

Sunday Worship

How Sunday Became the Popular Day of Worship

AUTHOR: KENNETH A. STRAND

Contrary to what many Christians believe, Sunday was not observed by New Testament Christians as a day of worship. They kept Saturday, the seventh day of the week. The question of how Sunday, the first day of the week, replaced Saturday, the seventh day of the week, as the main day of Christian worship has received increasing attention in recent years. One widely acclaimed study, for example, suggests that the weekly Christian Sunday arose from Sunday-evening communion services in the immediate post resurrection period, with Sunday itself being a workday until after the time of Constantine the Great in the early fourth century.[1] Eventually, however, Sunday ceased to be a workday and became a Christian Sabbath." Some simpler and more popular views are that either (1) Sunday was substituted immediately after Christ's resurrection for the seventh-day Sabbath, or (2) Sunday keeping was introduced directly from paganism during the second century or later. But is either of these views correct? What do the actual source materials tell us?

Both Days Observed.

One thing is clear: The weekly Christian Sunday--whenever it did arise--did not at first generally become a substitute for the Bible seventh-day Sabbath, Saturday; for both Saturday and Sunday were widely kept side by side for several centuries in early Christian history. Socrates Scholasticus, a church historian of the fifth century A.D., wrote, "For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries [the Lord's Supper] on the sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this." [2] And Sozomen, a contemporary of Socrates, wrote, "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." [3] Thus, "almost everywhere" throughout Christendom, except in Rome and Alexandria, there were Christian worship services on both Saturday and Sunday as late as the fifth century. A number of other sources from the third to the fifth centuries also depict Christian observance of both Saturday and Sunday. For example, the Apostolic Constitutions, compiled in the fourth century, furnished instruction to "keep the Sabbath [Saturday], and the Lord's day [Sunday] festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection." "Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath-day [Saturday] and the Lord's day [Sunday] let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety." [4] Gregory of Nyssa in the late fourth century referred to the Sabbath and Sunday as "sisters." [5] And about A.D. 400 Asterius of Amasea declared that it was beautiful for Christians that the "team of these two days comes together"--"the Sabbath and the Lord's day," [6] which each week gathers together the people with priests as their instructors. And in the fifth century, John Cassian refers to attendance in church on both Saturday and Sunday, stating that he had even seen a certain monk who sometimes fasted five days a week but would go to church on Saturday or on Sunday and bring home guests for a meal on those two days. [7] It is clear that none of these early writers confused Sunday with the Bible Sabbath. Sunday, the first day of the week, always followed the Sabbath, the seventh day. Furthermore, the historical records are clear in showing that the weekly cycle has remained unchanged from Christ's time till now, so that the Saturday and Sunday of those early centuries are still the Saturday and Sunday of today. Later in this article we will return to data from early church history of the second and subsequent centuries to trace the manner in which Sunday eventually eclipsed the Sabbath, but first it is important here to take a look at the New Testament evidence, inasmuch as the New Testament is normative for Christian practice.

How did Christ and the apostles regard the Sabbath and Sunday?

Sabbath in the New Testament. According to Luke 4:16, it was Christ's "custom" to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Moreover, at the time of Christ's death and burial, the women who had followed Him from Galilee "rested the sabbath day according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56), indicating that there had been no instruction from Him to the contrary. They were still observing the seventh day of the week! We may, in addition, take note of the fact that the implication of this text is that when Luke wrote the account several decades after Christ's crucifixion he took for granted that no change in Sabbath observance had occurred. He

Sunday Worship

reports this Sabbath observance "according to the commandment" in a totally matter-of-fact way, with no hint that there had been any new day of worship added in the interim. On the other hand we must also recognize, of course, that Christ was accused of Sabbathbreaking by the scribes and Pharisees. We may take, for example, the incident where Christ's disciples plucked grain as they walked through a grain field, rubbed it in their hands, and ate it (Matthew 12:1-8). And we could also notice several instances of Christ's healing work that ran counter to the Sabbath keeping views of the Jewish leaders--perhaps most strikingly the incident regarding the man with a withered hand (verses 10-13). What do these experiences mean? In order to understand the situation, one must recognize that Jewish Sabbath observance in Christ's day did not mean simply following Scripture laws but also adherence to strict regulations in Jewish oral tradition. The Mishnah, wherein multitudinous regulations of this so-called oral law were written down about A.D. 200, gives an idea of what Sabbath observance was like among the scribes and Pharisees.

There were both major laws and minor laws.

Additional Sabbath regulations. The thirty-nine major laws listed in the tractate (or section) of the Mishnah entitled "Shabbath" are given as follows: "The main classes of work are forty save one: sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or dyeing it, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer, and taking out aught from one domain into another. These are the main classes of work: forty save one." [8] These thirty-nine laws had many variations and ramifications. It would make a difference, for instance, whether two letters of the alphabet were written in such a way that they could both be seen at the same time. If water were to be drawn from a well in a gourd, a stone used as a weight in the gourd would be considered as part of the vessel if it did not fall out. However, if it should happen to fall out, it would be considered as an object being lifted, and therefore the individual with such an experience would be guilty of Sabbath-breaking. [9] Objects could be tossed on the Sabbath, but there were regulations pertaining to allowable distance and as to whether the object went from a private domain to a public domain, for example. [10] The foregoing are but a very few of the specifics mentioned in the tractate "Shabbath." And in addition to the laws mentioned in that tractate, the Mishnah contains other Sabbath regulations, the largest number of which deal with the Sabbath day's journey. (These are treated in the tractate "Erubin.")

In the context of this sort of casuistry regarding Sabbathkeeping, it is obvious why Christ's disciples were being accused of Sabbathbreaking by their picking and rubbing kernels of grain. One of the thirty-nine major Sabbath laws was "reaping"; another was "threshing." Thus Christ's disciples were both reaping and threshing--breaking two of the major laws of the Sabbath. If they blew the chaff away, they could also possibly have been considered as engaged in "sifting"--in which case they would have broken three different major Sabbath laws. Such "Sabbathbreaking," it must be emphasized, was not against God's commandments as given in Scripture but was purely and solely against the Jewish restrictions. In considering the various miracles that Christ performed on the Sabbath for the purpose of alleviating suffering, it is interesting that Christ Himself never accepted the Pharisees' criticism that He was breaking the Sabbath. Indeed, in connection with the case of the man with the withered hand, He raised a question, "What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days" (Matthew 12:11, 12). After this, He proceeded to heal the man. Thus He emphasized the lawfulness of this kind of deed on the Sabbath.

How about the apostles?

But now, what can we say about apostolic practice after Christ's resurrection? The book of Acts reveals that the only day on which the apostles repeatedly were engaged in worship services on a weekly basis was Saturday, the seventh day of the week. The apostle Paul and his company, when visiting Antioch in Pisidia, "went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down" (Acts 13:14). After the Scripture reading, they were called upon to speak. They stayed in Antioch a further week, and that "next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God" (verse 44). In Philippi Paul and his company went out of the

Sunday Worship

city by a riverside on the Sabbath day, to the place where prayer was customarily made (Acts 16:13). In Thessalonica, "as his manner was," Paul went to the synagogue and "three sabbath days reasoned with them [the Jews] out of the scriptures" (Acts 17:2). And in Corinth, where Paul resided for a year and a half, "he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks" (Acts 18:4; compare verse 11). Thus the evidence in the book of Acts is multiplied regarding apostolic attendance at worship services on Saturday.

The Lord's day.

Some believe that "the Lord's day" mentioned in Revelation 1:10 refers to Sunday. However, when we read the passage, we find no hint of it being either a Sunday or a worship day. John here simply states that he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." Although it is true that eventually the term "Lord's day" came to be used for Sunday, no evidence indicates this was the case until about a century after the book of Revelation was written!^[11] Most pointedly of all, there is neither prior nor contemporary evidence that Sunday had achieved in New Testament times a status that would have caused it to be called "Lord's day." Another day--the seventh-day Sabbath--had, of course, been the Lord's holy day from antiquity (see Isaiah 58:13) and was the day on which Christ Himself and His followers, including the apostle Paul, had attended religious services, as we have seen. In fact, there is not one piece of concrete evidence anywhere in the New Testament that Sunday was considered as a weekly day of worship for Christians. Rather, Christ Himself, His followers at the time of His death, and apostles after His resurrection regularly attended worship services on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. Moreover, when widespread Christian Sunday observance finally did become evident during the third to fifth centuries, this was side by side with the seventh-day Sabbath, as we have seen. The question now arises as to when and how Christian Sunday observance arose.

The first clear evidence for weekly Sunday observance by Christians comes in the second century from two places--Alexandria and Rome. About A.D. 130 Barnabas of Alexandria, in a highly allegorical discourse, refers to the seventh-day Sabbath as representing the seventh millennium of earth's history. He goes on to say that the present sabbaths were unacceptable to God, who would make "a beginning of the eighth day [Sunday], that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead."^[12] About A.D. 150, Justin Martyr in Rome provides a more clear and direct reference to Sunday observance, actually describing briefly in his Apology the worship service held on Sunday: "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." Next follow prayer, communion, and an offering for the poor.^[13] The same writer in his Dialogue With Trypho the Jew manifests an anti-Sabbath bent in a number of statements, including the following: "Do you see that the elements are not idle, and keep no Sabbaths? Remain as you were born."^[14]

Rome and Alexandria. Thus both Barnabas of Alexandria and Justin Martyr in Rome not only refer to the practice of Sunday observance, but they both also manifest a negative attitude toward the Sabbath. Interestingly, it is precisely these same two cities--Alexandria and Rome--that are mentioned by two fifth-century historians, Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen, as being exceptions to the general rule that worship services were still held on Saturday throughout the Christian world as late as the fifth century. What particular circumstances could have led Rome and Alexandria to their early adoption of Sunday observance? Moreover, why was Sunday observance soon (at least by the third century) so readily accepted throughout the rest of Christendom, even when the Sabbath was not abandoned? Obviously, the evidence thus far presented shatters the theory that Sunday was substituted for the seventh-day Sabbath immediately after Christ's resurrection. But likewise incorrect is the opposing view that the Christian Sunday was borrowed directly from paganism early in post-New Testament times. Not only does this theory lack proof, but the sheer improbability that virtually all Christendom suddenly shifted to a purely pagan practice should alert us to the need for a more plausible explanation. Especially is this so when we remember that numerous early Christians accepted martyrdom rather than compromise their faith. Justin himself was such a Christian, suffering martyrdom in Rome about A.D. 165.

Sunday Worship

Not a substitute for the Sabbath.

At such a time as this, would a purely pagan worship day have suddenly captured the entire Christian world, apparently without any serious protest? Furthermore, if this were the case, how would we account for the fact that the Christian Sunday, when it did arise, was regularly looked upon by the Christians as a day honoring Christ's resurrection, not as a Sabbath? This latter point deserves special attention. In the New Testament, Christ's resurrection is symbolically related to the first fruits of the harvest just as His death is related to the slaying of the Paschal lamb (see 1 Corinthians 15:20 and 5:7). The offering of the wave sheaf (grain sample) of the first fruits of the barley harvest was an annual event among the Jews. But in New Testament times there were two different methods of reckoning the day for this celebration. According to Leviticus 23:11, the wave sheaf was to be offered in the season of unleavened bread on "the morrow after the sabbath." The Pharisees interpreted this as the day after the Passover sabbath. They killed the Paschal lamb on Nisan 14, celebrated the Passover sabbath on Nisan 15, and offered the first-fruits wave sheaf on Nisan 16, regardless of the days of the week on which these dates might fall. Their celebration thus would parallel our method for reckoning Christmas, which falls on different days of the week in different years.

The Resurrection Festival

On the other hand, the Essenes and Sadducean Boethusians interpreted "the morrow after the sabbath" as the day after a weekly Sabbath--always a Sunday. Their day of Pentecost also always fell on a Sunday--"the morrow after the seventh sabbath" from the day of the offering of the first fruits (see Leviticus 23:15, 16). [15] It would be natural for Christians to continue the first-fruits celebration. They would keep it, not as a Jewish festival, but in honor of Christ's resurrection. After all, was not Christ the true first fruits (see 1 Corinthians 15:20), and was not His resurrection of the utmost importance (see verses 14, 17-19)? But when would Christians keep such a resurrection festival? Would they do it every week? No. Rather, they would do it annually, as had been their custom in the Jewish celebration of the first fruits. But which of the two types of reckoning would they choose--the Pharisaic or the Essene-Boethusian? Probably both. And this is precisely the situation we find in the Easter controversy that broke out toward the end of the second century. [16] At that time Asian Christians (in the Roman province of Asia Minor) celebrated the Easter events on the Nisan 14-15-16 basis, irrespective of the days of the week. But Christians throughout most of the rest of the world--including Gaul, Corinth, Pontus (in northern Asia Minor), Alexandria, Mesopotamia, and Palestine (even Jerusalem itself)--held to a Sunday-Easter. Early sources indicate that both practices stemmed from apostolic tradition.[17] This is a view more plausible than that the Sunday-Easter was a late Roman innovation. After all, at a time when Christian influences were still moving from east to west, how could a Roman innovation so suddenly and so thoroughly have uprooted an entrenched apostolic practice throughout virtually the whole Christian world, East as well as West?[18] A reconstruction of church history that sees the earliest Christian Sunday as an annual Easter one rather than as a weekly observance makes historical sense. The habit of keeping the annual Jewish first-fruits festival day could be easily transferred into an annual resurrection celebration in honor of Christ, the First Fruits. But there was no such habit or psychological background for keeping a weekly resurrection celebration. It is probable that the weekly Christian Sunday developed later as an extension of the annual one.

Various factors could have had a part in such a development. In the first place, not only did almost all early Christians observe both Easter and Pentecost on Sunday, but the whole seven-week season between the two holidays had special significance.[19] As J. van Goudoever has suggested, perhaps the Sundays between the two annual festivals had special importance too.[20] If so, elements already present could have aided in extending Sunday observance to a weekly basis, spreading first to the Sundays during the Easter-to-Pentecost season itself and then eventually throughout the entire year.[21] Thus the annual Sunday celebration could have furnished a source from which the early Christians in Alexandria and Rome inaugurated a weekly Sunday as a substitute for the Sabbath. But there is no reason why this kind of weekly resurrection festival had to supplant the Sabbath. And indeed, elsewhere throughout Christianity we find it simply emerging as a special day observed side by side with the Sabbath.

Sunday Worship

Sunday replaces Sabbath in Rome.

But what factor or factors prompted the displacement of the Sabbath by a weekly Sunday in Rome and Alexandria? Undoubtedly the most significant was a growing anti-Jewish sentiment in the early second century. Several Jewish revolts, culminating in that of Bar Cocheba in A.D. 132-135, aroused Roman antagonism against the Jews to a high level--so high, in fact, that Emperor Hadrian expelled the Jews from Palestine. His predecessor, Trajan, had been vexed too with Jewish outbreaks; and Hadrian himself, prior to the Bar Cocheba revolt, had outlawed such Jewish practices as circumcision and Sabbathkeeping.[22] Especially in Alexandria, where there was a strong contingent of Jews, and in the Roman capital itself would Christians be prone to feel in danger of identification with the Jews. Thus, especially in these two places would they be likely to seek a substitute for the weekly Sabbath to avoid being associated with the Sabbathkeeping Jews. Moreover, with respect to Rome (and some other places in the West), the practice of fasting on the Sabbath every week also tended to enhance the development of Sunday observance by making the Sabbath a gloomy day. This obviously had negative effects on the Sabbath and could have served as an inducement in Rome and in some neighboring areas to replace such a sad and hungry Sabbath with a joyous weekly resurrection festival on Sunday. As the weekly Sunday arose side by side with the Sabbath throughout Christendom, elsewhere than at Rome and Alexandria, perhaps it was inevitable that eventually the two days would clash quite generally, as they had done as early as the second century in Rome and Alexandria. This did in fact happen, and later in this article we will survey the process by which Sunday finally displaced the Sabbath as the main day for Christian worship throughout Christendom.

A brief summary of the facts ascertained thus far will now be in order:

1. The New Testament silence about the weekly observance of Sunday, in contrast to the recurring statements about the Sabbath, provides convincing evidence that there was no such Sunday observance in New Testament Christianity. (Moreover, the second-century silence regarding the Sabbath and Sunday, except for Rome and Alexandria, is in large part a result of the fact that basically no controversy had developed over the two weekly days except in those two places.)
2. The mushrooming literary evidence from the third through fifth centuries reveals that at last a weekly Sunday had become quite generally observed. Furthermore, throughout most of Christendom it was observed side by side with the Sabbath.
3. The background from Judaism for an annual "first-fruits" celebration on Sunday provided the basis for an annual resurrection celebration among Christians. This was undoubtedly the first step toward a weekly Sunday resurrection festival.

Increased reference to both Sabbath and Sunday.

It is a curious fact that the references dealing with both Sabbath and Sunday increased sharply in the fourth century A.D. and that many of these had overtones of controversy. In some instances, there was an emphasis to keep both days (as, for example, in the Apostolic Constitutions).

On the other side, however, stood the anti-Sabbath church leaders. For example, John Chrysostom, a contemporary of Gregory and Asterius, went so far as to declare, "There are many among us now, who fast on the same day as the Jews, and keep the sabbaths in the same manner; and we endure it nobly or rather ignobly and basely!"[23] Earlier we noted that the Sabbath fast--which made the Sabbath a sad and hungry day--helped bring about the rise of Sunday observance in Rome and in some other places in the West. Indeed, as early as the first quarter of the third century Tertullian of Carthage in North Africa argued against the practice.[24] About the same time Hippolytus in Rome took issue with those who observed the Sabbath fast. [25] However, in the fourth and fifth centuries evidence of controversy on this matter heightened. Augustine (died A.D. 430) dealt with the issue in several of his letters, including one in which he gave rebuttal to a zealous Roman advocate of Sabbath fasting--an individual who caustically denounced those who refused to fast on the Sabbath.[26] As another evidence of the controversy, Canon 64 of the Apostolic Constitutions specifies that "if any one of the clergy be found to fast on the Lord's day, or on the Sabbath-day, excepting one only, let him be deprived; but if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended." [27] The interpolator of Ignatius, who probably wrote at about the same time, even declared that "if any one fasts on the Lord's Day or on the Sabbath, except on the paschal Sabbath only, he is a murderer of Christ." [28] (On the Paschal Sabbath, the anniversary of the Sabbath during which Christ was in the tomb, Christians considered it

Sunday Worship

appropriate to fast.) The last two sources noted may indicate that the controversy had extended beyond Western Christianity; but as far as the actual official practice was concerned, only Rome and certain other Western churches adopted it. John Cassian (died about A.D. 440) speaks of "some people in some countries of the West, and especially in the city [Rome]" who fasted on the Sabbath.[29] And Augustine refers to "the Roman Church and some other churches . . . near to it or remote from it" where the Sabbath fast was observed. But Milan, an important church in northern Italy, was among the Western churches that did not observe the Sabbath fast, as Augustine also makes clear.[30] Nor did the Eastern churches ever adopt it. The question remained a point of disagreement between East and West as late as the eleventh century.[31]

The increase in references about the Sabbath--both for and against--indicate that some sort of struggle was beginning to manifest itself on a rather widespread basis. No longer did the controversy center in only Rome and Alexandria. What could have triggered this struggle on such a wide scale in the fourth and fifth centuries?

Undoubtedly, one of the most important factors is to be found in the activities of Emperor Constantine the Great in the early fourth century, followed by later "Christian emperors." Not only did Constantine give Christianity a new status within the Roman Empire (from being persecuted to being honored), but he also gave Sunday a "new look." By his civil legislation, he made Sunday a rest day. His famous Sunday law of March 7, 321, reads: "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." [32] This was the first in a series of steps taken by Constantine and by later "Christian emperors" in regulating Sunday observance. It is obvious that this first Sunday law was not particularly Christian in orientation (note the pagan designation "venerable Day of the Sun"); but very likely Constantine, on political and social grounds, endeavored to merge together heathen and Christian elements of his constituency by focusing on a common practice. In A.D. 386, Theodosius I and Gratian Valentinian extended Sunday restrictions so that litigation should entirely cease on that day and there would be no public or private payment of debt.[33] Laws forbidding circus, theater, and horse racing also followed and were reiterated as felt necessary.

Reaction to early Sunday laws.

How did the Christian church react to Constantine's Sunday edict of March, 321, and to subsequent civil legislation that made Sunday a rest day? As desirable as such legislation may have seemed to Christians from one standpoint, it also placed them in a dilemma. Heretofore, Sunday had been a workday, except for special worship services. What would happen, for example, to nuns such as those described by Jerome in Bethlehem, who, after following their mother superior to church and then back to their communions, the rest of their time on Sunday devoted "themselves to their allotted tasks, and made garments either for themselves or else for others"? [34] There is no evidence that Constantine's Sunday laws were ever specifically made the basis for Christian regulations of the day, but it is obvious that Christian leaders had to do something to keep the day from becoming one of idleness and vain amusement. Added emphasis on worship and reference to the Sabbath commandment in the Old Testament seem to have been the twin routes now taken. Perhaps a first inkling of the new trend comes as early as the time of Constantine himself--through the church historian Eusebius, who was also Constantine's biographer and keen admirer. In his commentary on *Psalm 92, "the Sabbath psalm,"* Eusebius writes that Christians would fulfill on the Lord's day all that in this psalm was prescribed for the Sabbath--including worship of God early in the morning. He then adds that through the new covenant the Sabbath celebration was transferred to "the first day of light [Sunday]." [35] Later in the fourth century Ephraem Syrus suggested that honor was due "to the Lord's day, the firstborn of all days," which had "taken away the right of the firstborn from the Sabbath." Then he goes on to point out that the law prescribes that rest should be given to servants and animals.[36] The reflection of the Old Testament Sabbath commandment is obvious.

With this sort of Sabbath emphasis now being placed on Sunday, it was inevitable that the Sabbath day itself (Saturday) would take on lesser and lesser importance. And the controversy that is evident in literature of the fourth and fifth centuries between those who would honor it reflects the struggle. Moreover, it was a struggle

Sunday Worship

that did not terminate quickly, for as we have seen, the fifth-century church historians Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen provide a picture of Sabbath worship services alongside Sunday worship services as being the pattern throughout Christendom in their day, except in Rome and Alexandria. It appears that the "Christian Sabbath" as a replacement for the earlier biblical Sabbath was a development of the sixth century and later. The earliest church council to deal with the matter was a regional eastern one meeting in Laodicea about A.D. 364. Although this council still manifested respect for the Sabbath as well as Sunday in the special lections (Scripture readings) designated for those two days, it nonetheless stipulated the following in its Canon 29: "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." [37] The regulation with regard to working on Sunday was rather moderate in that Christians should not work on that day if possible! However, more significant was the fact that this council reversed the original command of God and the practice of the earliest Christians with regard to the seventh-day Sabbath. God had said, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work" (Exodus 20:8-10, RSV). This council said, instead, "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday but shall work on that day."

Work forbidden on Sunday.

The Third Synod of Orleans in 538, though deploring Jewish Sabbatarianism, forbade "field labours" so that "people may be able to come to church and worship." [38] Half a century later, the Second Synod of Macon in 585 and the Council of Narbonne in 589 stipulated strict Sunday observance. [39] The ordinances of the former "were published by King Guntram in a decree of November 10, 585, in which he enforced careful observance of the Sunday." [40] Finally, during the Carolingian Age a great emphasis was placed on Lord's day observance according to the Sabbath commandment. Walter W. Hyde, in his *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, has well summed up several centuries of the history of Sabbath and Sunday up to Charlemagne: "The emperors after Constantine made Sunday observance more stringent but in no case was their legislation based on the Old Testament. . . . At the Third Synod of Aureliani (Orleans) in 538 rural work was forbidden but the restriction against preparing meals and similar work on Sunday was regarded as a superstition.

"After Justinian's death in 565 various epistolae decretales were passed by the popes about Sunday. One of Gregory I (590-604) forbade men 'to yoke oxen or to perform any other work, except for approved reasons,' while another of Gregory II (715-731) said: 'We decree that all Sundays be observed from vespers to vespers and that all unlawful work be abstained from.' . . . "Charlemagne at Aquisgranum (Aachen) in 788 decreed that all ordinary labor on the Lord's Day be forbidden, since it was against the Fourth Commandment, especially labor in the field or vineyard which Constantine had exempted." [41] God's Sabbath never forgotten. And thus Sunday came to be the Christian rest day substitute for the Sabbath. But the seventh-day Sabbath was never entirely forgotten, of course. This was true in Europe itself. But particularly in Ethiopia, for example, groups kept both Saturday and Sunday as "Sabbaths," not only in the early Christian centuries but down into modern times.

Nevertheless, for a good share of Christendom, the history of the Sabbath and Sunday had by the sixth through eighth centuries taken a complete circle. For most Christians, God's rest day of both Old Testament and New Testament times had through a gradual process become a workday and had been supplanted by a substitute rest day. God's command that on the seventh day "you shall not do any work" had been replaced by the command of man: Work on the seventh day; rest on the first. However, all Christians who consider the New Testament as the normative guide for their lives, rather than the decisions of men hundreds of years later, will ask whether the worship day of Christ and the apostles--Saturday, the seventh day of the week--should not still be observed today. We believe it should.

Kenneth Strand was professor of church history, Theological Seminary, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, and editor of *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, when this article was written. He has edited, compiled, or authored many books, including *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, *A Panorama of the Old Testament World*, and *A Brief Introduction to the Ancient Near East*. He aided in school planning for several overseas colleges. Copyright 1978 by Kenneth A. Strand.

Sunday Worship

1. Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*, trans. by A.A.K. Graham from the German ed. of 1962 (Philadelphia, 1968).
2. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 5, chap. 22, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (NPNF) Second Series*, Vol. II, p. 132.
3. Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 7, chap. 19, in *NPNF, Second Series*, Vol. II, p. 390.
4. *Apostolic Constitutions*, book 7, sec. 2, chap. 23, and book 8, sec. 4, chap. 33 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers (ANF)*, Vol. VII, pp. 469, 495.
5. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Castigatione* ("On Reproof"), in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 46, col. 309 (Greek) and col. 310 (Latin).
6. Asterius, *Homily 5*, on Matthew 19:3, in Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 40, col. 225 (Greek) and col. 226 (Latin).
7. Cassian, *Institutes of the Coenobia*, book 5, chap. 26, in *NPNF, Second Series*, Vol. XI, p. 243. *CF. Institutes*, book 3, chap. 2, and *Conferences*, part 1, conf. 3, chap. 1, in *NPNF, Second Series*. Vol. XI, pp. 213, 319.
8. "Shabbath," 7.2, in Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah* (London, 1933), p. 106.
9. *Ibid.*, 17.6, in Danby, *op. cit.*, p. 115.
10. *Ibid.*, 11.1-6, in Danby, *op. cit.*, pp. 110, 111.
11. The earliest clear patristic source is Clement of Alexandria. See, e.g., his *Miscellanies*, book 5, chap. 14, in *ANF*, Vol. II, p. 469.
12. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, chap. 15, in *ANF*, Vol. I, pp. 146, 147.
13. *Apology I*, chap. 67, in *ANF*, Vol. I, p. 186.
14. *Dialogue*, chap. 23, in *ANF*, Vol. I, p. 206. Several other statements in the *Dialogue* reveal a similar feeling.
15. J. van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars*, 2d rev. ed. (Leiden, 1961), pp. 19, 20, 23, 25, 26, 29. The Boethusians and Essenes actually chose Sundays a week apart because of a difference in their understanding of whether the Sabbath of Leviticus 23:11 was the Sabbath during or the Sabbath after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Moreover, they used a solar calendar in contrast to the lunar calendar of the Pharisees.
16. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 5, chaps. 23-25 (*NPNF, Second Series*, Vol. I, pp. 241-244), provides the details.
17. *Ibid.*, chaps. 23.1 and 24.2, 3, in *NPNF, Second Series*, Vol. I, pp. 241, 242; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 7, chap. 19, in *NPNF, Second Series*, Vol. II, p. 390.
18. The fact that Victor of Rome could not successfully excommunicate the Asian Christians (see Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 5, chap. 24, in *NPNF, Second Series*, Vol. I, pp. 242-244) provides further substantiation of this view. If Rome could earlier have influenced almost the entire Christian world, both East and West, to give up an apostolic practice in favor of a Roman innovation, why was she now incapable of stamping out the last remaining vestige of this practice? The only reasonable explanation of all the data seems to be that the Sunday-Easter was not a late Roman innovation, but that both it and Quartodecimanism (observance of Nisan 14) stemmed from apostolic times. For further details, see my "John as Quartodecimanism: A Reappraisal," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 84 (1965), pp. 251-258.
19. See Tertullian, *The Chaplet*, chap. 3; *On Baptism*, chap. 19, in *ANF*, Vol. III, p. 678; and *On Fasting*, chap. 14, in *ANF*, Vol. IV, p. 112.
20. Van Goudoever, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
21. Philip Carrington, *The Primitive Christian Calendar* (Cambridge, England, 1952), p. 38, has made this suggestion: Since crops could hardly have been ripe everywhere on the two Sundays especially set aside (day of barley first fruits and Pentecost day), may it not have been implied that any Sunday within the fifty days was a proper day for the offering of the first fruits? For an excellent discussion of the whole question of Easter in relation to the weekly Sunday, see Lawrence T. Geraty, "The Pascha and the Origin of Sunday Observance," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* (hereafter cited as *AUSS*) III (1965), pp. 85-96.
22. See Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, book 68, chap. 32, and book 69, chaps. 12-14, in *Loeb Classical Library*, Vol. VIII, pp. 394-397, 420-423, 446-451; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, book 4, chap. 2, in *NPNF, Second Series*, Vol. I, pp. 174, 175.
23. *Comment on Galatians 1:7* in *Commentary on Galatians*, in *NPNF, First Series*, Vol. XIII, p. 8.
24. In *On Fasting*, chap. 14 (*ANF*, Vol. IV, p. 112), Tertullian indicates that the Sabbath is "a day never to be kept as a fast except at the passover season, according to a reason elsewhere given." He also indicates his opposition to the Sabbath fast in *Against Marcion*, book 4, chap. 12 (*ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 363).
25. Hippolytus mentions some who "give heed to doctrines of devils" and "often appoint a fast on the Sabbath and on the Lord's day, which Christ has, however, not appointed" (from his *Commentary on Daniel*, iv. 20; the Greek text and French translation are given by Maurice Lefevre [Paris, 1947], pp. 300-303).
26. See Augustine's *Epistles* 36 (to Casulanus), 54 (to Januarius), and 82 (to Jerome), in *NPNF, First Series*,

Sunday Worship

Vol. I, pp. 265-270, 300, 301, 353, 354. They are dated between A.D. 396 and 405. It is Epistle 36 that gives rebuttal to the Roman advocate of the Sabbath fast.

27. English trans. in ANF, Vol. VII, p. 504. This canon is numbered 66 in the Hefele edition (see note 37, below).

28. Pseudo-Ignatius, To the Philippians, chap. 13, in ANF, Vol. I, p. 119.

29. Institutes, book 3, chap. 10, in NPNF, Second Series, Vol. XI, p. 218.

30. The first statement appears in Epistle 36, par. 27 (NPNF, First Series, Vol. I, p. 268), and a similar remark is made in Epistle 82, par. 14 (ibid., p. 353). References to Milan are found in Epistle 36, par. 32, and in Epistle 54, par. 3 (ibid., pp. 270, 300, 301).

31. See R. L. Odom, "The Sabbath in the Great Schism of A.D. 1054," AUSS I (1963), pp. 77, 78.

32. Codex Justinianus, l. iii., Tit. 12, 3, trans. in Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, 5th ed. (New York, 1902), Vol. III, p. 380, note 1.

33. Theodosian Code, 11. 7. 13, trans. by Clyde Pharr (Princeton, N.J., 1952), p. 300.

34. See Jerome, Epistle 108, par. 20, in NPNF, Second Series, Vol. VI, p. 206.

35. Migne, op. cit., vol. 23, col. 1169.

36. S. Ephraem Syri humni et sermones, ed. by T. J. Lamy (1882), vol. 1, pp. 542-544.

37. Charles J. Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, trans. by Henry N. Oxenham (Edinburgh, 1896), Vol. II, p. 316. Canon 16 (ibid., p. 310) refers to lections; and the fact that Saturday as well as Sunday had special consideration during Lent, as indicated in Canons 49 and 51 (ibid., p. 320), also reveals that regard for the Sabbath was not entirely lacking.

38. Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 208, 209.

39. Ibid., pp. 407-409, 422.

40. Ibid., p. 409.

41. W. W. Hyde, Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 261.

These Times / May 1982

<http://www.biblehistory.com/The%20Origin%20of%20Sunday%20Worship.html>