

KEY QUESTIONS

Should We WORSHIP on Saturday or Sunday?

By Rev. Thomas Key *Ph.D., Th.D., Sc.D.*

Missionary at Large

While most Christians worship on Sunday, several groups insist that Christians should observe a Saturday *Sabbath*. Let us go to the Bible and prayerfully consider two questions: Are Christians required to keep the Sabbath? On which day does the Bible say we should we worship?

ARE CHRISTIANS REQUIRED TO KEEP THE SABBATH?

Keeping the Sabbath is the fourth of the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy....” *Exodus 20:8-11* “It shall be a Sabbath of rest unto you.~~ *Leviticus 16:31* But who is the “you” to whom God was speaking? **Israel. The Hebrews.** “My Sabbath,” God said,” shall **ye [the Hebrews]** keep; for it is a sign between me and **you [the Hebrews]** throughout **your** generations.” *Exodus 31:13*

Nine of the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament. The **only exception** is the fourth commandment. While the New Testament mentions *Jews* keeping the Sabbath, it **is not** given as a requirement for Christian believers.

Jesus Himself, Who said He came to fulfill the Law (*Matthew 5:17*), repeatedly broke the Sabbath. He healed on the Sabbath. And when Jesus told the paralytic man whom He had just healed to take up his bedding (*John 5:8-10*), that man broke the Sabbath at Jesus’ direction. In *John 5:16-18*, He said that God the Father also works on the Sabbath! And He defended his disciples when they were rebuked by the Pharisees for breaking the Sabbath by gathering grain.

If we will read all of the Bible references to “Sabbath” and “worship,” we will see that devout **Hebrews worshiped seven days a week**. The Sabbath was for rest from the work, not for the only day to worship God.

Exodus 20:8-11 said that Hebrews, their children, and servants were to do no work on the Sabbath. *Exodus 16:23* forbade the gathering of food or even cooking on the Sabbath. A Hebrew who deliberately broke this law by gathering firewood on the Sabbath was executed (*Numbers 15:32-36*). But when the Pharisees asked why Jesus and His disciples do on the Sabbath “that which is unlawful,” Jesus clearly replied: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” *Mark 2:24*

It is appropriate and advisable for believers to rest one day a week, but we are not *commanded* to do so. In fact, those insisting on mandatory Sabbath keeping were rebuked in the New Testament: “Let no man...judge you. ..of the Sabbath.” *Colossians 2:16-17* “One man [a Jewish believer] esteemeth [considers] one day above another; another [a Gentile believer] esteemeth every day alike....” *Romans 14:5* The letter to the Galatians was written specifically to assure believers of their liberty from Jewish regulations, including Sabbath. (*e.g. Galatians 3:24-25*.)

While Jews were recognized by their keeping of Sabbaths, feasts, sacrifices, the food laws, circumcision, etc., Christians were to be recognized by their genuine love for each other (*John 13:34*), their loyalty to Jesus (*Acts 11:26*), and their following the Holy Spirit (*Acts 19:2; Ephesians 1:13, 4:30, 5:18*).

Consider this: If Sabbath-keeping were essential to getting to heaven, why is there no evidence that God required Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and all the others before Moses to observe it?

Modern living makes necessary working seven days a week to provide for electricity, water and sewage treatment, hospitals, hotels, ships, airplanes, cafes, steel mill furnaces, care of livestock, police and fire protection, etc.

If we follow Old Testament Sabbath prohibitions, *Exodus 35:3* forbids starting fires on Sabbath--thus making survival difficult or impossible in cold climates. Think about earth’s polar regions where days and nights are six months long each! And note *Exodus 31:13-17* condemn to death any who do not keep the whole law.

Also with modern travel, crossing the international dateline easterly can skip a sabbath, and going westerly can cause two!

It is important to remember, as *John 1:17* says: “... the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” One of the most obvious aspects of the Law given by Moses was the keeping of the sabbath. We no longer live in the Age of Law, but of Grace.

JESUS PROMISED CHANGE

In *John 16*, Jesus confided in His disciples about remarkable future events. In *verse 12*, He promises a **radical shift in religious practice**: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.” Breaking with sabbath-keeping would be one of the most obvious things that they could not understand at that time.

In *verse 13*, Jesus explains that after He goes to Heaven, the Spirit of Truth will guide them into what will seem to law-abiding Jews to be radical changes. In fact, it took the apostles thirty years to realize that Jesus meant that they had left the Age of Law and had entered the Age of Grace.

JESUS PROMISED CHANGE

New Testament letters to believers **never** command worshiping on Saturday. The letters in the New Testament by Peter, James, John (and of course to the Hebrews) were all written to Jews who had become followers of Christ. Not one of them instructs Jewish believers in Jesus to have Saturday (sabbath) worship! *Revelation 1:10* speaks of “the Lord’s day”—a typical term for the Sunday day of worship observed by early Christians because that was the day of the Lord’s Resurrection.

The early church worshiped as Christians on Sunday. *Acts 20:7* shows that in Paul’s ministry Christians met for the Lord’s Supper and preaching, not on the Jewish sabbath, but on the first day of the week. “And on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them....”

Near the end of the 1st century, a letter of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, tells of Christians meeting to worship on the first day of the week. The Didache [The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles], written around c. 80-120 A.D., says: “But every *Lord’s Day* gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your sins. Other writings also overwhelmingly confirm Sunday worship for Christians.

Salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ—not by sabbath-keeping.

The Law was given to show the awfulness of sin. Jesus came to deliver us from sin. A relationship with Him is the only way to Heaven.

DO YOU KNOW GOD?

How can you know *God personally*? Every person’s sinful, selfish rebelliousness separates him or her from God. Therefore it is vitally important that each of us must be sorry for our wrongdoing, ask Jesus to forgive us, and to believe that He does!

Consider the following verses that show how each of us comes to know God:

- “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” *Romans 3:23* “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags....” *Isaiah 64:6*
- “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” *I John 1:9* “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” *Romans 10:9-10*
- “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved.” *John 3:16-17*

Do you know to “believe on Jesus” means to admit that Jesus is **God**, and to put your trust totally in Him? *Acts 16:31* assures us: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved....”

WHAT YOU DO:

- Agree with God about your wrongdoing and that you need to change. *I John 1:9*
 - Believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord and risen Saviour. *Romans 10:9*
 - Receive Jesus Christ into your life. *John 1:12*
- All of this you do on the authority of God’s Word—the Bible. YOU do these things because you take God at His Word.

WHAT GOD DOES:

- Jesus Christ becomes your personal Saviour and Lord. *John 3:16*
 - Jesus Christ forgives your sins as He said He would in His Word. *I John 1:9*
 - You are now His child. *John 1:12*
 - You are now a new person. *II Cor. 5:17*
 - You now have the Holy Spirit in-dwelling or living inside you. *John 14:16-17*
 - You now have eternal life. *I John 5:12*
- All of this God does for you because you take Him at His word! You believe God means what He said!

WHAT YOU DO AS A FOLLOWER OF JESUS:

1. Read the Bible daily. *Acts 20:32, I Tim. 2:15*
2. Talk to God (pray) every day. *Heb. 4:16, John 16:24*
3. Obey the Bible’s teaching. *John 14:23*
4. Tell others about Jesus. *Romans 10:9*