

Appendix 11

A Day of Rest?

For Muslims, Friday is a very special day. It is compulsory for Muslim men to attend worship at the mosque on a Friday. Fridays are often marked red on a Muslim calendar. In most Muslim countries Friday is a holiday, rather than Sunday. However, Friday is not prescribed as a day of rest but rather an emphasis is laid upon the obligation to meet together for worship. In fact, work and business transactions are permitted as usual before and after the time of the Friday noon-prayer.

But why is Friday such an important day for Muslims? That question is not easy to answer. We would like to be able to say that the reason is made clear in the Qur'an, but there is only one reference to Friday.

'Believers, when you are summoned to Friday prayers hasten to remembrance of Allah and cease your trading. That would be best for you, if you but knew it. Then, when your prayers are ended, disperse and go in quest of Allah's bounty. Remember Allah always, so that you may prosper.'
(Surah 69:9-10)

This quotation comes from a *sura* is entitled *al-Jum'a*, 'Friday, or the Day of Congregation.' Rather than being an explanation of the importance of Friday, it portrays Allah as being 'the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the Almighty, the All-knowing' (62:1). It then speaks of Allah sending his revelations, and how these given by Mohammed are superior to those of the Jewish *Torah*, which the Jews would not obey. Then the above summons is given, with the promise of Allah's blessing.

However, in the *hadith* there are many references to Friday. Here are some relevant quotations from the *hadith* of Sahih Muslim:

'The best day on which the sun has risen is Friday; on it Adam was created, on it he was made to enter Paradise, on it he was expelled from it, and the last hour will take place on no day other than Friday.'ⁱ

'It was this day which Allah prescribed for us and guided us to it and the people came after us with regard to it, the Jews observing the next day and the Christians the day following that.'ⁱⁱ

'We were guided aright to Friday (as a day of prayer and meditation), but Allah diverted those who were before us from it. The rest of the *hadith* is the same.'ⁱⁱⁱ

The tradition of Friday being a special day for Muslims is based (1) on their understanding of the days of creation, (2) that Allah prescribed it, and (3) that it was designed to be a day for prayer and mediation. Muslims maintain that Mohammed said this was the best day to meet together to worship Allah.

There is an interesting article by Imam Ibn ul Qayyim al Jawziyyah entitled 'The Excellence of Friday', which quoted the above *hadith* extracts. It adds statements which are interesting.

'With regard to Friday, the Holy Prophet was also reported as saying: 'There is no time on Friday at which no (sic) Muslim would stand, pray and beg Allah for what is good but He would give it to him' and he pointed with his hand that (this time) is short and narrow.'^{iv} There is a good deal of difference of opinion among the scholars as to what exactly is that fortunate hour on Friday. ... The best course is that this hour should be treated as hidden, and the whole day should be spent in supplication and glorification of Allah. It was the Holy Prophet's practice to attach special significance and honour to Friday ... [by] going to Friday's congregational prayer early, listening to the sermon, wearing one's best clothes and remembering Allah all the time. When the Holy Prophet stood on the pulpit delivering Friday speech (sermon), his eyes would redden and his voice rise sharply with extreme anger. He, however, used to shorten the speech but prolong the prayer following it.'^v

Another *hadith* describes the days of creation in which Friday features.

'[Mohammed said:] Allah the Exalted and Glorious, created the clay on Saturday and He created the

mountains on Sunday and He created the trees on Monday and He created the things entailing labour on Tuesday and created light on Wednesday and He caused animals to spread on Thursday and created Adam ... on Friday; the last creation at the last hour of the hours of Friday, i.e., between afternoon and night.’^{vi}

Although Islam holds to a six day creation, we see that the actual days of creation are significantly changed from the biblical account. Friday is important because it is the last day of creation and the day on which Adam was created, was put into the Garden of Eden, and the day he was expelled from it. This begs a question. Why was Adam expelled from the Garden of Eden?

The Muslim conception of Adam and Eve differs from what the Bible teaches. The Qur’an states that Adam and Eve were directed by God to reside in the Garden of Eden and enjoy its produce as they pleased, assured of bountiful supplies and comfort. But the Garden exists in Heaven (Paradise), and is not an earthly creation. Adam and Eve were warned not to approach a particular tree so that they would not run into harm and injustice. But Satan tempted them and caused them to lose their joyful state. They were then immediately expelled from the Garden and brought down to earth to live, die, and to be taken out again for the Final Judgment. But having realised what they had done, they felt shame, guilt, and remorse. Note that in Muslim teaching Adam and Eve did not understand they had sinned (in the sense of rebellion and defiance of God’s command), but they prayed for God’s mercy and were forgiven. (See Surah 2:35-38; 7:19-25; 20:117-123).

For these reasons, Friday is understood to be the vital day for coming together to commemorate the *ummah* and to pray for God’s forgiveness and blessing. Friday holds special powers in this respect.

The following is a more detailed explanation of the Muslim creation account.

‘We have stated before that time is but hours of night and day and that the hours are but traversal by the sun and the moon of the degrees of the sphere. ... The Jews came to the Prophet and asked him about the creation of the heavens and the earth. He said: God created the earth on Sunday and Monday. He created the mountains and the uses they possess on Tuesday. On Wednesday, He created trees, water, cities and the cultivated barren land. These are four (days). ... On Thursday, He created heaven. On Friday, He created the stars, the sun, the moon, and the angels, until three hours remained. In the first of these three hours He created the terms (of human life), who would live and who would die. In the second, He cast harm upon everything that is useful for mankind. And in the third, (He created) Adam and had him dwell in Paradise. He commanded Iblis (Satan) to prostrate himself before Adam, and He drove Adam out of Paradise at the end of the hour.’^{vii}

There are differing accounts of creation among the *hadith*, and there are conflicts within these accounts. This is not the place to discuss these in depth, but note this quotation from the same source.

‘The Jews asked the Prophet: What about Sunday? The Messenger of God replied: On it, God created the earth and spread it out. They asked about Monday, and he replied: On it, He created Adam. They asked about Tuesday, and he replied: On it, He created the mountains, water, and so on. They asked about Wednesday, and he replied: Food. They asked about Thursday, and he replied: He created the heavens. They asked about Friday, and he replied: God created night and day. Then, when they asked about Saturday and mentioned God’s rest(ing on it), he exclaimed: God be praised! God then revealed: “We have created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days, and fatigue did not touch Us.”’^{viii}

Such is the essence of the *hadith*! However, from these quotations we rightly conclude that Muslims do not see Friday as a day of rest. It is a ‘holy’ day for Muslims, considered to be sacred (set apart) and is commemorated because they believe the Day of Judgement will take place on Friday.

Friday worship, the *salat al-jum’ah*, is congregational and observed at noon, or soon after, at the major mosques (the *Jam’a Masjid*) of a city. If a man misses worship on Friday without a valid reason, he is considered to be out of Islam. For women, this is not obligatory, but they may attend it if they wish and find it convenient (as is more common in Western countries), otherwise they engage in the noon prayer at home as usual.

Friday worship consists first of a sermon (*khutba*), delivered by the *imam* who is leading the prayer. This sermon is part of the worship and consists of two parts divided by a short interval. A sermon should begin and end with praise to God, blessings on the Prophet Mohammed and his Companions, and a supplication for all Muslims. The subject of these sermons consists of any matter related to Islam or the life of Muslims: be it current affairs, problems of Muslims, which may be local or worldwide. Also there is some commentary on Qur'anic passages or some explanation of religious practices. Friday sermons are designed to be a means of teaching Muslims concerning their responsibilities and obligations, and of keeping them abreast with current affairs, and of strengthening the spiritual bond (*ummah*) between the believers. The sermon is followed by two *rak'ahs* of *salat*.

Friday is often taken as a weekend holiday in many Muslim countries, but as Allah did not need to take rest from his exertions in creating, so Muslims are not obliged to take it as a holiday. Many Muslims work and undertake business transactions as permitted before and after the time of the Friday prayer.

Whereas in Muslim countries, Friday prayer is always observed in mosques, in Western countries, where there are not many mosques, any place where people can gather is suitable for this purpose. It is emphasised to any community of Muslims that it is their duty to make some permanent arrangement for the observance of *Jum'a* (Friday) prayer.

Friday may seem to resemble the Saturday Sabbath for Jews or Sunday for Christians.

[‘The similarity, however, is apparent rather than real. The basis of the Sabbath observances in these religions originated from the idea that as God the Creator ‘rested’ on the seventh day after six days of “labour” at completing the creation of the heavens and the earth, so man should also rest. ... This idea is fundamentally contrary to the teachings of Islam, as the omnipotent God does not become weary and requires rest from His ‘work.’ There is no Sabbath in this sense in Islam. Muslims can carry on their usual activities and business before and after the Friday prayer. God says in Quran: “O you who believe! When the call is proclaimed for prayer on Friday, hasten earnestly to the remembrance of God, and leave off business; that is best for you if you but knew. And when the prayer is finished, then you may disperse through the land and seek the bounty of God, and celebrate the praises of God often, that you may prosper.” \(Sura 62:9-10\)’](#)

The Christian understands that the Almighty, by definition, does not experience tiredness, but he ‘blessed the seventh day and sanctified it’ (Genesis 2:3). The Sabbath is not a commandment confined to Jews, but being based on a creation day, it is a *creation* ordinance binding on all mankind. This means God set it apart for the entire human race, for their benefit. Jews and Christians are to keep the Sabbath day because of the example the Almighty gave.

For Christians the Sabbath is a day of rest, a day on which to worship God as his family. For Christians the Sabbath has changed from Saturday (rather, 6pm Friday to 6pm Saturday) to Sunday, because of the resurrection of Jesus. This is in direct contrast to Muslims worshipping Allah on Friday, both with respect to the day and the reasons for such worship. ^{ix}

Among the many problems that may occur for Christians living in Muslim countries, the question of when to worship may be raised. Some Muslim countries observe a Friday holiday as the ‘weekend.’ This may cause problems for Christians wishing to meet on a Sunday, when they are expected to work as others do. One solution is to meet outside working hours, either before the start of business, or after business later in the day. Another solution that many Christians have found profitable is to worship on the Friday, as opportunity for a time of rest is given that day. It may be that some Christians would want to include both opportunities! The solution must ultimately be a matter of conscience, taking all circumstances into account. As Christian, we are not in bondage as to when we may worship. Worshipping on a Friday may be a helpful witness to Muslims.

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- i **Muslim, Sahih.** [Hadith](#) Book 4, Number 1856. A pdf file this hadith is downloadable from [here](#).
- ii Such is the type of inconsistent statement with which we have to contend! It seems that though at any time of day Allah will grant His blessing, yet 'worship' is confined to one hour - the "short and narrow."
- iii [Ibid.](#) Book 4, Number 1858.
- iv [Ibid.](#) Book 4, Number 1863.
- v **Imam Ibn ul Qayyim al Jawziyyah,** [Article:](#) The Excellence of Friday.
- vi **Muslim, Sahih.** [Hadith](#) Book 38, Number 6707
- vii **al-Tabar:** The History of al-Tabari, *Volume 1 – General Introduction and from the Creation to the Flood* (trans. Franz Rosenthal), State University of New York Press, Albany 1989, pp.187-193
- viii **Ibn Abbas,** cited by Answering Islam: Article: [Science in the Quran](#), Chapter 3: "Avoiding the Mistakes of Genesis."
- ix For a fuller treatment of the subject of the Christian Sabbath, see **McIntosh, Andy** *Genesis for Today* (Day One Publications, 2nd edition 2001): Chapter 6, pp.84-99.