



*A Ministry of the
Church of God (Seventh Day)*

The Weekly Cycle



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Questions about the historical continuity of the weekly cycle of seven days are of interest to two religious groups: first, those who observe the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath, and second, those who seek to honor the resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week, calling it “the Lord’s Day.”

Christians who observe the Sabbath according to the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) will want to be assured that the day they observe is actually the seventh day of the week. That is one of the purposes of this study.

Many denominations do not teach that the fourth commandment requires seventh-day Sabbath observance for Christians. But in their seeking to honor Christ’s resurrection on the first weekday, it is of concern to them to identify which day of the week it is.

The Church of God (Seventh Day) is confident that observing the commandment to keep the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath is God’s will for Christians, and that the day of the week called Saturday is the seventh day, the Sabbath referred to in both Old and New Testaments.

This question may not seem to be a matter of great concern to those who attach no significance either to the Sabbath or to the first day of the week as a religious observance. The majority of Jews and Christians, however, share a common interest in preserving the weekly cycle without interruption so they can identify their respective days of worship.

Doubting Continuity

Some find it hard to believe that the seven-day weekly cycle has been maintained for thousands of years. Many are of the opinion that it has not been continued intact over the centuries.

Some believe that the Sabbath was not observed from creation until Moses and that, therefore, the weekly cycle of Israel's Sabbathkeeping was not a continuation of unbroken weeks from the beginning.

Some believe that the Babylonian captivity disrupted the weekly cycle and that the dispersion of the Jews prevented its continuity after Babylon destroyed Jerusalem.

Some believe that since there were calendar reforms subsequent to Christ's resurrection, these changes caused the cycle to be interrupted again.

Some propose that the Bible itself proves that continuity of the weekly cycle was not important to God, because the sun stood still for about a day during the time of Joshua (10:12-14).

In these various ways, people have concluded that it is impossible — and thus unimportant — to know which day of the week is the seventh.

Miracle of a Day

The assumption that the extra daylight in Joshua's time confused the calendar ignores the fact that a "day" in the Bible is a night period and the subsequent daylight period. It is from sunset to sunset.

The assumption also ignores the fact that this whole long daylight period is not

referred to in the Bible as two days, but as one day: "So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. And there has been no day like that, before it or after it" (Joshua 10:13b, 14a).

The fact is that God continued to hold Israel responsible for Sabbathkeeping as though there had been no long day. The weekly cycle and the Sabbath that Israel observed had God's sanction, shown by His holding Israel accountable for Sabbathkeeping throughout the Old Testament.

Miracle of Manna

There is no Bible record of Sabbath observance after its institution at the end of creation week until Israel's exodus from Egypt. However, just before Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai, calling for Sabbath observance on the seventh day, God positively identified the seventh day with a miracle.

The miracle was a food called *manna*. It appeared on the ground on the first six days of the week, with a double portion on the sixth day. Then no manna fell on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. If there had been any loss of continuity or identity of the Sabbath from creation until then, God left no doubt about its identity with this forty-year-long miracle (see Exodus 16:15-30; Joshua 5:11, 12; Nehemiah 9:13-15).

God's prophets regularly confronted Israel because of their failure to observe the Sabbath. However, a remnant of people

always remained faithful to God (1 Kings 19:18). The Old Testament evidence does not suggest loss of continuity of the weekly cycle or of Sabbath observance during the time of the judges and kings of Israel.

Sabbath after Captivity

Returning from Babylonian captivity, Ezra and Nehemiah knew which day was the Sabbath and took careful note to instruct the returning Jews to observe it (Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15-22).

Josephus relates that under the leadership of the Maccabees, the Jews refused to fight with the soldiers of Antiochus on the Sabbath. These events occurred during the period between the end of the prophets (Malachi) and the first coming of Christ (see Josephus, Book XII, Chapter VI). This evidence suggests a continuity of the weekly cycle from the time of the latest Old Testament writings until the time of Christ's ministry.

During the Ministry of Jesus

The Gospels frequently report Sabbath-keeping in the life and ministry of Christ. Confrontations abounded between Christ and the Jews on many charges the Jews could bring against Him. However, there is no record of any disagreement between them regarding which day was the Sabbath. It is inconceivable that the identity of the Sabbath would be a problem when the Son of God weekly attended the synagogues of the Jews on the Sabbath (Luke

4:16), giving tacit approval of the time they set aside to worship.

From Jesus to the Present

Many are confident that the apostles initiated observance of the first day of the week as a day of worship, honoring the resurrection of Christ. They see this in Paul and others meeting on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), in taking up a collection on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2), in John's expression "the Lord's day" (Revelation 1:10), and in the admonition of Hebrews 10:25 not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some."

This line of reasoning suggests that the Christian church is concerned to identify the first day of the week for worship from the resurrection of Christ until now. The first day is observed by most Christians as a celebration of Jesus' resurrection.

Several questions help us put the problem regarding the preservation of the weekly cycle in perspective for the period from Christ's death to the present:

- How likely is it that even during times of persecution, all Jewish communities scattered worldwide would lose track of which day of the week is the Sabbath?
- If such a situation had developed, would there not be some historical record of how they agreed which day they should establish again as the Sabbath?
- How likely is it that during the persecution of Christians, all of them in scattered communities would have lost track of

which day was the Sabbath or the first day of the week?

- If such a situation had developed, would there not be a historical record of how all those Christian communities came together in agreement as to which day of the weekly cycle is the first day?
- How does it happen that Jews and Christians who observe the Sabbath and those who observe the first day of the week all agree which day is the seventh and which is the first?

The answers to those questions are not complicated! Jews and Christians agree because the weekly cycle has not been interrupted between the time of Christ and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Their agreement is not because of a mutual decision to arbitrarily reestablish the weekly cycle.

What do we find? As the Roman government became concerned with the Christian and Jewish communities, the early church councils discussed observing the first day of the week instead of the seventh-day Sabbath, which they considered Jewish. They admonished people who were observing the Sabbath not to do so, but instead to observe “the Lord’s Day,” meaning the first day of the week.

This indicates a keen awareness on the part of religious and civil authorities as to which day of the week was the first and which was the seventh. Tension caused by the divergent view of first-day observance versus Sabbath observance has been constant ever since observing the first day

began among Christians in the second century after Christ.

Question of Calendar Changes

The question of calendar reform in the past two thousand years needs consideration here. Is there a record of the calendar changes that have taken place? Indeed, there is! Many sources supply this information in detail, telling exactly how and when the calendar was changed in different countries (these were not all simultaneous). All sources verify that the changes in the calendar did not affect the weekly cycle. The major calendar reform taking place in the Christian era was the replacement of the Julian calendar by the Gregorian calendar in 1582.

One thing is common in the adoption of the calendar reform by various countries over an extended period. A certain number of days were deleted in the monthly cycle, but no days of the week were added or deleted in any of the calendar changes as the Gregorian calendar replaced the Julian calendar. For example, ten days in October 1582 were dropped to make the calendar coincide with the solar year. The record indicates exactly what happened as far as the weekly cycle is concerned, as well as the very days of the month that were deleted in October 1582.

History records that days were dropped only from the number of days in a month, but calendar reform did not interrupt the weekly cycle. Note the following from the

Catholic Encyclopedia (1910 Edition, Vol. 3, p. 740, in the article "Chronology"):

It is to be noted that in the Christian period, the order of days in the week has never been interrupted. Thus, when Gregory XIII reformed the calendar in 1582, Thursday, 4 October, was followed by Friday, 15 October. So in England, in 1752, Wednesday, 2 September, was followed by Thursday, 14 September.

A different number of days were dropped in England than earlier in Rome under Gregory XIII because of the two-century delay before England adopted the Gregorian calendar. During that time, as England continued under the Julian calendar, the calendar in England deviated from the solar year one more day (see *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, article "Calendar," volume 4, pp. 671, 677, 1902 edition).

The Gregorian calendar was adopted by the German states in 1700, by England in 1752, by Sweden in 1753, and by Russia as late as 1918 (see Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. VII, "The Age of Reason Begins," p. 595).

There is no record of the seven-day weekly cycle ever having undergone a change. Hence, we can be certain of which day is the seventh-day Sabbath and which is the first day of the week.

Various schemes, however, have been proposed for stabilizing the week, months, and years. Had they been adopted, they would have interrupted the weekly cycle. One such scheme had the approval of the Durants:

Ideally the calendar would have thirteen months, each of twenty-eight days, with a dateless holiday (or in leap years, two) at the close of the year. Such a one-page calendar, with rotary devices to indicate the month and the year, could serve for every month indefinitely; each day of the week would fall on the same dates every month and every year; the business year would be evenly divisible into equal months and equal quarters. But, alas, this would confuse the saints. (Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. VII, "The Age of Reason Begins," p. 595).

Similar systems have been seriously considered by various governments, but too much opposition is generated by such proposals. Consequently, no such scheme has been adopted, though it has been proposed again and again.

Logical Conclusion and Summary

So what is the rational conclusion? The weekly cycle has continued uninterrupted since Israel began observing the Sabbath after leaving Egypt. Had it been interrupted previously, the cycle was obviously reestablished and validated by the miracle of manna appearing six days each week, but not on the Sabbath, for forty years in the wilderness (see Joshua 5:12).

The Sabbath as observed by the Jews was recognized as valid by our Lord Jesus Christ in New Testament times. Since then, the Christians' and Jews' insistence to uphold their convictions and practices to observe their respective days of worship has made

it impossible for a disruption of the weekly cycle.

Why Discuss This Subject?

Some may be puzzled as to the need for this discussion. The need arises from arguments that are made to discredit observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. One argument is that no person can be sure which day is the seventh day of the week and that Sunday is just as likely the seventh day as is Saturday. Some think that Sunday actually is the seventh day of the week.

Another argument is that "one in seven" is all that matters. When all these arguments are carefully considered, there is no valid reason for trying to discredit Sabbath observance on the basis that its identity in the weekly cycle has been lost. The Bible and history do not support such an argument.



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