

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

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For the vast majority of Christians, Sunday – the first day of the week – is the day set aside for weekly worship. Very little thought is given to the seventh day and its very prominent place throughout the Scriptures, including in Jesus' own ministry, the practice of the Apostle Paul, and the prophecies of Sabbath observance in the future Kingdom. Instead, the majority of Christians worship on Sunday based solely on tradition handed down by Rome, without any biblical command or precedent at all.¹ Many, if not most, Christians are not interested in searching out the truth regarding such things, but are content to rely on whatever their particular denomination teaches without question. But for the few truth-seekers who wish to advance beyond the status quo in their Christian pursuit and understanding, a progressive survey of what the Bible says on this subject is warranted.

The Sabbath Rest was Ordained by God at Creation for Mankind in General

One of the misconceptions held by the majority is that the Sabbath day rest was given exclusively to Israel as part of the Law of Moses. Since the Old Covenant does not apply to Gentile Christians, neither does the Sabbath-day rest.

However, that the Sabbath was ordained by God for all mankind at the time of creation is not only clearly stated in Genesis, but was affirmed by Jesus Himself. The six-day creation account ends with these words: *"Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And 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. **Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it**, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."*² That God blessed and set apart the Sabbath day at the time of creation is absolutely clear. But, does this mean that He expected all humanity to rest on the Sabbath day from the time of creation? Was God's blessing and setting apart this day something for God's own benefit of resting? Was God blessing Himself? Was God exhausted from creating everything? Did God continue to take every Sabbath day off from governing the world after this? Or did His setting apart this day, and attaching a blessing to it, have to do with Adam and His posterity?

¹ See our article, There is no Biblical Basis for Sunday Worship:
http://www.4windsfellowships.net/feasts/first_day.pdf

² Gen 2:1-3

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

The first thing we should notice in the above passage is that God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath after He had rested on the seventh day, not before: "... and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, ***because in it He rested*** from all His work which God had created and made." Unless we are to suppose that God was exhausted and needed rest, the only possible reason for setting aside and blessing the Sabbath was a precedent for Adam and his descendants to follow as a pattern. To whom did God communicate this "blessing" if not to Adam? And to whom did the blessing flow from the Sabbath if not to Adam and his posterity?

After Adam's expulsion from Eden, we are told very little about the worship of God by Adam and his immediate descendants. The only instance of direct worship comes from the story of Cain and Abel, their bringing an offering to God. The time of their worship is stated in the Hebrew text.

Genesis 4:3-5

*3 And **in the process of time** it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.*

4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

5 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

The NKJV translates the Hebrew clause, *בְּסוֹף יְמֵי מַלְאָךְ הַשְּׁבִיעִי* as "in the process of time." However, that is a very loose paraphrase. The literal rendering of the Hebrew is "at the end of days."³ Some biblical scholars claim that this clause refers to the six days of the week, pointing to the Sabbath day which God had blessed. Others claim that it refers to an annual appointed festival at the time of harvest. Others understand it to refer to an undetermined time (as in the NKJV). However, that both Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God at the same time strongly suggests that this was a time appointed by God rather than just a random time of worship. In the creation account, we are told that God created the sun and moon for more than just light. "[L]et them be for signs and seasons."⁴ The word translated "and seasons" is *וּלְמִוְעָדִים* which literally means "appointed gatherings." This is the same term used repeatedly in the Torah for the Feasts. The Septuagint has *καὶ ὥρες* which also means "appointment" or "appointed time."

³ Jamieson Fausset Brown Commentary states: "Hebrew, 'at the end of days,' probably on the Sabbath."

⁴ Gen. 1:14

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

Also, God's reaction to Cain's offering in contrast to Abel's offering suggests an established expectation already in place concerning what was acceptable to God and what was not. From these two points is it reasonable to infer that Adam and his descendants had a form of worship established by God, and that this form included both appointed times as well as the manner of worship (whether the clause *מִיָּמֵינוּ יְהִי שַׁבָּת* refers weekly or annual worship). God had already "blessed" the Sabbath day after He rested. Thus the "blessing" extended to all succeeding Sabbath days as an extension of the very first Sabbath day. Obviously God communicated His "blessing" of this day to Adam, since there would be no purpose for blessing it unless that blessing was for those who followed God's example or rest. We should rightly infer that Adam and his descendants who sought to follow God's pattern rested each Sabbath day in order to embrace the Sabbath blessing.

Genesis also informs us that Seth and his descendants had a covenantal relationship with God. *"And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then [men] began to call upon the name of the LORD."*⁵ The reason that "men" is bracketed (in italics in the NASB) is because this word does not appear in the Hebrew text. Without it, the action of the verb should be applied to Seth. The Septuagint clarifies this statement as follows: *"καὶ τῷ Σηθ ἐγένετο υἱὸς ἐπωνόμασεν δὲ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐνωσ οὗτος ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ"* (lit. *"And Seth begat a son, and he called his name Enos. He [Seth] anticipated to call to himself the name of the Lord God"*). In other words, when Seth begat a son, naming him "Enos" (meaning "mortal"), Seth was anticipating taking the name of YHVH. The clause, *"call to himself the name of the Lord"* is a statement that is used exclusively in Scripture of God's covenant people, called by His name.⁶ The KJV renders the Hebrew with a marginal note, *"Or, to call themselves by the name of the Lord."* The LXX supports this understanding by using the word *ἐπικαλεῖσθαι*, which is the middle voice form of the verb meaning to name someone. Note both terms in this verse in the LXX.

καὶ τῷ Σηθ ἐγένετο υἱὸς ἐπωνόμασεν δὲ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐνωσ οὗτος ἤλπισεν ἐπικαλεῖσθαι τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ (Gen 4:26 BGT)

"And Seth begat a son, and he called his name Enos. He anticipated to call to himself the name of the Lord God."

⁵ Gen 4:26 NASB

⁶ Cf. 2 Chron. 7:14; Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21; Acts 15:17; Acts 22:16

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

The difference between ἐπωνόμασεν (called) and ἐπικαλεῖσθαι (called to himself) is that the former is in the active voice (Seth naming another person – Enos), while the latter is in the middle voice (Seth naming himself with the name of God).

This establishes the fact that Seth and his descendants had a covenant relationship with God. This is further verified by the fact that the descendants of Seth were called “the sons of God” (another covenantal term)⁷ in Genesis 6:2. Moses stated that they transgressed against God by intermarrying with “the daughters of men” – those who were not in a covenant relationship with God. Separation from pagans by God’s people is another consistent theme in God’s commands to His covenant people. As with all of God’s covenants with His sons and daughters, there are commandments with “blessings” attached to obedience. Given that the Sabbath day was “blessed” by God at the time of creation, it is difficult to imagine that God’s first covenant people, Seth and his descendants, would fail to lay hold on the “blessing” attached to keeping the Sabbath day!

Abraham, Seth’s descendant (through Noah), *“believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.”*⁸ But not only did Abraham trust God, but he also kept God’s commandments. *“Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”*⁹ Notice that this verse refers to Abraham’s obedience being beyond merely the things God asked him to do at any given time, such as leaving Ur, or offering His son Isaac. This passage refers not only to obeying God’s voice (things He spoke directly to Abraham), but also to Abraham’s obedience to God’s “commandments,” God’s “statutes,” and God’s “laws.” We obviously cannot conclude that God revealed the entire Law of Moses to Abraham prior to Moses and that Abraham kept all of the commandments in the Law. Many of them were related to the Levitical priesthood and required a Tabernacle or Temple. However, it is certain that commandments, statutes, and laws go beyond things God required only of Abraham. Such terms refer to a system in place for a whole class of covenant people. But what people group? There is no record of any of these things given to Abraham as part of the Abrahamic Covenant. Rather, the natural inference should be this: As a descendant of Seth, Abraham not only obeyed God’s voice to him personally and received the Abrahamic Covenant, but he also obeyed the commandments, statutes, and laws that has been handed down to Seth’s descendants through Noah, since Genesis traces Abraham’s descent down from Seth, through Noah, through Shem, and through Terah his father. Genesis takes great pains to show that Abraham was a descendant of Seth.

⁷ Isa. 45:11; 2 Cor. 6:18

⁸ Gen 15:6

⁹ Gen 26:5

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

As such, the above statement implies that Abraham kept the previous covenant faithfully in addition to obeying God's voice to Him directly. And that almost certainly would have included the very first covenantal blessing attached to Sabbath observance.

The Sabbath day was observed by Israel before receiving the Law of Moses

We next encounter the Sabbath day after the exodus, but before Israel arrived at Mount Sinai to receive God's Covenant. The Law (the "Old Covenant" which was superseded for believers in Christ by the New Covenant¹⁰) did not arrive until Moses ascended Mount Sinai at which time God gave the Ten Commandments. This occurred in the third month after the Israelites came out of Egypt.¹¹ However, on the fifteenth day of the second month, a bit over two weeks earlier,¹² God synchronized Israel with the weekly Sabbath rest by giving them manna from heaven on six days of the week and commanding them not to gather manna on the Sabbath day. Consequently, after leaving pagan Egypt, the Israelites kept the Sabbath rest at least twice successively before God appeared on the top of Mount Sinai to give Israel His Law. It is evident therefore that regular Sabbath observance by God's people existed prior to their receiving the Law. From these scant references, along with a few logical inferences, it is not a large leap to conclude that the Sabbath day rest was passed down from God to Adam, to Cain and Abel, then to Seth, then through Seth's descendants to Noah, through Shem down to Abraham, and down to Moses and Israel at the time of the exodus.

In the Ten Commandments that God gave Israel through Moses, the Sabbath command itself pointed backward in time to something they were already observing, which had been established at the time of creation according to Moses. It was therefore not new to mankind. Neither was it new to Israel since they were already dependent on it for their supply of manna.

Exodus 20:8-11

*8 "**Remember the Sabbath day**, to keep it holy.*

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

¹⁰ Hebrews 8

¹¹ Ex. 19:1 – Israel arrived at Sinai on the first day of the third month.

¹² Ex. 16:1 – Israel was commanded to synchronize with the Sabbaths on the fifteenth day of the second month.

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

In “remembering” the Sabbath day, Israel was not pointed back two weeks earlier when they began to keep the Sabbath, but rather they were pointed back to God’s original **blessing** of this day as their basis for observing it. Part of enjoying the “blessings” that God showers on all of His covenant people included the Sabbath blessing.

As God gave Israel the festivals of the Law to keep, He put the Sabbath day as the chief observance.

Leviticus 23:1-3

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

*2 “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, **these are My feasts.***

3 ‘Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.’”

This was followed by the instructions concerning Passover and all of the other annual festivals. Yet, we should not fail to notice that God did not say, “these are your feasts,” but rather, “these are My feasts.” That of course agrees with God Himself resting on the Sabbath. Here, God invited (and commanded) Israel to join Him in observing all these festivals in their “appointed times.” Why then should we not assume that God’s day of rest – the Sabbath – was Adam’s invitation to join in with God’s own precedent? As with all of the feasts that God gave to Israel, the Sabbath was in a sense joining with God in unison, a kind of synchronizing with God.

The Sabbath as repeated to Israel in the Law included not only “rest” but also “a holy convocation” מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ. This term means a called assembly. Thus, Sabbath observance was not an individual command, but a group command. It is the only one of the Feasts that does not require the priesthood or Temple, but can be done by a single family or group of families in the same location. This is why “synagogues” originated after the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, since gathering locally on the Sabbath day was all that Israel had left without a Temple or functioning priesthood. After the seventy-year Babylonian exile, Israel continued to gather in synagogues on the Sabbath, both in Israel and in the diaspora throughout the world. This is seen both in the Gospels and in Acts.

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

The Son of God shared the first Sabbath Day with Adam

In the Gospel accounts, there is no shortage of references to Jesus and His disciples observing the Sabbath day. Yet, the manner of their observance was not considered adequate under the Law of Moses according to the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus was repeatedly accused of breaking the Sabbath day requirement of avoiding all work. That He chose to heal people on the Sabbath, and even went so far as to command a man to carry his bed after healing him, was considered a serious violation of the commandment in the Law of Moses. And any fair assessment of the many restrictions concerning the Sabbath in the Law of Moses would seem to support their charge against Jesus and His disciples.

However, in defending Himself against their charge, Jesus did not justify Himself by pointing out any mistakes in their interpretation of the Law. Instead, He completely ignored the Law of Moses and instead went all the way back to creation to justify Himself, pointing to God's original precedent and purpose for the Sabbath Day!

Mark 2:23-28

23 Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain.

*24 And the Pharisees said to Him, "Look, why do they do what is **not lawful** on the Sabbath?"*

25 But He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him:

*26 "how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, **which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests**, and also gave some to those who were with him?"*

*27 And He said to them, "**The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.***

*28 "Therefore **the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.**"*

Observe that Jesus' defense first pointed to something that David had done. Jesus acknowledged that David's action was indeed contrary to the Law of Moses. But Jesus implied that David was justified in doing so. Why? It was because there was something higher than the Law of Moses, something that superseded it. That was the covenant that God had made with David. David understood something that the scribes and Pharisees failed to grasp, that God has the right to supersede His own commandments. Rigid legalism is not always correct, especially when God's people fully comprehend and bow to His higher purposes behind those commandments. As Paul stated in Galatians 3-4, the Law was a "tutor" for a child – Israel. But a mature son eventually moves beyond the need for the tutor. David was aware that God had promised the Messiah

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

from David's own loins, and that this Son of David would become the High Priest for God's people, not according to the Levitical order, but according to the priestly order of Melchizedek.¹³ David acted in anticipation of the fulfillment of this covenant. In this action we have clear precedent that those who embrace the Messiah (the "Seed" of both the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants) are released from the curse and penalty of the Law of Moses. This New Testament principle¹⁴ finds its precedent as far back as the actions of David described by Jesus!

But more importantly, in justifying His actions on the Sabbath, Jesus pointed His accusers back to creation, stating explicitly that **the Sabbath originated for the benefit of "the man"; "the man" did not come into existence to serve the Sabbath.** The Greek statement is as follows:

Τὸ σάββατον διὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐγένετο, καὶ οὐχ ὁ ἄνθρωπος διὰ τὸ σάββατον.
The Sabbath for the Man originated, and not the Man for the Sabbath.

Notice that "the man" includes the definite article both times (τὸν ἄνθρωπον & ὁ ἄνθρωπος). This can only refer to Adam himself! It is certainly not exclusive to Israel.

Second, note the word ἐγένετο (made). When referring to either events or inanimate things this verb means to come into existence, to come about, or to occur. It does not mean "was made" which would have to be in the passive voice (as if someone else made it). Here it is in the middle voice, which implies that the Sabbath rest "became" or "originated" of itself, without implying that someone (God) made it!

Our English translations are somewhat misleading, *"the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"* (NKJV). They ignore the definite article twice (THE man); they substitute the passive voice (was made) for the middle voice (came about). When we correct the translation, using the norms of Greek grammar, syntax, and lexical meanings of words, the translation is as follows: *"The Sabbath originated for the man, not the man for the Sabbath."* This would imply that the reason the Son of God rested Himself and blessed the Sabbath was because He and Adam rested together on that day! The Son of God¹⁵ shared the first Sabbath day rest with Adam! No wonder Jesus followed this statement with the words: *"Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."*

¹³ Psalm 110:1-7

¹⁴ Gal. 5:18

¹⁵ The Son of God was part of the "Us" and "Our" (plural Persons) who created man in the first place (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:15-17).

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

In summary, Jesus' defense against breaking the Sabbath was not based on technicalities of the Law of Moses which specifically forbids gathering food on the Sabbath.¹⁶ Instead He appealed to how the very first Sabbath day came about, when the Son of God shared this blessing of rest with Adam, after which He blessed and sanctified the seventh day. Of course He is "*Lord of the Sabbath!*" And if Jesus declared Himself "*Lord of the Sabbath,*" those of us who call Jesus Christ our "Lord" should absolutely expect to receive the Sabbath blessing when we follow our Master's own example, both on the original Sabbath at creation and throughout His earthly ministry!

What did Jesus do on the Sabbath days throughout His ministry? His "rest" included doing good deeds for others, such as healing the sick. Even Jesus' own "rest" in death was a precedent for keeping the Sabbath. His body was placed to "rest" in the tomb just before sunset on Friday night, and He did not stir again until near dawn on Sunday! The argument against Christians observing the Sabbath on the grounds that it was something designed exclusively for Israel is simply indefensible.

The Only New Covenant Precedent is Sabbath Observance by Christians

There is no direct command in the New Testament for all Christians to observe the Sabbath day. Therefore, there is no penalty stated for not doing so. As the Gospel went out to the nations, in some cases Sabbath keeping would have been virtually impossible since some Gentile nations did not have a seven-day work-week. However, the precedent set by Jesus and His disciples definitely included Sabbath observance. Even at the end of Jesus' ministry, after hearing everything Jesus had taught them throughout His entire public ministry, Jesus' followers observed the command to rest on the Sabbath. "*And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.*"¹⁷

The book of Acts makes it quite clear that the Jerusalem Christian assembly continued to observe the festivals commanded in the Law of Moses.¹⁸ And that necessarily included the foremost festival, the Sabbath day. It is therefore indisputable that Jewish Christianity faithfully worshipped on the Sabbath. And this would include Jesus' own Apostles, since they remained with the Jerusalem assembly until they were scattered following the martyrdom of Steven.¹⁹ The Christian assemblies in Samaria, Damascus, and Antioch were all established as missions of the Jerusalem assembly which definitely kept the Sabbath. It is virtually impossible to suppose that these new church plants would depart from the practice of the mother assembly in Jerusalem on such a basic

¹⁶ Ex. 31:13-17

¹⁷ Luke 23:56

¹⁸ Acts 15; Acts 21:20

¹⁹ Acts 8:4

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

issue of which day of the week to assemble for worship and instruction. Additionally, the new Christian assemblies at the beginning, close to the Holy Land, primarily consisted of converts from the diaspora synagogues and included proselytes – Gentiles who had formerly converted to Judaism. These were keeping the Law of Moses, and were assembling at the synagogues on the Sabbath day.

It is noteworthy that the Jews who persecuted the early Christians continued to refer to Christianity as a “sect” of Judaism right up until Paul’s first imprisonment at Rome. This hardly could have been the case if Christians worshipped on Sunday and had abandoned the Sabbath – the central feature of Israel’s identity. When Paul was arrested at the Temple, his accusers referred to Christianity as “the sect of the Nazarenes.”

Acts 24:5

5 “For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”

In his defense, Paul acknowledged that the Jews referred to Christianity as a “sect” of Judaism.

Acts 24:13-14

13 “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

14 “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

The term translated “sect” (αἵρεσις) literally means a “choice” or “preference,” implying a sub-group considered part of a larger group. The same term is used in Acts 5:17 for “the sect of the Sadducees,” and in Acts 15:5 for “the sect of the Pharisees.” In Acts 26:5, Paul referred to the Pharisees as “the strictest sect of our religion.” It is therefore clear that by referring to Christianity as the “sect of the Nazarenes,” the Jews continued to view Christianity as a part of “our religion,” even though both the Sadducees and Pharisees considered Christianity to violate the Law of Moses and proclaim a false Messiah. It is virtually inconceivable that the Jews would see Christianity as a “sect” of Judaism unless “the Way” also observed the Sabbath – the universally recognized emblem of Israel. Circumcision was private. But Sabbath observance was public.

In the book of Acts, Paul’s pattern of attending the synagogues on the Sabbath is clear. “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

for **three Sabbaths** reasoned with them from the Scriptures.”²⁰ This was, of course, so that he could evangelize his Jewish brothers. So this statement alone does not prove the typical custom of other Christians. However, as Jewish converts gradually began to split off from the synagogues, gathering separately, we also see Paul using these teaching sessions to instruct the Gentiles on the Sabbath day.

Acts 13:14-16,42-44

14 *But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.*

15 *And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”*

16 *Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, “Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: ... ”*

42 *So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, **the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.***

43 *Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.*

44 **On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.**

The gradual evolution of venue, from the synagogue to a separate Christian assembly, can be seen in Paul’s stay at Corinth.

Acts 18:4-11

4 *And **he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath,** and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.*

5 *When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.*

6 *But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.”*

7 *And **he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.***

8 *Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.*

9 *Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent;*

²⁰ Act 17:1-2

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

10 "for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city."

11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

The Corinthian congregation started as a split from the synagogue, with Crispus (the ruler of the synagogue) being the most notable convert. They continued to meet next-door to the synagogue in the house of Justus. Paul continued to teach there for eighteen months. However, the word translated "continued" in vs. 11 literally means to "sit." It is a Jewish idiom. In the synagogues, there were special seats in which to sit if you had something to say as a teacher. Literally, the above text says, "And he SAT there a year and six months teaching the word of God among them." Paul was a highly trained Jewish theologian.²¹ Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they loved to sit in these seats. "And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers."²² However, Paul used his credentials and these "chief seats" in the synagogues in order to have a platform for presenting the Gospel to his brothers in the synagogues.

Acts 13:14-15

14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down.

15 And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."

Rather than saying that Paul merely remained and dwelled there for eighteen months, Luke wrote that Paul "sat" for eighteen months in the role of teacher (rabbi), borrowing this idiom from the common usage in the synagogues. The changing venue from the synagogue to meeting next door, yet Paul retaining the role as teacher (rabbi) of the synagogue (sitting), strongly implies that they continued to follow the synagogue pattern, which was literally Sabbath school. Given that the passage begins by showing a transition from Paul's "sitting" in the synagogue each Sabbath in a role of teacher, to his "sitting" in the same role for eighteen more months in the house next-door to the synagogue, indicates that this was a Christian version of the synagogue. The Sabbath

²¹ Acts 5:34 & Acts 22:3

²² Matt. 23:6-7 NASB

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

was known by both the Jews and the Gentile proselytes as the day when the teaching of God's Word was to take place.²³

The complete absence of any 'Sabbath' vs. 'Sunday' controversy from the Judaizers (who were trying very hard to find fault with Paul's message) is sufficient evidence that the day of worship and instruction was not altered by Paul's teaching to the Gentiles.²⁴

The Apostle Paul established Christian assemblies in a variety of nations and cultures. Some of those cultures no doubt found it easy to keep the Sabbath, particularly where there was a large Jewish presence and a synagogue, and where a seven-day work-week existed as in many parts of the Roman Empire. But in other places an eight-day week was observed. Even in more remote places in the east a seven-day week existed, but it was not continuous. Lunar-weeks were observed.²⁵ That is, the month began on the new moon, and was divided into four weeks, the first three weeks were of seven days, followed by one week of eight or nine days to close out that month before the next new moon. Without a continuous seven-day week, consistent Sabbath-keeping would have been virtually impossible. This is most likely why the New Covenant does not specifically command Sabbath observance. Yet, there is no evidence at all from either the Bible or history that any Christians met regularly on Sundays while any of the Apostles were still alive.

Post-Apostolic Christianity

More than a century after Jesus' ascension we have the first statement concerning Christian worship on Sunday. However, this evidence only shows the practice in Rome, not necessarily what was universally practiced by all Christians. This evidence comes from Justin's First Apology, written from Rome to the emperor at Rome.²⁶

"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. ... 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

²³ Acts 15:21

²⁴ Acts 21:21

²⁵ Pinches, T.G. "Sabbath (Babylonian)," from Hastings, James. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics

²⁶ Justin was a Christian teacher at Rome. His First Apology was addressed to the Roman Emperor and the Senate (ch. 1).

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

(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.”²⁷

The reason some Christians abandoned the Sabbath in favor of Sunday is revealed in the Epistle of Barnabas, most likely written in Alexandria, North Africa in the second century.

“Further, He says to them, “Your new moons and your Sabbath I cannot endure.” Ye perceive how He speaks: Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made, [namely this,] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, 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. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens.”²⁸

The justification for abandoning the Sabbath and worship on Sunday was a misunderstanding of a statement in Isaiah concerning how God viewed the Sabbath, and instead honoring the “eighth day.”

However, these comments of Justin of Rome and Barnabas of Alexandria should not be taken as indicative of all or even the majority of Christian congregations. Nearly 200 years later, the Christian historian, Socrates, indicated that the majority of Christians in his day continued to gather weekly on the Sabbath, despite Constantine’s order that business be suspended on Sunday.²⁹

*“Nor is there less variation in regard to religious assemblies. For although **almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries 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. The Egyptians in the neighborhood of Alexandria, and the inhabitants of Thebais, hold their religious assemblies on the Sabbath, but do not participate of the mysteries in the manner usual among Christians in general: for after having eaten and satisfied themselves with food of all kinds, in the evening making their offerings they partake of the mysteries.”³⁰*

²⁷ Justin, First Apology, ch. 67

²⁸ Epistle of Barnabas, ch. xv

²⁹ Edict of Constantine, AD 321 – “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.”

³⁰ Socrates Scholasticus, Bk. V, ch. 22

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

If Socrates' assessment was accurate, and there is no reason to doubt it, then Sunday worship was rather rare among the early Christian assemblies after the Apostles. Given that the tendency of Christians after the destruction of Jerusalem was to distance themselves from the Jews, it is remarkable that the majority retained worship on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath in the Kingdom

The prophets are clear that in Christ's Kingdom, the Feasts will be observed. This does not mean that the Law of Moses will have jurisdiction. The Kingdom Law is the New Covenant. And this will include a new Temple in Jerusalem which will function as "*a house of prayer for all nations*"³¹ rather than just for Israel. Some of the Feasts will resume at this Temple, including Passover and Tabernacles.³² However, the Day of Atonement will not be resumed in the Kingdom, but rather the Throne of God will take the place of the Ark of the Covenant.³³ In the Kingdom, Jesus will celebrate the Passover with His Apostles.³⁴ But what about the weekly Sabbath observance, the chief of all the Feasts?

Isaiah 66:22-23

22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, "So shall your descendants and your name remain. 23 And it shall come to pass That from one New Moon to another, And **from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me,**" says the LORD.

Notice that "all flesh" will worship God on the Sabbath days, including all the Gentile nations. So we have continuity of history and prophecy concerning the Sabbath day, from the beginning of Genesis to the close of Revelation. All those who take hold of it receive its blessings.

Isaiah 56:6-7

6 "Also **the sons of the foreigner** Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants – **Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath,** And holds fast My covenant – 7 Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices Will be accepted on My altar; For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."

³¹ Isa. 56:7; Luke 19:46

³² Ezekiel 45:21-25

³³ Jer. 3:16-17

³⁴ Luke 22:15-16

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

Did Paul authorize any day one chooses?

The appeal is usually made to Romans 14:4-6 to justify Christians choosing a different day for holding their common assembly.

Romans 14:4-6

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it.

But the application of this passage to the question before us clearly goes beyond the scope of Paul's intended meaning. He was writing to the Roman assembly, which consisted of many Jews as well as Gentiles. The Jews were not gathering on a different day than the Gentile members. If their gatherings were weekly, they all assembled on the same day otherwise they would not be part of the same "assembly." Paul was not giving permission for the Gentiles to gather on Sunday and still allowing the Jewish members to gather on the Sabbath. Paul was very concerned about the unity of the body as expressed in Romans 12. If he was addressing the issue of which day to hold the assembly, he would certainly have argued for a single common assembly rather than merely encouraging each side not to interfere or judge the other.

The issue Paul was addressing was that, in addition to their common Christian gatherings for their regular assembly, some of the Jewish believers were observing the annual festivals of the Mosaic Covenant. And they were observing them to varying degrees (just as some were observing the kosher laws to varying degrees {vss. 2-3,14-23}). No doubt some even traveled to Jerusalem three times a year, as is evident from the fact that some Jews from Rome were present for Pentecost (Acts 2:10). Others may have merely marked the day at home with some sort of memorial that falls short of the strict requirements of the Law. In these kinds of situations Paul argued for liberty and a non-judgmental attitude.

It is apparent that the only observable tradition in the New Testament is a Sabbath assembly (following the synagogue pattern). Since they all had that in common, including the assembly at Rome, then the specific day of their assemblies was not in view at all in Paul's instructions in Romans 14, and therefore cannot rightly be used to defend a regular assembly on a different day since that is outside the scope of his instructions in that chapter.

The Seventh Day Sabbath Rest

Conclusion:

The absence of specific commands in the New Testament for Jesus' followers to observe the Sabbath can imply different things to different people. For some silence implies permission; any day will do. Yet, perhaps the silence should imply that no new command was needed because it never occurred to any of them to change the day that had been consistently observed by God's covenant people since creation. Silence is a funny thing, giving permission for anything and everything to some. Yet for others, silence binds us to previous revelation and what little apostolic precedent we do have in Acts.

As faithful Christians we must present a balanced point of view on this very controversial topic. We should not make Sabbath observance into a command for Christians, since neither Jesus nor His Apostles did so. We should not lose sight of Jesus' statement that the Sabbath was made for the man and not the man for the Sabbath. That is, it was meant for all mankind, to be a blessing and not a burden. Only the Law of Moses provided a penalty for not keeping the Sabbath. If we know the truth, we should stop short of saying that observance of the Sabbath is required of Christians. On the other hand, if we as Christians wish to grow beyond Roman Catholic tradition, to enter into closer fellowship with the Creator, and to follow the actual practice of Jesus and the Apostles, then ditching the Roman Catholic Sunday tradition and observing the Sabbath is certainly a great way to move forward.