

Are Christians to Keep the Sabbath?

The Sabbath is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. It was instituted and strictly kept as a special day by the nation of Israel. God said:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Exodus 20:8

If that wasn't clear enough, the rules were repeated:

Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death . . .

Exodus 31:14

Some independent thinker wanted to test that law.

Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. Numbers 15:32

Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." Numbers 15:35

So much for independent thinking.

THE SABBATH WAS FOR ISRAEL

Nehemiah understood that the Sabbath was not for all mankind but something specifically for Israel.

Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good

statutes and commandments. So You made known to them Your holy sabbath, And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, through Your servant Moses. Nehemiah 9:13-14

The Sabbath was and is a weekly reminder for Israel of God's dealings with them. He had delivered them from working without rest seven days a week as slaves in Egypt. The Sabbath was to be a day of total rest. It did not hold historical significance for other nations.

You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

Deuteronomy 5:15

Seventh-day-keeping groups like Seventh Day Adventists, Seventh Day Baptists and Seventh Day Pentecostals miss the purpose of the Sabbath. It was not kept by the great saints of Genesis. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob did not keep the symbolic day. It was introduced as an object lesson as Israel escaped from Egypt.

JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES KEPT THE SABBATH

Jesus was Jewish so lived and died under the Law of Moses. He kept the Law as it was intended. The Sabbath is mentioned more than 40 times in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. During Jesus' ministry, worshipers of God *kept* the Sabbath with all of its restrictions on food preparation, labor and travel.

IN THE CHURCH AGE

Then came the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. John 20:19-20

Jesus had arisen on the first day of the week and appeared to his disciples that same first day. This was the Lord's Day.

Soon the Gospel was proclaimed by Peter and the other hand-picked men in Acts chapter two. Three thousand Jews and converts to Judaism were baptized into the name of Christ. These people all attended the Jewish synagogues wherever they lived. But as the synagogue leaders began to persecute the new believers, they left and met separately.

The examples show the primary meeting day each week was the first

day of the week. It was not a day that was *kept* like the Sabbath of old, it was the day the church assembled to remember Jesus, not the escape from Egypt. The church was soon to become international when Gentiles were admitted into the church and the Sabbath would not remind them of anything. But the first day of the week would.

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. Acts 20:7

This congregation in Ephesus met on the first day of the week to break bread—observe the Lord's Supper.

The uninspired literature of the first and second century shows the day early believers met:

And on the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure." *Didache* 14:1 about AD 80.

One Apostle and a number of inspired prophets were still alive when this was written. None objected.

15:9 Wherefore we keep the eighth day as a day of gladness, on which also Jesus rose from the dead, and after he had appeared ascended unto heaven." *Letter of Barnabas* about AD 150

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 Savior 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." *Justin Apology* 1.67.7;

WAS THE SABBATH CHANGED?

The argument that someone in history later "changed the Sabbath to Sunday" falls flat in the light of these early quotation. It simply is not possible to get thousands of people in hundreds of towns and cities throughout the Roman Empire to switch from Saturday assembly to Sunday assembly. The obvious answer is that the early church met on Sunday, the Lord's Day, from the very first. The Church was launched at Pentecost in Acts 2 and Pentecost always fell on Sunday. The primary meeting day of the church has been on Sunday since day one.

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