



Sabbath

The idea of naming the days of the week in honor of the seven planets was, according to Eusebius, introduced by the Persians at the time of the war of Xerxes against Greece.⁽¹⁾ Dio Cassius, the Roman author of the fourth century, wrote that the division of the week into seven days in honor of the seven planets originated with the Egyptians, and then spread to other peoples.⁽²⁾

Even today the names of the days of the week in European languages can be traced to the names of the planets. Thus the Roman *dies Solis* (Sun), or Sunday, is *Sonntag* in German; *dies Lunae* (Moon), or Monday, is *lundi* in French and *Montag* in German; *dies Martis* (Mars), or Tuesday, is *mardi* in French and *martes* in Spanish; *dies Jovis* (Jupiter), or Thursday, is *jeudi* in French and *Donnerstag* in German;⁽³⁾ Friday is *dies Veneris* (Venus), or *vendredi* in French, while Saturday is *dies Saturnis*, the day of Saturn.⁽⁴⁾

The naming of the seven days of the week in honor of the seven planets is not only an act of reverence apportioned to these gods, but also a memorial to the seven ages that were governed by each of the seven planets in succession. This idea can be traced in the establishment of the Jewish week with its Sabbath. Although the social significance of the Sabbath as the universal day of rest for man, his servant, and the domestic animal working for him is so apparent from many passages in the Scriptures and especially from the beneficent application of a weekly day of rest by all civilized nations that took this precept from the Hebrew Bible, the cosmological meaning of the Sabbath must not remain overlooked.

In six ages the world and mankind went through the pangs of genesis or creation with its metamorphoses. It is not by mistake that the ages which were brought to their end in the catastrophes of the Deluge, of the Confusion of Languages or of the Overturning of the Plain, are described in the book of Genesis: the time of Genesis or creation was not over until the Sabbath of the Universe arrived. With the end of the world age simultaneous with the end of the Middle Kingdom and the Exodus, the Sabbath of the Universe should have begun.

The destruction of the world in the days of the Exodus closed, in the conception of the Hebrews, the age of creation. It was to signify the end of the time when the Earth and men were to be shaped and reshaped. The traditional and very old Hebrew prayer at the beginning of the Sabbath opens with these words: "The sixth day. And the heavens and the earth were established. And the Lord finished in the seventh day the entire work that He did and rested from all the work that He did."

The meaning of this passage is that in six world ages the heavens and the earth were finally established, and that now, in the seventh age, no further changes in the cosmic order should be expected. The Lord is actually implored to refrain from further reshaping the Earth.

The idea that God's day is a millennium is often met in Talmudic literature; the apostle Peter also says: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years."⁽⁵⁾ Thus the seven days of the week represent seven world ages; and the day of the Sabbath represents the seventh world age, which is our age. According to the rabbis of the Tractate Shabbat of the *Babylonian Talmud*, "Sabbath" is to be interpreted as *sabbatu* - cessation of the divine wrath.⁽⁶⁾

This fits exactly our idea of the Sabbath as the age of rest when the heavens and the earth are established and are not to be disturbed again.

Many exegetes have wondered as to why the prayer of benediction to the Sabbath starts with the words: "The sixth day," expecting to find there the words "The seventh day." The words "the sixth day" are not necessarily wrong here: the meaning may be that with the expiration of the sixth age the heaven and the earth become unchangeable. But it may be that the prayer originated in pre-Exodus days when only six ages were counted. The prayer next refers to the Sabbath as "the day of rest, the memorial to the act of genesis, because this day is the beginning of the reckoning of days, memory of the Exodus from Egypt." The assembling of three different causes for the establishment of the Sabbath would appear confusing were it not for the fact that the three occurrences were simultaneous: the last act of creation, the new flow of time, the Exodus from Egypt.

Although after the beginning of the seventh age new world catastrophes disrupted the established order—in the eighth and seventh centuries before the present era—the idea of the Sabbath of the Universe was already so deeply rooted that the new world catastrophes were not counted, so as not to discredit the establishment of the Sabbath. But the return of the sun's shadow ten degrees in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah was registered as "the seventh world wonder," ⁽⁷⁾ and thus actually the eighth world age started. The difference in the magnitude of the catastrophes caused also some nations of antiquity to count six, seven (as most nations), or eight, or nine, or even ten ages;⁽⁸⁾ one and the same people, like the Mayas, had traditions of five and seven ages in diverse books of theirs. Also, catastrophes recurring at short intervals, as those which took place in the eighth and beginning of the seventh century before the present era, could be regarded as the closing of one age, or a few short additional ages could be conceived. Catastrophes, variable as they were in their magnitude and consequences, could have had a subjective appraisal. Even the encounter of the earth with a lesser comet, which appeared very bright, in the days when Octavian Augustus observed the mortuary activities in honor of Julius Caesar, and which dispersed its gases in the atmosphere of the Earth, was regarded by one contemporary author as the end of a world age and the beginning of a new one, although no perceptible changes in the motion of the earth and no greater calamity than a year-long gloom were observed.⁽⁹⁾

The Sabbath being a day of rest in the social order, its cosmic meaning in the great fear of the end of the world can be suspected also in view of the rigor with which it was observed; at the beginning of the Christian era, members of some sects among the Jews would not even move, and would remain in the place and position in which the beginning of the Sabbath found them.⁽¹⁰⁾ Social institutions are generally not observed with such an awe and with such rigor. It was actually not the Deity, having worked during six ages and reposed in the seventh who gives example to man; it is man, by abstaining from work on the seventh day, the symbol of the seventh world age, who invites the Supreme Being to keep the established order of the heaven and earth, and not to submit them to new revolutions.

The same idea is found in the prayer of the Chinese Emperor Shun, who lived shortly after the Emperor Yahu. This prayer, declaimed by him, reads: "The sun and moon are constant; the stars and other heavenly bodies have their motions; the four seasons observe their rule." ⁽¹¹⁾ A number of centuries thereafter, in the days of the Emperor Kwei, the order of the celestial sphere was again disrupted: "the planets went out of their courses." ⁽¹²⁾

Also Hebrew psalmists and prophets tried to suggest to nature to abstain from revolt; but at the same time they expressed their fear of changes in the future comparable to those in the past. After more than two thousand five hundred years, one of the two original ideas of the Sabbath, its cosmic meaning, was lost to mankind, leaving the social idea conscious and triumphant the world over.

References

1. *Praeparatio Evangelica* IV.
2. Dio Cassius 37. 186; cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* III. 10; Petronius, *Satyricon*, 30: “lunae cursum stellarumque septem imagines.”
3. [Donnar, or Thor was the name for Jupiter among the Nordic peoples.]
4. Cf. H. Gunkel, *Schoepfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895). [The same system was in use in Babylonia and is still current in India and Tibet. See Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet, A Political History* (Yale University Press, 1967), p. 16: “The seven days of the week are named, as in the Western system, for the sun, moon, and the five visible planets. . . .” The people of Burma “also use a week of seven days, named after the planets.” F. Buchanan, “On the Religion and Literature of the Burmas,” *Asiatick Researches* VI (1799), p. 169.].
5. *The Second Epistle of Peter* 3:8.
6. Tractate Shabbat 13B. S. Reinach, *Cults, Myths, Religion* (1912), pp. 168ff.
7. Ginzberg, *Legends*, VI. 367.
8. See *Worlds in Collision*, Chapter 2, section “The World Ages,” and “The Sun Ages.”
9. [This comet of -44 was also observed in China. See De Cambre, *Histoire de l’astronomie chinoise* (Paris, 1817), p. 358.]
10. Josephus, *The Jewish War*
11. J. Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (Hong Kong, 1865), Vol. III, p. 1.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

