

Sabbath Worship Changed to Sunday Observance

How, when and why was the Sabbath changed from Saturday to Sunday?

Many Sunday observers argue that the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week dates back to Jesus and His apostles. They assert that Sunday observance replaced the seventh-day Sabbath for most Christians as early as the first century A.D. and became a fixed custom by the mid-second century. Therefore, they urge that all Christians today should regard the seventh-day Sabbath as a Jewish institution that should not be observed. Since Sunday was the first day of creation week (Gen. 1:5) and the day on which Christ rose from the dead (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-9), it should be observed as a day of Christian worship and rejoicing in accordance with the custom of the early Christian fathers. In fact, Sunday keepers argue that observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is a highly legalistic custom that is thoroughly consistent with those Jewish ceremonial practices abolished when Jesus died on the cross.

This theory raises a whole series of questions in regard to the teaching of the New Testament and the testimony of history. Did Jesus change the day from the seventh to the first day of the week? Did the apostles urge that Sunday be observed as a memorial of the resurrection of Christ? Did they themselves observe Sunday as a special day of worship? Was first-day worship a substitute for Sabbath worship for most Christians as early as the second century A.D.? Was the Sabbath regarded by early Christians as a purely Jewish institution with no significance for followers of Christ? What does history have to teach us regarding the reason for the change of the day from the seventh to the first day of the week? These questions are vital for Christians today! If it happens to be unscriptural and unhistorical that Sunday observance was initiated by Christ and the apostles, those who argue so strenuously for it today are supporting a non-Christian practice. If Jesus and the apostles observed the seventh-day Sabbath, and Sunday keeping crept into the Christian Church over a period of centuries as pagan ideas and practices became more and more acceptable, those who reject the Sabbath today are spurning one of Christ's commandments and are, therefore, in grave danger of being rejected by God. To be a Christian is to believe and act as Jesus did (John 14:15; Rev. 3:21; 12:17; 14:12). To profess faith in Christ while rejecting aspects of His teaching and refusing to live and worship as He instructed is to be guilty of serious sin. "Whoever says, 'I have come to know him,' but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked" (1 John 2:4-6).

We will begin with the Scriptures and then turn to history for the answers to the questions we are asking. A much more complete discussion of the Sabbath-Sunday question can be found in the book edited by Kenneth A. Strand, *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, DC.: Review and Herald, 1982).

DID JESUS AND THE APOSTLES CHANGE THE DAY OF WORSHIP FROM THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH TO SUNDAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK?

The word *Sunday* is not found in the Bible. In the New Testament the first day of the week is mentioned eight times. In none of the eight instances is the first day said to be a day of worship, never is it said to be the Christian substitute for the Old Testament Sabbath, and never do the texts suggest that the first day of the week should be regarded as a memorial of Christ's resurrection. Let us briefly consider each of the eight New Testament passages that mention the first day of the week.

Matthew 28:1, "After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake. . . ." Jesus was crucified on Friday. He rested in the tomb over the Sabbath and rose early on Sunday morning. The verse indicates that the women disciples returned to the tomb at the very first opportunity after the death and burial of Jesus. Because the Sabbath came so soon after His burial, they could not approach the tomb again until after sundown on Sabbath evening. (The Sabbath began at sundown [aka. sunset] on the sixth day and ended at sundown [aka. sunset] on the seventh day; compare Lev. 23:32; Neh. 13:19; Mark 1:21, 32) Early Sunday morning was the most convenient time for them to visit the tomb.

Mark 16:1, 2, "When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb." Mark records the same events as Matthew with the additional information that the women visited the tomb early on the Sunday morning for the express purpose of anointing Jesus' body with spices.

Mark 16:9, "Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons." This verse simply records that, after His resurrection early on the Sunday morning, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene.

Luke 23:54 24:1, "It [the day of Jesus' death and burial] was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the sabbath they rested according to the commandment. But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared." The Sabbath came a few hours after Jesus' death on the cross. The women disciples "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56, KJV). Then very early in the morning of the first day they visited the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus. The fact that they observed the Sabbath rest is sufficient indication that Jesus had never attempted to change the day or to suggest that after His death the first day would replace the Sabbath. Writing years after the event, Luke gave not the slightest hint that, even though the women disciples of Jesus observed the Sabbath, such a practice was no longer expected of Christians. He simply recorded that the Sabbath day "according to the commandment," which Jesus' followers were careful to observe, was the day after the crucifixion day (Friday), and before the resurrection day (Sunday).

John 20:1, "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." Mary Magdalene visited the tomb early the first day of the week. Nothing is said of Sunday as a day of worship or rest.

John 20:19, "When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" On the evening of the first day of the week the disciples were assembled behind locked doors "for fear of the Jews." Jesus appeared to them at that time. The passage does not say that henceforth Sunday was to be the day for worship. Since it was the evening of the first day of the week that Jesus appeared to the disciples, it was after sundown. According to Jewish reckoning this was actually the beginning of the second day (Monday; compare Gen. 1:5, 8). A week later when Thomas happened to be present, Jesus met with the disciples again (verse 26). But, writing years later, John records nothing regarding Sunday as a day of Christian worship. John's narrative gives no warrant for regarding Sunday as a substitute for the Sabbath or as a day to be distinguished by Christians above any other day of the week. And there is

no indication in the passage that Sunday should henceforth be observed as a memorial of Christ's resurrection.

Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight." Since the meeting was held at night on the first day of the week, it may have been Saturday night. According to Jewish reckoning, the Sabbath ended and the first day of the week began at sundown of the seventh day. If it were Sunday evening, the event gives no suggestion that Sunday should be observed as a day of worship. The following verses record that Paul preached a sermon on Thursday. The next day after the meeting recorded in Acts 20:7 (Monday), Paul and his party set sail for Mitylene (Acts 20:13, 14). The following day (Tuesday) they arrived opposite Chios (verse 15). The next day (Wednesday) they passed Samos (verse 15), and the day after that (Thursday) they arrived at Miletus (verse 15). The elders of the church of Ephesus met Paul at Miletus, and he preached to them (Acts 20:16-36). Because a Christian service was held on Thursday, do we conclude that Thursday is a day for regular Christian worship replacing the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath? A religious service on Sunday, Thursday, or any other day certainly did not make that day a replacement for the seventh-day Sabbath or a day of regular Christian worship and rest. There is no special significance in the disciples breaking bread at this first-day meeting, for they broke bread "daily" (Acts 2:46). We are not told that it was a Lord's Supper celebration, nor are we told that henceforth Sunday should be the day for this service to be conducted. To read Sunday sacredness or Sunday observance into Acts 20:7 is to do violence to the text.

1 Corinthians 16:1, 2, "Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem." These verses may be literally translated from the Greek as follows: "And concerning the collection for the saints, as I instructed the churches of Galatia, so also you do. On the first day of the week let each of you place (or 'lay') *by himself*, storing up whatever he might be prospered, so that when I come there might be no collections." (Italics supplied.) The phrase "by himself" (*par' heauto*), followed by the participle "storing up" or "saving" (*thesaupizon*), rules out the possibility that this is a reference to an offering taken up in a worship service. The Christian believer was to check his accounts on Sunday and put by at home the money that he wished to give to Paul for the support of the church. When Paul arrived, then the offerings of each individual would be collected.

None of these eight New Testament references to the first day of the week (Sunday), provides any evidence that Jesus or His disciples changed the day of worship from the seventh to the first day. Nor is the first day of the week represented as a time to memorialize the resurrection of Christ. Whatever special significance was given to Sunday in the later history of the church, it had no basis in the teaching or practice of Jesus and His apostles.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, Jesus instructed His disciples to observe the Sabbath after His death (Matt. 24:20). Jesus' instruction was incorporated into His interpretation of Daniel 8 (compare Matthew 24:15 ff.). Daniel predicted that the work of the little horn power would continue until the setting up of God's kingdom (Dan. 8:25). Hence, Jesus' instruction to flee from the little horn power was not confined to Christians at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70). Toward the end of time, during the great tribulation of Matthew 24:21, of which earlier tribulations were a type or preview, God's people will be obliged to flee again. Jesus' instruction that we pray that our flight will not be

on the Sabbath day emphasizes His will that we engage in only those activities on the Sabbath that are consistent with worship and spiritual rest.

The record of the book of Acts (chapters 13, 16:18) establishes that the apostles consistently kept the Sabbath day as a time for worship and fellowship. This observance was not merely a means of meeting the Jews in the synagogue on their Sabbath day. In Philippi, Paul and his companions met for worship by the riverside. Luke says, "On the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed [or "thought" or "assumed" : Greek *nomizo*] there was a place for prayer. . . ." (Acts 16:13). The apostles selected a place by the river that they thought would be appropriate for their Sabbath worship service, and there they prayed and witnessed for their Lord.

Jesus and the apostles kept the seventh-day Sabbath and instructed others to do likewise.

DID THE APOSTLE PAUL REJECT THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH?

Despite the evidence that Jesus kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and encouraged His followers to do the same (Matt. 24:20), and despite the evidence that Paul customarily observed the Sabbath (Acts 13, 16, 17, 18), some Bible students focus on certain passages in Paul's writings as supposed evidence that he sought to do away with the seventh-day Sabbath. The two passages that are usually presented are Romans 14:5, 6 and Colossians 2:13-17.

The Romans passage in context reads as follows:

"Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand. 5. Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. 6. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God" (Rom. 14:1-6).

Referring to verses 5 and 6, R. C. H. Lenski incorrectly comments: "We see no reason for refusing to assume that the distinction here touched upon refers to the Jewish Sabbath. What other day would any Roman Christian judge to be above other days? That self-chosen days are referred to is scarcely to be assumed. It is not difficult to see that a few Jewish Christians, some of them who perhaps came from the old mother church in Jerusalem, still clung to the Sabbath much as the Christians did after Pentecost."

If Lenski is correct, Paul was condoning those who were disregarding the seventh-day Sabbath? Other Sunday keeping scholars disagree with Lenski, and he is most certainly in error. In his writings, Paul consistently accepted the authority of the Ten Commandments as the standard of righteousness. "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom. 3:31). Paul identified the law that faith upholds as the Ten Commandments. "What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' . . . So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. . . . For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin" (Rom. 7:7, 12, 14). Christ died

"so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

It is inconceivable that one who had such a confirmed respect for the Ten Commandment law of God should summarily reject one of the commandments as no longer valid for Christians. Raoul Dederen pertinently comments: "It is to be noted, however, that the attempt to connect the Sabbath of the Decalogue with the 'days' mentioned in this passage is not convincing for everyone. Who could have a divine commandment before him and say to others: 'You can treat that commandment as you please; it really makes no difference whether you keep it or not'? No apostle could conduct such an argument. And probably no man would be more surprised at that interpretation than Paul himself, who had utmost respect for the Decalogue, God's law, which is 'holy, and just, and good' (chap. 7:12). Christ, the norm of all Pauline teaching, was indisputably a Sabbathkeeper. And Paul himself, who evidently cannot be reckoned among the 'weak,' worshiped on the Sabbath 'as was his custom' (Acts 17:2; cf. Luke 4:16).

"There is no conclusive evidence to the contrary. Paul was in no doubt as to the validity of the weekly Sabbath. Thus, to assume that when they were converted to Christianity by Paul, Gentiles or Jews would be anxious to give up the 'Jewish' Sabbath for their 'own day' is hardly likely. This could be expected only at some later time in the history of the Christian church, and for other reasons."

A number of conclusions emerge from a careful consideration of the passage:

(1) Romans 14 is not speaking of moral issues on which we have a clear "Thus saith the Lord." Verses 1-4 clearly make the point that God accepts both the spiritually strong who eat any food as well as the weak who think they should eat only vegetables. Speaking of both groups verse 4 says, "And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand."

(2) The stronger Christians who use any kind of food are not eating that which is physically harmful. For them to do so would be a contradiction of their Christian commitment. Earlier in the epistle Paul instructs: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1). To deliberately appropriate as food that which God condemns as harmful (see Lev. 11; Isa. 65:3, 4; 66:15-17) cannot be said to be behavior that God can accept; nor is it an acceptable application of the Romans 12:1 counsel. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul seriously warns against defiling the body temple. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). But in Romans 14, God accepted the diet of the non-vegetarians. The issue was not a matter of health. Since God accepted both parties, the dietary issue among the Roman Christians was a matter of indifference (*adiaphora*); it was not a question of right and wrong.

Paul says later in the chapter, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love" (Rom. 14:14, 15). This parallels the remark in his epistle to Timothy: "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4) Are we therefore to assume that slugs and snails and the kinds of flesh condemned in the Old Testament as unfit for food can now be eaten because the Christian has been given unrestrained freedom in questions of diet? Obviously not! What Paul is saying is that everything that God created as *acceptable for food* may be partaken of. But Paul is not condoning the eating of that which would be harmful to health whether it is specifically

mentioned in Scripture or not. Since our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit, imbibing that which is hurtful to health is a moral issue. The issue in Rome was not a question of health; it was a question of preference in matters that did not involve right and wrong in God's sight. But one party did not recognize that the specific dietary question was a non-issue. Vegetarians today who refrain from eating flesh for health reasons have a different motivation than did the vegetarians in the Roman church.

(3) In Romans 14:5, 6, Paul treats the controversy over days in a similar manner. The question was not a moral issue as it would have been if one of the Ten Commandments was being questioned. The Sabbath and worship are not even mentioned in the passage. The observance of the days in question, whatever days they were, was not a matter of right and wrong. The Lord accepted both parties, those who observed the days and those who did not. In the light of Matthew 24:20, the Lord could not have accepted anyone who did not honor His Sabbath day, as Jesus had honored it during his life on earth (Luke 4:16) and as Paul himself honored it (Acts 13, 15, 17, 18).

(4) Roul Dederen has pointed out that there seems to have been a clear connection between the observance of days in Rome and the vegetarianism of the weaker Christians. Those who were abstaining from eating particular foods "in honor of the Lord" seem to have been those who were observing particular days in honor of the Lord (verse 6). Dederen's suggestion is that there was a party in the Roman church that chose to refrain from certain foods on certain days which they regarded as religious fast days. He writes: "Paul's statement in Romans 14:2, 'One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables' (R.S.V.) is curiously analogous to his thought in verse 5, 'One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike' (R.S.V.). He mentions the two cases together, and later in the chapter he declares that a man should not be judged by his eating (verses 10-13), which may imply that Paul is referring to fast days. It appears quite probable from the context that Paul here is correlating the eating with the observance of days. Most likely--although it is impossible to ascertain this--the apostle is dealing with fast days in a context of either partial or total abstinence.

"Here again the Essenes may have caused the problem. It is certainly significant that besides abstaining from meat and wine--at least at times--they were also very specific in the matter of observing days. They sanctified certain days that were not observed by the general stream of Jews. . . .

"Some pertinent observations emerge now that could well tie in the matter of diet with that of esteeming certain days above others. The Essenes scrupulously abstained from meat and wine--at least at times. They added certain feast days to the regular Jewish calendar. The discussion over the point existed in Jewry prior to the advent of Christianity. Could it be that the controversy was carried over into the Christian church and finds itself reflected in Romans 14? In this case, the practice of the weak may be compared with the early Christian custom indicated in the *Didache* of fasting twice every week. Is it not significant, and relevant as well, that we have in this document too a matter of diet *and* days connected in a controversial issue?"

The *Didache* or *Teaching* that Dederen cites is a late first- or early second-century document. It reveals a controversy in the Christian church over fast days. The relevant statement reads: "Your fasts must not be identical with those of the hypocrites. They fast on Mondays and Thursdays; but you should fast on Wednesdays and Fridays." The hypocrites are a reference to the Jews whose fast days were Mondays and Thursdays. By contrast, Christians were to Fast on Wednesdays and Fridays.

We know that in Jesus' day there was a controversy over fasting. (See Matt. 6:16-18; 9:14, 15; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33-35.) In fact, in Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the Pharisee prayed, "I fast twice a week" (Luke 18:12). It seems that it would not be unusual for the fasting controversy of Jesus' day to carry over into the early Christian church with lively discussion as to which days would be the most appropriate for fasting.

Some have suggested that the days referred to in Romans 14:5, 6 were the ceremonial feast days of the Jewish religious year. (See Lev. 23; Num. 28, 29.) Although this is a possibility, the suggestion seems to be ruled out by the fact that these days were feast days, not fast days. Paul's discussion of the controversy over days (Rom. 14) is associated with his discussion of abstinence from food. Hence it seems that Dederen's suggestion of the presence in the Roman church of an ascetic group like the Essenes who were insisting on abstinence from certain foods on certain days is the most likely explanation.

At all events, the passage gives no warrant for the conclusion that Paul rejected the seventh-day Sabbath.

A second passage that is often cited as evidence that Paul rejected the seventh-day Sabbath is Colossians 2:13-17. In the New American Standard Bible, the passage is translated as follows:

"13. And 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, 14. having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. 16. Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17. things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ."

Verses 13 and 14 are speaking of God's forgiveness of the believer's sins made possible by Christ's death on the cross. Some would have us believe that the law was nailed to the cross. But this is not what the text is saying. It was our *indebtedness* in view of our having broken the law that was nailed to the cross. Verse 14 may be translated, "Blotting out the handwriting in decrees which was against us which was contrary to us, and he took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross." The "handwriting" (Greek: *cheirographon*) refers to a bond or certificate of debt.⁽⁹⁾ The certificate of debt was "in decrees" (Greek: *tois dogmasin*). God had decreed that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Jesus took the death which was ours so that we can have the life which is His. (Compare Romans 5:15-21.) "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). It was our guilt born by Jesus Christ that was nailed to the cross. As we have noted above, the law remains as the standard expression of God's righteousness. Christ died "so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Not only did Jesus suffer for our sins on the cross, he disarmed Satan and his cohorts and publicly displayed to the world and the universe the evil demons that they are. "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it" (Col. 2:15).

Verse 16 adds the corollary: No one can now judge the believer in regard to ritualistic eating and drinking or in respect to the sacrificial observances involved in the practice of the ceremonial law. "These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ" (verse 17).

The phrase "a festival [feast] or a new moon or a sabbath" (Col. 2:16, RSV) is an idiomatic or stylized reference to the ceremonial sacrifices offered in the ancient Israelite sanctuary or temple. The Old Testament background is in Numbers 28 and 29 and Leviticus 23, in which the burnt offerings daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly are listed. There were five yearly feasts, involving seven ceremonial sabbaths. The seven ceremonial sabbaths were:

- (1) The first day of the feast of unleavened bread (Lev. 23:7).
- (2) The last day of the feast of unleavened bread (Lev. 23:8).
- (3) The feast of weeks, 50 days after the feast of unleavened bread (Lev. 23:21).
- (4) The feast of trumpets on the first day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:24, 25).
- (5) The day of atonement on the 10th day of the 7th month (Lev. 23:27-32).
- (6) The first day of the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:35).
- (7) The last day of the feast tabernacles (Lev. 23:36).

Seven Old Testament passages use some form of the phrase "feasts, new moons, sabbaths" (1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:12, 13; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; Eze. 45:17; Hosea 2:11). Consistently these passages refer to the burnt offerings to be offered weekly, monthly, and yearly. Usually the feasts specify only the three pilgrimage feasts (Unleavened Bread, Weeks or Pentecost, and Tabernacles). The sabbaths must, therefore, include the ceremonial sabbaths--otherwise Solomon, for example, would have failed to offer burnt offerings on the days of Trumpets and Atonement.

"Then Solomon offered up burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of the Lord that he had built in front of the vestibule, as the duty of each day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses for the sabbaths, the new moons, and the three annual festivals--the festival of unleavened bread, the festival of weeks, and the festival of booths [tabernacles]" (2 Chron. 8:12, 13). If the "sabbaths" mentioned in the passage did not include ceremonial sabbaths, Solomon would have failed to offer the stipulated burnt offerings on the feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, because the feasts as listed exclude these two ceremonial sabbaths.

The word *sabbath* (whether singular or plural) in the phrase "feast, new moon, sabbath" specifies the *burnt offerings* for weekly and annual (ceremonial sabbaths). Colossians 2:16, 17 is simply teaching that *the sacrifices offered* weekly (sabbath), monthly, or yearly were a "shadow" pointing forward to Christ (see Heb. 8:5; 10:1), which lost their significance at the cross. Now no one has a right to judge those who reject these ceremonial observances which pointed forward to the sacrifice and heavenly ministry of Jesus Christ. The phrase "feast, new moon, sabbath" is simply a stylized way of referring to the temporary ceremonial observances that typified the work of our Savior.

Although the special animal sacrifices commanded for the weekly Sabbath (Num 28; Lev. 23) no longer have significance, the weekly Sabbath itself remains as a perpetual memorial of Creation (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Matt. 24:20; Heb. 4:9) and a sign of sanctification (Ex. 31:13) and redemption (Heb. 4:9-11).

The "food and drink" (Col. 2:16) may refer to the meal and drink offerings that were presented to God along with the burnt offerings (see Num. 28:2, 5, 7, 9, 13, 14, etc.). Or

they may refer to ritualistic eating and drinking or abstaining from eating and drinking of the kind referred to in Romans 14:1-6. Or they may refer to eating or not eating food that had been offered to idols (1 Cor. 8).

The force of the passage (Col. 2:13-17) is that, since Christ has died for our sins, and we have now been forgiven, ceremonial, ritualistic observances that foreshadowed aspects of his sacrificial and mediatorial ministries have been done away, and no Christian should allow himself to be judged in respect to these ceremonial observances. Paul was not abolishing the weekly Sabbath which, according to the book of Acts, he consistently observed.

WHEN AND WHERE DID SUNDAY OBSERVANCE BEGIN

The history of the early Christian Church establishes that worship services on Sunday, associated with a progressive rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath, began in Rome during the second century A.D. While most Christians around the Mediterranean world were still observing the Sabbath, there grew up in Rome a veneration of Sunday. Gradually this practice spread from Rome to other places. By the early medieval period, Sunday observance of one sort or another was quite common in the eastern empire as well as in the west. There were three closely related reasons for this development beginning in Rome and spreading from there to other Christian centers:

1. In the second century the Sabbath was made a fast day, while Sunday was a feast day.

Among the Jews the Sabbath was never a day of fasting, sadness and gloom. For them it was a festival occasion. In Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28, the Sabbath is included among the Jewish feast days. The apocryphal book of Judith says: "And she [Judith] fasted all the days of her widowhood, save the eves of the sabbaths, and the sabbaths, and the eves of the new moons, and the new moons, and the feasts and joyful days of the house of Israel."⁽¹⁰⁾ The book of Jubilees issues a stern warning to the person who fasts on the Sabbath: "And every man who does any work thereon, or goes a journey, or tills (his) farm . . . or whoever fasts or makes war on the Sabbaths: The man who does any of these things on the Sabbath shall die. . . ."

In the second-century Roman Christian church, the practices of Easter weekend were gradually transferred to every weekend of the year. Friday and Sabbath were fast days, while Sunday was a day of feasting and rejoicing in view of the resurrection of Christ. The result was that the Sabbath became a day of fasting and gloom by contrast with Sunday which was a day of joy and pleasantness.

Early in the third century, Tertullian wrote of the Roman Christians: "Anyhow, you sometimes continue your Station [fast] even over the Sabbath, -- a day never to be kept as a fast except at the passover season, according to a reason elsewhere given."

The evidence suggests that toward the end of the second century the Roman Church had begun to transfer the fasting practices of Easter weekend to every weekend of the year, by which Friday and the Sabbath were fast days, and Sunday a feast day. The gradual effect of this was to depreciate the Sabbath and exalt Sunday.

By the time of the Spanish Synod of Elvira (c. A.D. 306) weekly Sabbath fasting was the custom in the West: "We have decided that the error be corrected, so that we celebrate extensions of the fast every Sabbath day."

In the early fourth century, while various places in the West were treating the Sabbath as a fast day, this was not the custom in the East. By the fifth century, the weekly Sabbath fast

was a fixed custom in Rome. The reason is clearly brought out in the following statement of Pope Innocent I (402-417):

"A very clear reason shows why one should fast on the Sabbath. For if we celebrate the Diem Dominicum to show reverence for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ not only on the day of Easter, but indeed also from one weekly cycle to another one, if we assemble together for the commemoration of that very day, and fast on the sixth holiday, we must not omit the Sabbath, which comes between the sadness and the joy of that period."

Just as the Sabbath of Easter weekend was a fast day, so, it was reasoned, must be every Sabbath day of the year. The result was the denigration of the Sabbath to the level of a day of sorrow and mourning, by contrast with Sunday which was a day of Christian joy and rejoicing. The practical effect on Christians was to lead them to turn away from the Sabbath and to exalt Sunday as the special feast day memorializing Christ's resurrection.

Samuele Bacchiocchi writes: "That the Church of Rome was the champion of the Sabbath fast and anxious to impose it on other Christian communities is well attested by the historical references from Bishop Callistus (A.D. 217-222), Hippolytus (c. A.D. 170-236), Pope Sylvester (A.D. 314-335), Pope Innocent I (A.D. 401-417), Augustine (A.D. 354-430), and John Cassian (c. A.D. 360-435). The fast was designed not only to express sorrow for Christ's death but also, as Pope Sylvester emphatically states, to show 'contempt for the Jews' (*execratione Judaeorum*) and for their Sabbath 'feasting' (*destructiones ciborum*).

2. Anti-Semitism

"Following the death of Nero, the Jews experienced a setback. Military, political, fiscal, and literary repressive measures were taken against them on account of their resurgent nationalism, which exploded in violent uprisings in many places. Militarily, the statistics of bloodshed provided by contemporary historians, even allowing for possible exaggerations, are most impressive. Tacitus (c. A.D. 33-120), for instance, reports having heard that 600,000 Jews were besieged in the A.D. 70 war. Dio Cassius (c. A.D. 150-235), states that in the Barkokeba war of A.D. 132-135, some 580,000 Jews were killed in action besides the numberless who died of hunger and disease."

Bacchiocchi points out that "under Vespasian (A.D. 69-79) both the Sanhedrin and the high priesthood were abolished; and under Hadrian . . . the practice of the Jewish religion and particularly Sabbathkeeping were outlawed."

Bacchiocchi writes: "Literarily, a new wave of anti-Semitic literature surged at that time, undoubtedly reflecting the Roman mood against the Jews. Writers such as Seneca (died A.D. 65), Persius (A.D. 34-62), Petronius (died c. A.D. 66), Quintilian (c. A.D. 35-100), Martial (c. A.D. 40-104), Plutarch (c. A.D. 46-after 119), Juvenal (died c. A.D. 125), and Tacitus (c. A.D. 55-120), who lived in Rome for most of their professional lives, reviled the Jews racially and culturally. Particularly were the Jewish customs of Sabbathkeeping and circumcision contemptuously derided as examples of degrading superstition."

Christians were motivated to separate themselves from the Jews in the minds of the populace and rulers. They wrote against Jewish legalism and began to attack the Sabbath. Writing from Rome about the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr condemned Sabbath observance and provided the earliest account of Christian Sunday worship services:

"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, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs,

and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen. . . . But Sunday is the day on which we all 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. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration."

Thus Sunday observance began in Rome in the middle of the second century A.D. Opposition to the religion of the Jews was a factor in the depreciation of their Sabbath and the gradual substitution of Sunday.

3. Pagan sun worship contributed to the development of Sunday veneration among Christians.

Sun worship was one of the oldest practices in the Roman religion. From the early part of the second century A.D., the cult of Sol Invictus was very influential in Rome and other parts of the Empire. The emperor was regarded and worshiped as a Sun-god.

The planetary week was in common use in ancient Rome from the beginning of the Christian Era. The days of the week were named from the heavenly bodies as follows: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn. The day of the sun began the series and was regarded as the most important day.

Christian converts from paganism tended to cling to their veneration of the Sun and, therefore, of Sunday. In early Christian art and literature the image of the Sun was often used to represent Christ, the true "Sun of righteousness." "In the earliest known Christian mosaic (dated c. A.D. 240), found below the altar of St. Peter in Rome, Christ is portrayed as the Sun (*helios*) ascending on the quadriga chariot with a nimbus behind His head from which irradiates seven rays in the form of a T (allusion to the cross?). Thousands of hours have been devoted to drawing the sun disk with an equal-armed cross behind the head of Christ and of other important persons."

Bacchiocchi points out that early Christians ceased to pray facing Jerusalem. Instead they faced the sunrise (East). Christians adopted the pagan feast of the *dies natalis Solis Invicti* (the birthday of the Invincible Sun), December 25. Most scholars are convinced that the Church of Rome introduced and championed Sunday. Various Sun cults were present in Rome by the early second century. Their symbology was soon influencing Christian literature, art, and liturgy.

The historical evidence establishes quite conclusively that, although the Sabbath was still kept by many Christians around the Roman world in the second century, the trend in Rome (and, as we shall see, also in Alexandria) was toward depreciation of the Sabbath and the exaltation of Sunday. The three main factors that led to this development were: (1) the Sabbath fast introduced in Rome in the second century; (2) anti-semitism; (3) the influence of pagan religion on Christianity, since new converts tended to retain some of their old attachments to veneration of the Sun and the day of the Sun.

TO WHAT EXTENT WAS THE SABBATH OBSERVED AS A SACRED DAY OF WORSHIP BY EARLY CHRISTIANS?

Kenneth A. Strand provides very convincing historical evidence that, although in Rome and Alexandria the trend was to replace weekly Sabbath worship with Sunday worship services, elsewhere in the Roman Empire the Sabbath was observed along with Sunday until the fifth century.

Strand writes: "The situation in Rome and Alexandria, however, was not typical of the rest of early Christianity. In these two cities there was an evident early attempt by Christians to terminate observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, but elsewhere throughout the Christian world Sunday observance simply arose *alongside* observance of Saturday."

The evidence Strand presents is very impressive. Some of it is given here:

1. Two fifth-century church historians, Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen:

"For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries [the Lord's Supper] on the sabbath [Saturday] of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this. The Egyptians in the neighborhood of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious assemblies on the sabbath, but do not participate of the mysteries in the manner usual among Christians in general: for after having eaten and satisfied themselves with food of all kinds, in the evening making their offerings they partake of the mysteries."

"The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria. There are several cities and villages in Egypt where, contrary to the usage established elsewhere, the people meet together on Sabbath evenings, and, although they have dined previously, partake of the mysteries."

Strand comments: "Thus, even *as late as the fifth century* almost the entire Christian world observed *both Saturday and Sunday* for special religious services. Obviously, therefore, Sunday was not considered a substitute for the Sabbath."

2. In the late second or early third century, Origen, the famous Alexandrian Church Father wrote of the proper kind of Sabbath observance:

"Forsaking therefore the Judaic Sabbath observance, let us see what kind of Sabbath observance is expected of the Christian. On the Sabbath day, nothing of worldly activity should be done. If therefore desisting from all worldly works and doing nothing mundane but being free for spiritual works, you come to the church, listen to divine readings and discussions and think of heavenly things, give heed to the future life, keep before your eyes the coming judgment, disregard present and visible things in favor of the invisible and future, this is the observance of the Christian Sabbath."

3. The fourth-century compilation known as the Apostolic Constitutions, probably produced in Syria or elsewhere in the East, urged that both Sabbath and Sunday be observed.

"Have before thine eyes the fear of God, and always remember the ten commandments of God. . . . Thou shalt observe the Sabbath, on account of Him who ceased from His work of creation, but ceased not from His work of providence: it is a rest for meditation of the law, not for idleness of the hands."

"But keep the sabbath, and the Lord's day festival [Sunday]; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection."

"Oh Lord Almighty, Thou hast created the world by Christ, and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day Thou hast made us rest from our works, for

the meditation upon Thy laws. . . . We solemnly assemble to celebrate the feast of the resurrection on the Lord's day, and rejoice on account of Him who has conquered death, and has brought life and immortality to light."

"Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath-day and the Lord's day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety. We have said that the Sabbath is on account of the creation, and the Lord's day of the resurrection."

4. Gregory of Nyssa and Asterius of Amasea:

"Gregory of Nyssa in the late fourth century referred to the Sabbath and Sunday as 'sisters,' and about the same time Asterius of Amasea declared that it was beautiful for Christians that the 'team of these two days come together' -- 'the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.' According to Asterius, each week brought the people together on these days with priests to instruct them."

5. John Cassian:

"In the fifth century John Cassian makes several references to church attendance on both Saturday and Sunday. In speaking of Egyptian monks, he states that 'except Vespers and Nocturns, there are no public services among them in the day except on Saturday and Sunday, when they meet together at the third hour [9:00 A.M.] for the purpose of Holy Communion."

The historical evidence establishes that the Sabbath was kept by most Christians until at least the fifth century. Although Sunday was observed along with the Sabbath as a day for worship services, in most areas of the Roman Empire it did not replace the Sabbath. The trend in Rome and Alexandria, however, was for Sunday to replace the Sabbath. As we shall discover, in later centuries Sunday was treated as a day of rest, and Sabbath observance, although not discontinued by all Christians, was neglected by most.

IV. WHEN DID SUNDAY OBSERVANCE REPLACE SABBATH OBSERVANCE IN THE PRACTICE OF MOST CHRISTIANS?

Sunday gradually became a rest day. Although in the early Christian centuries Sunday worship services were held in Rome and Alexandria, and increasingly in other places, Sunday was not regarded as a day of rest required by the fourth commandment. The development toward regarding Sunday as the complete substitute for the seventh-day Sabbath was a gradual process from the fourth to the twelfth century.

1. Constantine made Sunday a civil rest day.

His famous Sunday law of March 7, 321 reads as follows: "On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or for vine-planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost."

Kenneth Strand comments: "This was the first in a series of steps taken by Constantine and by later Roman emperors in regulating Sunday observance. It is obvious that this first Sunday law was not particularly Christian in orientation. We may note, for instance, the pagan designation 'venerable Day of the Sun.' Also, it is evident that Constantine did not

base his Sunday regulations on the Decalogue, for he exempted agricultural work--a type of work strictly prohibited in the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 20:8-11."

2. Theodosius I and Gratian Valentinian

in A.D. 386 ruled that legal cases should not be heard on Sunday and that there should be no public or private payment of debt. Laws also forbade Sunday circus, theater, and horse racing.

3. Ephraem Syrus

(c. A.D. 306-373) wrote that the law requires rest for servants and animals on Sunday. The law is a reference to the Old Testament Sabbath commandment (Exod. 20:8-11).⁽³⁷⁾ Hence, by the second half of the fourth century some Christians were treating Sunday as a rest day in place of the seventh-day Sabbath, and they were justifying their practice by appealing to the fourth commandment.

4. The Council of Laodicea about A.D. 364

The council showed respect for the Sabbath as well as Sunday, but Canon 29 stipulated: "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day they shall especially honour, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ."

While such fourth-century documents as the *Apostolic Constitutions* were urging that both Sabbath and Sunday be observed, the Council of Laodicea and certain influential church leaders were attempting to substitute Sunday for the Sabbath as the day of rest.

5. In medieval times the Sunday "Sabbath" displaced the Saturday Sabbath throughout Europe.

i. Pope Gregory (Pope from A.D. 590-604) demanded that all secular activities should cease on Sunday so that the people could devote their time to prayer.

ii. The Arian rulers must have accepted Sunday as a day of rest and worship, for the Visigoths were defeated by the Romans in A.D. 543 because they refused to fight on Sunday.

iii. Pepin III, known as "the Short" (714-68), the Frankish king, Charlemagne (c. 742-814), the first Emperor (from 800) of the 'Holy Roman Empire,' and their successors attempted to enforce rest on Sunday.

iv. "By the twelfth century, Sunday had become quite fully the church substitute for the seventh day. The rest began at sunset and lasted until the next sunset. All secular work was strictly prohibited under stern ecclesiastical and civil penalties, for nothing except very stringent necessity was allowed to interfere with church attendance (though dispensations could be granted by ecclesiastical authority). This concept of Sundaykeeping was spelled out clearly by the great decretalists. In his collection of 1234, Gregory IX, for instance, collated a decree from the Synod of Mayence from the early part of the ninth century and a letter from Pope Alexander III to the Archbishop of Trondheim in Norway teaching how Sunday must be kept. Although those were local documents, they acquired a much greater authority when they were included in a major canonic collection."

6. One notable exception to the above trend was the Christian Church of Ethiopia

...which observed both Sabbath and Sunday throughout the Middle Ages and has continued to do so until the present.

7. In every Christian century, even during the Middle Ages, there have been faithful observers of the seventh-day Sabbath.

Daniel Augsburger concludes his chapter, "The Sabbath and Lord's Day During the Middle Ages," by writing: "But also, all throughout that period there were groups of people who, either through the example of the Jews or because of their study of the Scriptures, attempted to keep the day that Jesus and the apostles had kept. For obvious reasons we know little about their number or their names, but their presence shows that in every age there were some who attempted to place the Word of God above the traditions of men." He mentions, for example, the Passagini in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In 1420 a group of Sabbathkeepers in northern France were dealt with by the authorities. Also some of the Bohemian "Picards" were Sabbathkeepers. In the fifteenth century some of the English Lollards (followers of John Wycliffe) and certain Christians in the Scandinavian lands kept the Sabbath.

The trend from the fourth century on was away from observance of the Sabbath by most Christians and the substitution of Sunday as the day of worship and rest. Even so, in every century there were those who resisted the trend by adhering faithfully to the seventh-day Sabbath of the Scriptures.

We now summarize this article by reiterating that Jesus and the apostles observed the seventh-day Sabbath. There is no evidence in the New Testament for Sunday as a day of rest and worship. The New Testament nowhere invites or instructs Christians to observe Sunday as a memorial of Christ's resurrection. The apostle Paul did not attempt to abolish the seventh-day Sabbath. He consistently observed it. The Sabbath was neglected and depreciated in second-century Rome and Alexandria. Sabbath observance was progressively replaced by Sunday observance in the centuries that followed. But time and tradition to not abolish the law of God. Jesus said, "Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19). John wrote, "Whoever says, 'I have come to know him,' but does not obey his commandments, is a liar, and in such person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may be sure that we are in him: whoever says, 'I abide in him,' ought to walk just as he walked" (1 John 2:4-6).

Dear Friend, do you love Jesus enough to walk as He walked? Do you love Him enough to keep His commandments? Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). That includes the Sabbath commandment. Are you sure that your life is in His hands and that your name is written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:27)? Now is the time to make a decision for Him and for eternity. God is waiting longingly to take you into His arms of love and pour the Holy Spirit into your heart. Believe Him, accept Him, and follow His will in everything. Then you will have life and joy for eternity.