

The Lunar Sabbath Or The Seventh-Day Sabbath: Which?

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“*Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it. . .*”— Genesis 2:3

For millennia, most of the world has been using a week of seven days. These seven days continuously repeat in their accustomed order week after week after week. The first day of the week invariably follows the seventh day of the previous week with enduring regularity. That is how it has always been.

Some people who keep the Sabbath are attempting to change that, believing that we have been wrong all along on how to determine the weekly Sabbath. They call this Sabbath the “lunar Sabbath,” so designated based on its relationship to the new moon, which is the marker for the start of Hebrew months. In their conception, our lunar Sabbaths occur during each Hebrew month, incrementally at intervals of seven days from the new moon. Hence, lunar Sabbaths fall on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of each Hebrew month. (Instead, some lunar Sabbatarians observe the 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th days of each Hebrew month.)

The lunar month, designated in the Hebrew calendar from new moon to new moon, is 29.5 days long. Since a calendar cannot divide days in half, in practice, some Hebrew months last 29 days, others last 30 days. (Lunar Sabbatarians express divided convictions concerning the way the “extra” days are handled. Not all of them treat them in the same way.)

These extra day(s) in the lunar month mean that the lunar Sabbath falls on a *different* day of the week from lunar month to lunar month. The lunar Sabbath will fall on the same day of the week only four consecutive times before the end of the lunar month arrives and the lunar Sabbath is “reset” based on the next new moon.

For example, it may fall on a Thursday in one Hebrew month, but on a Sunday in another lunar month, since the lunar Sabbath is reset after the passage of 29 or 30 days, that is, reset with the coming of another new moon. (The “mathematical” way of looking at this is that seven, the number of days in a week, does not divide evenly into either 29 or 30.)

How Does the Lunar Sabbath Differ from the Seventh-Day Sabbath?

The weekly Sabbath observed by the Jews and by the churches of God is called the “seventh-day Sabbath.” It is so named because it is the seventh day of a recurring seven-day cycle that came into existence at the end of Creation Week, when God pronounced the seventh day as holy (Genesis 2:3). He taught the seventh-day Sabbath to the children of Israel just after they left Egypt by controlling the way manna fell during the week, as related in Exodus 16. It fell every day except on the seventh-day Sabbath. The Sabbath became enshrined in the Hebrew calendar. The Jews have been observing that recurring seventh day ever since that time.

The primary difference between the seventh-day Sabbath and the lunar Sabbath is this: *The seventh-day Sabbath does not “reset” with the coming of each lunar month.* The lunar month is irrelevant to determining the arrival of the seventh-day Sabbath, which is based simply on a recurring seven-day

cycle. Hence, the seventh-day Sabbath always falls on the same day of the seven-day week. It falls on a day the Jews call Sabbath, which the Romans named Saturday.

Is There Scriptural Basis for the Lunar Sabbath?

Lunar Sabbatharians defend their notion of pegging the weekly Sabbath on the lunar month by citing primarily two scriptures. One is Genesis 1:14 (*Holman Christian Standard Bible* [HCSB]): “Then God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night. They will serve as signs for festivals and for days and years.’”

The Hebrew word translated as “festivals” is *moedim*, a word that is key to lunar Sabbatharians’ arguments. *Moedim*, a plural noun (#4150 in *Strong’s Hebrew Concordance*) occurs for the first time in this passage. Translators often render it as “seasons” or “times.” Properly, it denotes “appointed seasons” or “appointed times,” referring to the festivals of God, His feast days. Today, we generally call these festivals by the term “holy days.” Lunar Sabbatharians, looking at Genesis 1:14, correctly conclude that the sun—and particularly the moon—play a key role in establishing the seasons, and most specifically, the appointed feast days, the holy days of God.

The biblical chapter that summarizes these festival days, these *moedim*, is Leviticus 23. This is the second passage on which lunar Sabbatharians focus. Most specifically, they cite Leviticus 23:1-4. (Note: *Moedim* is translated as “appointed times” in verses 2 and 4.)

The Lord spoke to Moses: “Speak to the Israelites and tell them: These are My *appointed times*, the times of the Lord that you will proclaim as sacred assemblies. Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh day there must be a Sabbath of complete rest, a sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord wherever you live. These are the Lord’s *appointed times*, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their *appointed times*.” (HCSB) (emphasis ours)

The remainder of Leviticus 23 discusses the *moedim*, the holy days, in their sequence through the year.

Here is the thrust of the lunar Sabbatharians’ arguments. They note that the weekly Sabbath, discussed in Leviticus 23:3, appears in the midst of the discussion of the *moedim*, the appointed times, mentioned in verses 2 and 4. They submit that the inclusion of the weekly Sabbath in verse 3, in the context of the *moedim*, the focus of the chapter, proves that the *weekly* Sabbath is connected to the *moedim*. Hence, they conclude that the moon, as mentioned in Genesis 1:14, is the basis for determining the *weekly* Sabbath, just as it is basic in determining the arrival of the holy days.

In other words, lunar Sabbatharians argue that the moon, which determines when a new month begins, also determines when the count toward the weekly Sabbaths begins.

The Holy Days: One Cycle

Lunar Sabbatharians’ *a priori* dismissal of an important fact has led them to a wrong conclusion. That fact is this: God recognizes two *distinct* cycles in determining Sabbaths: He created an *annual* cycle. He also created a *weekly* one. They are not the same.

The annual cycle, which defines the appointed feasts (*moedim*), is intrinsically connected with the moon, as Genesis 1:14 says. Specifically, the annual cycle is connected with the new moon, which in Hebrew is *khodesh* (*Strong's* #2320). The annual cycle actually begins on a new moon, the one starting the Hebrew month of Abib. The fall of most *moedim*, that is, most appointed festivals, is determined by the occurrence of a new moon.

For example, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread falls on the fifteenth day of Abib. It falls fifteen days into the month of Abib—fifteen days after the new moon that ushered in Abib. Likewise, the Feast of Trumpets is the first day (that is, the new moon itself) of the seventh month, Tishri. The Day of Atonement falls on the tenth day of Tishri.

As an illustration of the importance of the new moon in determining the “appointed feasts,” notice Leviticus 23:4-6 (HCSB), which renders *khodesh* as “month”: “The Passover to the Lord comes in the first month, at twilight on the fourteenth day of the month. The Festival of Unleavened Bread to the Lord is on the fifteenth day of the same month.”

Khodesh appears ten times in Leviticus 23, always in reference to determining the day on which the *moedim* arrive. This stress on the new moon is consistent with God’s comments in Genesis 1:14 that the moon would “serve as signs for festivals.”

So, the fall of the *annual* “appointed feasts” is based on the arrival of new moons, which define the start of the Hebrew lunar months. The annual holy days define one cycle, a cycle of seven holy days throughout the year.

The Weekly Sabbath: Another Cycle

The fall of the seventh-day Sabbath is defined according to a second cycle. It is a separate cycle, a different one. Importantly, in the description of the seventh-day Sabbath, the concepts of *moedim* and *khodesh* are not at all present. For example, neither word appears in Leviticus 23:3: “Work may be done for six days, but on the seventh day there must be a Sabbath of complete rest, a sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord wherever you live” (HCSB).

Genesis 2 records God’s creation of the seventh-day Sabbath and hence, the institution of the weekly occasion. In this passage as well, neither the word *moedim* (appointed feasts) nor *khodesh* (new moon) appear even once:

By the seventh day God completed His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it He rested from His work of creation. (Genesis 2:2-3 [HCSB])

What is strikingly stressed in this passage is the cycle of the *seventh day*, not the arrival of a new moon. Other verses that stress the concept of “the seventh day” as a definitive element in the seventh-day Sabbath’s timing include Exodus 23:12; 31:15, 17; 34:21; 35:2; and Deuteronomy 5:13-14.

Finally, *khodesh* and *moedim* are conspicuous by their absence in the Sabbath commandment itself—not even a hint:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy: You are to labor six days and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. You must not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the foreigner who is within your gates. For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days; then He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and declared it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11 [HCSB])

In each of these pivotal passages concerning the weekly Sabbath, the word *moedim* is absent. Its absence shows that the weekly occasion is not an “appointed feast” and therefore not part and parcel with the annual occasions, which are defined by a separate cycle. In addition, in each of these same passages, the word *khodesh* is also absent, indicating that the new moon is not a factor in determining the coming of the seventh-day Sabbath.

In summary then, lunar Sabbatarians ignore the clear fact that God has instituted *two* discrete cycles and with them, two different methods of determining the fall of Sabbaths. Lunar Sabbatarians apply the method of counting the holy days—which at its core does involve the new moons—to determining the occurrences of the weekly Sabbaths. However, the Scriptures do not support using the same method for both cycles.

To reiterate: The new moon and the lunar month are irrelevant in determining which day the seventh-day Sabbath falls on.

Did Christ Keep the Lunar Sabbath?

Christ, our example, did not observe the lunar Sabbath. As recorded in Luke 4:16-17 (HCSB), Christ “came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. As usual, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Him. . . .”

The Jews, as Paul wrote in Romans 3:2, had received the “oracles” (that is, the revelation or the words) of God. The Torah contains many of those “oracles,” including the oracle of the seventh-day Sabbath. God deeply engrained the correct Sabbath day into the consciousness of the children of Israel during their wanderings in the wilderness of Zin, and, as a result of this weekly reminder by the absence of manna on the Sabbath, they came to enshrine that day into what has come to be called the Hebrew calendar.

During Christ’s time on earth, the Jews continued to keep the correct weekly occasion. If Christ had kept the lunar Sabbath, chances are He would have been reading to an empty room that day in the synagogue. There would have been no one present there to hand Him the scroll of Isaiah. The Jews would have been elsewhere.

The Jews certainly took exception to the *way* Jesus kept the Sabbath. For instance, they expressed their dismay when His disciples plucked corn on the Sabbath or when He healed on the Sabbath. *However, the Jewish leadership had no issue with the day He kept.* If they had such an issue, we certainly would read about it in the Gospels. Yet, that issue never arose.

The absence of any dispute over the correct day is an “argument from absence” that Christ kept the *same* weekly Sabbath that the Jews did—the same day they still keep. He kept the same weekly

occasion the church of God keeps today. It is the seventh-day Sabbath, the Sabbath described in Genesis 2:2-3 and in Exodus 20:8-11.

Pentecost and the Lunar Sabbath

Probably one of the best arguments against the lunar Sabbath concerns Pentecost. God instructs that the Day of Pentecost, correctly counted, will always occur on the day *after* a Sabbath:

You are to count seven complete weeks starting from the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the presentation offering. You are to count 50 days until the day after the seventh Sabbath and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord.
(Leviticus 23:15-16 [HCSB])

So, the requirement that Pentecost fall on the day *after* the seventh Sabbath becomes a “check point” to ensure that we have counted correctly.

A person keeping the lunar Sabbath will never find an occasion where the count of those fifty days brings him to the day *after* the Sabbath he is keeping. Try it for yourself with paper and pencil; it will soon become clear that absolutely no scenario exists where Pentecost falls on the day after a lunar Sabbath. It will never happen.

If the concept of the lunar Sabbath were correct, the requirement that Pentecost fall after a Sabbath would be impossible to meet. The model that lunar Sabbatarians use to determine the Sabbath does not mesh with the instruction concerning Pentecost, as stated in Leviticus 23:15-16.

More Than a Minor Miracle

If we counted the number of days from any seventh-day Sabbath back to the original (seventh-day) Sabbath, that is, all the way back to the one described in Genesis 2:2-3, we would come up with a large number. As we tirelessly counted, we could “count” on this: Whatever number of days defines that interval of time, it would *always* be divisible by seven, the number of days in a week. The number of days from any seventh-day Sabbath to the original Sabbath will be divisible by seven.

That is an amazing fact. Throughout history, God has preserved the knowledge of the seventh-day Sabbath. Considering all the various calendars that have been developed over the years by pagan, godless individuals, some of those calendars basing their weeks on more than seven days, it is indeed a miracle that God has preserved the knowledge of the *true* Sabbath day to the present. Considering all the troubles that the Jews, who preserved that knowledge in their calendar, have encountered, it is more than a minor miracle.

It is fitting that we thank God for preserving a knowledge of the seventh-day Sabbath over the years for us. He did not command that the seventh day be kept and then hide it from us. Rather, our Provider has taught us the correct day; not a day has been lost in the count. We should not be deceived by the false notion of the lunar Sabbath, which is in fact one of the lies Satan has developed to hide the correct seventh day.