

# **The Rise of Sunday Observance**

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## **Introduction**

It is only natural as believers learn about the seventh-day Sabbath to wonder how Sunday observance came to replace the Sabbath. In this appendix we will briefly examine that question. Interestingly, this very subject has drawn new attention in the Christian world today. There is a movement among many seventh-day Sabbath-keepers of rejecting the Sabbath, while a growing number of Sunday-keepers have reevaluated the matter and accepted the Sabbath. Therefore, it is important that we examine the issue of how Sunday observance came into the Christian Church.

## **Early Second Century**

In the first half of the second century A.D. (the 100s), a radical break from the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday worship occurred in two major cities, Rome, Italy, and Alexandria, Egypt. No other areas of the Christian world made this break at this early time. Instead, Christians elsewhere were still keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. However, in Rome and Alexandria, Christians were anxious to make certain that the Roman Empire officials knew that Christians were not the same as Jews, even though originally Christianity had begun in the first century as a Jewish Christian Church.

Among the Jews were many agitators and political rebels against Roman rule. That was why the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed in A.D. 70, in the first century, and again during the Jewish revolt known as the Bar Cocheba (or Kochba) Revolt in 132-135. After this last revolt, the Romans banned Jews from even entering the city of Jerusalem, which the Romans rebuilt and renamed. About the same time (about 135), Emperor Hadrian issued a decree prohibiting Jews from observing the Sabbath and from practicing circumcision, the two distinctive practices of the Jews. Because Christians did not want to experience the same oppression which the Romans used in retaliation against the Jews for their revolts, the Christians in Rome and Alexandria made this radical break from the Sabbath so as to disassociate themselves from anything the Jews were doing. Christians in the city of Rome were living in the capital of the Roman Empire, right under the noses of Roman officials. And in Alexandria there was an especially large Jewish population. Therefore, Christians in these two cities were especially anxious to separate themselves from the Jews in the minds of the political officials.

There were other important developments occurring in the early second century. The church at Rome took the lead in promoting Easter Sunday in place of the Christian practice of observing the Jewish Passover every spring. In this way, the focus moved from the death of Christ (Passover) to His resurrection (Easter). By the late second century, there were believers in both western and eastern parts of the Empire who observed Easter Sunday. Conversely, there were believers in both parts, including Asia, the western-most part of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), where the seven churches in Revelation are located, who were refusing to adopt what most some historians have called the Roman Easter. This demonstrates both the rapidly growing influence of Rome and the willingness of many Christians to make certain changes which would distinguish them from Jews. Nevertheless, most Christians at that time were unwilling to abandon the Bible Sabbath for this purpose.

Regarding the Sabbath, the church at Rome in the early second century instituted a rule requiring believers to fast from food every Sabbath (Saturday). This was also done to disassociate themselves from Jews because the Jews were well known for their great feasts on Sabbaths. A number of non-Jewish Christian critics accused Jews of gluttony on the Sabbath. Historical records strongly suggest that the weekly Saturday fast was based on the Holy Saturday fast at Passover season.

That latter annual fast had two purposes: (1) showing sorrow for Christ's death and the fact that He lay in the tomb on Saturday; and (2) showing contempt for the Jews, who were viewed as the perpetrators of His death. Thus, it appears that the *weekly* Saturday fast was championed by Rome for the same reasons. In addition, according to early Christian writings, the Saturday fast also prepared the believers to enjoy even more the joyous Christian celebration of the resurrection on Sundays. Naturally, such fasting on Sabbath would make Christians come to dread the day and look forward all the more to Sunday. The Sabbath (Saturday) fast was resisted greatly in the eastern part of the Roman Empire for several centuries, although increasingly adopted in the West.

The earliest arguments used by Christians at Rome and Alexandria to justify their abandonment of the Sabbath in favor of Sunday in the early second century emphasized two points: (1) that Sunday was associated during Creation week with the creation of light on the very first day of that week, and Jesus is the Light of the world and the Son/Sun of righteousness; and (2) that Christ was resurrected on Sunday, so this way believers celebrate His resurrection every week on Sunday. Interestingly, the early second century was precisely the time when Sunday was elevated to the most important day of the week among sun-worshippers in the Roman Empire—hardly a coincidence. In reflection of the growing popularity of the sun-worshipping religion Mithraism, a Persian import, the day of the sun (Sunday) was moved from the second day to the first day of the

week. Please note that this was done by simply switching names of the days of the week, a change which did not affect the weekly cycle itself. Note these words from Justin Martyr, a Christian at Rome, written to the Roman Emperor about 150:

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 Saviour on the same day rose from the dead.  
[*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “First Apology,” ch. 67 (LXVII)]

A few scholars believe this passage attributed to Justin actually is a later interpolation written by an unknown author. However, most scholars view it as genuine. In any case, early Christian history credits Christian leaders at Rome and Alexandria for originating Sunday worship in the Christian Church, and that same history limits Sunday worship to those places, and some local surrounding areas near them, during the early portion of the second century. During this same time frame, Christian believers everywhere else were still observing the seventh-day Saturday Sabbath and not keeping a weekly Sunday.

Nevertheless, as we shall see, the idea of celebrating the Lord’s resurrection every Sunday spread to the rest of Christianity, probably as early as the second half of the second century. Interestingly, however, we shall see that the seventh-day Sabbath was still observed along side of the weekly Sunday celebration of the resurrection.

#### Evidence for Second Century Origin of Sunday Observance

The apocryphal *The Gospel According to Peter* 35, 50 is dated to the second half of the second century (ca. 190). The author’s casual use of “the Lord’s” (with “day” obviously implied) to describe the actual day of Christ’s resurrection (see preceding section) strongly suggests that this term had already come to mean Sunday among Christians generally by that time. Because Sunday would not have become known as the Lord’s day unless it was already a day for Christian worship, this is good evidence for the origin of Sunday as a day for Christian worship earlier in the second century (probably the first half). Because this is the first occurrence of the term “the Lord’s (day)” for Sunday, this also suggests that it is unlikely that the origin of Sunday worship would extend all the way back into the first century.

Clement of Alexandria was the head of the school for educating pagan converts in the ways of Christianity from about 190-202. He referred to “the Lord’s day Plato prophetically speaks of in

the tenth book of the *Republic*, in these words: ‘And when seven days have passed to each of them in the meadow, on the eighth they are to set out and arrive in four days’” (*Miscellanies* (also called *Stromata*), v. 14; *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, p. 2, 469). Here is a reference to the so-called eighth day of the week as being the Lord’s day, a reference which makes it clear is referring to the weekly Sunday. *The Epistle of Barnabas*, written by a pseudonymous Barnabas from Alexandria (in Egypt) about 130-138, was the first Christian author to speak of Sunday as the eighth day in a weekly cycle (still maintaining a seven-day week, but with Sunday as both the first and the eighth day)—see *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. by Jack Sparks, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1978, “The Letter of Barnabas,” ch. 15, vv. 8-9.

Note this statement which includes a fragment from a lost work of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (in Gaul, or France) from about 177-202: “This [custom], of not bending the knee upon Sunday, is a symbol of the resurrection...as the blessed Irenaeus, the martyr and bishop of Lyons, declares in his treatise *On Easter*, in which he makes mention of Pentecost also; upon which [feast] we do not bend the knee, because it is of equal significance with the Lord's day, for the reason already alleged concerning it.” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Irenaeus of Lyons,” “Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus,” no. 7]

The references to Pentecost and the Lord’s day in the above statement has led some scholars to conclude that because Pentecost is an annual festival, and the Lord’s day is being compared with it, then the latter must refer to the annual Easter Sunday. However, a closer examination reveals that it is the weekly Sunday and the annual Easter season which are being compared. Pentecost is mentioned because it was considered the end point of the Easter season; note that it is part of the lost work of Irenaeus called *On Easter*, which makes Easter the focus of that lost work, not Pentecost itself. The word “Sunday” in this statement is obviously a reference to the weekly Sunday, and the practice of not bending the knee on Sunday is further illustrated by the author’s comparison of the same practice on Pentecost Sunday (the entire Easter season). And “the reason already alleged concerning it” is that Sunday is associated with “a symbol of the resurrection.” Thus the Lord’s day and the weekly Sunday are equated, and the reference to Pentecost being “of equal significance with the Lord’s day” equates Pentecost (and thus the entire Easter season) with the weekly Sunday. Tertullian (ca. 160-220), a theologian from Carthage (in North Africa), made a similar point: “We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Whitsunday [Pentecost].” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Tertullian,” “De Corona (The Chaplet),” ch. 3]

Justin Martyr wrote (from Rome) to Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius about 150, defending the Christian faith, and emphasizing Sunday worship:

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...

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 Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (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. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “First Apology,” ch. 67]

Note that Justin Martyr makes very clear that Sunday was the day that “all who live in cities or in the country” have a “common assembly” for religious purposes. The fact that he is writing a defense of Christianity to the Emperor strongly implies that he is referring to a widespread Christian practice rather than only that which occurred in Rome, unless one assumes that this was a later interpolation by an unknown author. At least one scholar has concluded that this is evidence that Sabbath worship had been eliminated from almost all of Christianity by the middle of the second century because Justin Martyr is silent about Sabbath observance. But this is an overdrawn conclusion because Justin Martyr is obviously attempting to distinguish Christians from Jews because the latter were viewed as troublemakers by the Emperor. Note also how he emphasizes that Christians worship on Sunday (literally “the day of the sun”) in an obvious attempt to identify Christians as in harmony with the Empire, the majority of whose citizens worshiped the sun. In this context, we would indeed expect him to say nothing about Sabbath worship. Thus, his silence about believers in most areas also worshiping together on Sabbaths should not be interpreted to mean that this practice did not also happen.

*The Epistle of Barnabas*, written by a pseudonymous Barnabas from Alexandria (in Egypt) about 130-138, is universally characterized by two features: (1) a vehement denunciation of Jews and the Jewish religion, and (2) an allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament which declares that much of the Jewish practice and belief was never intended to be literally observed in this life.

In this larger context, chapter 15 (just nine verses) concerns the Sabbath. In allegorizing the six days of Creation week into each day representing 1,000 years, Barnabas declares that the day of the Lord in judgment will come after 6,000 years of human history. The Sabbath rest, represented

by the seventh day of Creation week, is an eschatological rest which will only be realized literally after the judgment, when the Lord ends sin and makes all things new. Therefore, no one is to keep the literal Sabbath because no one is yet holy enough to do so. He adds, and is the first writer to so state, that the eighth day is (allegorically) the beginning of another world (the literal, realized fulfillment of the current Sabbath rest), and the reason Christians observe the eighth day of every week (Sunday) in anticipation of the eschatological eighth day. Then, in a secondary mention, he adds that it was also the eighth day on which Jesus rose from the dead.

*The Epistle of Barnabas* is largely based on a radical allegorizing of the Old Testament which was rejected by the great majority (albeit not all) of early and later Christian leaders and scholars. Specifically, even his allegorizing of Creation week and the seventh-day Sabbath were almost universally rejected by later Christian scholars and leaders. Furthermore, his reference to the resurrection of Christ as only a secondary reason (later it became the prime reason) adds to the contextual evidence in his epistle that Sunday observance was only in its very early, uncertain beginnings. This evidence is fully consistent with the conclusion that Sunday observance did not begin until the second century. [See *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. by Jack Sparks, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1978]

Although not allegorizing like Barnabas, Justin Martyr was also motivated by a great deal of anti-Semitic rhetoric—see *Dialogue with Trypho (the Jew)*, Chapters 16, 17, 18, 21, 23. Specifically, he taught that the Sabbath (and sometimes he added circumcision too) were given to the Jews to mark them out for special divine judgments because of their wickedness, and that the Sabbath was no longer to be observed by Christians. A few examples follow:

For we too would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the Sabbaths, and in short all the feasts, if we did not know for what reason they were enjoined you,—namely, on account of your transgressions and the hardness of your hearts. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “Dialogue with Trypho,” ch. 18]

For if there was no need of circumcision before Abraham, or Of the observance of Sabbaths, of feasts and sacrifices, before Moses; no more need is there of them now, after that, according to the will of God, Jesus Christ the Son of God has been born without sin, of a virgin sprung from the stock of Abraham. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “Dialogue with Trypho,” ch. 23]

Do you see that the elements are not idle, and keep no Sabbaths? Remain as you were born. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “Dialogue with Trypho,” ch. 23]

Moreover, that God enjoined you to keep the Sabbath, and impose on you other precepts for a sign, as I have already said, on account of your unrighteousness, and that of your fathers.... [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “Dialogue with Trypho,” ch. 21]

The quotations from Justin Martyr cited above reveal three basic motivations for Sunday worship: (1) an effort to make Christians harmonize with the pagan Roman Empire because of his repeated references to Sunday (literally, “the day of the sun”); (2) light was created by God on the first day of Creation week; and (3) lastly, Christ was resurrected on the first day of the week. In addition to these reasons, he argues in his *Dialogue with Trypho (the Jew)* that (1) the eighth day (Sunday) was “a type of the true circumcision, by which we are circumcised from deceit and iniquity through Him who rose from the dead on the first day after the Sabbath” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “Dialogue with Trypho,” ch. 41]; and (2) the eight persons saved in Noah’s ark “were a symbol of the eighth day, wherein Christ appeared when He rose from the dead, for ever the first in power.” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Justin Martyr,” “Dialogue with Trypho,” ch. 138]

The writings of Justin Martyr reflect an anti-Semitism which is absolutely foreign to the New Testament. Furthermore, his justification for Sunday worship is partly allegorical (comparing Sunday with light on the first day of Creation week; circumcision on the eighth day being compared to Sunday as the eighth day; the eight persons saved in the ark compared as types of Sunday as the eighth day) and at least partially rejected by later Christian leaders. And his reference to the resurrection of Christ was a secondary reason. Therefore, in a similar way (albeit different), Justin Martyr’s arguments against the Sabbath (as punishment for the Jews’ wickedness) and for Sunday worship reflect the same kind of early, tentative beginnings of Sunday observance that Barnabas reflected in his writings. Furthermore, the anti-Semitism prevalent in both Barnabas and Justin Martyr dates to the first half of the second century, exactly in the era when the Second Jewish Revolt (Bar Kochba) occurred and when Emperor Hadrian had decreed against the Jewish practices of circumcision and Sabbath-keeping. All this evidence is fully consistent with the conclusion that Sunday observance did not begin until the second century.

## Summary of Reasons for Second Century Origin of Sunday Observance

- The first evidence for Sunday observance is in the second century. Even the only use of the term “the Lord’s day” in the first century (Revelation 1:10) is a unique reference to the seventh-day Sabbath.
- The first use of “the Lord’s (day)” as a reference to Sunday occurs in the late second century (ca. 190). Although this fact implies that Sunday observance must have become common by that time, it also suggests that the origin of Sunday observance probably did not go as far back as the first century (otherwise “the Lord’s (day)” would probably have been coined as an expression for Sunday earlier than the late second century).
- The arguments advanced for Sunday observance by Barnabas (ca. 130-138) and Justin Martyr (ca. 150) represent a tentative, early practice (otherwise their arguments would have been more well-thought out and certain, as later Christian arguments were).
- The vehement anti-Semitism reflected in both Barnabas and Justin Martyr for the abandonment of the Sabbath is best explained as the result of growing Jewish discontent in the early second century (as in the Second Jewish Revolt, or Bar Kochba Revolt, 132-135) and the Roman Emperor Hadrian’s hostility toward those Jewish religious practices which made the Jews stand out as a unique people in the Empire, especially circumcision and Sabbath-keeping.

### **The Origin of the Sabbath Fast**

Christian history is in widespread agreement that the church in Rome championed the weekly Sabbath fast relatively early in the Christian Era. Please note the following representative samples of testimonies:

As to the seventh day of the week there is less difficulty in acting on the rule above quoted, because both the Roman Church and some other churches, though few, near to it or remote from it, observe a fast on that day.... [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Augustine of Hippo,” “Letters,” Letter 36 (“From Augustine to Casulanus”), A.D. 396, Ch. 12, par. 27] Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo (in North Africa) from 396-430.

The next day is the Jewish Sabbath, on which day Christ's body rested in the grave,

as in the original fashioning of the world God rested on that day from all His works. Hence originated that variety in the robe of His bride which we are now considering: some, especially the Eastern communities, preferring to take food on that day, that their action might be emblematic of the divine rest; others, namely the Church of Rome, and some churches in the West, preferring to fast on that day because of the humiliation of the Lord in death. Once in the year, namely at Easter, all Christians observe the seventh day of the week by fasting, in memory of the mourning with which the disciples, as men bereaved, lamented the death of the Lord (and this is done with the utmost devoutness by those who take food on the seventh day throughout the rest of the year); thus providing a symbolical representation of both events -- of the disciples' sorrow on one seventh day in the year, and of the blessing of repose on all the others. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, "Augustine of Hippo," "Letters," Letter 36 ("From Augustine to Casulanus"), A.D. 396, Ch. 13, par. 31]

This question I would wish to see him investigate, and resolve in such a manner as would not involve him in the guilt of openly speaking against the whole Church diffused throughout the world, with the exception of the Roman Christians, and hitherto a few of the Western communities...But now, when he assails with such reproachful and abusive language the Church bearing fruit and increasing throughout the whole world, and in almost all places observing no fast on the seventh day of the week, I warn him, whoever he is, to beware. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, "Augustine of Hippo," "Letters," Letter 36 ("From Augustine to Casulanus"), A.D. 396, Ch. 2, par. 4]

But some people in some countries of the West, and especially in the city [Rome], not knowing the reason of this indulgence, think that a dispensation from fasting ought certainly not to be allowed On the Sabbath, because they say that on this day the Apostle Peter fasted before his encounter with Simon [Magus]. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, "John Cassian," "Institutes," bk. 3, ch. 10] John Cassian (ca. 360-435) was a monk and writer in southern Gaul (modern France).

The quotations cited above from Augustine and John Cassian near the turn of the fifth century clearly and especially associate Rome with the Sabbath fast. Moreover, John Cassian's statement connects this practice to their alleged belief that the apostle Peter set an example for it. This suggests, while not proving, that Roman and certain other Western Christians began this practice

much earlier than the late fourth century, although not necessarily as early as the first century.

This notion that Rome pioneered the Sabbath fast early in the Christian Era is more strongly suggested by the testimony of Hippolytus, a priest and theologian who wrote at Rome between ca. 202-234 that “even today they are ordering the fast on the Sabbath [of which Christ has not spoken, dishonoring even the Gospel of Christ]” (*Commentary on Daniel*, 4, 20, 3, in *Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1887ff.; trans. by Samuele Bacchiocchi in his own *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977, p. 191; see also footnote 70). Because it is clear that the antecedent of the pronoun “they” to which Hippolytus attributes the ordering of the Sabbath fast in the above quote is someone in Rome, and only an ecclesiastical authority could order such a religious practice, it must be a reference to the church hierarchy at Rome, led by the Pope. Furthermore, the clause “even today they are ordering” (the Greek verb is in the present indicative tense) implicitly means that the practice of the Sabbath fast had begun (by the Roman church) sometime in the past and was continuing. Therefore, the statement of Hippolytus is strong evidence favoring the conclusion that the weekly Sabbath fast was begun by the Roman church no later than the second century. Any objection that Hippolytus’ disapproval of the Sabbath fast when he was writing from Rome implies a lack of common acceptance of this fast in the city is discounted by the fact that he was of Eastern origin and Greek orientation in his scholarship (Easterners widely rejected the Sabbath fast) and that he was very critical of the church leadership at Rome, even becoming an anti-pope after he lost the election to Bishop Callistus in 217.

We learn from Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, that Marcion, the founder of a radical anti-Jewish sect in Christianity, ordered his followers to fast every Saturday to show contempt for the God of the Jews, whom he considered inferior to the supreme God. As far as Marcion was concerned, the God of the Old Testament was not the God of the New Testament, neither was Jesus the Jewish Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. And these are just the beginnings of his theological heresy. [*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen>, “Marcionites”; see also Epiphanius, *Adversus haereses* 42, 3, 4] Fasting on the Sabbath would contrast sharply with the feasting of the Jews and make the Sabbath a woeful, rather than a delightful, day. Marcion was based in Rome ca. 144 onward, a time period in which Rome might have instituted the Saturday fast. But it is inconceivable that the Roman church would have borrowed the idea of the Saturday fast from a heretic who was eventually excommunicated from the church, especially when the reasons for Marcion’s Saturday fast were largely based on heretical theological views. Therefore, this evidence points to the origin of the Saturday fast in Rome no later than the first half of the second century, before the time of Marcion.

Two statements, one by Tertullian (ca. 155-225 in Carthage, North Africa) and another by Augustine (bishop of Hippo, North Africa from 396-430), compare the weekly Sabbath fast to the annual paschal fast at Easter in such a way that implies the former developed as an extension of the latter:

Anyhow, you sometimes continue your Station [i.e., fast] even over the Sabbath,—a day never to be kept as a fast except at the passover season, according to a reason elsewhere given. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Tertullian,” “On Fasting,” ch. 14]

See Augustine’s statement above from *The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Augustine of Hippo,” “Letters,” Letter 36 (“From Augustine to Casulanus”), A.D. 396, ch. 13, par. 31.

This connection between the annual and the weekly Sabbath fast is fully consistent with the well-known past (and present) view that the weekly Sunday is the little celebration of the resurrection (of Christ) in contrast to the big celebration at Easter. (The modern Italian word “pasquetta” means “little Easter.”) Therefore, if the Easter Sunday tradition began in the first half of the second century, and the weekly Sabbath fast was an extension of the annual Easter Holy Saturday fast, then it logically follows (from that and the other evidence cited above) that the weekly Sabbath fast began early in the second century (in Rome), almost immediately after the introduction of Easter Sunday.

Our conclusion is reinforced by the testimony of two early fourth century bishops—Pope Sylvester (314-335, of Rome) and Victorinus (ca. 304 of Pettau, Austria). Both of these bishops emphasized that the fasting on Saturday was intended, by contrast, to make the rejoicing all the greater on Sunday. NOTE: It should be noted that the Sabbath fast was typically considered an extension of the commonly practiced fast on Friday, and that both fasts reflected the sadness of the apostles at the death of Christ—see (1) Tertullian’s statement above to Christians that “you sometimes continue your Station [i.e., fast] even over the Sabbath...” Note the word “continue” (2) note also the two statements below:

If every Sunday is to be observed joyfully by the Christians on account of the resurrection, then every Sabbath on account of the burial is to be regarded in execration of the Jews (*exsecratione Judaeorum*). In fact all the disciples of the Lord had a lamentation on the Sabbath, bewailing the buried Lord, and gladness prevailed for the exulting Jews. But sadness reigned for the fasting apostles. In

like manner we are sad with the saddened by the burial of the Lord, if we want to rejoice with them in the day of the Lord's resurrection. *In fact, it is not proper to observe, because of Jewish customs, the consumption of food (destructiones ciborum) and the ceremonies of the Jews.* [S. R. E. Humbert, *Adversus Graecorum calumnias* 6, *Patrologie cursus completus, Series Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne, Paris: Garnier Fratres et J. P. Migne, 1844ff., 143, 933 as trans. by Samuele Bacchiocchi in his *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977, p. 194]

On the seventh day...we are accustomed to fast rigorously, that on the Lord's day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, "Victorinus," "On the Creation of the World"]

The two previous quotes in support of the Saturday fast obviously view it as an extension of the Friday fast. It should be noted that by Saturday, a Christian following this practice would be very hungry indeed—a hunger which would only be exasperated throughout that entire day. One may also reasonably infer that it would not take very long before such a Christian would look upon the Sabbath (Saturday) with disdain. Furthermore, in this context, he would look forward all the more to the joy of feasting on Sunday. In fact, these rather obvious conclusions point us to the origin of the Sabbath fast in a church which pioneered Sunday observance while abandoning the Sabbath. What better, practical way to foster hatred for the Sabbath and admiration for Sunday! As previously examined, it was the church at Rome which did exactly that, beginning in the early second century.

One more observation adds to the confirmation of our conclusion. The quotation of Pope Sylvester above places the Sabbath fast in the context of rather strong anti-Semitic feelings: "...every Sabbath on account of the burial is to be regarded in execration of the Jews...gladness prevailed for the exulting Jews...*it is not proper to observe, because of Jewish customs...the ceremonies of the Jews.*" Victorinus exhibits an anti-Jewish bias in his remarks as well, because the very next statement after the one quoted above, reads: "And let the parasceve [Friday] become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews." The presence of anti-Semitic motives for the Sabbath fast lead us back to the anti-Semitic motives for the Roman rejection of the Sabbath and her innovation of Sunday worship. Such anti-Semitic motives are best seen in light of the growing Jewish political agitation against Rome and of Emperor Hadrian's anti-Jewish decrees in the early second century.

## Summary of Reasons for Second Century Origin of the Sabbath Fast in Rome

- The consistent testimony of the Church Fathers points to Rome as the principal church which championed the Sabbath fast.
- Hippolytus, a priest and theologian in Rome during the early third century, implicitly points to the church leadership of Rome as having instituted the Sabbath fast no later than the second century.
- The fact that the radical heretic Marcion, operating out of Rome by ca. 144, taught his followers to keep a Sabbath fast out of contempt for the inferior God of the Jews, certainly makes it inconceivable that the church leadership at Rome would have copied his teaching. Therefore, the Roman church must have begun advocating the Sabbath fast no later than the first half of the second century.
- The fact that the annual Easter Sunday and the weekly Sunday are interrelated, and that there is evidence suggesting that the weekly Sabbath fast was based on the Holy Saturday fast (at Easter season), then the weekly Sabbath fast probably was not originated until Easter Sunday had been established.
- Historical evidence which ties the Sabbath fast with both anti-Semitism and the making of Sunday a more glorious day by contrast with the Sabbath leads to the conclusion that the same church which completely abandoned the Sabbath and promoted Sunday worship is the church which championed the Sabbath fast as the very means of achieving its goals. This, then, points back to the church at Rome in the early second century.

### **Late Second Century**

Historical evidence suggests that by the second half of the second century, Christians in many places were honoring the weekly Sunday as the day of Christ's resurrection, while continuing to keep the Sabbath holy. This is apparent from the historical evidence that the expression "the Lord's day" had become the typical Christian reference to Sunday by that time.

Most Sunday-keeping scholars cite Revelation 1:10, where the apostle John says he was in the Spirit on "the Lord's day," as proof that Sunday had become the day of worship among Christians within the time of the apostles in the first century A.D. Is this what John meant? These same Sunday-keeping scholars interpret two first-half second-century statements referring to "the

Lord's" (no Greek word for "day") as "the Lord's day" evidence to support their conclusion that it is Sunday in Revelation 1:10.

### Didache 14:1

*Didache* 14:1 is considered by most scholars to be the first use of "the Lord's" (with "day" allegedly implied) to Sunday. *The Didache* (written originally in Greek) is dated by almost all scholars to the first half of the second century. But because its material appears to predate its own writing, probably extending much of its teachings back into the first century (the time of at least the apostle John), its importance to this issue is potentially very great. A literal translation of 14:1 reads as follows: "And on (or according to) the Lord's of the Lord come together, break bread and hold Eucharist (or give thanks), after confessing your transgressions that your offering may be pure" (my own translation).

A few scholars believe this reference is to Easter Sunday, typically because the assumption is made that because every Sunday is the Lord's day, the expression "the Lord's of the Lord" must refer to the special, annual Sunday on which Christ was resurrected. Most scholars, on the other hand, view this passage as referring to the weekly Sunday.

But the following five facts preclude any interpretation of "the Lord's" as a reference to Sunday, whether the annual Easter Sunday or the weekly Sunday: (1) The second section of the book (Chapters 6-10) deals with instructions concerning food, fasting, baptism, prayer, and the Eucharist, whereas the third section (Chapters 11-15) deals with how to treat one another—and 14:1 is in this latter section rather than the former; (2) Chapter 14 deals, not with the time for the Eucharist, but with the spiritual conditions which believers must meet before they participate in it—confession of sin (verse 1) and reconciliation with fellow believers (verse 2: 'And let no one who has a quarrel with his friend join you until they are reconciled... '); (3) the quotation (in verse 3) loosely based on Malachi 1:11 does not deal with a specific time ("In every place and at all times"), but with the manner of participation ("offer a pure sacrifice to me"); (4) the *Didache* contains frequent instructions for believers to behave according to the commandment, doctrine, or teaching (see 1:5; 2:1; 4:13; 6:1; 11; 13:7); and (5) the conjunction "and" at the beginning of 14:1 connects it with the previous chapter, which ends with the instruction to "give it in accord with [or according to] the commandment" (13:7).

Therefore, we conclude that the correct interpretation is to be reflected in the following translation: "And according to the Lord's own commandment come together, break bread and hold the Eucharist (or give thanks)..." (my own translation). Thus, *Didache* 14:1 does not make reference

to Sunday as “the Lord’s day.”

*The Epistle to the Magnesians 9:1*

This epistle was written by Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch, Syria, about 110-115, to Christians in Magnesia (in Asia, modern Turkey, near the seven churches to which John particularly wrote Revelation). The key passage in 9:1 is literally translated as follows: “If, then, those who lived in ancient customs [or ways] attained a new hope, no longer sabbatizing but living according to the Lord’s...” (my own translation).

The context of chapter 8 reveals that “those who lived in ancient customs [or ways]...” were the Old Testament prophets: “Do not be deceived by strange doctrines or by antiquated [or ancient] myths, since they are useless. For if we are still living in conformity with Judaism, we acknowledge that we have not received grace. For the most divine prophets lived in conformity with Christ Jesus...” (8:1-2). Because Ignatius certainly knew that the Old Testament prophets did indeed keep the Sabbath rather than Sunday, his reference in 9:1 to “no longer sabbatizing but living according to the Lord’s...” must constitute a contrast between legalistic Jewish Sabbath-keeping (cf. 8:1’s reference to *grace*) and proper Sabbath-keeping. This conclusion is reinforced by the unknown author who added the following interpolation to the text: “Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness....But let every one of you keep the Sabbath in a spiritual manner, rejoicing in the meditation on the law, not in the relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, nor walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them (Pseudo-Ignatius, *The Epistle to the Magnesians, Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, pp. 62-63). Most of the descriptions here of Jewish Sabbath-keeping represent Jewish legalism regarding how the day should be observed.

The context on both sides of 9:1 consists of warnings not to live like Jews (or practice Judaism)—“living in conformity with Judaism” (8:1) and “practice Judaism” (10:3)—because that is legalism and thus contrary to the gospel. Therefore, the contrast is between living according to legalism and living according to the Lord. In addition to this contrast, the words which immediately follow “no longer sabbatizing but living according to the Lord’s” are “on which also our life arose through him and his death.... This leads us to the logical conclusion that the controversial statement should be translated as follows: “no longer sabbatizing [keeping the Sabbath legalistically] but living according to the Lord’s *life*. Remember also that in 8:2, the instruction about the Old Testament prophets was that they “lived in conformity with Christ Jesus” (with His life).

### *The Gospel According to Peter*

The earliest documented use of “the Lord’s (day)” as clearly a reference to Sunday is found in the apocryphal *The Gospel According to Peter*, vv. 35, 50, written in the last part of the second century (ca. 190). In these verses, the writer is obviously referring to the very Sunday on which Christ rose from the dead. The fact that he used the term “the Lord’s” in place of “Sunday” is evidence that Christians had by that time accepted the weekly Sunday as “the Lord’s day.” Both quotations are from *The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Other Works, “Apocrypha,” “Gospel of Peter.”

And in the night in which the Lord's day was drawing on, as the soldiers kept guard two by two in a watch, there was a great voice in the heaven.... (verse 35)

And at dawn upon the Lord's day, Mary Magdalen, a disciple of the Lord, fearing because of the Jews, since they were burning with wrath, had not done at the Lord's sepulchre the things which the women are wont to do for those that die and for those that are beloved by them--51 she took her friends with her and came to the sepulchre where he was laid. (verses 50-51)

But does the practice of calling Sunday “the Lord’s day” by the second half of the second century prove that the apostle John’s use of “the Lord’s day” in Revelation 1:10, written in the 90s, at the close of the first century, was also a reference to Sunday? No, not at all. It is not good scholarship to assume that the later meaning of an expression must have been its meaning 75-100 years earlier. There must be evidence of such early usage meaning. But the fact that there is no documentation for “the Lord’s (day)” meaning Sunday until the late second century leaves a significant gap of time. Furthermore, John also wrote the gospel of John, in which he refers to Sunday as “the first day of the week,” which is exactly the only expression for Sunday in any of the gospels or anywhere else in the New Testament. If “the Lord’s day” had already meant Sunday in John’s day, then we have a right to expect that it would have been used in the rest of the New Testament as at least the most common term for it. Not only is that not the case, it is never found there.

Neither, by the way, can the apostle John’s expression “the Lord’s day” be a reference to the annual Easter celebration. Revelation 1:4 tells us that he wrote the book especially to the seven churches in Asia. As noted earlier, history records that the Christians in Asia were among those Christians at this time who did not celebrate Passover/Easter on a Sunday every year. Instead, they celebrated Passover according to the strict Jewish calendar (on Nisan 14), regardless of which day of the week that date fell on from year to year. Therefore, the apostle John would hardly have made an oblique

reference to Easter Sunday, without arguing for its observance, to believers who did not accept the observance of that annual day.

The only other possibility at all for the interpretation of “the Lord’s day in Revelation 1:10 is to the only day which the Bible associates as belonging to the Lord. And that day is the Saturday Sabbath. Note especially Exodus 20:8-11 (particularly verse 10), Isaiah 58:13, Matthew 12:8, and Mark 2:28. It is also true that the expression “the Lord’s day” is not found anywhere else in the Bible, including the New Testament, to refer to the Sabbath. So why did he use such an unusual term here? Undoubtedly, the apostle John used “the Lord’s day” in Revelation 1:10 because the very reason he had been exiled to the island of Patmos was his refusal to take the official step of acknowledging the Emperor as “lord,” an action deemed as emperor worship. Thus he used this play on words to refer to the true Lord, a play on words which would help assure that the book of Revelation would survive as a document and not be destroyed as a subversive book by the Roman authorities.

The historical point is that by the second half of the second century, many Christians outside of Rome and Alexandria were probably observing Sunday in honor of Christ’s resurrection. However, they were still observing the Sabbath also. Notice the following statement, written by a Christian historian in the fifth century:

The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Sozomen,” *Ecclesiastical History*, bk. 7, ch. 19]

Notice that the above author indicates by his wording that there was no confusion in Christianity between the Sabbath (Saturday) and Sunday (the Lord’s day). That should come as a shock to any modern Protestant Sunday-keeper who believes that Sunday, the Lord’s day, is the Christian Sabbath. Most Protestant believers are part of a Christian tradition that identifies the Lord’s day as the Christian Sabbath, a tradition that early Christian history undermines. However, the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Lutheran Churches have a tradition that simply says Sunday replaced the Sabbath but it not itself a Christian Sabbath—that there is no Christian Sabbath.

#### **Fourth Century Developments**

Thus far in our investigation of the relationship between Sabbath and Sunday in the Christian

Church we saw that the Sabbath (Saturday) was entirely replaced by Sunday only in Rome and Alexandria, Egypt as early as the first half of the second century, probably not coincidentally just about the time that Christian tradition says the last of the original apostles of Jesus (John) had died. Elsewhere at that time, Christians observed only the Saturday Sabbath. We also discovered that many Christians apparently had begun to include Sunday services in honor of Christ's resurrection by the second half of that second century.

However, in nearly all places outside of Rome and Alexandria, this weekly honoring of the resurrection was in addition to their Sabbath observance, and not itself observed as a Sabbath. Instead of Sunday being called the Christian Sabbath, it was known as "the Lord's day." It is also true that Christians in Rome and Alexandria did not refer to Sunday as a Christian Sabbath either. In those places, the view was that there really was no Christian Sabbath because the Sabbath had met its antitypical fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ, which means that the Bible Sabbath had merely pointed forward in time to the spiritual rest which would be available in the gospel once the Messiah had come and/or completed His mission on earth. Now that Christ had done so, the Sabbath had been abrogated. Thus, Sunday was viewed as a Christian replacement for the Bible Sabbath, but not as a new Sabbath per se.

Now let us move through the corridors of Christian history a little faster and note what happened. It was probably inevitable that once Christians outside of Rome and Alexandria had added Sunday as a day of worship in honor of the resurrection that it would eventually bring it into conflict with the Sabbath. For at least a century and a half, from the middle of second to the early fourth century, Christians outside of Rome and Alexandria observed the entire 24 hours from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset as the Christian Sabbath, went to services on Sunday morning, and then spent the rest of Sunday as any ordinary day. However, the Roman Emperor Constantine "converted" to Christianity in 312. When he legalized it formally with the Edict of Milan (or Edict of Toleration) the next year (313), Christianity suddenly became the popular religion of the entire empire. By the thousands, half-converted pagans followed Constantine's example and flooded the Christian Church with themselves and with some of their pagan outlooks and practices. Official persecution of the Church had ended, but ironically, its popularity would help to greatly weaken its witness from within.

Of course, at the same time there were still many official pagans living in the Roman Empire, most of whom included sun-worship in their religious practices. This was also a time when the empire's economic, political, and moral weaknesses were inviting military attacks from what the Romans called barbarian tribes, who came mostly from the north in Europe. In order to unite the major religious elements of the empire, and thus to preserve and strengthen the entire empire, Emperor

Constantine issued world history's first Sunday Law in 321, forbidding unnecessary work on Sundays. This decree made Sunday a civil holiday. The language of the decree in calling Sunday "the venerable day of the sun" indicates that Sunday was already respected and popular by this time. Indeed, as we have already shown, it was respected and popular among both pagan sun-worshippers and Christians. The same language ("day of the sun") illustrates that the decree was hardly very Christian in its perspective.

Subsequent Roman emperors in the same century strengthened laws restricting labor on Sundays. Wishing to maintain its popular image as a patriotic religion, and facing increasing temptations for Christian believers to spend Sunday afternoons in idle amusements because they could not work now, many Christian bishops and other leaders began to emphasize a greater importance for Sunday worship and to apply part of the Sabbath Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) to Sunday. This application of the Sabbath Commandment to Sunday was a new development. However, it did not mean that leaders viewed Sunday as the new Christian Sabbath. Rather, they reinterpreted the commandment as requiring one day in seven to rest and worship, which they applied to Sunday as the Lord's day (not as a Sabbath), a day they agreed the Church had instituted by its own authority, and not by direct divine authority.

At the same time, the Council of Laodicea (ca. 364) commanded that Christians work on the Sabbath (Saturday) in order to minimize idleness and not be associated with the Jews. The same council, however, continued to encourage morning worship services on the day it still called the Sabbath, a decision which seemed to be a compromise between the Roman Church's complete abrogation of any notion of a Christian Sabbath per se and the majority view that Saturday was still the Sabbath. Of course, this "compromise" gutted the Sabbath of its essential meaning of rest and reduced it to merely a morning for worship.

In the same century, the Roman Church took the leadership in pioneering December 25 as the date on which to commemorate the birth of Jesus, the date on which pagan sun-worshippers celebrated the annual rebirth of the sun-god because the daylight hours of each day started getting longer on that date back then. This was another obvious reflection of the massive influx of recent pagan converts into the Christian Church. It also gave the Church more common ground upon which to attract converts from sun-worshipping cults, of which the chief one was Mithraism.

### **The Fourth Century Onward**

The reaction to the fourth century attempt to gut the Sabbath of most of its meaning by requiring work on Saturday was mixed. Generally speaking, Christians in the eastern part of the Roman

Empire were proportionately more resistant to the change, while believers in the western half tended to be more compliant. Nevertheless, even in the fifth century, most believers outside Rome and Alexandria continued to honor Saturday, calling it the Sabbath, by holding worship services on that day as well as on Sunday. Remember the comment to this effect by one fifth century Christian historian quoted earlier.

Despite the widespread practice of holding worship services on both days, the fifth century witnessed a gradual increase in treating the rest of Saturday as an ordinary work day. Then in the sixth through the eighth centuries, Church councils and popes increasingly strengthened the “no work” rules regarding Sunday. Thus, the change from Sabbath to Sunday was a very gradual and subtle one. It was the sixth century in which the seventh-day Sabbath lost out to Sunday altogether as a day of worship among the great majority of Christians in the western part of the former Roman Empire. Not coincidentally, by the early sixth century, the Bishop of Rome, called the Pope, had essentially filled the vacuum left by the decline and fall of the Roman Empire (476). He was the most highly respected and powerful political (as well as religious) leader in the western half of the former empire. It was the influence of this Latin Church, whose Pope spoke authoritatively for it, that already was dominating the West even before the dawn of the sixth century.

The eastern half of the former empire became known as the Byzantine Empire. There the Christian Church was more Greek than the western Latin half. And long before its official split with the Roman-based church in the West in 1054, the Eastern Church was already growing apart from the West. One example was its refusal to accept the Pope of Rome as the final authority in all of Christendom. Another example was its respect for the Biblical, seventh-day Saturday Sabbath. In the East, nearly all Christians continued the practice of honoring both Saturday and Sunday in some way for many centuries. Most of them treated the Saturday Sabbath as a work day after services on that day, while attending services and resting on Sunday (“the Lord’s day”). Indeed, one of the several issues which eventually led to the formal split between the western and eastern churches in 1054 was the Eastern Orthodox Churches’ refusal to comply with the Saturday fast, which the Roman Church had pioneered in the second century and spread throughout the West as its influence had spread.

In Ethiopia and Armenia, the seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday) was also honored as a day of rest and worship in addition to Sunday. In other words, believers in those regions essentially observed two Sabbaths. Furthermore, the seventh-day Sabbath was also honored by scattered groups of believers throughout the Middle Ages and beyond on the continent of Europe, although they were viewed, and persecuted, as heretics by the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, it appears that there has never been a time in Christian history when the seventh-day Sabbath has been completely lost

to Christianity.

### **Evidence for Sabbath and Sunday Observance Continuing for a Few Centuries**

In the *Epistle to the Magnesians*, Ignatius (bishop of Antioch, Syria, who wrote this epistle ca. 110-120) testifies indirectly to Sabbath observance in his region and at least in Asia (see earlier section). His warnings against Jewish legalism undoubtedly stem partly from the geographical proximity of Palestine to the south of Syria, as well as to Jewish converts to Christianity elsewhere. Indeed, many Christian leaders of the early centuries of Christianity speak of a continuous stream of numerous Jewish converts who wielded a considerable influence in the church in the East (but not the West, where Gentile converts outnumbered Jewish ones quite early in the Christian Era). Thus, we can be reasonably certain that Ignatius' testimony means that the Sabbath was being observed in significant portions of the East (not only in Asia) early in the second century.

In the *Apostolic Constitutions*, usually dated to the second half of the fourth century (or as late as ca. 400) and written by an unknown person(s) as a kind of instructional manual, Christians are told to "...keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection." [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, "Miscellaneous," "Apostolic Constitutions," bk. 7, ch. 23]

Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath-day and the Lord's day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety. We have said that the Sabbath is on account of the creation, and the Lord's day of the resurrection. [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, "Miscellaneous," "Apostolic Constitutions," bk. 8, ch. 33]

Gregory of Nyssa, bishop of Nyssa (in Asia Minor) from about 370-385, wrote that the Sabbath and the Lord's day are siblings, so that if you hurt one you hurt the other:

With which eyes do you look at the Lord's Day, you who have dishonored the Sabbath? Do you perhaps ignore that the two days are brothers and that if you hurt one, you strike at the other? [*On Reproof (or De Castigatione)*, in *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 46, col. 309 (Greek), trans. by Kenneth Strand in *How Sunday Became the Popular Day of Worship*, a reprint of *These Times* magazine, Southern Publishing Association, 1979]

Asterius of Amasea in Pontus (in Asia Minor) in one of his sermons (c. 400), referred to the Ateam

of these two days comes together...the Sabbath and the Lord's day....≡ [Homily 5, on Matthew 19:3, in *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 40, col. 225 (Greek), trans. by Kenneth Strand in *How Sunday Became the Popular Day of Worship*, a reprint of *These Times* magazine, Southern Publishing Association, 1979]

In the Eastern regional council of bishops known as the Council of Laodicea (ca. 364), Canon 29 declared that “Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Councils,” “Laodicea,” Canon 29] The idea of working on the Sabbath was to highlight the extra prominence of Sunday. The fact that this is the very first Church council to deal with the relationship of Sabbath and Sunday, and that Christians were being urged to work on Saturday and not Judaize (by Sabbath-keeping) strongly implies that Sabbath-keeping was an old custom which was being strongly challenged by church leaders.

However, Canon 16 of the same council showed that the Sabbath was still to be honored, albeit no longer as per the Sabbath Commandment in the Old Testament, by providing special Scripture readings for corporate worship on the Sabbath—“The Gospels are to be read on the Sabbath [Saturday], with the other Scriptures.” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Councils,” “Laodicea,” Canon 16] Furthermore, Canons 49 and 51 reflect special status for both the Sabbaths and Sundays during the Lent season: “During Lent the Bread must not be offered except on the Sabbath Day and on the Lord's Day only.” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Councils,” “Laodicea,” Canon 49]. “The nativities of Martyrs are not to be celebrated in Lent, but commemorations of the holy Martyrs are to be made on the Sabbaths and Lord's days.” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Councils,” “Laodicea,” Canon 51]

Palladius (from Asia Minor; ca. 365-425) wrote a history of early monasticism entitled *Lausiac History*, in which he made numerous references to the observance of both Sabbath and Sunday (*Lausiac History*, 7, 5; 14, 3; 20, 2; 25, 4; 48, 2).

Church historian Salminius Hermias Sozomen (better known as Sozomen; from Palestine; d. ca. 447/448) records in the fifth century that “The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria.” [*The Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Sozomen,” “Ecclesiastical History,” Bk. 7, ch. 19]

Church historian Socrates Scholasticus (better known as Socrates; from Constantinople; lived most of his life in the first half of the fifth century) gave this testimony concerning the Sabbath in his century:

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 Fathers of the Church*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers>, “Socrates Scholasticus,” “Ecclesiastical History,” bk. 5, ch. 22]

His wording strongly implies that, not only had Christians at Alexandria and Rome abandoned the Sabbath a very long time ago, but Christians virtually everywhere else had never done so. This is evidence, therefore, that some kind of Sabbath observance had been continuous into the fifth century, in addition to some type of Sunday observance since about the middle of the second century, of course.

## **Conclusion**

The historical evidence concerning the relationship of the Saturday-Sabbath and Sunday in early Christianity leaves little or no doubt that Sunday observance arose in Rome and Alexandria (in Egypt) in the early second century of the Christian Era. That Rome was the principal proponent of this new liturgical innovation cannot be doubted because of its promotion of the Sabbath fast in order to highlight the joy of feasting on Sunday. At the same time, the church at Rome was originating and influencing the Christian world to change the date of the annual Passover from the Jewish (and Biblical) Nisan 14 to Easter Sunday. And in doing so, the resurrection of Christ, rather than His crucifixion, became the focal point of that liturgical season. The chief motivation for both the weekly and the annual Sunday celebrations was to disassociate Christians from Jews in the minds of the imperial Roman authorities in light of renewed Jewish nationalism and reactive Roman suppression of Jewish religious practices, including Sabbath-keeping. At first, most Christians merely added Sunday worship to their weekly religious calendar, while retaining their Sabbath-keeping. Ultimately, however, the legalization and subsequent popularity of Christianity in the Empire (creating a massive influx of new Gentile converts, as opposed to Jewish ones), coupled with imperial restrictions on Sunday labor in the fourth century, combined to gradually move most believers away from the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath altogether. All of this historical evidence provides enormously powerful testimony that neither Jesus nor His apostles ever abolished or replaced the Sabbath for Christian believers. We can safely conclude at this point that “there remains therefore a Sabbath-rest for the people of God” (literal translation from the Greek of

Hebrews 4:9).