

“Sabbath”

Exodus 20:8

**Baxter T. Exum (#1030)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
September 6, 2009**



Introduction:

Most of us probably know that it is illegal to purchase a car on a Sunday here in the state of Wisconsin. And yet as strange as that may be for some people, other places have some rather strange laws as well. In Bench, Idaho, for example, I have read that a couple kissing on a Sunday are legally required to **“pause for breath”** between each kiss. In Peewee, West Virginia, it is illegal to let your horse fall asleep in a bathtub on the Sabbath—unless you sleep with the horse. In Crawford, Nebraska, women who are single, widowed, or divorced, may not legally parachute on the Sabbath. In Kittery, New Hampshire, local citizens may not stick out their tongues at a dog on the way to church. And in Okanogan, Washington, it is illegal to read the Sunday paper sitting on a rocking chair on the front porch while church services are in session. I would certainly hope that some of these have been repealed by now, but it is interesting to see the attitudes that some people have had toward worshiping God on a particular day of the week.

This morning, I would like for us to think for a few moments about why we worship on the first day of every week. At first, this may not seem like a very pressing concern. It is not something that we usually ask ourselves on a regular basis, and yet it is a question that has come up several times here at this congregation over the past few years, and it is a question that was actually turned in by one of our members last week. On top of that, there are several denominations in our area who worship on Saturday as opposed to Sunday, so it is a question that we should consider. Are we right when we worship on Sunday, or have God’s people had it wrong for nearly 2,000 years?

At this time, I would like to ask several of the men of the congregation to pass out a handout for this morning’s lesson. If you were here this past Wednesday evening, then you may already know that our projector blew out a very expensive bulb—a bulb that is roughly half the price of a new projector, and so instead of using the projector, and because there are so many Scripture references this morning, I have put most of those references on a handout so that we can keep up with the study. As we think about the day that we are to use for our worship assembly, I would like for us to consider several aspects of this issue from various parts of the Bible.

- I would like for us to consider, first of all, that the observance of the Sabbath (or worship on the seventh day of the week) was only required of the Jewish people under the Old Covenant.

- I would like for us to consider the fact that the New Covenant requires that we meet together for worship on the first day of the week.
- And then I would like for us to consider several objections that are usually made when it comes to worshiping on Sunday as opposed to Saturday.

I. **But first of all, though, let us please establish that THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH WAS ONLY COMMANDED OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE UNDER THE LAW OF MOSES.**

This is very important for us to remember: The Jewish people were the only ones ever required to keep the Sabbath. Some people will go to **Genesis 2**, and they will try to teach that worship on the Sabbath was commanded from the very beginning, but when we look at what the Bible actually says, we see something else. Please look with me at **Genesis 2:2-3**. In **Genesis 2:2-3**, the Bible says, ***“By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”*** To start with, please notice that there is no command to worship in these verses. There is no example of worshiping on the Sabbath in these verses. There is no penalty for those who refuse to worship on the Sabbath in these verses. In fact, please notice that the word **“Sabbath”** is never even mentioned!

We also need to remember that the book of **Genesis** was most likely written by Moses roughly 2500 years after these things took place. In other words, Moses was not there at the creation taking notes, but the book of **Genesis** was most likely written later in Moses’ life—many years after the Ten Commandments had been given. When we understand this, then we can understand the language that is used here. The past tense that is used simply means that God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it sometime before the writing of the book of **Genesis**, and **Genesis** was written after the Ten Commandments.

To illustrate, there is a similar language issue in **Genesis 3:20**, where Moses said, ***“Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.”*** When Eve was called Eve, was she the mother of all the living? The answer is: No! She was not the mother of anyone at that point. But she was by the time that Moses recorded the book of **Genesis**. In the same way, Sabbath worship was not commanded until centuries after the creation of the world.

If we keep reading in the Old Testament, we would see that Sabbath observance was actually commanded for the very first time under the Law of Moses. In fact, the very first time the word **“Sabbath”** is ever used in the Bible is in **Exodus 16**, and in this chapter some very detailed instructions are given. That is very interesting, because if the Sabbath had been observed since the creation, then why was all of that detail necessary? By the way, **Exodus 16** is where Moses had to tell the people to collect two times the manna on Friday so they would not need to go gather it on Saturday. This was a brand new thing—something they had never experienced before!

The fact is, there is no record of anyone ever keeping the Sabbath (or even knowing about the Sabbath) until Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and into the wilderness. In fact, not a single patriarch is ever recorded as having observed the Sabbath—not Adam, not Enoch, not Abraham, not Isaac, not Jacob—as far as the Bible is concerned, not a single one of them ever observed a single Sabbath Day. But rather, the word is not even mentioned in the Bible until **Exodus 16**. Sabbath observance is then also mentioned just a few chapters later, in the Ten Commandments in **Exodus 20**. When those Ten Commandments were repeated forty years later in **Deuteronomy 5**, Moses said something very interesting in the prologue to the Ten Commandments. Please notice with me **Deuteronomy 5:2-3**, where Moses said, ***“The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today.”*** Many years later in the book of **Nehemiah**, a prophet would summarize the history of Israel by saying (referring to God and the Israelites), ***“Then You came down on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. So You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, through Your servant Moses” (Nehemiah 9:13-14).*** In other words, when the Law of Moses was given, it was a new covenant and had not been given to any other nation in such a way ever before. The Jewish people were unique in this regard in that they only learned about the Sabbath through Moses.

Not only that, but Moses gave a more complete explanation of the need for a Sabbath rest in **Deuteronomy 5:15**, where he said, ***“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.”*** And so the day of Sabbath rest was specifically designed to remind the Israelites that God had freed them from Egyptian slavery! And so for a Gentile, the Sabbath would not have the meaning that was intended in the original design. It would be a little bit like someone from Australia trying to celebrate the Fourth of July. Yes, they have a Fourth of July down there, but it does not have the meaning for them as it does for us.

Further proof that the Sabbath was only intended for the Jewish people is found shortly after the giving of the Ten Commandments, in **Exodus 31:13-18**. If you believe in underlining in your Bible, this would be a good time to do it, to underline the references specifically to the nation of Israel. Please look with me at **Exodus 31:13-18**...

¹³ ***“But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.’*** ¹⁴ ***‘Therefore you are to observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.*** ¹⁵ ***‘For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of***

complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death. ¹⁶ 'So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.' ¹⁷ "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed." ¹⁸ When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.

And so we learn here that the Sabbath was commanded only for the Israelites under the Old Covenant. Some would point out that God said this would be a ***"perpetual covenant."*** However, I would also point out that the same wording is used in other passages referring to the feast of the Passover, the burning of incense, the burnt offerings, and the offering of the first fruits. But for some reason, some people insist on reaching back into the Old Testament, doing away with these things, but holding on to the Sabbath. In reality, though, all of these things (including the Sabbath) were specifically given to the nation of Israel and remained in force only until the death of the Messiah. On the handout, I have included several verses from the book of Amos. In **Amos 8:2**, God said through the prophet that the end was coming for the nation of Israel, and then down in **verses 9-10**, the Lord gave us a clue as to when that will happen, ***"'It will come about in that day,' declares the Lord GOD, 'That I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight. Then I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sackcloth on everyone's loins and baldness on every head. And I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son, and the end of it will be like a bitter day.'"*** When did the sun go down at noon? When was the earth made dark in broad daylight? When was there mourning as for an only son? I would suggest that that day happened with the death of Jesus on the cross—which certainly fits in very well with what the rest of the Bible teaches on this subject. The nation of Israel's special relationship with God came to an end almost immediately after the Lord spoke from the cross and said, ***"It is finished."***

Applying all of this specifically to the Sabbath, we should consider Paul's words in **Colossians 2:13-17**, where Paul said, ***"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."***

And so we have established that the Sabbath holiday is not required for Christians today—it was never kept by the patriarchs, it was only given to the Jews as a way of remembering their deliverance from Egypt, it was not revealed to any other nation,

and it was nailed to the cross (along with the rest of the Old Law). In other words, when it comes to worship as Christians, we can go into our study of the New Covenant with open minds—not giving any preference to one day over another.

II. With this in mind, we can go to the New Testament, and we learn that THE NEW COVENANT REQUIRES US TO GATHER FOR WORSHIP ON THE FIRST DAY OF EVERY WEEK.

A. And one of the first and main reasons we meet on Sunday is that THE LORD WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD ON SUNDAY MORNING (Mark 16:9; John 20:1).

That right there is pretty significant, but even beyond the resurrection, several other things happened that day. The resurrection of Christ was first proclaimed from one person to another. According to Luke 24:10, Mary and the other women told the apostles about it. Further down, in verses 33-34, the men from the road to Emmaus also spoke to the apostles. And again, this happened on Sunday, the day of the resurrection.

B. Not only was Christ raised on a Sunday, but following the resurrection, HE MADE AT LEAST TWO APPEARANCES TO THE APOSTLES ON SUNDAYS. We see this from John 20—in verse 19, and a week later in verse 26.

C. In addition to these things, we also need to remember that THE CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED ON A SUNDAY.

The church was established in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost was always 50 days after Passover, and so we learn that the Lord's church was established on a Sunday morning.

D. The next reason we worship on Sunday is found in Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week, when we were GATHERED TOGETHER TO BREAK BREAD, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight."

The key here is to realize that the breaking of bread in this verse refers to the Lord's Supper. The meal apparently happens down in verse 11, but the purpose of the whole gathering was specifically for the purpose of breaking bread. Paul was rushing back to Jerusalem with some famine relief, but he stayed in Troas almost an entire week so that he could be there for the Lord's Day gathering. This was not something they could have just moved to Monday or Tuesday, but the purpose of the gathering was to partake of the Lord's Supper—something which could only be done on Sunday, and something that Paul did right before preaching until midnight.

- E. **And finally, we also worship on the first day of the week, because THAT IS WHEN WE HAVE BEEN COMMANDED TO GIVE.**

In **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**, the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth and said, *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”* And so we are to give on the first day of the week. The obvious reason is because that is when we are also to get together for the Lord’s Supper—Sunday is the day to get together for worship.

- III. **Back when I was in college, I had a rather lengthy discussion with a leader in the Seventh Day Adventist church (a group that meets on Saturdays), and so at this time I would like for us to close by considering FOUR OF THEIR STRONGEST ARGUMENTS FOR KEEPING THE SABBATH. These are the arguments he made with me.**

- A. **First of all, they will say that JESUS KEPT THE SABBATH IN LUKE 4:14-16.**

A very simple answer here is to realize that Jesus was living under the Old Law. Just as my will does not go into effect until I die, the New Covenant did not go into effect until the death of Jesus. Jesus, therefore, when He kept the Sabbath, was simply being obedient to the Old Covenant. We could also very kindly point out that Jesus was also circumcised on the eighth day and kept the Passover, and yet again, these things are not binding on us as Christians.

- B. **Another argument that is usually given is that PAUL AND THE EARLY CHRISTIANS KEPT THE SABBATH.**

At this point, they will show us passages about Paul going to the synagogues on the Sabbath (**Acts 13:14; 18:4**). But we need to remember that these were Jewish assemblies and took place at Jewish synagogues. Why, then, did Paul go to the synagogues? Because the Christians had been told to take the gospel to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles (**Romans 1:16**). If you were going to a strange town 2000 years ago and needed to find a bunch of Jews, you would start by going to a synagogue, and that is exactly what Paul did, and when they rejected him, he left the synagogues and went to the Gentiles. And so when the early Christians went to the synagogues, it was not for the purpose of worship, it was for the purpose of evangelism—it was to proclaim to those people that they no longer needed to keep the Sabbath! And if we were to read the context of those accounts, we would see that that is exactly what happened.

- C. **A third argument often made is that THE POPE CHANGED THE WORSHIP FROM SATURDAY TO SUNDAY.**

There are certainly many reasons why I can be upset with the pope; however, to be fair, this is not one of them! In fact, this is perhaps one of the few things that the pope has not changed! I would encourage you to consider the article by Wayne Jackson, *"The Early Church and the Sabbath Day."* He has quotes there going all the way back to 125 AD, stating as a matter of fact that the first day of the week is the day set aside for worship—hundreds of years before there was ever such a thing as a pope. Please, please read the article!

D. But there is another main objection we will hear from those who have decided to worship on Saturday, and that is, they will argue that THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE MORAL LAW AND THE CEREMONIAL LAW.

They make a distinction between the Law of Moses and the Law of the Lord, and they say that the Law of Moses (the ceremonial law) was abolished at the time of Christ, but the Law of the Lord (the moral law, as embodied in the Ten Commandments) lives on. If you were here at this congregation a couple of years ago, then this may seem a little familiar to you. We had a false teacher come through who made a slightly similar argument.

There is a problem, however, in that these two terms (these two concepts) are used interchangeably, and there is no Biblical distinction in the Old Covenant between the ceremonial law and the moral law. In fact, sometimes the term, *"law of the Lord,"* clearly refers to certain **"ceremonial"** parts of the Law of Moses. For example, consider **2 Chronicles 31:3-4**, a reference to King Hezekiah, *"He also appointed the king's portion of his goods for the burnt offerings, namely, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the fixed festivals, as it is written in the law of the LORD."* Notice, the ceremonial aspects of the Law of Moses are described as being written in the *"law of the Lord."*

Another example is found in the New Testament. In **Luke 2:22-24**, Dr. Luke actually uses the terms interchangeably when referring to the sacrifices offered by Mary and Joseph at the birth of Christ, *"And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, 'EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD'), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, 'A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS.'"* Again, the sacrificial part of the Old Testament is referred to as being found in the Law of Moses and in the Law of the Lord. There is no distinction between the moral law and the ceremonial law.

Another point here is found in **Romans 7**. After writing about how we are free from the Law, the apostle Paul says in **Romans 7:7**, *"What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COVET.'"* Notice, he says we are not

under the Law (earlier in **Romans 7**), and then as an example from the Law that we are no longer under, he directly quotes one of the Ten Commandments! So, the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross—all of it—the sacrifices as well as the Ten Commandments.

At this point those who claim we need to observe the Sabbath today have another problem: If we no longer have the ceremonial law, then how do we obey the moral law? And here's the issue with the Sabbath: How do we keep it? The fourth commandment says, ***"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"*** (**Exodus 20:8**). Without the rest of the Law of Moses, how do we do that? What does it mean to keep the Sabbath holy? Is it enough to cease from all work? Or must we also abstain from lighting a fire? After all, God Himself said in **Exodus 35:2-3**, ***"For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day."*** So, does the church need to drag me out of town and throw rocks at me until I'm dead simply for going over to my thermostat and punching up the temperature on a cold winter day, knowing that my touching that button just ignited a fire in the furnace in my basement? You may think I'm joking, but I remember going to a hotel owned and operated by a devout Jewish family up in Montreal. Along with the service and fire keys, the elevator also had a Sabbath key. We asked about it, and they said that in order to avoid doing the ***"work"*** of pushing a button on the Sabbath day, they turn that key right before the Sabbath starts (at 5:59 Friday evening), and for the next 24 hours the elevator goes up and down stopping at every floor. That way, you can go to the temple and then come back to your room without wearing yourself out by pushing the elevator button! That is the kind of trouble we get in when people start telling us we need to keep the Sabbath these days—we can't—there is no way to keep the Sabbath without pulling little chunks from the Old Testament to tell us HOW to keep the Sabbath day.

By the way, the whole kindling a fire thing is another good argument for the Sabbath commandment being limited to a small group of people for a very limited time. Jerusalem, for example, is in the same latitude as Houston and New Orleans, and it rarely ever goes below about 40 degrees. As brother Jackson pointed out in one of his articles, we can hardly imagine trying to keep this command in a place like Alaska or Siberia.

Conclusion:

- We have learned, then, that the Sabbath observance was only required of the Jewish people.
- We have learned that as Christians we are to assemble on the first day of the week.
- And finally, we have considered and answered several arguments that are usually presented against the idea of worshiping on Sunday.

I don't know if you have thought about this, but if we live an average lifespan of around 70 years, we will live ten years of Sundays. And so the real question and

challenge this morning is not whether we will pause for breath while kissing on a Sunday or whether we will let our horse fall asleep in the bathtub, but the challenge for us this morning is: What are we doing with such a large amount of time? Are we taking full advantage of the time that God has asked of us? Certainly many people around us simply consider Sunday as being the second part of the weekend—a little bonus day tacked on to Saturday. But Sunday is not the weekend. Sunday is the first day of the week, and as such we need to respect it for what it is. It is the Lord's Day.

If you have not respected the Lord's Day in the past, and if you need the prayers of the church to help you repent of that disrespect to God, we can pray about that together—right now. For those who are not Christians, the Bible teaches that we must turn away from sin, we must believe in the Lord, and we must allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our past sins. If you have any questions, ask. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, please let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org

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Baxter T. Exum (#1030)
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I. THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH WAS ONLY DEMANDED OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

- Genesis 2:2-3 By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.
- Genesis 3:20 Now the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.
- Deuteronomy 5:2-3 The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, with all those of us alive here today.
- Nehemiah 9:13-14 Then You came down on Mount Sinai, and spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. So You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, through Your servant Moses.
- Deuteronomy 5:15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.
- Exodus 31:13-18 But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “You shall surely observe My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.” When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.
- Amos 8:2, 9-10 “The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.... It will come about in that day,” declares the Lord GOD, “That I will make the sun go down at noon and make the earth dark in broad daylight. Then I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring sackcloth on everyone’s loins and baldness on every head. And I will make it like a time of mourning for an only son, and the end of it will be like a bitter day.”

Colossians 2:13-17 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

II. CHRISTIANS ARE TO ASSEMBLE FOR WORSHIP ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK.

Mark 16:9 Now after He had risen early on the first day of the week, He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.

John 20:1 Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, while it was still dark, and saw the stone already taken away from the tomb.

Luke 24:10 Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles.

Luke 24:33-34 And they got up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found gathered together the eleven and those who were with them, saying, "The Lord has really risen and has appeared to Simon."

John 20:19 So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you."

John 20:26 After eight days [a week later; NIV] His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, "Peace be with you."

Acts 2:1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place...

Acts 20:7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

III. OBJECTIONS TO WORSHIPING ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK:

Luke 4:14-16 And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.

Acts 13:14 But going on from Perga, they [Paul and his companions] arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

- Acts 18:4** And he [Paul] was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath and trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.
- Romans 1:16** For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
- 2 Chronicles 31:3-4** He [Hezekiah] also appointed the king's portion of his goods for the burnt offerings, namely, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths and for the new moons and for the fixed festivals, as it is written in the law of the LORD. Also he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites, that they might devote themselves to the law of the LORD.
- Luke 2:22-24** And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "EVERY firstborn MALE THAT OPENS THE WOMB SHALL BE CALLED HOLY TO THE LORD"), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, "A PAIR OF TURTLEDOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS."
- Romans 7:7** What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "YOU SHALL NOT COVET."
- Exodus 20:8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
- Exodus 35:2-3** For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy day, a Sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day.



THE

Sunday

KNIGHT ARNOLD

NEWS

A PUBLICATION OF KNIGHT ARNOLD CHURCH OF CHRIST

VOLUME 20

MAY 31, 1994

No. 22

THE EARLY CHURCH AND THE SABBATH DAY

By Wayne Jackson

In 1847 Ellen G. White, founder of the Seventh Day Adventist cult, claimed she had a vision of the holy of holies in heaven. She contended that she saw the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) surrounded by a halo which indicated that the sabbath day was to be observed today. In fact, Mrs. White wrote:

In the last days the Sabbath test will be made plain, when this time comes, anyone who does not keep the Sabbath will receive the mark of the beast and will be kept from Heaven.

It is out of this background that modern apologists for Adventism attempt to defend Sabbath observance for the Christian age. One Adventist theologian, in an article entitled "How Long Did the Early Church Keep Sabbath?" asserted that the documents of church history afford "striking evidence that the seventh-day sabbath was widely observed in the Christian Church for centuries" (*Liberty*, Jan./Feb., 1968). It is quite significant that the author of that article made no attempt to establish his case on the basis of New Testament evidence. Rather, an appeal was made to certain writings of the post-Nicean age (after 325 A.D.) for an accumulation of the coveted evidence. Support for "Christian" Sabbath-keeping was secured from the following sources: (1) Socrates (385-445 A.D.), (2) Sozomen (early fifth century), (3) Athanasius (298-373), (4) *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (late fourth century), (5) Augustine (354-430), (6) the Council of Laodicea (365), (7) Jerome (340-

420), (8) *Patrologia* (specific author unnamed), (9) Pope Gregory I (590-804).

It is certainly revealing that none of these citations is from a source earlier than the middle of the fourth century A.D., two hundred and fifty years after the death of the last apostle! And yet the author brazenly concludes: "The evidence thus shows that the Sabbath was generally observed by Christians during the first four centuries."

Evidence Against Sabbath Observance from Earliest Church History

If the early church kept the Sabbath, one wonders why quotations in abundance were not introduced from writings nearer the apostolic age. Any student of church history knows that the patristic writings are purer the closer they are to the New Testament era. The truth of the matter is that those documents nearest to the New Testament time itself (the ante-Nicean writings, before 325 A.D.) bear unmistakable testimony to the fact that the early church was not authorized to keep the Sabbath nor any other vestige of Judaism. Note the following quotations:

Incense is a vain abomination unto me, and your new moons and Sabbaths I cannot endure. He has, therefore, abolished these things...Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day, also, on which Jesus rose again from the dead (*Barnabas*-120 A.D.)

But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving (*Didache*-125 A.D.)

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place...But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly...(Justin Martyr-140 A.D.)

We passed this holy Lord's day, in which we read your letter, from the constant reading of which we shall be able to draw admonition (Dionysius-170 A.D.)

On one day, the first day of the week, we assemble ourselves together, and on the days of the readings we abstain from sustenance (Bardesanes of Syria-180 A.D.)

He, in fulfillment of the precept, keeps the Lord's day...glorifying the Lord's resurrection in himself (Clement of Alexandria-194 A.D.)

The old law is demonstrated as having been consummated at its specific times, so also the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary...We neither accord with the Jews in their peculiarities in regard to food, nor in their sacred days (Tertullian-200 A.D.)

If it be objected to us on this subject that we ourselves are accustomed to observe certain days, as, for example, the Lord's Day...(Origin-225 A.D.)

The solemn festival of the resurrection of the Lord can be celebrated only on the Lord's Day...Our regard for the Lord's resurrection which took place on the Lord's Day will lead us to celebrate it on the same principle (Anatolius-270 A.D.)

Lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews which Christ...in his body abolished (Victorinus-300 A.D.)

But the Lord's day we celebrate as a day of joy, because on it He rose again, on which day we have received it for a custom not even to bow the knee (Peter of Alexandria-306 A.D.)

They (the patriarchs prior to the flood) did not, therefore, regard circumcision, nor observe the Sabbath, neither do we...because such things as these do not belong to Christians (Eusebius-324 A.D.)

These quotations certainly refute the Adventist allegation that "the Pope changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday." The testimony of history is clear-Christians were worshipping God on the first day of the week, Sunday, for centuries before there was any such creature as a "Pope." But that aside, surely the biblical information on this theme should be given consideration.

The Sabbath as Presented in the Bible

First, the Sabbath was *not* required as a holy day during the patriarchal age; it was first given as a preview testing for Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 16:4ff), and later

formally incorporated into the law of Moses (Deut. 5:1-5). [Note: for an excellent discussion on whether the Sabbath was observed from the beginning of creation, see Dan Winkler's material in *Difficult Texts of the Old Testament Explained* (Winkler Publications, 1982), pp. 195-198.]

Second, just as circumcision was a "token" or sign between God and Abraham, along with his descendants (Gen. 17:11), so the Sabbath was a "sign" between Jehovah and Israel (Ex. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12). How could the Sabbath function as a "sign" between the Lord and Israel if that ordinance had been given to every other nation as well?

Third, certain restrictions connected with the Sabbath indicate that it was not designed to have application for all time and in all regions of the earth. On the Sabbath, for example, no man could "go out of his place" (Ex. 16:29), and no fire could be kindled on the Sabbath (Ex. 35:3).

Fourth, it was foretold that the law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments) would be superseded by a "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31ff; cf. 1 Kgs. 8:21; 8:9; Heb. 8:6ff.)

Fifth, The New Testament clearly teaches that the law of Moses has been abrogated (Col. 2:14ff; Eph. 2:15). Man is dead to, discharged from that law (Rom. 7:4,6), and that includes the Ten Commandments, for within this context the apostle says, "I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7). In order to be consistent, those who attempt to bind the Sabbath should argue for keeping *all* the law of Moses today (cf. Gal. 5:3), but they do not. A careful investigation of the books of Romans, Galatians and Hebrews (cf. also 2 Cor. 3) would eliminate this error of supposed Sabbath-keeping.

Sixth, concerning the first day of the week, it may be said: (1) Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week (John 20:1) and appeared to his disciples that day (John 20:19) as well as on the following Sunday (John 20:26). (2) The church was established on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1), which always came on the first day of the week. (Lev. 23:16). (3) Christians met for worship on Sunday (Acts 20:7). (4) The first century saints were commanded to give into the treasury of the local congregation on "the first day of every week" (Greek text-1 Cor. 16:2). (5) When the apostle John received the vision in preparation for the great book of Revelation, he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10), which certainly was Sunday (see the patristic quotations above).

The renowned church historian Phillip Schaff summed up the matter in his monumental work, *History of the Christian Church*, when he wrote:

The universal and uncontradicted Sunday observance in the second century can be explained only by the fact that it had its roots in apostolic practice (Vol.1, p. 478).

Conclusion

In light of all the above evidence, we must kindly, but firmly, point out that the Seventh Day Adventists and other Sabbatarian groups are grossly in error. (From *The Restorer*, Nov./Dec., 1992, pp. 8-9)