

Questions & Answers

ABOUT THE SABBATH

Q "The scriptures seem to indicate that the apostles observed 'the first day of the week' (namely the eve of Sunday) as the 'Lord's Day,' the regular day of worship. I don't have the historical background to know for sure if the above was a fact or not."

A Historical records concur that the "early church" kept the Sabbath (Saturday), and that even well past the fourth century some kept both the Sabbath and Sunday side by side. *A Critical History of the Sabbath and the Sunday in the Christian Church* by A. H. Lewis, D.D. (The American Sabbath Tract Society, Alfred Center, New York, 1886) presents a very good picture of what occurred regarding the Sabbath and how it was replaced by Sunday when Constantine converted to "Christianity."

The more modern *Catholic Encyclopedia* states on page 336 that "The obligation of rest from work on Sunday remained somewhat indefinite for several centuries." The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* adds that "There is nothing to indicate that the practice of coming together on Sunday . . . was regarded as obligatory . . . during the first three centuries of the Christian Era" (p. 800).

Sunday observance came to be added to Sabbath observance in the professing Christian world (and later superseded it) due to the belief that Christ was resurrected on Sunday.

Hastings Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics states: "Although Jewish

Christianity disappeared from the West before the end of the 2nd century, there is plenty of evidence that some of its traditions persisted in the Eastern Church for two hundred years more. The Apostolic Constitutions (vii 23, 26) recognized a parallel observance of the Sabbath and Sunday. [During the second, third and fourth centuries, many documents appeared purporting to be written by the apostles. Among these were the spurious 'Apostolic Constitutions.' They were circulated to create the impression that man-made tradition had apostolic blessing. Although deliberate frauds, these documents nonetheless express some of the religious teachings during the centuries after the death of the apostles.] And the Council of Laodicea [about 365 A.D.], while condemning a Judaizing observance of the Sabbath, marked it as a festival and a day of worship" (vol. 12, pp. 104-105).

The twenty-ninth canon of the Council of Laodicea reads as follows: "Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather, honoring the Lord's day, and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be Judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ" (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XIV, p. 148).

So the Sabbath was still observed on Saturday centuries after the original apostles died.

Q "Isaiah 58:13-14 says that the Sabbath is supposed to be a delight, but then turns around and says

not to seek your own pleasure. This seems like a contradiction to me."

A Isaiah 58:13-14 reads: "If you turn back your foot from the sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord. . . ." In short, the Sabbath is God's day. It is a day to be honored. It is a time to "delight in the Lord" as opposed to one's own mundane business affairs.

It should be carefully noted that the term "seeking your own pleasure" does not necessarily, in the Hebrew, have reference to personal enjoyment. The word "pleasure" (*khephets* in Hebrew) means various things according to context. In the Jewish Publication Society translation it is rendered "thine own business." *The New English Bible* makes the meaning clearer than either the King James or Revised Standard Version, "If you cease to tread the sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the sabbath a day of joy . . . if you honour it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs . . ."

This translation shows the true intent of the words "thine own pleasure"! The Hebrew term rendered "pleasure" is often translated "desire" or "purpose" in other passages (see Ecclesiastes 3:1, 17; I Kings 5:8-10). The Jewish translation speaks of "pursuing thy business" and "thy wonted ways." The Hebrew *khephets* is not addressing the question of *pleasurable* activities that are illegal on the seventh day! If pleasure were not present, how could the day possibly be a delight?

This passage of Scripture has been erroneously applied to such activities as television viewing, swimming, listening to music, marital relations, and even reading the comics in the newspaper! Of course, any of these activities *could* violate the spirit of the Sabbath day if they are *abused* or *overdone*. They are not, of and by themselves, wrong. Any activity which interferes

with or detracts from the joy, rest, and spiritual intention of the day could be wrong. If an activity works against the spirit of the Sabbath, it is wrong, no matter what it is.

The main concern of most scriptures pertaining to the Sabbath is that one should not pursue his or her usual business or work activities on that day. One should have more of God and less of himself in his thoughts on the Sabbath. It is a day to honor God, to remember His creation, and to rest. (For more on this subject, please write for our free article entitled "The Sabbath Was Made for Man.")

Q "Today's English Version of the Bible says in Acts 20:7, 'on Saturday evening we gathered together,' which is directly contrary to what the Authorized Version says. So may I ask, did those disciples meet on the first day or the last day of the week? Will you please explain?"

A The literal Greek wording of this passage is "on the first day of the week." However, because in today's English language the phrase "first day of the week" is commonly regarded as referring to Sunday, the Today's English Version translators evidently felt it necessary to specify that the disciples' meeting was on Saturday evening rather than on Sunday morning.

In both Old and New Testament times, days were begun at evening (roughly at sunset) and ended at the following evening. However, Roman practice was to count days from midnight to midnight, and this became the system of the modern world. When names for the days were adopted, Sunday of course meant a midnight-to-midnight period. It is obvious the Acts 20:7 meeting did not take place on Sunday morning, since in that very unusual circumstance Paul preached till midnight.

Q "When does the Sabbath day begin and end?"

A In the beginning, the Sabbath was rendered "holy time" by God at creation. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he

had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (Gen. 2:1-3). That period of time defined broadly as "evening and morning" was blessed and hallowed. To hallow or sanctify is to make holy or set apart for holy use. When originally defined, the days of creation week were set only in the broad terms of "evening and morning," not specifically from the moment of sunset to sunset, although there is a rough relationship between evening and sunset (see Deuteronomy 16:6 and Mark 1:32). It is the individual's responsibility (*within* the guidelines of the Church), to determine as best he is able the meaning of "evening" which begins a day. Scandinavians certainly have more need of a broad meaning of "evening" than do people who live in the tropics.

The Sabbath was a day upon which God "rested"—that is, ceased from His labors of creation—and "was refreshed" (Ex. 31:17). The example is clear. God rested. Man should rest from his weekly labors also. When man observes the Sabbath day, he is imitating his Creator and commemorating the creation itself.

For more information on this subject, write for the free booklets *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* and *The Ten Commandments*.

Q "I feel that your insistence on Sabbath keeping is an affront to the liberty of the gospel of Christ. I fail to see why Christians 'have to' keep the ritual law as given in the Pentateuch, but I agree that the moral law is unchangeable. As Christians, we must love God and our neighbors, for 'love is the fulfilling of the law.'"

A We respect your right to have an opinion, but we also have an obligation to clarify the issues.

First of all, the Sabbath is *not* a part of a ritualistic law. It is one of the basic Ten Commandments (Ex. 20; Deut. 5). When a young man asked Jesus how he could enter into eternal life, Jesus replied: "Keep the commandments." Jesus

then proceeded to quote several of the commandments of *the decalogue* to show *which* law He meant (see Matt. 19:16-19).

Since the Sabbath is *one* of those decalogue commandments, the breaking of which is sin (I John 3:4), a person who has knowledge of the true Sabbath must observe it to avoid sinning.

Jesus Himself talked about the liberty of the gospel. He said: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you *free*" (John 8:32). Not understanding what Jesus meant, the Pharisees retorted that they "were never in bondage to any man" (verse 33). So "Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin [transgression of the law] is the servant of sin" (verse 34).

Some of the Pharisees were indeed in bondage to sin. And anyone who knowingly breaks God's Sabbath is committing a sin and is, therefore, in spiritual bondage.

It is fulfilling God's law of love to keep the Sabbath. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments [including the Sabbath] are not grievous" (I John 5:3). Jesus said: "If you love me, *keep my commandments*" (John 14:15).

In summary, obeying God by keeping His Sabbath shows God we love Him. It is an *unchanging* moral law—not a ritualistic law.

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