

From Sabbath to Sunday

We digress at this time from distinctive RCC dogmas to a distinctive RCC claim: the ability and right to change the Sabbath to Sunday. "The conference of bishops can abolish certain holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday with prior approval of the Apostolic See." (Canon Law 1246 sec. 2, quoted in the RCC Catechism 2177 regarding "The Lord's Day")

Since this is a study of history, our first task is to examine the history of the Sabbath briefly.

1. When and where was the Sabbath instituted? (Gen 2:2-3, Ex 20:11, Mark 2:27, Heb 4:4)
2. What was Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath? (Matt 12:8, Mark 2:27-28, Luke 6:5, 9; 14:3)
3. In death, how did Jesus treat the Sabbath? (Luke 23:52-24:6)

Following Christ's death, we have the record of the apostles to examine. Their attitudes toward the Sabbath should show us what they taught about the Sabbath. Further, since the apostolic record is inspired scripture, it will demonstrate God's intentions for us. No man has the right to change God's laws. There are many possible points of discussion, but we will only consider the most important ones here.

4. What was Paul's custom regarding the Sabbath? (Acts 17:1-2, 17; cf. Luke 4:16; Acts 18:4,11) Can we document any particular number of Sabbaths that Paul is recorded as observing?
5. What was the understanding of the common people regarding the apostles and Sabbath? (Acts 13:42-44)
6. On what day did the converts to the faith worship? (Acts 16:11-13; 18:4)

7. There are times when the modern translations, while perfectly accurate, loses some of the original content. In this question we look at two such texts.

What specific instruction did Paul give the new converts to the faith regarding the Sabbath? (Eph 6:1-3, 1 Cor 16:2, Heb 4:9) [Note: the Greek *kata mian sabbatou* translated "first day of the week" in 1 Cor 16:2 is literally "every first after the Sabbath". The Greek *apoleipetai sabbatismos* translated "there remains a Sabbath rest" in Heb 4:9 is literally "there remains a Sabbath-keeping".]

8. In this question, we truly need to be detectives.

Luke, in his introduction to his gospel (Luke 1:1-4), begins with a greeting to Theophilus. This person is not a Jew, as can be seen from his Greek name. Also, Luke greets him with an honorific of "most excellent", using the same Greek words Paul uses to greet Festus the governor in Acts 26:25, indicating that Theophilus is a person of some civil importance. Just as Theophilus was a Gentile, so was Luke (Col 4:14). This physician was a careful historian as well, as is documented by considerable archeological evidence.

In Luke 3:1-2 is recorded a litany of VIP's who were prominent at the time Jesus began preaching. The natural assumption that arises is that Luke, a gentile Roman citizen, raised with the Roman calendar, is using the Roman calendar. Unfortunately, the Roman calendar does not allow the particular VIP's listed to be correct. Such an error is very unlike Luke, whose considerable care with historical facts has been noted. If Luke is using the Jewish calendar, however, everything in the list matches perfectly. What does this fact tell us about the teaching of Paul regarding the Sabbath? What does it say about the

understanding of the Sabbath among the converts? (Note particularly Luke 1:4)

9. What attitude did the apostles present regarding obedience to God? (Rom 1:1, James 1:1, Phil 1:1, 2 Pet 1:1, Jude 1, Rev 1:1)

10. What attitude did the apostles teach regarding obedience to God? (Rev 7:3; 14:12, 2 Thess 1:6-8, James 2:10, Psalm 1:1-2 cf. Rom 7:22, 1 John 5:3)

History of the change:

At this point, we diverge from our usual practice of questions and answers. No scripture can aid us in the exploration of the change from Sabbath to Sunday observance. Our story follows two paths: the eastern and western branches of the church. The eastern branch of the church, with greater Jewish membership and influence, paid far greater heed to the Sabbath and Passover, two Jewish holy days with importance to Christianity. The western church, with its prominent branch in Rome, the seat of the Empire, was more influenced by political and pagan factors.

The first hint of change did occur during the lifetime of some of the apostles. The first Jewish revolt (66-70AD) led to a change in the way the Jews were treated by the Romans. It began with a decision by the priests to quit offering prayers for the benefit of the Emperor. Cestius Gallius, the Roman governor of Syria, marched to Jerusalem to put down this insurrection. The church, heeding Jesus' warning (Matthew 24:15-20) left the city when Gallius inexplicably withdrew. The revolt continued, and in 70AD, the Roman army under Titus destroyed the city with massive loss of life, but without loss to the church.

After this exodus, the Jerusalem church continued in the surrounding country, particularly in the Nazarene sect. Over the next few years, numerous repressive legal changes were instituted against the Jews due to Jewish uprisings in many Roman territories. These included:

- Vespasian (69-79AD) abolished the Sanhedrin and the office of High Priest.
- Vespasian also established a discriminatory tax on Jews (the *fiscus judaicus*)
- Domitian (81-96AD) and Hadrian (117-138AD) increased this tax.

In 64AD, Rome had burned. Nero blamed the Christians, and ignored the Jews. This certainly could not have set well. A smoldering hatred of the Jews, probably present all along, burned brighter. The church in Rome, which had essentially no Jewish tradition (Romans 11:13) had little difficulty setting off down a different path from the eastern churches which had strong Jewish traditions. As it became dominant, the hatred showed more clearly in its patristic writing.

The second Jewish revolt (132-135AD) was crushed by Hadrian, who then prohibited the practice of the Jewish religion throughout the Roman Empire. He specifically outlawed Sabbath observance, on pain of death. This put Christians in a tough position. Their weekly Sabbath was cause for execution. This was no lightweight concern. Something had to be done. The church in Rome began the work. It should be noted that there was one other motivation at work: hatred of the Jews.

The early post-apostolic fathers carried on the faith and the Sabbath. The earliest writing we have, from Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (98-117AD), admonishes the believers to stop "sabbatizing but liv(e) according to the Lord's life." (It is worth noting here that papal encyclical *Dies Domini* deliberately misquotes this passage as "no longer observing the Sabbath, but keeping the Lord's Day". ¶ 23) The context of his statement makes it clear that he is condemning the legalistic prescriptions of how to observe the Sabbath, exhorting the believers to make it a day of holy celebration. Ignatius makes direct reference to "Judaizing" in reference to these prescriptions.

About 135AD, during the persecution of Hadrian, the church found itself needing a way to look different from Jews, and a way to avoid the death penalty for Sabbath-keeping. The most obvious change would be to drop the Sabbath. But what justification could be given?

The Epistle of Barnabas (approx. 130-138AD) is the first writing which clearly identifies Sunday observance. Barnabas (a pseudonym for the unknown author) defames the Jews as a people and allegorizes Jewish doctrine to destroy its meaning. He describes Jews as "wretched men" who were

“abandoned by God.” Then he states that “I will make the beginning of an eighth day, that is, the beginning of another world.” His first argument for this new day of observance is that God cannot stand the Jewish “new moons and Sabbaths” (a reference to Is 1:13), and so makes a new one. Almost parenthetically he throws in the resurrection as a secondary motivation for Sunday observance. This is a pattern seen commonly in early patristic writing.

Why pick Sunday? In theory, it would be possible to pick Thursday, since that was the day of the Last Supper, Friday for the crucifixion, Sabbath (OOPS!) since He rested in the grave, or Sunday for the resurrection. In fact, none of these reasons was sufficient to pick a day. The Gnostic technique of allegorical interpretation of scripture gave a solution.

As Barnabas says, the “eighth day” should be observed. The reasons were (loosely):

- Jesus is the Light
- On the first day of creation (commemorated with the next Sunday, the eighth day), God made light
- Jesus is the “Sun of Justice”

Conveniently, Sunday was also the day the pagans of the Roman Empire observed. The cult of the Invincible Sun (*sol invictus*) was the dominant religion. They believed that the sun was God. Since Christians believed that God is the Sun (of Righteousness, Mal 4:2), the “Sun is God/God is Sun” juxtaposition conveniently made Christians both familiar in appearance to the general public (unlike the Jews) and made pagans easy converts since they could carry on with many of their familiar customs.

At the same time, another controversy between the Roman and eastern sections of the church was brewing. From early apostolic days the church had been observing the *pascha* (Lord’s Supper) on the Jewish Passover. This was a memorial of the crucifixion which we now know as the “Passion”. The Jewish calendar put the Passover on Nisan 14 (Nisan was the first month of the Jewish calendar.) This made good sense, since Christ was crucified on Passover. Those who observed this day were known a “Quartodecimans” from the Latin for “fourteen”.

At about the same time as Sunday observance began to be promoted, a move was afoot to move the *pascha* to Sunday, in honor of the resurrection. This makes a kind of sense, since the resurrection did take place on Sunday. We should note that there is no scripture for or against either practice, since there is no command to observe the resurrection. Christ’s death on the cross provided the required sacrifice, not his resurrection.

Motivated by the same need for differentiation from and hatred of the Jews, the Roman church pushed for the *pascha* to be moved to Sunday. This battle became so bitter that, in the latter part of the second century, Victor, Bishop of Rome, excommunicated the entire eastern church for maintaining the quartodeciman position.

Moving the *pascha* to Sunday failed to solve the problem completely. Once in seven years, the Passover and the *pascha* would both fall on Sunday. Scholars of the Roman church attempted to crack the riddle of the Jewish calendar without success. Eventually, they adopted a calendation for the *pascha* which was based on the vernal equinox, a pagan holiday, so that there would be total independence of the Jews. This still left a one in seven chance of having the two holidays coincide, so rules were adopted which pushed the *pascha* back one week any time it would coincide with Passover. This timing has been preserved in the odd way we figure the date for Easter (the modern term for the *pascha*.)

As can be readily seen, driven by the church in Rome, Christians began slowly to differentiate themselves from Jews. Other measures were taken to reinforce this process. Fasting was imposed on Sabbath as a means of making it a detestable day. The process of polemicizing the issue continued to pound home the themes of God’s shame on the Jews and the eighth day observation. The theology of the eighth day solidified around the creation week and 2 Peter 3:8

⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

This allowed them to make the seven days of creation into seven thousand years of earth’s history. The seventh day would be the millennium of Revelation 20, and the “eighth day” would usher in the new earth. This eschatological view allowed them to twist the scripture into saying that we should

observe the eighth day. Soon every text which included the number eight was used to support the view, including the fact that there were eight people on the ark!

This debate continued full force until the fourth century. Three events finally closed the issue until the seventeenth century. In 321, Constantine issued the first of several Sunday laws. In 325, the Council of Nicaea and in 336, the Council of Laodicea settled both the quartodeciman and Sunday observance issues in favor of the position taken by the church of Rome.

In the seventeenth century, a branch of the Baptist church in England rediscovered the Sabbath. These Seventh-day Baptists established their first church in the new world in 1671. The Second Adventists were founded in the 1830's, anticipating the end of the world in 1844 as a result of a misinterpretation of the 2,300 days of Daniel 8:14. Shortly after this failed to take place, the Adventists, who were observing Sunday, were introduced to the Sabbath. Within a couple of years, the Second Adventists became the Seventh-day Adventists and are now the dominant sabbatarian church in the world. In the twentieth century, others have come to the Sabbath, including the Seventh-day Church of God.

Today, the RCC is again promoting the observance of Sunday as essential for the Christian. Typical of RCC twisting of scripture, Pope John Paul II writes in *Dies Domini*, "It is the duty of Christians, therefore, to remember that, although the practices of the Jewish Sabbath are gone, surpassed as they are by the 'fulfilment' which Sunday brings, the underlying reasons for keeping 'the Lord's Day' holy - inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments - remain valid, though they need to be reinterpreted in the theology and spirituality of Sunday." (§ 62)

We should note that the fulfillment of the law through Christ was the sacrifice of the cross, fulfilling the penalty of the law. The law was not a prophecy that could be fulfilled and thrown away.

11. What did Jesus say about the duration of the law? (Matt 5:18)

Later in *Dies Domini*, the Pope declares that Sunday is "the extension and full expression" of the Sabbath (§ 59). This idea is founded totally on tradition, developed over centuries (not handed down), and is contrary to scripture. The Pope even admits that Sunday observance is "the christianization of the notion of Sunday as 'the day of the sun' (a pagan observance) (§ 27). . . What began as a spontaneous practice later became a juridically sanctioned norm. (§ 30). Christians, called as they are to proclaim the liberation won by the blood of Christ, felt that they had the authority to transfer the meaning of the Sabbath to the day of the Resurrection (§ 63)" As we have seen repeatedly in RCC dogma, this tradition is elevated over scripture. If this were the end of the discussion, we could pass it off as error which should not affect a student of scripture and servant of Christ. Unfortunately, *Dies Domini* is far more.

Pope John Paul II calls on Christians to "strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy (§ 67)". This sounds much like the SDA legal battles surrounding Sabbath observance. It would be easy to dismiss it as another form of the same issue, revolving around permissive legislation. Unfortunately, the Pope envisions not permissive, but prescriptive legislation. That is, he is asking for worldwide laws which promote or require Sunday observance. The SDA battle was to make sure that Sabbath observance was allowed. This difference is found in several places. Pope Leo XII spoke of "Sunday rest as a worker's right which the State must guarantee. (§ 66)" The Catechism states (Sec 2188) "In respecting religious liberty and the common good of all, Christians should seek recognition of Sunday and the Church's holy days as legal holidays." (emphasis added)

We can readily see that the power of the state, wielded for centuries by the RCC itself, is being called upon to advance the agenda of the RCC. This leads us toward the universal Sunday laws predicted by Ellen G. White. (Great Controversy pp. 582-592) Just as the early RCC under Sylvester used the state to further its goals, the new RCC, healed of its deadly wound of 1798, again is using the state as its agent to require all people to submit to its authority.