

6. JESUS NEVER MADE DAYS OR PLACES HOLY

The celebration of times and days is one of the most typical traditions of all religions. Combine such celebrations with the propensity of religions to designate certain places as holy, and you have two of the most prominent characteristics of any religion: the holy day and the holy place. It is therefore striking that the first-century followers of Christ instituted no holy days to commemorate any of the events in Christ's life. Nor do they ever mention with a single word any of the places in the life of Christ as being special in any way.

Though the writers of scripture recorded many of the smallest details about Jesus' life, they made no note of the day he was born, the day he was baptized, the day he was crucified, the day he was resurrected, or the day he returned to heaven. Neither did they place memorials at his place of birth, the places of his miracles, the place where he was crucified, or the place of his ascension into heaven.

Paul, the apostle who traveled around the Roman world for at least thirty years after the resurrection of Christ, recorded no practices of any believers to celebrate any day from the life of Christ. In fact, Paul wrote specifically to the believers in Colossae that they should not be deceived about teachings concerning the significance of days (Colossians 2:16 ff). He also mentions the Sabbath in this regard. The whole passage is a warning about getting involved in superficial religious activity.

Christianity's traditions of special days were borrowed from other religions

Saturnalia was an ancient Roman celebration in honor of the god Saturn. It began on the seventeenth of December and lasted seven days. It was a merry occasion. Schools and all public businesses stopped. Courts of law closed and no criminals could be punished. Families had banquets. Even slaves were temporarily set free and allowed to attend the festival. The last days were spent visiting and giving gifts. Many scholars see in this festival the roots of Christmas. Many of the other traditional trappings of Christmas such as Santa Claus, the Christmas tree, and holly leaves are also borrowed from other places and times.

Over the centuries, tradition has assigned importance to many days. A look at a European Church Calendar reveals that almost every single day is a celebratory day of

some sort or another. There is nothing about this practice that stems from anything Jesus or his students did. It is actually much more attuned to the practices of the ancient Greeks who loved the partying and the merriment of religious holidays. These were days of no work. The priests butchered animals, gave the useless parts to the gods, and sold the good meat to the people for their banquets.

The scriptures documenting Christ are remarkably free of any holy days. The writers of the scriptures leave no doubt that the most important day for anyone is always today. Jesus told his men that they should work while there is still light, because the night comes when no man can work. He also said that today could be any man's final day. According to Jesus, today is the day to do the will of God; today is the opportunity God gives; today people can study Christ's words and begin doing what he says.

Jewish influences

Christianity also borrowed from Judaism traditions of celebratory days and holy days. Though the Jews had nothing near the number of celebrations that were so typical of the Greek religious culture, they nevertheless had several important ones. The most prominent holy day of the Jews, of course, is the Sabbath. To remember the Sabbath was one of the original ten commandments.

At the time of Christ, the Sabbath, like so much of Judaism, had become overgrown with traditional add ons. Jesus often ran afoul of these and was constantly chided by the Jewish leaders for his seemingly lax behavior toward their Sabbath traditions. His pointed remarks about how their traditions were a manipulation of the true meaning of the scriptures particularly infuriated them.

From the Jews' point of view, Jesus was being obstinate toward God. In their thinking their own traditions were the expression of the will of God. This is the power that religious traditions develop over the years. They become familiar, practiced, accepted, even beloved. In spite of the popularity that it cost him, Jesus did not stray from the scriptures. He did not flinch when it came to opposing religious traditions

Today, Sabbath traditions continue to exert much influence not only in Judaism but also in Christianity which has adopted Sunday as a kind of Christian Sabbath. For most Jews, the Sabbath observance has become a centerpiece in the practice of their religion. A look at any number of websites will acquaint one with the views of modern Jews toward the Sabbath. [Http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm](http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm) is an example. Here is a lengthy excerpt of the information provided on the site:

Of course, no discussion of Shabbat would be complete without a discussion of the work that is forbidden on Shabbat. This is another aspect of Shabbat that is grossly misunderstood by people who do not observe it.

Most Americans see the word “work” and think of it in the English sense of the word: physical labor and effort, or employment. Under this definition, turning on a light would be permitted, because it does not require effort, but a rabbi would not be permitted to lead Shabbat services, because leading services is his employment. Jewish law prohibits the former and permits the latter. Many Americans therefore conclude that Jewish law doesn't make any sense.

The problem lies not in Jewish law, but in the definition that Americans are using. The Torah does not prohibit “work” in the 20th century English sense of the word. The Torah prohibits “melachah,” which is usually translated as “work,” but does not mean precisely the same thing as the English word. Before you can begin to understand the Shabbat restrictions, you must understand the word “melachah.”

Melachah generally refers to the kind of work that is creative, or that exercises control or dominion over your environment. The word may be related to “melekh” (king; Mem-Lamed-Kaf). The quintessential example of melachah is the work of creating the universe, which G-d ceased from on the seventh day. Note that G-d's work did not require a great physical effort: he spoke, and it was done.

The word melachah is rarely used in scripture outside of the context of Shabbat and holiday restrictions. The only other repeated use of the word is in the discussion of the building of the sanctuary and its vessels in the wilderness. Exodus Ch. 31, 35-38. Notably, the Shabbat restrictions are reiterated during this discussion (Ex. 31:13), thus we can infer that the work of creating the sanctuary had to be stopped for Shabbat. From this, the rabbis concluded that the work prohibited on Shabbat is the same as the work of creating the sanctuary. They found 39 categories of forbidden acts, all of which are types of work that were needed to build the sanctuary:

Sowing, plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, selecting, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing wool, beating wool, dyeing wool, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying, untying, sewing two stitches, tearing, trapping, slaughtering, flaying, salting meat, curing hide, scraping hide, cutting hide up, writing two letters, erasing two letters, building, tearing a building down, extinguishing a fire, kindling a fire, hitting with a hammer, taking an object from the private domain to the public, or transporting an object in the public domain.

All of these tasks are prohibited, as well as any task that operates by the same principle or has the same purpose. In addition, the rabbis have prohibited handling any implement that is intended to perform one of the above purposes (for example, a hammer, a pencil or a match) unless the tool is needed for a permitted purpose (using a hammer to crack nuts when nothing else is available) or needs to be moved to do something permitted (moving a pencil that is sitting on a prayer book), or in certain other limited circumstances. Objects that may not be handled on Shabbat are referred to as “muktzeh,” which means, “that which is set aside,” because you set it aside (and don't use it unnecessarily) on Shabbat.

The rabbis have also prohibited travel, buying and selling, and other weekday tasks that would interfere with the spirit of Shabbat. The use of electricity is prohibited because it serves the same function as fire or some of the other prohibitions, or because it is technically considered to be "fire."

The issue of the use of an automobile on Shabbat, so often argued by non-observant Jews, is not really an issue at all for observant Jews. The automobile is powered by an internal combustion engine, which operates by burning gasoline and oil, a clear violation of the Torah prohibition against kindling a fire. In addition, the movement of the car would constitute transporting an object in the public domain, another violation of a Torah prohibition, and in all likelihood the car would be used to travel a distance greater than that permitted by rabbinical prohibitions. For all these reasons, and many more, the use of an automobile on Shabbat is clearly not permitted.

The article was included in this length to provide an illustration of the kind of minutia and reasoning that is typical of Jews toward their Sabbath traditions. Though extensive, it still reveals only a small part of Jewish Sabbath traditions.

Christianity has also developed Sabbath traditions over the centuries. The most influential one is the emergence of Sunday as a Christian holy day. Some Christian denominations, called Sabbatarians, actually observe Saturday which is the Jewish Sabbath. The name Sabbatarian has also been claimed by Christians, especially Protestants, who believe Sunday must be observed with just the sort of rigorous abstinence from work associated with the Jewish Sabbath.

In Orthodox Christianity, working and requiring somebody else to work on Sunday are sometimes prohibited (including buying goods or services, use of public transport, driving a car, gardening, washing a car, etc.). Allowed exceptions include religious services, the use of electricity, and urgent medical matters. In Roman Catholicism, those who work in the medical field, those in law enforcement, and soldiers in a war zone are dispensed from the usual obligation to avoid work on Sunday.

Christmas

Though Sunday is without a doubt the most common holy day of Christendom, other holy days eclipse it in terms of participation and influence. Christmas eve and Christmas day are the primary examples. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there is scarcely a single aspect of human life that is not impacted in some way by the yearly celebration of Christmas in Europe, North America, South America, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia.

As noted before, it is not at all unusual for some businesses to attribute anywhere from twenty to forty percent of their year's volume in sales to Christmas purchases. The

travel industry goes into high gear for weeks; restaurants and bars record their busiest times; the entertainment industry explodes with viewers; Christmas pageants and musical performances abound; worship services overflow; homes, businesses, and offices are decorated lavishly.

The money spent on decorations, celebrations, gifts, and travel related to Christmas is astronomical, and the institutions of Christianity are not only in the middle of the indulgence, the pompousness, the commerciality, and the giddiness of it all, they encourage it, participate in it, and profit from it.

The contrast of Christmas traditions today with the records in the scriptures could not be greater. In the scriptures, one finds the record of Christ's birth written in documentary style and reflecting the seriousness of the time. We read that Jesus' family had to be underway due to a census; the birth was in simple circumstances; signs in heaven were visible for those with eyes to recognize them; there was rejoicing in heaven and among shepherds in the fields; foreign scholars came from great distance to give gifts to the family. These same visitors were called to give a report to the king who subsequently ordered all the males in the Bethlehem area under the age of two murdered. Jesus' family managed to flee to Egypt before the carnage.

There is no further record in the scriptures that either Jesus, his family, his students, or his followers ever made the day of his birth the focus of celebration. The institutional church has made holy days out of these, and more, even including events that have no mention in the scriptures such as the legendary ascension of Mary into heaven and events associated with the so-called saints.

Holy days demand a lion's share of the expenditures of Christianity

By far the most noticeable and important activity of the people who identify themselves as Christians in all parts of the world is their attendance at Sunday-morning "worship services." The worship service also requires the greatest portion of the funds of all institutionalized Christian groups particularly when one figures in the construction and the maintenance of the sanctuary as the place where worship services are held. Most of these services consist of a speech by a leader, music, celebratory functions, and varying kinds of liturgical involvement.

The second most noticeable activity of Christians also involves functions similar to the Sunday-morning service such as the celebration of holidays, marriages, funerals, confirmations, communal prayer, and baptisms. These, too, are pricey items in the budget of organized religion. Christmas alone may be the single most expensive event in the world.

Though these activities describe significant portions of Christian activity and expenditures today, they by no means describes the life of Christ, the lives of the men who were his closest students, or the lives of the people who were their students.

The visitation and maintenance of holy places is a expensive item in Christianity

Christians the world over can also be observed making pilgrimages or special tours to holy places such as Jerusalem, Israel, Rome, Westminster Abbey, Notre Dame Cathedral, Lourdes, and any of literally hundreds of famous cathedrals, monasteries, cemeteries, and special places where miracles supposedly occurred. The cost of such trips is incalculable.

Nowhere in the Christian scriptures are any places deemed to be holy. Never do the apostles journey to any of the places frequented by Christ to pay homage to the memory of what happened there. Never are they recorded commissioning memorials or hallowing any locations.

Only the body of a believer is a holy sanctuary and only the home is a holy place

As is the case with all traditions, they not only divert people's attention to wasteful and deceptive practices and beliefs, but they also cover up the truth and the wisdom of clear scriptural principles. This can be observed on a daily basis in the Christianized world. On the one hand, church goers can be seen observing holy days and visiting holy places, and on the other hand the same people can be seen living lives that have little to do with the example of Christ, and they can be seen returning to homes that by no means reflect the holiness of the Savior.

In the homes of professing Christians the world over, the most honored and prominent place in the home is usually given to the television which sits like a polished altar in a family room with chairs positioned as in a chapel. In these homes far more time and attention is given to the voices coming from the electronic media than from the scriptures.

Who among the adherents of Christianity seeks to make a "center for Christ" out of their home? Who among them seeks new contacts for Christ in the hope of making them students for him? And yet, in spite of the lack of interest in following the teachings and examples of Christ, the same people may well attend church, take part in worship services, and even plan an expensive trip to the Holy Land "to walk in the footsteps of Jesus." This is the logic and the practice of much of traditional Christianity. Though giving lip service to the life of Christ, it prefers to follow the precepts of a worldly and opportunistic religion.

Christ's holy places

Holiness refers to the concepts of purity and dedication. Both ideas take their impetus from the character of God. The holy character of God and His words are attested throughout the Christian scriptures. Therefore whatever is set aside and dedicated to Him should be pure and acceptable.

In relation to his followers, the place that was most holy to Jesus was their bodies. He considered them to be the temples of the Spirit of God. It is perhaps one of his most surprising teachings. The context of the whole message of Christ is that God has come into the world to take up his abode with men. In Jesus, God took on flesh and blood and lived as a man and invited men to receive him. He came not to a building of stone but to them as individuals. They were given total access to him and his holiness. Those who did receive him were said to be nothing less than "one" with him.

Closely related to the holiness of the body of the follower is the holiness of the family relationship. The oneness of man and wife reflects the oneness of Christ with those who have received him. The scriptures say that even the children in the family are made holy.

So much of what is written in the scriptures builds on the holiness of these basic relationships. This is why one can walk in the light as he is in the light. This is why one can live as he lived.

Christianity has perpetrated great harm on the holiness of these relationships. It has turned marriage into one of its ceremonial sacraments, removed the family father from the center of the ecclesia, and chosen to educate children outside the family. This has taken the focus of God's holiness and moved it from the individual and the family to buildings, liturgies, objects, places, leaders, and celebrations. The result has been individuals and families who live not unlike the people of the world, and the trivializing of the message of Christ into the tenets of a worldly religion.

Jesus' holy day

The most important time of dedication mentioned in the Christian scriptures is truly today. Today is the day of salvation; today may be the last day that one can work; today one's life may be taken; today is the day of the Lord; today is the day one should trust God. No day is more important than today. To waste today is to waste one of God's great gifts.