

The Harvester



*Preparing Souls
To Serve The Lord!*



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Is The Sabbath Day Binding?

Brian R. Kenyon

While doing mission work in Jamaica several years ago, I was surprised to learn that denominationalist people who did not identify as Seventh Day Adventist tenaciously held to the notion that God requires Christians to keep the Sabbath Day. Since that time, I have encountered many more in America and abroad who hold similar beliefs. As the summer approaches, many will go on mission campaigns and encounter those who think the Sabbath Day is still binding. This study presents and Scripturally evaluates common arguments used to bind the Sabbath Day as necessary for salvation.

"Keeping the Sabbath Originates from Creation"

Perhaps the most common argument used for the Sabbath is the claim that keeping the Sabbath is a commandment that originated from the seventh day of creation. This idea is traceable at least as early as 1957 in *Seventh-Day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, which said, "The Sabbath is a memorial of creation ... it had no ceremonial significance by foreshadowing something yet to come ... it had only commemorative significance, pointing back to the creation of the world" (quoted by Hoekema 158). It is claimed that since God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh (Gen. 2:1-3), that the "seventh-day-ness" of the Sabbath was not a temporary feature of the day that was meant to be changed, but that it was always to remain part of God's commandments. Sabbatarians would perhaps compare it to God's laws of marriage (Mt. 19:3-12 cf. Gen. 2:18-25) or God's laws concerning the instrumental roles

of men and women (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:21-33; 1 Tim. 2:8-15), all of which were grounded in creation.

In evaluating this argument, however, it must be realized that the command to keep the Sabbath did not originate from creation, but was only given to a specific people, Israel, about twenty-five hundred years after creation (Ex. 19:1-6; 20:8-11; Deut. 5:1-6, 12-15; Neh. 9:13-15). There is no Biblical evidence for anyone being commanded to keep the Sabbath before the giving of the Law at Sinai! When God gave Israel the Sabbath Day to rest and to remember His deliverance of them from Egypt, He gave them the same day upon which "he had rested" after He created the universe in six days. Moses wrote about creation week centuries after the events actually happened. The Sabbath day was not "blessed" or "hallowed" to Israel until after they had been delivered from Egypt (Ex. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15).

A Closer Look at the Seventh Day in Genesis 2:1-3

In evaluating the argument that keeping the Sabbath Day goes back to creation, a closer examination of Genesis 2:1-3 is helpful. Moses wrote:

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Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. ²And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Gen. 2:1-3)

Several points are worthy of consideration in this text relevant to the claim that keeping the Sabbath Day is required today. First, God completed His creative activity in six days (Gen. 2:1 cf. 1:1-31). “The heavens and the earth, and all the host of them” refers to the entire created universe, whether seen or unseen. The word translated “host” may refer to an army (Gen. 21:22), to the stars (Deut. 4:19), or to angels (1 Kgs. 22:19). It is applicable to an organized and disciplined body (Hamilton 141). The term is collective, and in this context designates “the total made up of the various component parts in the planned design of creation” (Speiser 7). The word “finished” can mean to finish off, to destroy, to consume (cf. Gen. 41:30; Josh. 24:20), or, as in the context of Genesis 2:1, to bring to completion (Hamilton 141-142). Thus, the universe is no longer in a process of being created. What Genesis 1:1-31 allows for is not additional creation, but pro-creation and self-perpetuation.

Second, God blessed and sanctified the seventh day (Gen. 2:2-3). “Ended,” in “on the seventh day God ended His work,” is best taken as a “pluperfect,” meaning that “God had completed his work, and on the seventh day ...” (Hamilton 142). The word translated “rested” basically means “to

cease” from work which may imply rest, but not necessarily. Genesis 2:3 is not stressing rest from work, but rather God’s ceasing from His creative work because it was complete (Vine 203). “Sanctified [hallowed, ASV; made it holy, ESV]” is translated from a word that basically means to set apart. By virtue of being sanctified, one day of rest was set apart from six days of creative activity. It was by God’s design alone that the seventh day was set apart. Therefore, humanity does not confer sanctity on this day by refraining from work (Hamilton 143). Nowhere did Moses mention the “Sabbath Day” in Genesis 2:1-3!

“The ‘Lord’s Day’ Is Equivalent To the Sabbath Day”

Probably the next most common argument is to claim that the “Lord’s Day” is equivalent to the Sabbath Day. The primary way in which this argument is advanced is by linking Mark 2:28 with Revelation 1:10 (adapted from Martin 460-461). The claim is made that since “the Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath” (Mk. 2:28, KJV), when John says he “was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (Rev. 1:10), the Sabbath and the “Lord’s day” must be the same. “Lord of the Sabbath” is taken as possessive (i.e., the Sabbath belongs to the Lord) and likewise the “Lord’s day” is taken as the day belonging to the Lord, thus equating the Sabbath with the Lord’s day.

In evaluating this argument, however, their faulty reasoning is based on an English possibility rather than the specifics of the Greek language used in these passages. The syntax in the context of Mark

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*Our final deposit for the month is usually made on the last Wednesday of the month. All contributions received after that time are reported on the next month’s financial statement.

2:28 indicates that Christ did not mean that the Sabbath was His possession. Rather, Jesus was saying that as Lord of all, He could do as He pleased on the Sabbath as long as it was in harmony with God's will. Mark 2:27 implies that when the true welfare of humanity conflicts with the Jewish-derived traditions about observing the Sabbath Day, the true welfare of humanity must take precedence (adapted from McGarvey 277). Humanity, however, is not capable of completely unbiased judgment as to a person's true welfare. Only the Lord, because He knows all that is in mankind (Jn. 2:24-25), can make this judgment without partiality.

In Revelation 1:10, the original language is not a genitive of possession, which would be required in order to make "the Lord's (τη κυριακη) agree with "day" (ἡμέρα). John did not mean that the Lord's day was the Lord's possession, but that it was the day dedicated to Him. Many great events associated with the new covenant established by Christ occurred on the first day of the week (Christ's resurrection, the establishment of the church, etc.). If the Sabbath had meant so much to the New Testament writers, and if it was so widely observed by the early church, then why is there no Bible evidence?

"First Day of the Week Worship Was Started By the Papacy"

Another common argument is to assert that first day of the week worship was forced upon the early church by the papacy. Of course, what proponents usually mean by "papacy" is Constantine. He was the Roman Emperor who, through the Edict of Milan (AD 313), gave Christians legal freedom to worship. Constantine was not a pope. That whole idea is necessitated by the supposed papal succession back to the apostle Peter, who also never served as pope!

In evaluating this assertion, however, Constantine did not institute the first day of the week as the Christian day of worship. The New Testament was completed about two hundred years before Constantine! While some avenues of worship (such as prayer and singing) can and should be done any day of the week (cf. Jn. 4:23-24; Acts 2:42; 16:25), the God-inspired writers of the New Testament specified only one day that Christians certainly assembled to worship regularly. That day was "the first

day of the week" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Additionally, there are numerous uninspired early "Christian writings" that spoke of the first day of the week as being the day Christians came together to worship. Some of the more notable ones are the *Epistle of Ignatius* (ca. AD 107), the *Didache* (late first/early second century), and Justin Martyr's *First Apology* (AD 155) (Hoekema 168).

Conclusion

Keeping the Sabbath Day was never a part of the new covenant (cf. Heb. 8:7-13)! Jesus' death "wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us [including the Sabbath Day] ... And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col. 2:13-14). The old covenant has fulfilled its purpose (Gal. 3:24-25). Let us lovingly approach those who have been deceived into thinking the Sabbath Day is still binding and teach them the truth!

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Tom Holland (lower left) passed away April 25, 2019. He loved preachers as this "roundtable" photo shows. On Jan. 24, 2015, he met with FSOP students and staff to encourage us. From Tom's left are Jim Ezekiel, Ted Wheeler, David Stearsman, Nathan Franson, Hiram Kemp, Daniel Stearsman, Forest Antemesaris, Chad Tagtow, Rico Brown, Jack Pinckert, and Bob Bauer.

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May 2019

Page 4

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Wednesday	__ 8:30-12:00	English I: Grammar (124)	Patterson	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Holy Spirit (250)	Kenyon	3
Thursday	__ 8:30-12:00	Logic (270)	Beals	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Romans (261)	Brownlow-Dindy	3
Friday	__ 8:30-12:00	Church History (242)	Daugherty	3
	__ 1:00-4:15	Genesis (264)	Kemp	3
Extension Classes				
Thursday	__ 6:00-8:30	Denominational Dogmas (131) (Tenth Street church of Christ, Apopka)	Kenyon	2.5
	__ 6:00-8:30	Isaiah (281) (Orange Street church of Christ, Auburndale)	Bauer	2.5
	__ 7:00-9:30	TBA (Wesconnett church of Christ, Jacksonville)	Atnip	2.5