

Saturday or Sunday?

What does the word 'Sabbath' mean? What day was it kept? Did the early church keep Saturday or Sunday? Has the Sabbath day been changed from Saturday to Sunday?

What is 'Sabbath':

The word 'Sabbath' means 'rest' (from work).

What day was it kept?:

Sabbaths often fell on *different days*. It fell on the first day (Lev.23:39), sometimes on the 7th day (Ex.20:8) and sometimes on the 8th day, (Lev.23:39). This is why we sometimes find two Sabbaths in the one week, (Lk.6:1 '***On the second Sabbath after the first...***'). When Jesus died there were *two Sabbaths in the one week*, one the usual Saturday Sabbath and one a 'special Sabbath', (Jn.19:31: '***for that Sabbath was a high day***')

Sabbaths were also of *different lengths*. Some were one day long, (Ex.16:23-39), some two days long (Lev.23:6-8,15-22), some one year long (Lev.25:4), some 70 years long, (2Chr. 36:21), and some eternity long, (Heb.4:9)!

Did the early church keep Saturday or Sunday?:

Various Sabbath groups (such as Seventh Day Adventists) teach the Sabbath was originally Saturday and was replaced with Sunday by Constantine or the Roman Catholic religion.

It is true that in 321AD Constantine decreed the Christian Sabbath, Sunday, the rest day for the Roman Empire and the Roman church practised this in following years. However, what these Sabbath groups do not tell us is that the practise of keeping Sunday had *already* been observed for nearly 300 years before it was ever observed by Constantine or the Roman Catholic religion! Scripture and History do not lie - from the beginning the Christian church met together to break bread and take up offerings on Sunday - 'the first day of the week'. *It is an historical and scriptural fact that Sunday was kept in the first few hundred years:*

Historical Proofs (Secular):

'Encyclopaedia Britannica' under 'Sabbath' and 'Sunday': '*In the early Christian church, Jewish Christians continued to keep the Sabbath like other points of law...on the other hand Paul from the first days of Gentile Christianity, laid it down definitely that the Jewish Sabbath was not binding on Christians...In 321 A.D. Constantine made the Christian Sabbath, Sunday, the rest day for the Roman Empire, but it was observed by Christians for nearly 300 years before it became a law by Constantine*'.

The 'New International Encyclopaedia' on 'Sunday': '*...before the end of the apostolic period, Sunday, known as the Lord's Day, had thoroughly established itself as the special day to be sanctified (set apart) by rest from secular labor and by public worship...the Emperor Constantine confirmed the custom by a law of the state*'.

The 'Catholic Encyclopaedia' on Sunday: '*Sunday was the first day of the week according to the Jewish method of reckoning, but for Christians, it began to take the place of the Jewish Sabbath in apostolic times as the day set apart for public and solemn worship of God*'.

The 'International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia' on the 'Lord's Day' says: '*...Uncircumcised Gentiles, however, were free from any obligation of Sabbath observance*'...No

observance of a special day of rest is contained among the 'necessary things' of Acts 15:28,29...A given day as a matter of divine obligation is denounced by Paul as forsaking Christ (Gal.4:10) and Sabbath keeping is condemned explicitly in Col.2:16...a man might do as he pleased (Rom.14:5,6) but no general rule as necessary for salvation could be comparable with liberty wherewith Christ has made us free (Gal.2:1-21; 3:1-14; 5:1-4, 13)'.

Historical Proofs (Christian/Church Fathers*):

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, (30-107 A.D) - a disciple of John; lived at the time of apostles): '*...those who walk in the ancient practices attain to newness of hope, no longer observing the Sabbath but fashioning their lives after the Lord's day on which our life also arose through Him...after the observance of the Sabbath (that the Jews kept), let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's day as a festival, the resurrection day, the Queen and chief of all days of the week...on which our life sprang up again, and victory over death was obtained in Christ...it is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has come to an end...if any man preach the Jewish law unto you, listen not to him...*'. (Vol.1, P.63-82).

'The Teachings of the Twelve Apostles' (80 A.D.): '*but every Lord's day, (Sunday), do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread and give thanksgiving*'. (Vol. V11, P.381).

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (2nd century): '*Break your fast...the first day of the week, which is the Lord's day...after eight days let there be another feast observed with honour, the eighth day itself*'. (Vol.V11, P.447).

'The Teachings of the Apostles' (105 A.D.): '*The Apostles therefore appointed...on the first day of the week let there be service and reading of the Holy Scriptures and the oblation (Lord's Supper); because on the first day of the week our Lord arose upon the world, and ascended to heaven*'. (Vol.V111, P.668).

The Epistle of Barnabas (120-150 A.D.): '*...we also keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose again from the dead*'. (Vol.1, P.147).

Justin Martyr, (Lived 100-165 A.D., a Gentile; wrote this approx. 110 A.D.): '*And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read...but Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead*'. (Vol.1, P.186).

In his dialogue with Trypho, a Jew, Justin Martyr says: '*...we live not according to the law,...and do not observe the Sabbaths as you do?...for we too would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the Sabbaths, and in short all feasts, if we did not know for what reason they were enjoined to you...I speak of fleshly circumcision and Sabbaths and feasts...The Gentiles, who have believed in Him, and who have repented of their sins...shall receive the inheritance*

along with the patriarchs...even although they neither keep the Sabbath nor are circumcised, nor observe the feasts...Christ is useless to those who observe the law...the Sabbath and sacrifices and offerings and feasts...have come to an end in Him...but if some, through weak-mindedness wish to observe such institutions as were given to Moses...along with their hope in Christ...they shall probably be saved'. (Vol.1 P.199-218).

Tertullian, Presbyter North African Church, born about **145 A.D.**: '...you Christians have a festive day every eighth day...we make Sunday a day of festivity...you who reproach us with the sun and Sunday should consider your own proximity to us. We are not far off from your [god] Saturn and your days of rest...it follows, accordingly, that, in so far as the abolition of carnal circumcision and of 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'. (Vol.111, P.70,123,155,313-14).

Bardaism (Born **154 A.D.**): '...Christians...upon one day which is the first day of the week, we assemble ourselves together...'

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, **155 A.D.**: 'The mystery of the Lord's resurrection may not be celebrated any other day than on the Lord's day.' (Vol 8, P.773.)

Theophilus, pastor of Antioch, **162 A.D.**: 'Both reason and custom challenge us that we should honour the Lord's day, seeing on that day it was that our Lord completed His resurrection from the dead'.

Clement of Alexandria, **174 A.D.**: 'The old seventh day [Saturday] has become nothing more than a working day'.

Irenaeus, **178 A.D.**: 'The mystery of the Lord's resurrection may not be celebrated on any other day than the Lord's day and on this alone should we observe the breaking of the Paschal feast...Pentecost fell on the first day of the week, and was therefore associated with the Lord's day.'

Origen, Approx. **200 A.D.**: '...at the end of the covenant now grown old, which is the end of the Sabbath...'

Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, (**200-258 A.D.**)
'The Lord's day is both the first and the eighth day'.

Victorinus, **300 A.D.**, says, 'On the Lord's day we go forth to our bread and giving of thanks, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews, which Christ Himself the Lord of the Sabbath in His body abolished' (Section 4, 'On The Creation').

Eusebius, (**265-340 A.D.**), father of Church History, who made a history of the time between the birth of Christ and Constantine: 'From the beginning Christians assembled on the first day of the week called by them the Lord's day, for the purpose of religious worship, to read the Scriptures, to preach and to celebrate the Lord's Supper...the first day of the week on which the Saviour obtained the victory over

death. Therefore, it has the pre-eminence, first in rank, and is more honourable than the Jewish Sabbath'.

Scriptural Proofs:

'And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them...', (Acts 20:7); 'Now concerning the collection for the saints...Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store...', (1Cor.16:1,2)

'Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week...the disciples were assembled...Jesus came and stood in the midst...And after eight days again his disciples were within...then came Jesus...', (Jn.20:19,26).

'Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross...Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come...' (Col.2:14-17); '...how turn you again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain', (Gal.4:9-11).

'Him that is weak in the faith receive you, but not to doubtful disputations...4 Who are you that judges another man's servant?...5 One man esteems one day above another: another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind', (Rom.14:1-5).

Has the Sabbath been changed to Sunday?:

There is *no* scriptural command to keep a Sabbath or a 'Lord's Day' on any fixed day! The Bible teaches every man should have his own mind on this, (Rom.14:1-5; Col.2:14-17).

The 'Sabbath' was originally given to Israel. To teach that this Sabbath has been changed to Sunday as a command is contrary to all hermeneutical principles in 'rightly dividing' the Word!

'Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the Lord that does sanctify you...Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath...It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever...And he gave unto Moses...', (Ex.31:13-18)

'...I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them', (Ezek.20:12).

(Note: All the 10 commandments are repeated in the New Testament except the fourth concerning the Sabbath)

Summary:

Most early Christians commonly observed the 'Lord's Day' as Sunday, called the 'first day of the week'; On this day Christians commonly 'gathered together' to read the scriptures, break bread, and collect monies. Yet, nowhere in scripture has the 'Sabbath' been 'changed' from Saturday to Sunday or to be kept as a command for Christians, (Rom.14:1-5; Col.2:14-17).

Terry Arnold

* Some sources taken from: The Ages Digital Library Collection