

Which Day of Worship Did God Make Holy?

Did Jesus or the apostles abrogate the seventh-day Sabbath?

Throughout their history the children of Israel and Judah continually rejected the commandments of God. In particular, they refused to consistently keep God's Sabbath and holy days. At the temple of God in Jerusalem, they literally turned their backs on God to worship the *sun* and various occult gods—a forerunner of today's Sunday observance. Generation after generation, they repeatedly and grievously transgressed against God. Yet, in His love and mercy for His people and for the sake of His promises to Abraham, God sent numerous faithful prophets over hundreds of years with warnings and calls to repentance.

Ignoring the record of the Old Testament, apostate Orthodox Christendom has in defiance of God **perpetuated the sins of ancient Israel and Judah**. While its leadership professes to represent the God of the Bible and to claim His authority, its popes, priests, ministers and evangelists actually oppose God by **rejecting** much of His Word. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church today accepts and observes the *traditions* of the “church fathers” and various papal proclamations—claiming that they are as binding and authoritative as the Word of God. In practice, however, such traditions and papal proclamations actually *supersede* the authority of the Word of God. Protestants also accept as authoritative the traditions of the “church fathers,” and falsely teach that Jesus abolished the Law of God. As a result, they practice the very things God commands them to avoid—even while professing to serve Him!

The apostle Peter prophesied that this would happen. “But there were also false prophets among the people [of ancient Israel and Judah], as indeed there will be **false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies, personally denying the Lord who bought them**, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many people will follow *as authoritative* their destructive ways; *and* because of them, **the way of the truth will be blasphemed**. Also, through insatiable greed they will **with enticing messages exploit you for gain...**” (II Pet. 2:1-3).

Genesis reveals that the seventh-day Sabbath is a special creation of God from the beginning. “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And by *the beginning of* the seventh day God finished His work which He had made. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. **And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it He rested from all His work which God had created and made**” (Gen. 2:1-3). Sanctifying the Sabbath means that God **set it apart** or **made it holy**. Since God is holy, only He has the authority to make or declare something holy. God made the Sabbath holy by taking five specific actions: 1) God created it; 2) God blessed it; 3) God sanctified it; 4) God put His presence in it; and, 5) God rested on it. **Therefore, no man has the power or authority to change, annul or abrogate what God has personally made holy.**

The weekly cycle of seven days has been the same from creation. On the Roman calendar today, the seventh-day Sabbath is called Saturday.

The laws of God have been in effect from the beginning (Rom. 5:12-14). If there was no law for the 2,500 years from Adam to Moses, there would have been no sin—because where there is no law, sin is not imputed (Rom. 4:15). Sin is the transgression of the law (I John 3:4)—therefore if there is sin, there is law. The fact that God passed judgment on mankind and destroyed them with a universal flood because of gross wickedness and sin (Gen. 6:5-13), proves that the laws and commandments of God have always been in effect.

The patriarchs Abel, Enoch and Noah walked with God (Gen. 5:22; 6:9). They were righteous in that they believed God and kept His laws and commandments (Heb. 11:4-5, 7; 12:24). Since all the commandments of God are righteousness, this means the patriarchs kept the

seventh-day Sabbath as well as all the other commandments.

After the flood, Abraham, the father of the faithful, received God's promises because he believed and obeyed Him (Gen. 12:1-4; 22:1-18; 26:5). Abraham's faith was counted as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). The apostle James writes of Abraham's faith and righteous works (Jas. 2:20-24)—which would have absolutely included Sabbath-keeping. Indeed, since God does not change (Mal. 3:6), and Jesus Christ is "the same, yesterday, today and forever" (Heb. 13:8), we can conclude that the laws, commandments and statutes that Abraham kept were the same as those given later to Israel at Mount Sinai.

Weeks before the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, God miraculously provided manna for them to eat. On the sixth day of the week, God sent a *double portion* of manna; He sent none on the seventh day. Thus, the children of Israel would not need to gather food on the seventh day and could observe the Sabbath rest. Some, however, went out on the Sabbath to gather manna anyway—but didn't find any. Through Moses, God asked, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?" (Ex. 16:28).

At Mount Sinai God expounded upon the Fourth commandment, saying, "**Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.** Six days you shall labor and do all your work. **But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God.** In it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter; your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the stranger within your gates; For *in* six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it" (Ex. 20:8-11). Moses recounted the Sabbath commandment in Deuteronomy five.

In Leviticus, God declares that the Sabbath is a holy convocation: "Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It *is* a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings" (Lev. 23:3).

There are a number of key Scriptures concerning Sabbath-keeping as a special sign between God and His people. For example:

"And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak also to the children of Israel [the Church is called the spiritual "Israel of God" in Gal. 6:16], saying, "Truly you shall keep **My Sabbaths**, for it [the keeping of God's Sabbaths] *is* a **sign between Me and you** throughout your generations **to know that I am the LORD Who sanctifies you.** You shall keep the Sabbath therefore, for it *is* holy to you. Everyone that defiles it shall surely be put to death, for whoever does *any* work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people" ' " (Ex. 31:12-14).

"Six days may work be done, but on the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. **Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever;** for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed" (verses 15-17). This **perpetual covenant**—meaning it cannot be changed or abolished—of Sabbath-keeping is **in addition** to the covenant that was ratified between God and the children of Israel as recorded in Exodus 24.

In Ezekiel 20, God commanded the children of Israel to put away the idols of Egypt and keep His laws and Sabbaths. "And I gave them My statutes and showed them My ordinances, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them. And also I gave them **My Sabbaths** to be a sign between Me and them, that *they* might know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies them. **But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness;** they did not walk in My statutes, and they despised My ordinances, which *if* a man does, he shall even live in them. And **they greatly polluted My Sabbaths...**" (Ezek. 20:11-13; also verses 18-21).

When Jesus Christ began His ministry, He taught concerning the laws and commandments of God, and the prophets, saying, "**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or**

the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, **until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the law until everything has been fulfilled**” (Matt. 5:17-18). Since heaven and earth still exist, **the laws and commandments of God are still in full force and effect!**

Jesus further taught regarding the commandments: “Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; **but whoever shall practice and teach *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven**” (verse 19). In another account, when a young rich man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus gave this answer: “If you desire to enter into life, **keep** [Greek *poiēw*, meaning “to practice,” “to do”] **the commandments**” (Matt. 19:17).

The apostles also taught commandment-keeping to New Testament Christians. In the 90s AD, the apostle John wrote that Christians were to keep the commandments of God. “And whatever we may ask we receive from Him **because we keep His commandments and practice those things that are pleasing in His sight. . . . And the one who keeps His commandments is dwelling in Him, and He in him**; and by this we know that He is dwelling in us: by the Spirit which He has given to us” (I John 3:22, 24).

Contrary to the Word of God, Dr. Russell K. Tardo champions the *lawless* Protestant viewpoint by claiming that all the laws and commandments of God have been abolished, rendered inoperative, or fulfilled. “In fact, the whole law of Moses has been rendered inoperative. The New Testament message is clear for all who have ‘ears to hear.’ **The whole of the law of Moses has been rendered inoperative by the death of the Lord Jesus. The law, in its entirety, no longer has any immediate and forensic authority or jurisdiction whatsoever over anyone. . . . Christ is the complete end and fulfillment of all of the laws’ 613 commandments, ending their jurisdiction over us completely**” (Tardo, *Sunday Facts & Sabbath Fiction*, pp. 26-27). To allege that Christ completely fulfilled the Law and brought it to an end is absolute nonsense—the idea creates an untenable “lawless grace”—contradicting Jesus Christ’s own plain teachings.

Jesus observed the seventh-day Sabbath as a custom. “And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and **according to His custom, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.**” (Luke 4:16). After Jesus left Nazareth, He continued to teach the people throughout all Galilee—particularly on the Sabbath. “Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and **taught them on the Sabbath days.** And they were astonished at His teaching: for His word was with authority” (Luke 4:31-32). Never at any time did He claim that He had come to do away with the Sabbath.

The Sabbath was made to be a blessing for all mankind. Jesus used the Sabbath to preach the gospel, to teach and to personally administer God’s love, mercy and blessings through healing and the casting out of demons. He used the Sabbath to release people from sin. Hence, Jesus revealed that the Sabbath day is a day of love, mercy, forgiveness, redemption and salvation—a day of blessing! John recorded how Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath—only to be accused of breaking the Sabbath by the Jewish leaders (John 5:5-16). He replied, “My Father is working until now, and I work” (verse 17). The Jews did not understand that *spiritual works* such as healing the sick, casting out demons, and helping the poor and destitute on the Sabbath day glorify God. These acts are a part of the good works of keeping the Sabbath day holy. Jesus did not work for gain. Rather, His was a spiritual work.

Another dispute arose because Christ and His disciples had plucked ears of grain to eat on the Sabbath. Afterward, Jesus announced, “The Sabbath was made for man, *and* not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, **the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath**” (Mark 2:27-28). Jesus Himself is Lord of the Sabbath because He—as the God of the Old Testament—created, blessed, and sanctified the day. It is the *true* “Lord’s Day.”

Throughout the book of Acts, we find that the apostle Paul taught on the Sabbath—as was his practice. In Thessalonica he taught on the Sabbath at a synagogue: “And as was the custom with Paul, he went in to them and **for three Sabbaths** reasoned with them from the Scriptures... (Acts 17:2-4). Again, in Antioch, Paul taught on the Sabbath. “They came to Antioch of Pisidia: and they went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day *and* sat down” (Acts 13:14). Afterwards, some wanted to hear more: “And when the Jews had gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles entreated *him* that these words might be spoken to them **on the next Sabbath**. Now after the synagogue had been dismissed, many of the Jews and the proselytes [Gentile converts] who worshiped *there* followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, **persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And on the coming Sabbath** [not the next day, Sunday—but the next *Sabbath*], **almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the Word of God**” (Acts 13:42-44).

If it were indeed true—as taught by theologians and believed by millions of churchgoers—that after the resurrection of Christ the apostles changed the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first day, Paul certainly would have instructed these worship-seekers to come back the very next day, Sunday—but he didn’t!

When Paul was in Corinth, he taught “*every Sabbath*” for one and a half years (Acts 18:4-11). These scriptures prove that Paul did not institute Sunday-keeping as a replacement for the seventh-day weekly Sabbath among the Gentile communities.

In no way does being “under grace” eliminate the need to obey the Fourth Commandment. Sabbath-keeping is not opposed to grace. In fact, Paul often taught Gentiles on the Sabbath day about the grace of God. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul taught that grace does not abolish law, but that it establishes law. “[There is] indeed one God Who will justify *the* circumcision by faith, and *the* uncircumcision through faith. Are we, then, abolishing law through faith? MAY IT NEVER BE! Rather, we are establishing law!” (Rom. 3:30-31).

Later in this same epistle, Paul makes it clear that a Christian cannot continue to live in sin, transgressing the commandments of God—including the Fourth Commandment. “What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin, so that grace may abound? MAY IT NEVER BE! We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer therein?” (Rom. 6:1-2).

There is not even the slightest hint in the New Testament that the apostles of Jesus Christ—including Paul, who was the apostle to the Gentiles—taught that Sunday was the Gentile Sabbath. **Never at any time did they teach that Sunday would replace the seventh-day Sabbath.** Throughout the writings of all the apostles, the Sabbath is upheld.

Many theologians have misconstrued Jesus’ declaration that He is “Lord of the Sabbath” to mean that He was using His authority to abolish the Sabbath. This interpretation of Jesus’ words is completely unfounded. Among those scholars who understand the true meaning of Sabbath-keeping passages are the writers of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*: “At times Jesus is interpreted to have abrogated or suspended the Sabbath commandment on the basis of the controversies brought about by Sabbath healings and other acts. Careful analysis of the respective passages does not seem to give credence to this interpretation. The action of plucking the ears of grain on the Sabbath by the disciples is particularly important in this matter. Jesus makes a foundational pronouncement at that time in ... [an authoritatively] structured statement of antithetic [contrasting] parallelism: ‘The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath’ (Mark 2:27). The disciples’ act of plucking the grain infringed against the rabbinic *halakhah* of minute casuistry [i.e., the Jews’ use of false reasoning to create traditional laws to define trivial, frivolous matters] in which it was forbidden to reap, thresh, winnow, and grind on the Sabbath (*Sabb.* 7.2). Here again rabbinic Sabbath *halakhah* is rejected [by Jesus], as in other Sabbath conflicts. **Jesus reforms the Sabbath and restores its rightful place as designed in creation, where the Sabbath is made for all mankind and not specifically for Israel, as claimed by normative**

Judaism (*cf. Jub. 2:19-20, see D.3*). The subsequent logion [pronouncement], ‘The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’ (Mark 2:28; Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5), indicates that man-made Sabbath *halakhah* does not rule the Sabbath, but that **the Son of Man as Lord determines the true meaning of the Sabbath**. The Sabbath activities of Jesus are neither hurtful provocations nor mere protests against rabbinic legal restrictions, but are part of Jesus’ essential proclamation of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in which man is taught the original meaning of the Sabbath as the recurring weekly proleptic [anticipated] ‘day of the Lord’ in which God manifests his healing and saving rulership over man” (*The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, pp. 854-55; emphasis added).

As these scholars have written, the Gospel accounts do not support the widespread belief that Jesus abolished the Sabbath. Rather, as the Lord of the Sabbath, He taught the true meaning of the Sabbath day and set the example for its proper observance. Christ’s apostles continued to keep the Sabbath and to teach the early believers to keep it, as Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews clearly demonstrates. The apostle Paul wrote this epistle in 61 AD, more than thirty years after the beginning of the New Testament Church. Even at that time, false ministers were beginning to teach that Sunday, the first day of the week, had replaced the Sabbath. To counter these false teachings, Paul gave the brethren a sober warning that to reject the Sabbath and accept Sunday was sin—just as the children of Israel sinned when they rebelled against God in the wilderness.

Paul drew the comparison between the rebellious Israelites—who were not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their Sabbath-breaking and occult worship of the sun god—and professing Christians who harden their hearts in disobedience to God. He warned them that just as the Israelites were not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their unbelief and Sabbath-breaking, they likewise would not enter into the Kingdom of God because of their unbelief and Sabbath-breaking. “For He spoke in a certain place about the seventh *day* in this manner: ‘**And God rested on the seventh day from all His works**’; and again concerning this: ‘If they shall enter into My rest—’ Consequently, since it remains *for* some to enter into it, and those who had previously heard the gospel did not enter in because of disobedience, again He marks out a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying in David after so long a time (exactly as it has been quoted above), ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken *long* afterwards of another day. **There remains therefore, Sabbath-keeping [sabbatismos] for the people of God**” (Heb. 4:4-9).

Paul does not say, “There remains Sabbath-keeping for the Jews.” He clearly declared, “There remains Sabbath-keeping for **the people of God**”—Gentiles as well as Jews (I Pet. 2:10 and Eph. 2:11-13).

What could be clearer! God’s Word reveals that if we want to be true Christians, we must follow the example of Christ, living by every word of God and keeping all of His commandments. **Our very calling and hope of salvation requires that we observe the seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship and fellowship.**