

Are Adventists Keeping the Wrong Sabbath?

Jews, Seventh-day Adventists, and other Sabbath-keeping groups keep the Sabbath every seventh day in accordance with the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:9-11. In the last few years, a number of individuals among Messianic Jews and Seventh-day Adventists have started to promote the Lunar Sabbath Theory.

The Lunar Sabbath Theory

This theory says that the fixed traditional Sabbath keeping every seventh day from Friday sunset through Saturday sunset is a corruption of an "original" biblical Sabbath based on the lunar cycle. Under this model, the Sabbath always falls on the 8th, 15th, 22st and 29th day of each lunar month.

On the Biblical lunar-solar calendar, each lunation (or lunar month) always begins with a New Moon day, which is in a class of worship day all by itself. Six work days follow on the second through seventh of the month. The seventh-day Sabbath always falls on the 8th, the 15th, the 22nd and the 29th of every lunar month. This is the reason it is called a lunar Sabbath.¹

Since the lunar month is 29 ½ days, each month has 4 weeks with seven days and one or two days over depending on if the month has 29 or 30 days. If you maintain a seven-day rhythm this means that the lunar Sabbath can fall on any day of the week; because with each new lunar month it falls a day or two later in the week than the last month (see below). As a result, to follow this system one must deal with the difficult and impractical situation of having to take a different day off from work each month on a rotating schedule.

New Moon and Transition Days

Because the seven-day rhythm cannot be maintained if the Sabbath must always fall on the 8th, the 15th, the 22nd, and the 29th of every lunar month, the first day, the New Moon day, and 30th day of the month are not counted as part of the week.

¹ www.worldslastchance.com, "Saturday Sabbath? Or Lunar Sabbath?" (accessed January 2011).

All days are not created equal according to Scripture. The Lord Yahuwah has ordained three separate and distinct classes of days that occur monthly: *New Moon* days, *six work days*, and *seventh-day Sabbaths*. The 30th day, known in astronomical terms as translation day, is simply a work day, but is not part of a six day week followed by a seventh-day Sabbath.²

S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
24	25	26	27	28	29	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10

The transition days (yellow) and the New Moon days (blue) are not counted as part of the regular week. Because “The New moon is a worship day all by itself and is not counted when counting out the week”³ when a lunar month has 30 days the time between the Sabbath on the 29th of the month and the first Sabbath of the next month are not seven days but nine days (transition day, New Moon day, and six work days).⁴

² www.worldslastchance.com “Three Months in a Row.” (accessed January 2011).

³ Arnold Bowen, “The Lunar Sabbath,” page 1 (<http://www.lunarsabbath.org/> accessed January 2011).

⁴ I am indebted to Terri Heagy for the above calendar graphic. Her unpublished manuscript “Challenges Regarding the Lunar Sabbath” contains an excellent rebuttal of the Lunar Sabbath theory.

The Calendar of Israel

It is hard to imagine a people with lives more closely regulated by the calendar than the people of ancient Israel.⁵ The Israelite year was a lunisolar year of 354 days in which the months alternated between 29 and 30 days, but the seven-day week was not affected by the lunar calendar. The Jewish month invariably began with the new moon. No exact information is available to explain how the Israelites originally adjusted their inaccurate lunar calendar to synchronize with the actual solar year. But we know that in post-exilic times an extra month was inserted between Adar and Nisan. That month, sometimes called Veader (“and Adar”), was added seven times within a 19-year cycle.

The Jewish calendrical system and the annual feast cycle was tied to the harvest seasons of the Jewish year. The Passover on the 14th day of the first month and the wave sheaf offering two days later always fell in the period of the newly ripened barley harvest, Pentecost 50 days later in the time of the ripening of the wheat harvest, and the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles in the 7th month after the remaining harvests (primarily grapes and olives) had been gleaned. This was the general pattern in OT times as well as in the time of Jesus.

While the Jewish feasts were set by the lunar calendar, the seventh-day Sabbath was not. It had its own set time and was not considered part of the feasts. The feasts were dependent on the lunar calendar but the Sabbath was not dependent on anything except the seven-day cycle God developed and preserved since Creation. Throughout the Bible there is a distinction between the feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths of the ceremonial system and the seventh-day Sabbath.

The Claims of Lunar Sabbatarians examined

Claim # 1 – “The seventh-day Sabbath fell on every 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th of the lunar month.”⁶

a. All the ceremonial Sabbaths were assigned to certain dates. The Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month (Lev 23:5); the Feast of Unleavened Bread on the fifteenth day of the first month (Lev 23:6); the Feast of Firstfruits on the sixteenth of the

⁵G. W. Bromiley, ed., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Revised, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 1:576.

⁶www.worldslastchance.com “Time by Design.” Accessed January 2011.

first month (Lev 23:10, 11); the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev 23:16); the Feast of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month (Lev 23:24); the Day of Atonement on the tenth day of the seventh month (Lev 23:27); the Feast of Tabernacle on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Lev 23:34).

God tied each ceremonial Sabbath to a particular day. If He wanted each weekly Sabbath celebrated on the 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th of the month why is there not a single verse in Scripture telling the Israelites that the Sabbath should be observed on these days? Was not the weekly Sabbath more important than the yearly Sabbaths?

b. According to Numbers 33:3 the Exodus took place on the fifteenth day of the first month. The fifteenth day was the day after Passover, “They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians.” They began their journey on the 15th while it was still night. Ellen White says, “Before the morning broke, they were on their way.”⁷ If the 15th was a Sabbath it would have been their first full day of travel. In light of Matthew 24:20 where Jesus told the disciples “And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath,” it is hardly likely that God began the Exodus from Egypt on a Sabbath.

c. The children of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Sin “on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt” (Exod 16:1). Again, they travelled on the 15th; therefore it cannot have been a Sabbath.

d. In Joshua 5:10-12 we are told that the manna ceased on the 16th of the first month:

Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho.¹¹ And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day.¹² Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

The Passover was the 14th day of the first month. On the 15th they ate the produce of the land, and on the 16th the manna ceased. If the manna ceased on the 16th

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 281.

of the first month, it must have fallen on the 15th otherwise the text would have said it ceased on the 14th or on the 15th. Hence the 15th cannot have been a Sabbath because God never gave manna on the Sabbath.⁸

We have looked at four biblical texts that indicate that the 15th of the month could not have been a Sabbath. This shows the fallacy of the Lunar Sabbath theory. The main pillar of this teaching is clearly not as sound as advocates of this theory would have us believe.

Claim # 2 – “The Lord has ordained three separate and distinct classes of days that occur monthly: *New Moon days, six work days, and seventh-day Sabbaths.*” In addition, the 30th day is also not counted as part of the six-day week.⁹

a. According to Genesis 1:1-2:3, God created only two classes of days: six working days and the Sabbath. This is confirmed in in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. “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 do no work” (Exod 20:9, 10).

b. There is evidence for a New Moon festival among the nations in ancient Mesopotamia as far back as the third millennium BC.¹⁰ In the Bible, however, the New Moon celebration is not mentioned until the time of Moses. The only legislation concerning the New Moon in the Old Testament is in the prescribed burnt offering of Numbers 28:14. While Amos 8:5 seems to indicate that no work was to be done on the New Moon day, other texts show that it was not a day of rest. For example, Israel left Egypt on the first of the month (Num 33:3); Moses was told to set up the tabernacle on the first day of the month (Exod 35:2); Ezra began his journey to Jerusalem on the first of the month (Ezra 7:9). William Hallo says, “Only the first day of Tishri had the

⁸ I am indebted to Michael Pedrin for some of the material in this article. His unpublished manuscript “The Big Lie” is another excellent rebuttal of the Lunar Sabbath theory.

⁹ www.worldslastchance.com “Three Months in a Row.” (accessed January 2011).

¹⁰ See William W. Hallo, “New Moons and Sabbaths: A Case-study in the Contrastive Approach,” *Bible and Spade* 9 (1980).

character of a special holiday, and even here the biblical text, as is well known, avoids the term *rōš haššānā*, head of the year.”¹¹

Even if the New Moon was a day of rest like the Sabbath, there is no indication that it was not reckoned as part of the 6-day week, as were all the other ceremonial Sabbaths of Leviticus 23. Why should all the other yearly Sabbaths be part of the 6-day week but not the New Moon day?

c. That the weeks in the Old Testament were continuous unbroken cycles uninterrupted by the New Moon is shown in Leviticus 23:15, 16.

And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. ¹⁶ Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.

Seven Sabbaths are forty-nine days and the day after the last Sabbath is the fiftieth day. This can only be so if the weeks are counted as uninterrupted cycles of seven days.

This is confirmed by the timeline for the Flood. According to Genesis 7:24, “the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days.” It began to rain “in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month” (Gen 7:11). The ark came to rest on Mount Ararat five months later “in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month” (Gen 8:4). This is clear evidence that the biblical month has 30 days; therefore, 150 days are five months, uninterrupted by New Moon days.

Claim # 3 – The Jews were forced to give up their lunar calendar and accept the pagan Roman calendar.

The Julian/Gregorian calendar has never changed its seven day cycle once it changed from the original eight day cycle around the time of Constantine in A.D. 321. . . . Most people have had no idea that the eight day week of the original pagan Julian calendar was *not* recognized by the Hebrew communities at the time of Christ. . . . It was only after Rome conquered

¹¹ Ibid., 64.

Jerusalem in A.D. 70 that the Jews began to succumb to the ways of Rome and her pagan calendar.¹²

Traces of the seven-day week can be found among the earliest civilizations of the Middle East. Mesopotamian astrologers designated one day for each of the seven most prominent objects in the sky—the Sun, the Moon, and the five major planets visible to the naked eye. The Israelites always adhered to the seven-day week as Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Leviticus 23:15, 16 clearly indicate. Other nations had weeks of different lengths.¹³

The Roman eight-day calendar was changed to a seven-day calendar early in the imperial period not in the time of Constantine.¹⁴ Now, if the Jews were forced to give up their lunar Sabbath calendar in exchange for adopting the pagan Julian calendar either in the days after AD 70 or since the time of Constantine, there should be a huge amount of evidence in existence today that this change occurred.

The Jews have always been known as a fairly stubborn people. If they believed God had given them a lunar Sabbath, they would not have given it up without a major struggle. There would be records everywhere in history about the resistance of the Jews in changing their method of keeping Sabbath.

Since the Jews were spread throughout the nations of the world it would have required an army of missionaries going everywhere to convince and enforce the change of their Sabbath-keeping from the lunar method to the weekly cycle. There should have been pockets of Jews worldwide ferociously clinging to the old ways that God had given them and many Jewish groups still keeping the lunar Sabbath to this day.

But the exact opposite is true. History is absolutely silent as to any such events taking place. There are no recorded commands given to change the cycle from a lunar to weekly Sabbath, and the Jews today around the world keep the Sabbath on Saturday.

¹² K.L. French, “The Creator’s Calendar,” unpublished manuscript, 3, 4.

¹³ In Assyria, 6 days was the rule; in Egypt, 10; in China; 15. The ancient Germans used a five-day cycle; the early Romans used eight days.

¹⁴ The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, “During the first two centuries AD, the Greco-Roman world generally adopted the planetary seven-day week of the astrologers.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th edition, s.v. “Church Year.”

When differences arise between two groups, there is always a split, with some believing one way and others believing the other way. With such conflicting changes to the belief structure of the Jews, we should see such a split among them. There was a split between Jews, but it wasn't over the lunar Sabbath theory. It was the split between the Karaite and Rabbinical Jews – and that was mainly over how to calculate the feast days.

The mathematical odds of all the Jews worldwide changing from the lunar calendar to the 7-day week without leaving any historical trace are astronomical – it is virtually impossible. This is an overwhelming missing link for the lunar Sabbath theory.

Summary

Lunar Sabbatarians claim that the luni-solar calendar is the true biblical calendar in which the Sabbath falls always on the 8th, 15th, 22nd, and 29th of the month. Furthermore, the New Moon and the 30th day of the month are not counted as part of the week. They also claim that the Jews under the Romans were forced to give up the lunar calendar and accept the Julian calendar with its continuous cycle of seven-day weeks.

Our investigation has shown that these claims cannot be substantiated from Scripture or history. The biblical Sabbath, as the seventh day of the week, was instituted in Eden and was celebrated by the Jews in Old and New Testament times without interruption. Like the feast days the new moon days were part of the weekly cycle. Ellen White clearly stated:

Like the Sabbath, the week originated at creation, and it has been preserved and brought down to us through Bible history. God Himself measured off the first week as a sample for successive weeks to the close of time. Like every other, it consisted of seven literal days.¹⁵

Conclusion

All the arguments of lunar Sabbatarians seem to boil down to whether God tied the Sabbath to the lunar calendar, as He did with the feasts, or if He set up a weekly

¹⁵ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1958), 11.

cycle at Creation for the Sabbath and preserved it to our day. There is no conclusive evidence in Scripture pointing to the Sabbath being tied to the moon. On the contrary, the Bible is clear that the week has a recurring cycle of seven days ending with the Sabbath. This is supported by the plain statements of God's word, the Spirit of Prophecy, and history.

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