

## Why do Christian churches worship on Sunday instead of Saturday?

1. Sabbath-keeping was and will be an important part of God's unique plan for the nation of Israel.
  - a. The creation account, written by Moses, explains that God blessed and sanctified the seventh day, because on that day God rested from His work of creation (Gen. 2:2-3; the noun *sabbath* [שַׁבָּת] comes from a verb meaning *to cease, desist, rest*).
    - i. Moses certainly traces Sinaitic sabbath requirements to the creation week, but it is not at all certain that this means that Adam and Eve had to celebrate a sabbath.
    - ii. To the contrary, when Adam and Eve were put in the garden to dress it and to keep it (Gen. 2:15), they were given but one requirement, i.e. to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. From all the other trees of the garden they could freely eat (vv. 16-17).
    - iii. Whereas Israel had to gather a double-portion of manna on Friday to rest on Saturday (see point 1.c below), Genesis records no similar instruction for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, nor for any of the other patriarchs.
    - iv. Note that our celebration of Independence Day on July 4<sup>th</sup> memorializes the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, but it did not become a national holiday until Congress passed a law making it so in 1870. Moses's sabbath memorializes God's resting on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, but this truth does not necessarily mean that celebration of the sabbath was a requirement for God's people prior to Moses (see Deut. 5:2-3 and Neh. 9:14).
  - b. *Seven* is significant as a number signifying blessing, sanctity, and completion in honor of the Creator both prior to and subsequent to the giving of the Mosaic law at Sinai in areas unrelated to sabbath keeping. These sevens are evidently traceable to the creation week in the same way the sabbath day is later in the history of the nation of Israel. "All Sabbaths were reminders of the sovereignty of God in His exercise of power in creative acts" (John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1986), 244). Gen. 2:2-3 likely answers the question, "Why seven?" for all of these sevens. These sevens are typically temporary and specific in their unique applications, not perpetual and normative requirements for God's people (I only list those I found in the Torah below).
    - i. Seven of each kind of clean beast and of birds were to be taken on Noah's ark (Gen. 7:2-3).
    - ii. A seven-day delay prior to the rains of the global flood was communicated to Noah (Gen. 7:4, 10).
    - iii. Noah's ark came to rest in the seventh month on the seventeenth day of the month (Gen. 8:4).
    - iv. Noah waits seven days prior to sending out the dove (Gen. 8:10, 12).
    - v. Abraham separated seven ewe lambs to make a covenant with Abimelech regarding a well (Gen. 21:28-30).
    - vi. Jacob served seven-year increments for his wives (Gen. 29:18, 20, 27, 30).
    - vii. Jacob bows seven times before Esau (Gen. 33:3).
    - viii. God gave Pharaoh a dream about seven fat years followed by seven years of famine (Gen. 41:2-7, 18-54).
    - ix. Joseph mourned Jacob's death for seven days (Gen. 50:10).

- x. The plague of blood on Egypt's river lasted seven days (Exod. 7:25).
- xi. The celebration of the Passover was to include seven days of eating unleavened bread, from the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month to the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the first month (Exod. 12:14-20, 13:6-7; Num. 28:17, 24; Deut. 16:3-4). The sacrifice included seven lambs (Num. 28:19).
- xii. The seventh year was a year of freedom for a Hebrew slave (Exod. 21:2).
- xiii. The firstborn of livestock was to remain seven days with its mother before being given to the Lord (Exod. 22:30; Lev. 22:27).
- xiv. Fields, groves, and vineyards were to be given a seventh year of rest during which they were not cultivated, but the poor could help themselves to whatever grew (Exod. 23:10-11).
- xv. The feast of unleavened bread was to last seven days (Exod. 23:15; 34:18; Lev. 23:6).
- xvi. God spoke to Moses on the seventh day after six days of glory on Sinai (Exod. 24:16).
- xvii. The lampstand of the tabernacle was to have seven lamps (Exod. 25:37; 37:23; Num. 8:2).
- xxviii. The successor to the high priest was to wear his garments seven days prior to coming into the tabernacle to minister (Exod. 29:30).
- xix. The priesthood was consecrated by sacrifice for seven days that they die not (Exod. 29:35; Lev. 8:33, 35).
- xx. The altar of the tabernacle was consecrated by sacrifice for seven days (Exod. 29:37; Lev. 8:11).
- xxi. A priest confessing his sin would dip his finger in the bullock's blood and sprinkle it before the Lord seven time (Lev. 4:6).
- xxii. A priest confessing the sin of the whole people would sprinkle the bullock's blood before the vail seven time (Lev. 4:17).
- xxiii. A woman who gave birth to a child was ceremonially unclean for seven days (Lev. 12:2). Menstrual period too (Lev. 15:19, 24).
- xxiv. Observations of leprosy cases were to take place in seven-day intervals (Lev. 13:4-6, 21, 26-27, 31-34, 50-54). Houses too (Lev. 14:38-39).
- xxv. One pronounced cured of leprosy was sprinkled seven time with the blood of a bird (Lev. 14:7). Houses too (Lev. 14:51).
- xxvi. The final quarantine of a cured leper was to last seven days (Lev. 14:8-9). Bodily emissions too (Lev. 15:13, 28).
- xxvii. The ceremony of the cured leper included a priest sprinkling oil seven times before the Lord (Lev. 14:16, 27).
- xxviii. The sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat on the day of atonement was done seven times (Lev. 16:14).
- xxix. Blood was sprinkled seven times on the altar to cleanse it on the day of atonement (Lev. 16:19).
- xxx. The day of atonement was to be celebrated on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month (Lev. 16:29, 23:27; Num. 29:7). It involved the sacrifice of seven lambs (Num. 29:8-10).
- xxxi. The feast of trumpets commenced on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:24). Sacrificing seven lambs was part of the celebration (Num. 29:1-4).
- xxxii. The feast of tabernacles commenced on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month; it was to last seven days with a sacrifice on each day, followed by a special 8<sup>th</sup> day (Lev. 23:34-36, 39-

- 43). The sacrifice included seven bullocks and a doubling of the normal seven lambs to fourteen (Num. 29:12-35), until the eighth day when it goes back to seven (Num. 29:35-36).
- xxxiii. Seven sabbath years were counted for the timing of the Jubilee in the 50<sup>th</sup> year (Lev. 25:8).
  - xxxiv. The Jubilee trumpet would sound on the day of atonement in the seventh month (Lev. 25:9).
  - xxxv. God's punishment of Israel's sin and that of their enemies is described as a multiple of seven (Lev. 26:18-28; Deut. 28:7, 25).
  - xxxvi. The Nazirite who accidentally had contact with a sudden death would experience cleansing and shave his hair on the seventh day after the incident (Num. 6:9).
  - xxxvii. Miriam experienced a seven-day exile as punishment from the Lord (Num. 12:14-15).
  - xxxviii. The blood of the red heifer was sprinkled before the sanctuary seven times (Num. 19:4).
  - xxxix. Contact with a corpse caused ceremonial defilement for seven days (Num. 19:11-19, 31:19), including men of war (Num. 31:24).
    - xl. Balaam built seven altars with seven sacrifices while prophesying for Balak (Num. 23:1-4, 14, 29).
    - xli. An offering that included seven lambs was ordered for the first day of each month (Num. 28:11).
    - xlii. Indebtedness between Israelites was to be forgiven every seven years (Deut. 15:1, 9, 12; Neh. 10:31).
    - xliii. The law was to be read by the nation every seven years at the feast of tabernacles (Deut. 31:10-11).
- c. The first mention of a human sabbath observance comes prior to Israel's arrival at Sinai (Exodus 19) in the context of the Lord's regulations for manna consumption (Exod. 16:1-22). These regulations undoubtedly anticipated the law of Sinai, but they are necessary prior to the giving of the law due to Israel's complaining over hunger (vv. 2-3). This sabbath requirement seems to function almost like a dry run for the Sinaitic regulation. It all begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the second month after their exodus from Egypt (v. 1). The next morning the manna appeared (vv. 13-14). This they could gather for 6 days, but not on the seventh (vv. 3-5, 22).
- i. The purpose of the manna regulations was to test Israel, to see if they would walk in God's law or not (v. 4). No similar regulation tests for the faithfulness of the local churches of the New Testament. They have other tests of faithfulness (Revelation 2-3).
  - ii. The seventh day after the manna first appeared is called "the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord" (v. 23). It is not clear that this is necessarily the seventh day of the week (a Saturday). All we can say with certainty is that it was the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the second month after the Exodus.
  - iii. The manna did not appear on the seventh day because God wanted his people to rest on the sabbath (vv. 25-30). Some of them went looking for it anyway to the Lord's displeasure (vv. 27-28). The failure to keep sabbath law begins as soon as the law is established. Throughout its history, Israel miserably fails this test of sabbath-keeping, which becomes a major cause for God's judgment on the nation.

- d. Remembering to keep the sabbath day holy is the fourth of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15).
  - i. Preliminary definitions.
    1. The ethical (Gr: ἔθω, meaning *to be accustomed*) application of God's law.
      - a. Pertains to the definition of moral right vs. moral wrong.
      - b. Morality comes from God's unchanging holy nature, so ethical applications of God's law are necessarily immutable and universal (existing everywhere for eternity without change).
      - c. Violations of the ethical application of God's law cause the assembly to lose its morality as a godly people.
      - d. All Scripture is profitable for universal ethical applications, either directly or indirectly (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
    2. The ecclesiastical (Gr: ἐκκλησία, meaning *summoned assembly*) application of God's law.
      - a. Pertains to the definition of the ecclesia or assembly.
      - b. Assemblies come from God's unique plans for man in different places and at different times, so ecclesiastical applications of God's law are necessarily provisional (arranged or existing for the present; possibly to be changed later).
      - c. Violations of the ecclesiastical application of God's law cause the assembly to lose its distinctiveness as an assembly for a certain time and place.
      - d. Some Scripture is profitable for provisional ecclesiastical applications at certain times and in certain places (Mark 7:19, "purging all meats" KJV = "(Thus He declared all foods clean)" NASB; Acts 10:10-16).
  - ii. The addressee of the Ten Commandments is Israel, whom the Lord had brought "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exod. 20:2). Similarly, subsequent commands for sabbath-keeping are directed at "the house of Jacob" (Isa. 58:1, 13-14). Whatever applicability these commandments have to non-Israelites must therefore be established in concert with other passages of Scripture or from the obvious universality of the ethics involved.
  - iii. Note that when the Ten Commandments are repeated in Deuteronomy, Moses emphasizes that the pre-Sinaitic fathers were not under the same covenantal law, including the fourth commandment (Deut. 5:3). Neh. 9:14 assumes the same truth.
  - iv. Nine of the ten commandments occupy the ground of universal morality and ethics. Sabbath-keeping is the one exception to this rule.
    1. For example, it is easy to see how not murdering someone is morally and ethically superior to murdering someone. Telling the truth is morally and ethically superior to lying. Marital fidelity is morally and ethically superior to the betrayal of adultery. Resting on Saturday rather than working on Saturday, however, does not have the same ethical and moral force. When my neighbor works on Saturday, I am not instinctively disappointed the way I am if he steals

from me. This is because resting is not morally superior to working, nor is Saturday morally superior to Sunday through Friday.

2. Although every Scripture carries moral/ethical weight, the nature of the fourth command is uniquely ecclesiastical/covenantal in contrast to the moral/ethical nature of the other nine commandments. It functions as a covenantal sign (Exod. 31:16-17; see 1.e below), not merely as a moral principle. The primary application of the command is for a non-universal (Israel only) and non-ethical (signifying the Sinaitic covenant) purpose unlike the other nine commands.
  3. Although remembering the sabbath is the fourth of the Ten Commandments, the Lord also categorizes it with the holy feasts that He had commanded Israel to celebrate, none of which appear in the Ten Commandments (Lev. 23:1-4; 1 Chron. 23:31, 2 Chron. 2:4, 8:13, 31:3; Neh. 10:33, Lam. 2:6, Hos. 2:11). This category of religious observations will be useful to worship again during the millennium, primarily “for the house of Israel,” but evidently also frequented by “all flesh” (Isa. 66:23, Ezek. 44:24, 45:17, 46:1-4, 12). We may conclude that the sabbath is the most important of this specifically ecclesiastical category. Note that Paul seems to follow that categorization in the one time that sabbaths are mentioned in the New Testament epistles (Col. 2:16).
  4. Sabbaths are also in the same category as gifts, vows, and freewill offerings given to the Lord (Lev. 23:38).
  5. The exceptional nature of the Sabbath command may be seen in some allowed exceptions in Israel’s obedience of it. For instance, Israel marched around Jericho for seven straight days at the Lord’s direction, which appears to be an exception to the normal rule of the fourth commandment (Josh. 6:14-15). No such exception for the other nine commandments was ever directed by the Lord.
- v. The fourth commandment regarding the sabbath is unique among the Ten Commandments, because unlike the other nine, it is the one of the Ten no Old Testament Gentile nation is ever condemned for violating. That *thy stranger that is within thy gates* (Exod. 20:10) is mentioned in the sabbath law indicates that foreigners would not normally keep a sabbath in their own country, i.e., while not within the gates of Israel (the *when-in-Rome* principle).
1. The worship of other gods – Psalm 96:5.
  2. The making of images – Deut. 7:5.
  3. Blasphemy of God’s name – Psalm 74:10.
  4. Sabbath breaking – none.
  5. Honor father and mother – Jer. 35:18-19.
  6. Thou shalt not kill – Ps. 94:6.
  7. Thou shalt not commit adultery – Num. 25:1.
  8. Thou shalt not steal – Jud. 2:16.
  9. Thou shalt not lie – Jer. 50:35-36.
  10. Thou shalt not covet – Jer. 51:13.
- vi. Similarly, the New Testament is silent on the requirement of sabbath-keeping for local churches during our day, whereas it emphasizes the relevance of the other nine

commandments for the church age. It is not merely this silence that sets the fourth commandment apart, but the loud emphasis on the importance of the other nine commandments, which provides the context for this silence.

1. The worship of other gods – Rom. 3:29.
  2. The making of images – Acts 19:26.
  3. Blasphemy of God’s name – Rom. 2:24.
  4. Sabbath breaking – none.
  5. Honor father and mother – Eph. 6:1-3.
  6. Thou shalt not kill – Gal. 5:21.
  7. Thou shalt not commit adultery – Gal. 5:19.
  8. Thou shalt not steal – 2 Thess. 3:10.
  9. Thou shalt not lie – Eph. 4:25.
  10. Thou shalt not covet – Eph. 5:3.
- vii. Other notes on the fourth of the Ten Commandments.
1. To remember the sabbath day as holy was to refrain from work and commerce (Exod.20:9-10; Neh. 10:31; 13:15-22; Jer. 17:21-24).
  2. To work six days and rest the seventh was in commemoration of the Creator’s first work week, a part of Israel’s young-earth creationism faith (Exod. 20:11). Sabbath-keeping apart from that faith is unknown to the pages of Scripture.
  3. Allowing servants weekly rest was intended to remind Israel that they were slaves in Egypt (Deut. 5:15).
  4. God’s purpose for the normal 7<sup>th</sup>-day-of-the-week sabbath rest was physical refreshment (not worship) (Exod. 23:12).
  5. Sabbath-keeping was to be observed even in the busy seasons of farming (Exod. 34:21).
  6. Lighting a fire in one’s home was forbidden on the sabbath day (Exod. 35:3).
  7. The Lord calls Israel’s sabbaths, “My sabbaths.” They belong to the Lord (Lev. 19:3, 30).
  8. Making known the holy sabbath is one of a list of blessings God specifically gave to Israel beginning with the generation of Sinai, including the exodus, the parting of the Red Sea, the leadership of the pillar of cloud and fire, the gift of manna, etc. (Neh. 9:13-14). It was evidently not made known prior to Sinai.
  9. Genuine conversion to Judaism from the Gentile world was evidenced by sabbath-keeping (Isa. 56:1-8). Evidently, some like the queen of the South and the men of Nineveh, were born again without conversion to Judaism (Matt. 12:41-42). Conversion to Judaism is not God’s will for the New Testament believer (Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11).
  10. Staying home in your dwelling was an important feature of sabbath-keeping (Lev. 23:3).
  11. Baking new bread for the table of shewbread was a part of sabbath-keeping (Lev. 24:8; 1 Chron. 9:32).
  12. Keeping sabbath and reverencing the tabernacle went hand-in-hand (Lev. 19:3, 30; 26:2; Ezek. 22:8, 26, 23:38).

13. Israel's forfeiture of the land would be caused by unfaithful sabbath-keeping (Lev. 26:27-35, 43; 2 Chron. 36:21).
  14. Doubling the daily sacrifice was part of sabbath-keeping (Num. 28:9-10).
  15. Any lawful practice, sabbath-keeping included, done without purity of heart and motive is an abomination to the Lord (Isa. 1:13; Lam. 1:7; Amos 8:5).
  16. Sabbath-breaking, working rather than resting on Saturday, was a capital offense for the nation of Israel (Exod. 31:14-15; 35:2; Num. 15:32-36). To the degree that the sin became normative, Israel's existence as a nation would be threatened (Jer. 17:27; Ezek. 20:13, 21, 24).
  17. The sabbath law found explicit precedent in the creation week; its celebration was a part of the young-earth creationism faith of Israel (Exod. 31:17).
  18. The Lord is said to have been refreshed on the seventh day of the creation week, again exemplary of the Lord's goal for the sabbath, i.e. to provide physical refreshment (Exod. 31:17).
- e. God interprets the meaning of sabbath-keeping as a Sinaitic covenantal sign (Exod. 31:12-17; Ezek. 20:12-24).
- i. No other commandment of the Ten Commandments is given this kind of special explanation. The need for it with the sabbath is a consequence of the fourth commandment's non-ethical nature. The ethical purpose of the other nine are more self-evident.
  - ii. Sabbath-keeping is a sign between the Lord and the children of Israel throughout their generations (Exod. 31:13a; Ezek. 20:12, 20). "Ye shall keep" and "holy unto *you*" (Exod. 31:13-14) refer to Israel, as does "I gave *them*" (Ezek. 20:12). Israel was to keep the sabbath perpetually throughout the bloodline of their generations (Exod. 31:16).
  - iii. The sign signifies that the Lord had set the nation of Israel apart from other nations for His blessing and use (Exod. 31:13b), another indication that the other nations were not required to observe it.
  - iv. The sabbath law was covenantal and perpetual, designed to last forever (Exod. 31:16-17), an indication that Israel was designed to last forever too.
  - v. Sabbath-keeping is a sign of the Sinaitic covenant in the same way that circumcision was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 17:11). Just as it was not necessary for New Testament believers to be circumcised during the church age (Rom. 4:11), so also is it not necessary for them to keep the sabbath (Col. 2:16).
- f. Some special days and periods are celebrated as sabbaths, though they would not fall on Saturday. Unlike ordinary sabbath-keeping, these sabbaths emphasize Israel's worship.
- i. The Day of Atonement, always the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the seventh month (Lev. 16:31; Num. 29:12).
  - ii. Passover sabbaths, always the 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> day of the first month (Lev. 23:6-8; Num. 28:18, 25; Deut. 16:8).
  - iii. The first fruits were offered on the day after the first Passover sabbath (Lev. 23:11, Num. 28:26).
  - iv. Pentecost happened on the morrow of seven sabbaths from the first fruits (Lev. 23:15-16; Deut. 16:9).

- v. The first day of the feast of trumpets was a sabbath, although the first day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:24).
  - vi. The day before the day of atonement, the ninth day of the seventh month, was a sabbath day (Lev. 23:32), as was the day of atonement (Num. 29:7).
  - vii. The first day of the feast of tabernacles was a day of sabbath rest, as was the eighth day of the feast (Lev. 23:35, 39; Num. 29:12, 35).
  - viii. Every seventh year was a sabbath rest year for fields and vineyards in which cultivation was prohibited (Lev. 25:2-6, 20).
2. Jesus, the Lord of the sabbath, violated the laws apostate Judaism followed for sabbath-keeping.
- a. Jesus was a Jew who observed the sabbath sinlessly.
    - i. He had a custom of entering the synagogue on the sabbath (Mark 1:21, 6:2, Luke 4:16).
    - ii. He taught people on the sabbath (Mark 1:21, 6:2, Luke 4:31).
    - iii. He lived the life of a Jew under the law, and He did so without sin (Gal. 4:4, 2 Cor. 5:21).
  - b. Sabbath-keeping was a bone of contention between Jesus and apostate Jewish leadership. Jesus was right; His opponents were wrong.
    - i. Jesus heals a lame man at a pool in Jerusalem on the sabbath (John 5:5-18).
      - 1. After Jesus heals the man, He tells him to pick up his mat and walk. The Jews rebuke the man for the illegality of picking up his mat on the sabbath (vv. 8-10).
      - 2. When the Jews find out that it was Jesus who had instructed the lame man to pick up his bed on the sabbath, they began persecuting Jesus. The Lord's response was to say that both He and His Father had always done a lot of work on the sabbath (vv. 17-18). Evidently, God rested that first Saturday from creating, but He has worked on every Saturday since. This response, of course, added the accusation of blasphemy to that of sabbath-breaking from the Jews.
      - 3. Note that John tells us that Jesus did two things, neither of which were acceptable to the Pharisees. Jesus made Himself equal with God, and Jesus "loosed" the sabbath (v. 18). Neither were a violation of His holy nature. In regard to the second, Westcott notes: "Literally, he was loosing (ἐλυε, Vulg. solvebat), i.e. he declared that the law of the sabbath was not binding. The word (λύω) expresses not the violation of the sanctity of the day in a special case, but the abrogation of the duty of observance" [*The Gospel According to St. John*, 84].
    - ii. The disciples pluck ears of grain on the sabbath (Matt. 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, Luke 6:1-5).
      - 1. When one remembers the prohibition of gathering manna on the sabbath (Exod. 16:3-5) and the untimely death of the one who gathered sticks on the sabbath (Num. 15:32-36), one can more readily understand the Pharisaical concern in this episode.
      - 2. Jesus defends the actions of His disciples. He does so by asking the Pharisees a simple question, "Have you not read?" (Matt. 12:3, 5, Mark 2:25, Luke 6:3). He was referring to the public reading of the Old Testament that these Jewish leaders would have done in their synagogues each sabbath. They would have read with their approval 1 Samuel 21, which tells the story of David's breaking the law that instructed that shewbread be eaten by priests only, and they would have read with approval Num. 28:9-10, which instructs priests to double the



daily sacrifice on the sabbath day as an exception to the fourth commandment. His warning to the Pharisees seems to be that they must be careful about the deceitfulness of their own hearts, which are prone to the inconsistencies of false religion (Jer. 17:9).

3. Jesus explains that the actions of His disciples are defensible on three grounds.
  - a. Jesus is greater than the temple and Lord of the sabbath, meaning they were His idea and served His purposes (Matt. 12:6, 12:8, Mark 2:27, Luke 6:5). He was just about done for a time with both, because those for whom they were intended – Israel – had apostatized in unbelief.
  - b. The sabbath was made to serve the needs of man, and man was not made to serve the needs of the sabbath (Mark 2:27).
  - c. When a man must choose between an application of God’s ethical law and God’s ecclesiastical law (David’s predicament), the ethical law is always the right choice (Matt. 12:7; Hos. 6:6).
- iii. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the sabbath (Matt. 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-11).
  1. The scribes and Pharisees look for an opportunity to accuse Jesus of sabbath-breaking, even asking a test question about healing the man on the sabbath (Matt. 12:10, Mark 3:2, Luke 6:7).
  2. Jesus asks whether it is lawful to do good or evil on the sabbath – to give someone help or to do them harm (Mark 3:4, Luke 6:9).
  3. Jesus drives home His point with an argument from the lesser to the greater. The scribes and Pharisees would help their sheep out of a pit on the sabbath, but they would deny Christ the right to heal a man. Men are greater than sheep, therefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath to men as well as sheep (Matt. 12:11-12).
  4. The hardness of heart of these sabbath advocates grieves the heart of Jesus (Mark 3:5).
  5. Clinging insanely to their zeal for no work on the sabbath, the Pharisees are willing to overlook the lifestyles of the Herodians to destroy Jesus (Matt. 12:14, Mark 3:6, Luke 6:11).
- iv. Jesus heals a paralytic woman on the sabbath and defends Himself against the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 13:10-17).
  1. The ruler of the synagogue indignantly insists that there are six days on which to be healed and so it does not have to be done on the sabbath day (v. 14).
  2. Jesus calls the indignation hypocrisy, because the same ruler would water his ox on the sabbath. A daughter of Abraham is suffering more than mere thirst. In view of both her greater worth and her greater need, she should be treated better than the animals on the sabbath (vv. 15-16).
  3. The simplicity of the argument was embarrassingly obvious (v. 17).
- v. Jesus heals the man born blind on the sabbath day (John 9:1-41).
  1. Jesus calls His healing activity, which He did on the sabbath (v. 14), *works*, and He encourages His disciples to follow His example (John 9:4).

2. The position of the Pharisees regarding Christ was “This man is not from God, because he keepeth not the sabbath” (v. 16). Any who followed Christ risked excommunication from the synagogue (v. 22), a fate the man born blind eventually suffers (v. 34).
3. The Pharisees rejection of Christ was cloaked in a misinformed zeal for Moses (vv. 28-30).
4. The Pharisees suffered from mistaken conclusions about Moses, because they failed to see their need for God to open their blind eyes (vv. 39-41).
- vi. Jesus heals the man with dropsy on the sabbath day at the Pharisee ruler’s house (Luke 14:1-6). He makes the same argument about an ox or donkey fallen in a well (see 2.b.iv).
- c. From the early days of His earthly ministry, sabbath-breaking was the most effective accusation leveled by the leaders of Judaism against Jesus (John 7:21-24).
  - i. The “one work” Jesus refers to in v. 21 was likely the first healing He did on the sabbath in John 5 (see 2.b.i above). It was then that Jesus had explained that He and His Father worked every sabbath, and the Jews knew that He was claiming to be God.
  - ii. Jesus explains that at times the law of Moses requires two things, but only one can be done, so a choice must be made. The example of this principle He gives comes from the practical incompatibility of the law of sabbath-keeping and the law of circumcision at times. Sabbath-keeping requires refraining from work on sabbaths, but the law of circumcision (Lev. 12:1-3) requires that a baby boy be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of its life, many of which are sabbaths (v. 22). So, a choice must be made between two ecclesiastical requirements – obey the sabbath law or obey the circumcision law. Jews chose the circumcision law. When it comes to the choice our Lord had to make between no work on the sabbath and healing on the sabbath, the choice is far clearer, because now we are talking about choosing between the ethical requirements of the law – love your neighbor – and the ecclesiastical requirements of the law – do not work on Saturday.
  - iii. Jesus calls making these correct choices judging *righteous judgment* rather than judging *according to appearance* (v. 24).
- d. Other references to the sabbath in the Gospels.
  - i. Jesus warned about the travel hinderances of winter and of sabbath-keeping when it came to escaping Jerusalem when the temple was destroyed (Matt. 24:20).
  - ii. Jesus was crucified the day before the Passover high-sabbath (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54 – a Thursday).
  - iii. Women visit the tomb with spices and ointments on Friday prior to resting on the seventh-day sabbath (Luke 23:56).
  - iv. It was when the sabbath ended that the empty tomb was discovered (Matt. 28:1, Mark 16:1).
3. Local church worship on the first day of the week as the Lord’s Day in celebration of the resurrection of Christ is one of the ecclesiastical differences of the church when compared to God’s design for Israel.
  - a. The transition from the sabbath to the first day of the week seems to be foreshadowed in some of the religious practices of Israel. The morrow-of-the-sabbath emphasis of both the celebration of the first-fruits (Lev. 23:11, Num. 28:26; emblematic of the resurrection of Christ as the first-

fruits of them who sleep – 1 Cor. 15:20) and the celebration of Pentecost (Lev. 23:15-16; Deut. 16:8; emblematic of the birth of the church – Acts 11:15) seems to point to the first day of the week as a special day. Other possibilities in this category include circumcision on the eighth day of a boy's life and the year of Jubilee, which is the year after seven sabbath years.

- b. The first assembly time for the disciples of Christ was on Resurrection Sunday. The second was on the Sunday following Resurrection Sunday (John 20:19-31). Jesus attended both assembly times, and He has not missed one since (Matt. 18:17-20). Alfred Edersheim comments: "Once more the day of days had come—the Octave of the Feast. From that Easter-Day onwards the church must, even without special institution, have celebrated the weekly-recurring memorial of His Resurrection, as that when He breathed on the Church the breath of a new life, and consecrated it to be His Representative. Thus, it was not only the memorial of His Resurrection, but the birthday of the Church, even as Pentecost was her baptismal day. On that Octave, then, the disciples were again gathered, under circumstances precisely similar to those of Easter" (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2.646).
- c. In the book of Acts, we read that believers met daily for worship time together (Acts 2:46-47). Whatever the day of the week, the idea of limiting assembly times to one per week is not the ideal for the New Testament church (Acts 20:31). The more we faithfully assemble together in worship of our faithful High Priest over the house of God, the more successful we will be at drawing near in God-honoring worship, holding fast to our common confession of faith, and caring for one another to provoke unto love and good works (Heb. 10:19-25). God desires that we gather "so much the more as [we] see the day approaching."
- d. It is also true that the New Testament church member can view every day alike, or some days as special (Rom. 14:4-6). What these different views have in common is that they are decisions made for the Lord. Celebration or noncelebration of special days in special ways is a personal matter of preference; but neglecting the assembly times of the local church due to a lack of interest in or commitment to the ministry of the local church is sin, whatever day of the week.
- e. In the book of Acts, we read about the sabbath as the assembly day for the synagogue of Judaism, which Paul seeks to reach evangelistically.
  - i. In Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-52).
    1. Paul was permitted to speak only after the ruler of the synagogue invited him to (v. 15).
    2. Paul addressed the synagogue on the sabbath as Jews, not Christians (v. 16, "Men of Israel and ye that fear God"; v. 17 "the God of this people Israel chose our fathers"; v. 23, "God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus"; v. 24, "all the people of Israel"; v. 26, "Men of Israel, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God"; v. 31, "witnesses unto the people"; v. 32, "the promise which was made unto the fathers"; v. 43, "Jews and religious proselytes").
    3. Paul preached forgiveness and justification in the crucified and risen Christ, because these Jews "could not be justified by the law of Moses" (v. 39).
    4. Gentiles were present in these sabbath synagogue meetings, and they were the most receptive listeners (vv. 42, 44).
    5. Jews became jealous and chased Paul and Barnabas out of the city (vv. 45-51).

6. The newly saved Christian disciples of Pisidian Antioch would have been no longer welcome in the synagogue on the sabbath (v. 52).
  - ii. In Philippi the sabbath contact was with women praying near a river. Although some interpreters see a synagogue described here, the fact that men do not seem to be present indicates that it was not and that, if one did exist in the city, perhaps on this occasion Paul was not welcome there (Acts 16:13).
  - iii. In Thessalonica there was a synagogue that welcomed Paul's evangelism for three sabbaths (Acts 17:1-5). The pattern of Pisidian Antioch holds here and elsewhere (Iconium, Acts 14:1-5; Berea, Acts 14:10-14; Athens, Acts 17:16-17; Corinth, Acts 18:1-17; Ephesus, Acts 18:19, 19:8-10).
  - iv. The Jerusalem Council was concerned for the church's testimony to Jewish synagogues, which read Moses every sabbath (Acts 15:21).
- f. While it is true that there are indications that early Jewish Christian believers viewed their local churches as synagogues (Acts 22:19, 26:11, James 2:2), it is not clear that they assembled on the sabbath rather than on the first day of the week.
  - i. Sabbath-keeping is nowhere discussed as part of the way local churches and their members are to behave (1 Tim. 3:15).
  - ii. *Synagogue* eventually gives way to *church* as the normal term for the assembly of believers (cp. "angel of the church" vs. "synagogue of Satan" in Rev. 2:8-9 and 3:7-9).
- g. The Jewish seventh-day *sabbath* is mentioned only one time in the epistles of the New Testament, a passage that groups it with other ecclesiastical arrangements God ordained for Israel that are no longer relevant in that sense for local churches (Col. 2:16; see Lev. 23:37-38 for the same grouping). Paul warns us to let no man judge us about our sabbath-keeping.
- h. Like circumcision, sabbath-keeping is a New Testament picture of the results of the new birth in Christ (Col. 2:11, Heb. 4:1-11). Neither remain religious practice, however, for the church age.
  - i. The phrase, "there remaineth a rest [i.e., *sabbath-keeping*; *sabbatismos*] for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9) should be contrasted with "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" in Heb. 10:26. The author's point in chapter 10 is that the willful sin of the NT believer is no longer dealt with by the animal sacrifices in vv. 1-4, and that his sin is far more serious given his greater light and responsibility (v. 28).
  - ii. The sabbath-keeping referred to is modeled by the creation week (v. 4), but it was also a rest that many sabbath-keeping Jews in David's day had failed to enter because of unbelief (vv. 5-7). Nor had Joshua given them this sabbath rest in the conquest of Canaan (v. 8), even though many under Joshua would have kept sabbath faithfully.
  - iii. Only the Spirit-convicted tender heart of faith that ceases from works salvation in response to the gospel of grace can enter into this sabbath-rest (vv. 2-3, 8-13). This sabbath-keeping is a metaphor based on the creation week picturing the free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ alone, not works (Matt. 11:28). James Hastings: "We lose much of the meaning of this passage [Heb. 4:9] by our superficial habit of transferring it to a future state. The ground of the mistake is in the misinterpretation of that word 'remaineth', which is taken to point to the 'rest' after the sorrows of this life are all done with. Of course there *is* such a rest; but if we take the context of the passage, we cannot but recognize this as the truth that is taught here, that Faith, and not Death, is

the gate to participation in Christ's rest—that the rest remained over after Moses and Judaism, but came into possession under and by Christ" [*The Speaker's Bible: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (1923; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961), 81].

- i. New Testament passages indicate that it was the normal practice for New Testament churches to assemble on the first day of the week, Sunday (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2).
- j. The Bible commands believers to rejoice in the day that the rejected Messiah was made the chief cornerstone, which was resurrection Sunday (Ps. 118:22-24, Matt. 21:42-44, Acts 4:10-11).
- k. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). The sabbath belonged to man and was made for man's refreshment. Resurrection Sunday belongs to the Lord was made for His glory and exaltation (Ps. 118:22-24).
- l. Worship on the Lord's Day was the practice of the post-apostolic church as well. Ignatius, pastor of the church of Antioch in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., wrote that Christians are those who "have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day" (*Epistle to the Magnesians* 9; quoted in David Beale, *Historical Theology In-Depth: Themes and Contexts of Doctrinal Developments since the First Century* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2013), 2:106).

Conclusion: Why do Christian churches worship on Sunday instead of Saturday?

1. Meeting every day of the week, the early church met on both Saturday and Sunday. The question of "Which day?" can miss this important point. Our hearts need to be set on not missing assembly times by God's grace. The idea that we limit our getting together to once a week is foreign to Scripture.
2. There is no evidence in Scripture that God intended Saturday sabbath-keeping for anyone except the nation of Israel. While Moses references the creation week and includes sabbath-keeping in the Ten Commandments, careful observation uncovers the facts (1) that the first recorded human sabbath observance happened in Exodus 16 with the gift of manna, (2) that unlike the other nine commandments the fourth commandment is never explicitly required of Old Testament Gentile nations nor of New Testament church members, (3) that from Adam to Sinai the fourth commandment had not been given nor observed by God's people (Deut. 5:2-3, Neh. 9:14), and (4) that the ecclesiastical nature of sabbath-keeping puts it in a category of ecclesiastical requirements for the nation of Israel (along with temple architecture and furniture, priestly garments and lineage, sacrifices, national assemblies, etc.), which have lost their direct ecclesiastical application today because God is using a new visible ecclesia, the local church.
3. Jesus and His heavenly Father do good works every Saturday, and He encourages us to do the same (John 9:4). Healing people on the sabbath made Christ a sabbath-breaker, except for the fact that the law also emphasizes ethical and moral requirements, like "love your neighbor as yourself," which take priority over ecclesiastical requirements that are less important. When a choice must be made between an ecclesiastical requirement and an ethical one, the weightier matters of the law are our responsibility (Matt. 23:23-24).
4. Just like the temple gave way to local churches in the providential plan of God for our age, so also has sabbath-keeping given way to everything else that the epistles of the New Testament say are the duties of local churches and their members. Although mentioned 91 times in the Old Testament's instruction for Israel, *sabbath* is mentioned in only one verse of these New Testament books, a verse Paul wrote to guard local churches against sabbath-keeping requirements (Col. 2:16).

5. The first day of the week was an important assembly time for the disciples of Christ from the very first Resurrection Sunday (John 20:19-31). The first day of the week is explicitly mentioned twice in the New Testament as a day of weekly assembly for the local church (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2). While the practice of the NT church was to assemble many times throughout the week, Sunday was the day that belonged to the Lord as the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). Worship in the Spirit on that day was not neglected, because resurrection Sunday is the day that the Lord has made, the day when the Rejected Stone became the Chief Cornerstone. It is the special privilege of NT believers as living stones of this new sacred temple of God's plan for this age to rejoice and be glad in it (Ps. 118:22-24; 1 Pet. 2:5).