

## Q & A #5

**There are those who teach that the Sabbath was not known before the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai and that only the Israelites and later the Jews were obligated to observe the Sabbath. Is this why Christians, since the cross, don't sense the necessity to follow the specific day of the fourth commandment?**

**Answer:** For the record, it will come as a surprise to many that today over 30 million grace-filled Christians in just one denomination observe the Sabbath on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. And they choose to keep it sacred based on their love for Jesus and His fourth commandment. It is just as surprising that from the day that Jesus returned to heaven, the whole of the first century church and most of the Christians in the early centuries of Christianity kept the Saturday Sabbath that Jesus kept. Therefore, they did not teach or practice then what some believe today, as you have stated in your question.

Much of the historical documentation for ongoing Sabbath observance after the resurrection of Jesus is unknown to current believers in Christian circles. Here is what one contemporary historian of early Christianity said:

**“Fourth-century Gentile Christians, despite the anti-Jewish ideology of their own bishops, kept Saturday as their day of rest. . . .”**

(Dr. Paula Fredriksen, former chair of the Department of Religion at Boston University quoted by Jay Tolson and Linda Kulman, “The Real Jesus,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 8, 2004, p. 43)

We ask the reader, why should our Lord give the Creation Sabbath “blessing” to one group of people—the Jews—and leave the rest of the world's population barred from its benefits? One of the first lessons to be learned by Christ's disciples is that God is “no respecter of persons,” whether in Old or New Testament times. Israel was chosen by the Creator to give this weekly gift from Creation to the whole world.

Do we not remember that God's promise to Abraham was that through him (and his descendents—Israel) “all the families of the world would be blessed” (Genesis 12:3)?

What has just been stated shows itself to be in full agreement with what Jesus said to His detractors: “The Sabbath was made for man. . .” (Mark 2:27). Please note that Israel, or the Jews as a nationality, are included with this. The Greek word used for “man” is “anthropos,” which means “mankind”—the human race from Adam to the last person born on earth. This would also include all the people who existed before the giving of the fourth commandment at Mt. Sinai, in Exodus 20. Jewish author Abraham Heschel has reasoned that because “time” comes to everyone, the Sabbath is not to be observed only by one nation, sect, or class. Rather, its blessings and obligations are universal and ageless.

### **Biblical Proof – the Sabbath before Sinai**

So, what biblical proof is there that the Sabbath was kept before Sinai? For that matter, what proof is there that any of the Sinai Commandments were known before Sinai, for not one of them—let alone the fourth—is stated verbatim in Scripture before Exodus 20.

Who is willing to say that God waited until after the world's population was destroyed in the Flood, until after humans were dispersed following the tower of Babel, until after God called Abraham and his descendents to bless the peoples of the whole world, until after Israel had existed for four hundred years in Egypt that the Creator God would finally reveal His expressed will—including the Sabbath—to humanity?

There is one major biblical clue that, for many Bible believers, answers the question directly. God Himself said of Abraham: “. . . in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Genesis 26:4, 5). This is very comprehensive; do you agree? Included in this, evidently, was Abraham's knowledge and practice of tithing (Genesis 14:18-20). Therefore, what could we reasonably

assume about these “commandments, statutes, and laws” which God mentioned Abraham guiding his life by? Could they also include the other nine commandments identified at Mt. Sinai in addition to the Sabbath commandment?

Many of those who question the Sabbath's being kept through the centuries, beginning with Creation week, do not question that marriage, the Sabbath's sister institution, was practiced from Creation onward. Again, it must be remembered that Jesus said: " 'The Sabbath was made for man [all humanity including those between Creation week and the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai]' " (Mark 2:28).

## Historical footing??

The recent contention that the Sabbath originated at Sinai instead of at Creation does not stand on firm historical footing. Martin Luther himself commented on the pre-Sinai Sabbath test recorded in Exodus 16:4, 22—30: “Hence, you can see that the Sabbath was before the Law of Moses came, and has existed from the beginning of the world. Especially have the devout, who have preserved the true faith, met together and called upon God on this day.”(1) It stands to reason that, if the sacred time of the Sabbath was designed for humans to be in relationship with their Creator, it would begin at their creation. As it was "blessed" and "sanctified" (set apart distinctly for divine interaction), it was set in motion, becoming effective immediately.

Are we to assume that, on the seventh day of Creation, God blessed and sanctified that first seventh day only? None of the Bible writers in the Old or New Testaments subscribe to this exclusive designation. Rather, Jesus Christ, the chief proponent in the world of the seventh-day Sabbath, stated that the Sabbath was made for man—for mankind (Mark 2:27). This would include those of the human family who lived from Creation prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai.

Many noteworthy spokesmen have validated the Sabbath's longevity. In debating Martin Luther, Johann Eck declared: “If you. . . turn from the church to the Scriptures alone, then you

must keep the Sabbath with the Jews, *which has been kept from the beginning of the world.*" (emphasis supplied)

Martin Luther did not question the Sabbath's early origin, describing its purpose in his commentary on Genesis 1, 2:

**God blessed the Sabbath and sanctified it to himself. It is moreover to be remarked that God did this to no other creature. God did not sanctify to himself the heavens nor the earth nor any other creature. But God did sanctify to himself the seventh day. This was especially designed of God to cause us to understand that the "seventh day" is to be especially devoted to divine worship. . . It follows therefore from this passage, that if Adam had stood in his innocence and had not fallen he would yet have observed the "seventh day" as sanctified, holy and sacred. . . Nay, even after the fall he held the "seventh day" sacred; that is, he taught on that day his own family. This is testified by the offerings made by his two sons, Cain and Abel. The Sabbath therefore has, from the beginning of the world, been set apart for the worship of God. . . For all these things are implied and signified in the expression "sanctified."** (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis*, edited by J. N. Lenker, vol. 1, Lutherans in All Lands Co., Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1904, pp. 138-140)

First century Jewish author Philo of Alexandria considered the Sabbath as having been made for all humanity:

**But after the whole world had been completed according to the perfect nature of the number six, the Father hallowed the day following, the seventh, praising it, and calling it holy. For that day is the festival for all people, and the birthday of the world.** (Philo of Alexandria, "On the Creation," Section XXX (89), in *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 13)

The first century Jewish historian Josephus cited God's rest at the Creation as the reason for observance of the Sabbath:

**Moses says, That in just six days the world and all that is therein was made; and that the seventh day was a rest and a release from the labor of such operations; —whence it is that we celebrate a rest from our labors on that day, and call it the Sabbath; which word denotes rest in the Hebrew tongue.** (Flavius Josephus, “Antiquities of the Jews,” book 1, chapter 1, section 1, in *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1996, p. 29)

## Concluding Thought. . .

In his book *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*, Professor and author Sigve Tonsad stated that, in blessing and consecrating the seventh day (Genesis 2:1-3), God made “a permanent imprint on human time” (p. 497). The fourth commandment pointedly refers to this moment in Creation—*the seventh day*—completing the first full week in earth time (Exodus 20:11). In this way a boundary was set for all time. This repeating cycle of seven days has never been broken since Creation week. Because of its origin with Adam and Eve in their innocence, the Sabbath transcends all nationalistic, ethnic and racial distinctions. God Himself has forecast the Sabbath's eternal, unending status: “ 'For as the new heaven and new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, . . . from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says the LORD” (Isaiah 66:22, 23).

## Footnotes

(1)Translated from *Auslegung des Alten Testaments* [Commentary on the Old Testament], in *Sämmtliche Schriften* [Collected Writings] (1880), edited by Johann Georg Walch, vol. 3, col. 950; reference given by Conradi is *Luther's Works*, vol. 35, p. 330, as given in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, p. 2632.