

Did Jesus Abolish the Seventh-day Sabbath?

Contrary to popular ideas, Christ's teachings and example both uphold the validity of the Fourth Commandment.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus made it absolutely clear that the commandments of God are in force under the New Covenant: **“Therefore, whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of [from] heaven; but whoever shall practice and teach *them*, this one shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven”** (Matt. 5:19).

Which commandment of God is typically rejected and considered the “least” by mainstream Christianity today? The Fourth Commandment! As strange as it may seem, many of those who reject this commandment will profess to keep the other commandments and claim that they are doing the will of God. But as the apostle James shows, breaking even one of the commandments of God is sin, and brings the same condemnation as breaking them all. “For *if* anyone keeps the whole law, but sins in one *aspect*, he becomes guilty of all” (James 2:10).

Let us examine the Fourth Commandment—considered the least by mainstream Christianity: **“Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter; your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the stranger within your gates; for *in six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it”*** (Ex. 20:8-11).

Nowhere in the entire Bible do we find a single scripture that changes the day of rest and worship from the seventh day of the week to Sunday, the first day of the week. Several passages are often used by Sunday-keepers to support their belief that Christians should worship on the first day of the week. However, when those passages are correctly understood and interpreted, it is clear that Jesus Christ did not change the Sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week. (See *Rome's Challenge to the Protestants*.)

Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made **for man...**” (Mark 2:27). Contrary to the teachings of mainstream theologians, God did not command Sabbath keeping for the Jews only. In the beginning, God created the Sabbath by hallowing the seventh day as the weekly day of rest and worship—when there was not a single Jew on earth. The only humans at that time were Adam and Eve, the progenitors of all mankind. It was for all humanity that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, making it holy: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And by *the beginning of* the seventh day God finished His work which He had made. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because on it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Gen. 2:1-3).

The seventh day was sanctified at the creation of the world. God established that day as a time for rest and worship from the beginning. He sanctified it, and blessed it, and rested on it, setting the example for mankind. Down through the ages, the record of this act of God has been preserved in the book of Genesis, one of the books of the Law. Remember what Jesus Christ declared concerning the Law: “For truly I say to you, **until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled**” (Matt. 5:18).

Since God created time, and time is measured by the movement of the earth in relationship to the heavens, time will exist as long as the heavens and the earth exist. As long as the heavens and the earth exist, the seventh-day Sabbath will not pass from the Law. Consequently,

the Fourth Commandment is still in force today and remains binding on all mankind.

Contrary to what mainstream Christianity may teach or what people may practice, Sunday has never been and will never be the Lord's day. The seventh day of the week, called Saturday today, is the Lord's Sabbath day. Jesus Christ emphatically declared that He is Lord of the Sabbath day: "And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, *and* not man for the Sabbath; therefore, the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath' " (Mark 2:27-28). **Jesus Himself declared that He is Lord of the Sabbath—the seventh day of the week. Therefore, the Sabbath day is the Lord's day—not Sunday.**

Some have misconstrued Jesus' declaration that He is Lord of the Sabbath as signifying that He was abolishing the Sabbath by His authority. This interpretation of Jesus' words is completely unfounded. Among the scholars who understand the true meaning of these Scriptures are the writers of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Notice what they have written about these critical verses:

"At times Jesus is interpreted to have abrogated or suspended the Sabbath commandment on the basis of the controversies brought about by Sabbath healings and other acts. Careful analysis of the respective passages does not seem to give credence to this interpretation. The action of plucking the ears of grain on the Sabbath by the disciples is particularly important in this matter. Jesus makes a foundational pronouncement at that time in ... [an authoritatively] structured statement of antithetic [contrasting] parallelism: 'The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath' (Mark 2:27). The disciples' act of plucking the grain infringed against the rabbinic *halakhah* of minute casuistry in which it was forbidden to reap, thresh, winnow, and grind on the Sabbath (*Sabb.* 7.2). Here again rabbinic Sabbath *halakhah* is rejected, as in other Sabbath conflicts. Jesus reforms the Sabbath and restores its rightful place as designed in creation, where Sabbath is made for all mankind and not specifically for Israel, as claimed by normative Judaism (*cf. Jub.* 2:19-20, see D.3). The subsequent logion, 'The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath' (Mark 2:28; Matt. 12:8; Luke 6:5), indicates that man-made Sabbath *halakhah* does not rule the Sabbath, but that the Son of Man as Lord determines the true meaning of the Sabbath. The Sabbath activities of Jesus are neither hurtful provocations nor mere protests against rabbinic legal restrictions, but are part of Jesus' essential proclamation of the in-breaking of the kingdom of God in which man is taught the original meaning of the Sabbath as the recurring weekly proleptic 'day of the Lord' in which God manifests his healing and saving rulership over man" (vol. 5, pp. 854-55).

As these scholars show, the Gospel accounts do not support the widespread belief that Jesus abolished the Sabbath day. Rather, as Lord of the Sabbath, **He taught the true meaning of the Sabbath day and set the example for its proper observance.** Long after His death and resurrection, Jesus' apostles continued to keep the Sabbath and to teach the early believers to keep it as well.