessalonica it was his custom to reason on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2); at Corinth he did so "every Sabbath," persuading Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). James likewise noted that Moses was read in synagogues "every Sabbath day" (Acts 15:21). If Paul had transferred the commandment to Sunday, the silence surrounding such a change is remarkable.

Paul preached salvation by grace. He rejected every attempt to make obedience a ladder to God's favour. But grace and obedience are not enemies. A day on which man ceases from work is hardly a natural symbol of salvation by works. Man stops. God remains God. And he rests.

CHAPTER FIVE

So When Did Sunday Appear?



"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths." — Jeremiah 6:16

At this point the trail changes. **We have searched the New Testament for an explicit transfer of the Sabbath and have not found one.** But that does not mean Sunday worship never arose. It clearly did. The important question is when.

The change was not accomplished in one moment. There was no single morning on which the whole Christian world awoke and announced, "The Sabbath is now Sunday." The evidence points instead to a gradual process. Different regions developed differently. Different writers offered different reasons. Old practices persisted beside new ones.

That historical setting matters. The first generations of believers had been overwhelmingly Jewish. Jesus was Jewish. The apostles were Jewish. The Scriptures of the early assemblies were the Hebrew Scriptures. Jerusalem stood at the heart of the earliest movement. But history became brutal.

Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. Further revolt brought further disaster. Roman suspicion of Jewish identity intensified. After the Bar Kokhba revolt in the second century, the separation between synagogue and an increasingly Gentile Christianity widened dramatically. Circumcision, Passover and the Sabbath all marked a people Rome increasingly regarded with hostility.

This does not mean every Christian who worshipped on Sunday hated Jews, nor that one cause alone explains the change. History is rarely so simple. But something unmistakable begins to appear in the literature: Christian identity is increasingly defined in contrast to Jewish practice, and the Sabbath becomes one of the points at which that separation is expressed.

An early Christian writing known as the Epistle of Barnabas develops an imaginative "eighth day" argument. The six days of Creation are interpreted as six thousand years of world history. The seventh day becomes the great coming age of rest. Beyond the seventh comes the eighth day, a symbol of the new world. From this symbolism the writer attempts to justify Christian observance of the eighth day.

There is genuine beauty in the picture. The seventh day as the Messianic age and the eighth as the beginning of eternity is a striking pattern. But it raises a simple question: where did God say that an eighth-day symbol abolishes the seventh-day commandment? The eighth only has meaning because the seventh came before it. What we are witnessing is not an apostolic decree. We are witnessing theology being developed to explain an emerging practice.

Another early witness is Ignatius of Antioch. In his letter to the Magnesians he warns Christians against "Judaizing," and the common English translation contrasts Sabbath observance with living according to the Lord's Day. The exact wording of that famous sentence has been debated, so it should not be made to carry more weight than it can bear. What is clear, however, is the growing polemical contrast between Christianity and Jewish practice.

By the middle of the second century the evidence becomes clearer still. Justin Martyr, born at Flavia Neapolis in Samaria to a pagan family and later writing in Rome, gives us one of the earliest unmistakable descriptions of Christians gathering regularly on what he explicitly calls the day of the Sun. His First Apology, addressed to Antoninus Pius and the Roman authorities, explains that Christians assemble on that day because it is associated both with the beginning of Creation and with the resurrection of Jesus.

Justin's Dialogue with Trypho reveals something even more important for our question. His argument against the Sabbath is no longer simply that Messiah has fulfilled a sign. He says that circumcision, Sabbaths and feasts were imposed upon Israel "on account of your transgressions and the hardness of your

hearts." Elsewhere he argues that the Sabbath was enjoined because of Israel's unrighteousness. Whether one accepts that theology or not, it is a striking shift in emphasis from Genesis, where God blesses the seventh day before Israel exists, and from Jesus, who says that the Sabbath was made for man.

Justin therefore matters not because he single-handedly changed the day, but because he shows how far the argument had moved by the middle of the second century. The Sabbath is increasingly described as a Jewish burden, while Sunday is defended by new Christian symbolism.

The solar setting deserves more than a passing notice. The first day was already known throughout the Roman world as the day of the Sun, and Justin repeatedly uses that designation when explaining Christian worship to Roman authorities. **The standard translation gives "the day called Sunday"; Justin's Greek is literally "the day called of the Sun."** Constantine later legislated for the same day under the title dies Solis, "the day of the Sun." Christian writers also increasingly employed the language of light and the "Sun of righteousness" when defending the first day. The evidence does not reduce Sunday to one simple act of pagan borrowing; neither does it allow the solar setting to be dismissed. Sunday emerged and was defended within a Roman culture in which the first day already carried powerful solar language and symbolism. **That convergence is historically significant.**

> **JUSTIN MARTYR · c. AD 155**
>
> *"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place."*
>
> **FIRST APOLOGY 67**

Justin's witness predates Constantine's civil Sunday law by well over a century. The significance is not that paganism issued a decree and Christianity obeyed it. It is that the new Christian day took root in a Roman world which already named and honoured that day through the Sun. Anti-Judaizing

pressure helped drive separation from the Sabbath; the established day of the Sun offered a culturally familiar alternative; and Christian writers increasingly clothed the first day in the language of light. **The solar setting is therefore not an accidental footnote to the story.** It belongs to the historical world in which Sunday rose.

Here at last Sunday worship stands plainly before us. But notice the date. We are no longer reading Acts, Paul or John. We are well into the second century.

Notice also how the theological explanation has changed. Exodus says the memorial of Creation is the seventh day because on that day God rested from His completed work. Justin argues from the first day because light began there. Other writers appeal to the eighth day, circumcision on the eighth day, the eight persons saved in Noah's ark and other symbolic patterns.

If Sunday had simply been commanded by the apostles, why were such arguments necessary? The multiplying explanations do not prove that every argument was insincere. They do, however, reveal something important: later theology is doing work that an explicit apostolic command would have made unnecessary.

CHAPTER SIX

Passover to Easter — Sabbath to Sunday



"For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." — 1 Corinthians 5:7

There is another historical development running alongside the Sabbath question: Passover. The earliest followers of Jesus did not need to invent a festival explaining His death. God had already given one. Messiah was crucified in the Passover season, and Paul could write, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." The bread, the cup, the Lamb, the blood and the deliverance from bondage saturate the Gospel story.

In the second century another dispute arose. Should the death and resurrection of Messiah continue to be commemorated according to the biblical Passover calendar, or should the celebration be attached to Sunday? In Asia Minor many believers continued the older practice associated with the fourteenth day of the biblical month. They became known historically as Quartodecimans, "fourteenthers." Rome increasingly favoured a Sunday celebration.

The disagreement became so serious that toward the end of the second century Victor, bishop of Rome, attempted to cut off churches in Asia which refused to conform. The incident is important because it shows that inherited practices were not being replaced everywhere at once. Christians who claimed old apostolic associations could still resist the Roman custom.

The two developments begin to mirror each other. Passover becomes increasingly associated with an annual resurrection Sunday. Sunday becomes increasingly associated with a weekly resurrection celebration. The annual feast and the weekly day reinforce one another. Later Christian writers could therefore speak of every Sunday as, in effect, a weekly resurrection feast.

The New Testament memorial language surrounding the Lord's Supper, however, points most explicitly to Messiah's death and His coming again: "Ye do shew the Lord's death till He come." The later weekly-Sunday theology places increasing emphasis upon the resurrection.

The resurrection is glorious. Without it our faith is vain. But the question remains: did the resurrection itself transfer the Sabbath? Scripture never says so. The resurrection can give the first day significance without making it the Sabbath. Biblical sacred time already demonstrates that different days may carry different meanings without one abolishing the other.

What develops historically is something more than honouring the resurrection. **It is substitution. And substitution requires authority.**

Here we must speak carefully. The church's history with the Jewish people is painful, and this booklet should never replace one prejudice with another. We are not blaming modern Christians for the sins of ancient writers, nor claiming that every Sunday observer participates in anti-Judaism. But the historical record contains language which should grieve every follower of Jesus.

Some second-century Christian writers increasingly described Jewish observances with contempt. The Sabbath could become a mark of a rejected order from which Christianity must distance itself, and the language of "Judaizing" became a weapon in defining Christian identity.

By the fourth century the rhetoric had become unmistakable. In the letter circulated after Nicaea concerning Easter, Constantine urged Christians, **"Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd."** The issue was the annual feast, not the weekly Sabbath, but the sentence exposes the atmosphere in which Jewish calendrical practice was increasingly treated as something from which the church should separate.

CONSTANTINE · AFTER NICAEA

"Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd."

LETTER CONCERNING THE PASCHAL SETTLEMENT

This did not create Sunday worship from nothing, nor did Nicaea invent Easter Sunday. But the annual and weekly developments reinforced one another: Passover was increasingly separated from the biblical calendar, and Sunday increasingly became the distinctive Christian day.

The question was no longer merely, "What did the apostles do?" It had also become, "How do we ensure Christianity is not mistaken for Judaism?" That is a very different question.

When theology begins from the desire to be unlike another people rather than from the commandment of God, we should be cautious. The issue is whether later separation from Jewish practice caused the church to distance itself from things Scripture itself had never repudiated.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Did Constantine Change the Sabbath?

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." — Matthew 7:7

No — at least not in the simplistic way the claim is often made. This matters because weak arguments damage strong ones. Constantine did not wake up one morning and invent Sunday worship. Christians had already been gathering on Sunday for generations. The historical trail reaches well back into the second century.

What Constantine represents is something different. By the fourth century, practices which had once developed within portions of the church were gaining the support of imperial and ecclesiastical power. What had begun as custom could now become established social order.

In AD 321 Constantine issued a civil law directing that on "the venerable day of the Sun" judges, city people and workshops should rest. Agricultural work was expressly exempted when necessary. The law did not call Sunday the Sabbath, did not cite the fourth commandment and did not claim to be an apostolic decree. It gave legal protection and public force to a day already important in Christian practice.

CONSTANTINE · AD 321

"On the venerable day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed."

CIVIL SUNDAY LAW

The wording is worth noticing. Constantine legislated under the Roman title dies Solis, the day of the Sun. Whatever mixture of political and religious motives lay behind the law, Sunday was now fixed within imperial civic life

under its solar name. By the fourth century the day long known to Rome as the day of the Sun and the dominant Christian day of assembly had converged in public law. **That fact is not peripheral to the history.**

As the centuries progressed, Sunday increasingly inherited characteristics which originally belonged to the Sabbath: rest, cessation from work, public sacredness and legal protection. The transformation was gradual rather than instantaneous.

The Council of Laodicea later gives us an especially revealing snapshot. Canon 29 states that Christians "must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day," while honouring the Lord's Day instead. Yet the same council still provided for Scripture to be read on the Sabbath. Older and newer patterns were therefore still close enough together that ecclesiastical authority felt the need to regulate them.

The later historians Socrates and Sozomen show how slowly this transition worked itself out. Writing in the fifth century, Socrates observed that "almost all churches throughout the world" celebrated the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath, with Rome and Alexandria as exceptions. Sozomen likewise reported that Constantinople and many other places assembled on the Sabbath as well as on the first day. Whatever later theology said about Sunday, actual Christian practice remained mixed for centuries. That survival is difficult to square with the idea of a universal apostolic transfer from the seventh day to the first.

This is not the picture of a clean apostolic transfer which everyone had unquestioningly practised from the resurrection onward. It is the picture of an ongoing historical transition.

Constantine did not create the transition. Imperial and ecclesiastical authority helped consolidate it. That distinction allows history to speak without depending upon the slogan, "Constantine changed the Sabbath," which is too simple to bear the weight often placed upon it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Christian Sabbath



"The seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God." — Exodus 20:10

Eventually a remarkable thing happened. Christianity began taking the language of the Sabbath and applying it to Sunday. The fourth commandment remained, but the day changed. **The seventh became the first.** The theological obligations of Sabbath rest were increasingly attached to what was now called the Lord's Day. Thus emerged the idea of the Christian Sabbath.

But this creates a profound question. If the Sabbath commandment itself is still important enough to require Christians to keep a holy day, how can the same commandment be used to establish a day which it never names? The commandment does not say, "Remember one day in seven." It does not say, "Remember whichever day the church appoints." It says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God."

As Sunday increasingly inherited Sabbath language, theologians were forced to explain by what authority the transfer had occurred. That question becomes especially revealing when we listen not merely to modern defenders or critics, but to major voices within the churches themselves.

The distinction matters. To defend Sunday as a long-standing ecclesiastical custom is one argument. To claim that Scripture itself explicitly transfers the Sabbath to Sunday is another. The two should not be confused.

Where is that text? That is the question with which we began. After travelling through the New Testament and the early centuries of Christian history, the question remains.

The usual answer is the resurrection. Yes, the first day is associated with the resurrection, and that makes the resurrection glorious. But it does not

automatically make Sunday the Sabbath. Jesus was crucified in the Passover season; that does not make every corresponding weekday a weekly Passover. The Spirit was poured out at Pentecost; that does not make every corresponding weekday a weekly Pentecost.

Biblical events may give profound significance to an occasion without creating a new weekly commandment. If the resurrection changed the fourth commandment, Scripture could have said so very simply. It never does.

The New Testament writers continue to call the resurrection day "the first day of the week." **They do not call it the new Sabbath. They do not call it the Christian Sabbath. They do not explicitly identify it as the Lord's Day.** Those identifications emerge later.

That distinction between apostolic text and later theological development lies at the heart of the entire investigation. And, remarkably, later Catholic and Protestant authorities sometimes state it more plainly than popular argument does.

CHAPTER NINE

By What Authority?

"To the law and to the testimony." — Isaiah 8:20

Once Sunday had become the dominant Christian day, different traditions explained its authority in different ways. What is striking is that voices separated by major theological divisions sometimes agree on one historical point: the first day is not simply the seventh-day commandment with a new number supplied by an explicit New Testament text.

Thomas Aquinas states the Catholic position with unusual clarity. In the Summa Theologiae he says that observance of the Lord's Day took the place of Sabbath observance "not by virtue of the precept but by the institution of the Church and the custom of Christian people." Within Roman Catholic theology this is not an admission of embarrassment. It reflects a view of ecclesiastical authority and tradition that does not depend upon Scripture alone.

THOMAS AQUINAS
"Not by virtue of the precept but by the institution of the Church and the custom of Christian people."
SUMMA THEOLOGIAE

James Cardinal Gibbons made the same distinction even more sharply in The Faith of Our Fathers. Arguing that Scripture alone cannot contain every Christian obligation, he wrote that one may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and find no line "authorizing the sanctification of Sunday." He immediately contrasted this with Scripture's religious observance of Saturday.

JAMES CARDINAL GIBBONS

"You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday."

THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

The Protestant Reformers rejected Rome's claim to bind consciences by church tradition, yet their own confessional writings are equally revealing. Article XXVIII of the Augsburg Confession says that the church "designated the Lord's Day" so that people would know when to assemble, and rejects the idea that the keeping of one particular day is necessary for salvation.

Martin Luther's Large Catechism is similarly candid. Discussing the commandment to sanctify the holy day, Luther says that "in itself no one day is better than another." Sunday is retained because it had long been appointed for public worship and because orderly common assembly requires an agreed day.

These witnesses do not agree with one another about the authority of church tradition, the continuing force of the Sabbath, or the theology of the Lord's Day. That is precisely why their convergence is so interesting. Catholic and Lutheran voices alike distinguish later Sunday practice from a simple biblical command saying that the seventh day has become the first.

This chapter is not an appeal to authority against Scripture. It is the opposite. It allows the traditions to tell us how they themselves understood the development. The question for the reader remains the one with which we began: where is the apostolic command that transfers the holiness of the seventh day to Sunday?

CHAPTER TEN

There Remains a Sabbath



"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." — Hebrews 4:9

History is not where the Sabbath story ends. The writer of Hebrews takes us somewhere deeper. He looks back to Creation, to Israel in the wilderness and to Joshua bringing the people into the land. Then he says something astonishing: "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God."

The Greek word is unusual: sabbatismos. It is not the ordinary word for "rest" used throughout the chapter, katapausis. Sabbatismos is specifically Sabbatic — a **Sabbath observance or Sabbath-rest**. The simple KJV rendering "rest" therefore conceals something of the force of the word. The writer has been speaking about God resting on the seventh day, quotes Genesis, and then says that a sabbatismos still "remains" for the people of God.

Hebrews does not reduce the Sabbath merely to a future heaven, nor merely to an ancient Jewish institution. Creation, present salvation and future consummation are brought into one continuous picture. The believer enters God's rest by faith now, yet is still exhorted to labour to enter that rest. The promise is tasted in the present and awaits fullness in the future.

This is exactly what we saw at the beginning. The Sabbath looks backward, speaks into the present and looks forward. Creation. Redemption. Restoration.

The believer rests in Messiah now, yet the world is not at rest. Creation still groans. Death still reigns. Nations still rage. The Kingdom is not yet present in its fullness. Therefore the Sabbath continues to preach. Every seventh day whispers that there is still a rest to come.

From very early times Jews and Christians saw something suggestive in the biblical week: six days of labour followed by the seventh day of rest. Could human history itself follow that pattern? Six ages of toil, then the great Messianic Sabbath. A thousand-year Kingdom. Whatever one makes of exact chronological schemes, the symbolism itself is magnificent.

The Sabbath becomes a miniature of the Kingdom. The King reigns. Bondage ends. Creation is restored. The oppressed are released. The earth rests. Messiah — the One who healed upon the Sabbath — brings the world into the fullness of what those healings foretold.

The woman bent double is straightened. The blind see. The lame walk. The captive is released. The whole creation enters the liberty of the children of God. Jesus's Sabbath miracles cease to be isolated stories. They are previews. They are signs of the age to come.

Isaiah sees that future world and writes, "And it shall come to pass ... from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me." The Sabbath appears at Creation, in the wilderness, in the prophets, throughout Jesus's ministry and in the argument of Hebrews; Isaiah sees it in the restored world.

Perhaps this is why the question of the Sabbath matters more than the question of a weekday. **The Sabbath is a message.** It declares that God created the world. It declares that God redeems slaves. It declares that God sanctifies His people. It declares that Messiah gives rest. And it declares that history itself is moving toward restoration.

A SIGN WRITTEN INTO TIME

The Sabbath is the Gospel written into time.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Remember



"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." — Exodus 20:8

We have travelled a long way to arrive at one word: remember.

God did not begin the fourth commandment with debate, defend or argue. He said, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Perhaps the word itself contains a warning. Things which are in no danger of being forgotten rarely need to be remembered.

For many centuries sincere believers have loved God while worshipping on Sunday. This booklet does not question their sincerity, nor does it claim that God has been absent from their worship. The faithfulness of God is greater than the errors of men. But sincerity cannot turn tradition into Scripture, and love of tradition should never make us afraid to examine it.

The Bereans were called noble because they searched the Scriptures to discover whether the things they had been taught were so. That spirit is still needed. The final question is not what Christians have done for centuries. The question is what God said.

What day did He bless? What day did He sanctify? What day did He command mankind to remember? What day did Jesus call His own? What day did He fill with healing, liberty and restoration? And where did He ever command another day to take its place?

If Scripture reveals such a change, we should embrace it. If Scripture does not reveal it, then perhaps we have inherited something we need to reconsider — not angrily, not self-righteously, and never as though Sabbath observance could save us.

Only Messiah saves.

The Sabbath does not redeem us. **It remembers the Redeemer.** It does not create us. **It remembers the Creator.** It does not sanctify us by our own works. **It points to the One who sanctifies us.** And it does not establish the Kingdom. **It waits for the King.**

For six days mankind labours. Then comes the seventh: a sanctuary not made of stone, a temple built not in space but in time, a day in which the creature stops and remembers the Creator, a day in which the slave remembers freedom, a day in which the weary hear the voice of Messiah: "Come unto Me ... and I will give you rest."

The Sabbath was never meant to be a burden. **It was given as a blessing and an invitation to delight in the LORD.**

ISAIAH 58:13-14

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."

ISAIAH 58:13-14

The invitation is now clear: cease from ordinary pursuits, call the Sabbath a delight, and delight in the LORD. God Himself calls it "my holy day" and "the holy of the LORD." Isaiah does not use John's exact Greek phrase in Revelation 1:10, but the biblical idea is striking: the seventh-day Sabbath is a holy day belonging to the LORD. Nor is the blessing confined to Israel alone. Isaiah 56 welcomes the stranger who joins himself to the LORD and keeps the Sabbath, while Isaiah 66 looks forward to the Kingdom when "all flesh" will worship from Sabbath to Sabbath.

And after many centuries, the ancient command is still calling to us.

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY,
TO KEEP IT HOLY.

Selected Historical Witnesses



Justin Martyr, First Apology, ch. 67, for the mid-second-century description of Sunday assembly; Dialogue with Trypho, especially chs. 16, 18, 21 and 23, for his argument concerning circumcision, Sabbaths and Jewish observance.

Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Magnesians, chs. 8-10, for the early anti-Judaizing polemic and the much-discussed Lord's Day/Sabbath passage.

The Epistle of Barnabas, ch. 15, for the early Christian eighth-day argument.

Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book V, for the Quartodeciman controversy; Life of Constantine III.17-19 for Constantine's post-Nicene letter concerning Easter and Jewish reckoning.

Eusebius, Commentary on Psalm 91, for the later language of first-day light, the "day of the Sun," and the transfer of Sabbath features to the Lord's Day.

Codex Justinianus 3.12.3 and related Constantinian legislation of AD 321 for the civil rest law on the "venerable day of the Sun."

Council of Laodicea, Canon 29, for the fourth-century prohibition on "Judaizing" by resting on the Sabbath and the instruction to honour the Lord's Day.

Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen, Ecclesiastical Histories, for fifth-century testimony that Sabbath assemblies continued widely alongside first-day gatherings, with Rome and Alexandria standing as notable exceptions.

Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae II-II, q.122, a.4, for the statement that Sunday observance took the place of Sabbath observance through the institution and custom of the Church rather than by virtue of the precept itself.

James Cardinal Gibbons, The Faith of Our Fathers, in the discussion of Scripture and tradition, for the statement that Scripture contains no line authorising the sanctification of Sunday.

The Augsburg Confession, Article XXVIII, and Martin Luther's Large Catechism, Third Commandment, for Reformation-era distinctions between the biblical Sabbath precept and the ecclesiastical appointment of Sunday for orderly public worship.

The historical discussion in this booklet is a concise synthesis of the author's larger Sabbath-to-Sunday research. The witnesses above identify the principal sources used in the argument.

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