

The Circumcision of the Eighth Day

An OT Covenant and its NT Implications

- ¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty [El Shaddai]; walk before me, and be blameless,
- ² that [And] I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly."
- ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God [elohim] said to him,
- ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.
- ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.
- ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.
- ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.
- ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."
- ⁹ And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.
- ¹⁰ This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.
- ¹¹ You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.
- ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or

- bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring,
- ¹³ both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.
- ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."
- ¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.
- ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."
- ¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?"
- ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!"
- ¹⁹ God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.
- ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes [25:13–16], and I will make him into a great nation.
- ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."
- ²² When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.
- ²³ Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him.
- ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.
- ²⁵ And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

²⁶ That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised.

²⁷ And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Genesis 17:1-27

Genesis 17: A Brilliantly Cut Diamond

The passage before us today is central to something Reformed Christians take great delight in writing and talking to other people about—the doctrine of **the covenants**. Many, many books have been written on the covenants, and almost all of them deal to a large extent with Genesis 17. I am certainly going to talk about the covenant this morning, and **I have not yet decided if I will do something more concentrated on this topic next week**. But if I do, I first want us to see this entire chapter in its full, brilliant context.

I know this is obvious, but this is a story. Sometimes I think pastors and laymen alike forget that when they enter into a study of Genesis (and other stories). It wasn't really written to be spliced and diced and dissected into tiny theological pieces for our personal doctrinal hobbies. Ch. 17 is **a single literary unit**, meaning that it was meant to be read and thought about all at once. Its structure is complex, but also dazzling, like a perfectly cut diamond. The light that reflects through this structure will astound you for its Gospel

clarity and the way it pictures Christ and his church. This is truly, a high water-mark chapter in Genesis, and in all of God's word. I hope your worship of the Savior will be increased because of it, and that you will be sanctified through it.

Let's try to wrap our minds around the structure. Doing this will help us see the central idea of the story. You can outline the story in one of two ways. First, you can think of it like a hymn with two stanzas that are different, yet which repeat similar ideas.

- A Yahweh's intention to make an oath about progeny (1–2)
- B Abram falls on his face (3a)
- C Abraham father of nations (4b–6)
- D God will carry out his oath forever (7)
- E The sign of the oath (9–14)
- A¹ God's intention to bless Sarah with progeny (16)
- B¹ Abraham falls on his face (17–18)
- C¹ Sarah mother of a son, Isaac (19)
- D¹ God will carry out his oath forever (19b, 21a)
- E¹ The sign of the oath (23–27)¹

Both stanzas begin with God coming to declare his intention to make an oath about future children. Then both have

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 17–18.

Abram/Abraham falling on his face. Then the promise actually goes out, first to Abram, then to Sarai. Just here, the LORD changes both of their names. Then, to both, God promises that this will be a covenant that will last forever. Finally, both stanzas end with an oath-sign. In the middle of this what I will call **the sign** and **the son**.

The other way to outline the story is in the familiar form of **a chiasm**. Like an arrowhead, the chiasm begins broadly, and narrows down to a tip or a center.

- A Abraham 99 (1a)
- B The Lord appears (1b)
- C God speaks (1c)
- D **First** speech (1bc–2)
- E Abraham falls on his face (3a)
- F **Second** speech (name-change, nations, kings) (4–8)
- G **THIRD SPEECH: A Sign of circumcision on the eighth day(9–14)**
- F¹ **Fourth** speech (name-change, nations, kings) (15–16)
- E¹ Abraham falls on his face (17)
- D¹ **Fifth** speech (19–21)
- C¹ God ceases speaking (22a)
- B¹ God goes up from him (22b)
- A¹ Abraham 99, Ishmael 13 (23–25)²

² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 17.

This chiasm begins and ends by telling us that Abram/Abraham was 99 years old when this story took place (Gen 17:1, 24-25). Whenever you see a number like this being repeated, it is a good bet that there is a deliberate structure to the text. “99” strikes us that Abram is a very, very old man. My oldest grandparent, and the oldest person I believe my family line has ever known, died last summer at 98½. Abram is older than her. Given the focus on children in this passage, this makes Abram’s age and God’s promise extraordinary. The story also ends by telling us that Ishmael is 13 years old. This means that it has been 13 years between the Angel of the LORD appearing to Hagar in the previous chapter and the LORD’s visit here to Abram.

But who is the “LORD” that appears to Abram? What I mean is, it tells us that “the LORD” appeared to Abram (vs. 1). But notice that when he leaves (vs. 22), it says “God “went up from Abraham.” I was struck by this. This word to “go up” (*alah*) is clearly related to the word for an “offering” (*alah*). This expression of the LORD going up has not occurred before, but it does occur later, in the days of the prediction of another son, the child Samson. Here, “the Angel of the LORD” comes to Samson’s mother and father. It says, “So Manoah took the young goat with the grain offering, and offered (*alah*) it on the rock to the LORD, to the one who

works wonders, and Manoah and his wife were watching. And when the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the LORD went up (*'alah*) in the flame of the altar. Now Manoah and his wife were watching, and they fell on their faces to the ground” (Jdg 13:19-20). This is the same response that Abraham has in our chapter. Why would the LORD “go up” from Abram here? Why does it use this language? I think it is because this is, yet again, the Angel of the LORD, the God who keeps coming to his man ever since he was in Babylon.

Vs. 1 adds a new fascinating thing. It gives a new name for God, “**I am God Almighty.**” This name has not occurred before in Genesis. It is the famous *El Shaddai*. No one knows exactly what this name means, but here are some guesses. Whenever it occurs in Genesis, it is associated with **divine omnipotence**, especially God’s ability to fulfill his promises and to make the barren fertile (28:3; 35:11; 48:3).³ Hence, the translation “Almighty.” Some have thought it literally means “**God of the Wilderness**” or “**God of the field.**” A very similar word in Akkadian means “**Lord of the Mountain/Steppe**” (*belu šadu*).⁴

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 28.

⁴ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 88.

This last one is especially interesting in light of **the only time the divine name occurs outside of the Bible**. Discovered in 1967, The **Deir Alla Inscriptions** are fragments of plaster that had fallen to the floor from the inner walls of an ancient manufacturing and distribution center located on a mound about eight miles east of the Jordan River. They are dated to just after the time of Solomon.⁵ They give an ancient account of **Baalam** the Seer that differs from those in the Bible. The way the name is used is of **the gods of the divine council** who come to Baalam and tell him what they have decided to do. They are called the “**Shaddai gods,**” **the gods of the mountain of the divine council**. “El” is the name of the High God in Israel and other neighboring countries. So El-Shaddai would be the High God of the divine council, as summarized in “the Angel of the Great Council” (**Isa 9:6 LXX**).

Well, El Shaddai now says, “**Walk before me, and be blameless.**” This is the same **language used of Noah** (**Gen 6:9**), except that this is a command given to Abram after his “fall,” (**Gen 16:1-6**), whereas it was used of Noah prior to his “fall” (**Gen 9:20-23**). This subtly connects El Shaddai back to Noah, even as it show El Shaddai giving the law to Abram. Note well, walking with God and being blameless is moral law.

⁵ William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, *Context of Scripture* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2000), 141.

The order of the story is faith first, then the command to obey to the law. The moral law has always existed. **This law will become important by the time we are done this morning**, as will the identity of the LORD, as all of this will really help us make sense of how this passage relates to us in the NT era.

With that, let's move into the rest of the passage. When God El Shaddai speaks in **vs. 1**, this begins **the first of five speeches**. This first speech introduces “**my covenant between me and you**” (**vs. 2**). God says that he will “**make**” (*nathan*) a covenant. Almost always, when a **new** covenant is being made, the idea is that the parties will “**cut**” (*karath*) a covenant. When an **older** covenant is being established, they will *qum* the covenant.⁶ Later in this chapter, the covenant is said to be “**established**” (*qum*, **vs. 7**). This strange word in vs. 2 has led to disagreements by theologians over whether God is making a new covenant or confirming an old one.⁷

(Because of vs. 7) I tend to think that **God is reconfirming the covenant** he gave and has been reconfirming to Abram throughout Genesis. It is very interesting to consider how

⁶ See the comments on Genesis 6:18 in that sermon.

⁷ The Reformed Baptist Nehemiah Coxe is an early fount of the idea that Gen 17 gives a brand new covenant, thereby making two completely different covenants that God makes with Abraham. The first is a covenant of grace, the later (this one) is a covenant of work. This is the direction that many are now taking in ARBCA. See Nehemiah Coxe: Covenant Theology From Adam to Christ, ed. Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, Francisco Orozco (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005).

clever the story is written in this regard. Each time the covenant comes, something new is added to our understanding of what God is promising to Abram. It is almost like Abram couldn't handle the truth all at once, so God gives it to him in bites, feeding him like a little child.

Progressive Revelation of the Covenant in the Abraham Stories

The LAND	DESCENDANTS	NATURE of COVENANT	SEED
The land (12:1)	A great nation (12:2)	Protection: Abram's blessers blessed; his disdainer cursed (12:3)	To your seed (Gen 12:7)
This land (12:7)	Descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth (13:16)	Slavery: Egyptian slavery and exodus (15:13)	Your very own son (Gen 15:4)
All the land which you can see (13:15)	Descendants as many as the stars (15:5)	Eternal covenant: Be your God and your descendants' God (17:7)	Sarah your wife shall bear you a son (Gen 17:19)
The river of Egypt to the Euphrates (15:18)	Offspring will be too many to count (16:10)		
Canaan (17:8)	Multitude of nations and Kings shall come from you (17:5-6)		

God says that he will **multiply** Abram (17:3). This had to be good news to the man who just fell like Adam. For to multiply is to partake in **the blessing of creation**. God hasn't abandoned Abram. One wonders if after 13 years of having no contact with the LORD, after what he and Sarai had done,

if Abram's faith might be at the lowest possible point. Then he receives this promise.

In response, Abram falls on his face (**vs. 3**). He worships the LORD. He must be filled with great joy and overwhelmed with gratitude for the God who has not abandoned him after all.

The **second speech** of God starts now. “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations” (4). *Le'ab hamon*. This promise becomes the basis upon which God starts over with Abram by giving him a new name. “No longer shall you be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made (*nathan*)⁸ you the father of a multitude of nations” (5). The verb is in the **perfect tense**, which we can translate in the past tense. Is God talking about Ishmael?

But then it moves to the **future tense** (in English). “I will make you exceedingly fruitful (more creation language), and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you” (6). This prediction of the future must have astonished Abraham who at this point has one 13 year old son born from a slave girl. It also is an important prophecy of the kings of Israel. And, of course, these kings of Israel culminate in a line

⁸ This is the same word used to “make” a covenant in **vs. 2**.

that ends in the King of kings, the one born **King of the Jews**—the Lord Jesus.

At this point, the LORD says that he will “**establish**” (*qum*) my **covenant** between, not just him and Abraham, but **him and his offspring**, throughout their generations for an **everlasting covenant**. Everlasting means just what it says. It is not like the covenant made with Moses, which was temporary (“everlasting” is never attached to the Mosaic covenant). This important verse comes up in Galatians 3:16 (along with the earlier verse in **Gen 12:7**). The Apostle says, “**Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ**” (**Gal 3:16**). And so we have the NT explicitly saying that Christ receives in this covenant.⁹ Keep this in mind as we move along.

But it is **not just one offspring**. In the meantime, before Christ comes, there will be kings and many children and God is swearing to be God to them (**Gen 17:7b**). He also swears, for the first time in so many words, to give the land of **Canaan** to them as an everlasting possession (**8**). The question

⁹ Thinking about this from the Angel of the LORD (Son of God) perspective, this is a classic example of the Angel of the LORD—El Shaddai—speaking on behalf of the Father with whom he bears the same name (El) about promises that will be fulfilled when the Son incarnates.

of an “everlasting land” is problematic, given that in fact the land was not everlastingly Abraham’s (i.e. it was taken away more than once). So how do we make sense of it being everlasting, and yet also able to be taken away?

We do it through **typology**. Canaan is a type of something else, which is true of the sign of the covenant as we will see in moment as well. What is happening in this covenant is that the **promises** are working on **two levels**. There is the **physical level** of biological children, geographical land, and physical signs in the flesh. These point to spiritual realities that are real, but their full consummation has not yet appeared in physical form. “**Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel**” (**Rom 9:6**), the Apostles says.

Christ is the only way through the morass. In him, the spiritual first yet perfectly meet the physical. He is True Israel. He is the True Land or place where God resides. As it regards Canaan the physical land, we understand that this place was given to the Angel of the LORD as his inheritance among the sons of God. It belonged to him. He could do whatever he wanted to do with it. So he gave it to Abraham. He, Isaac, and Jacob all enjoyed life in the land unconditionally.

But in his sovereignty, God sent Israel into Egypt and they lost the land. God had his own reasons for this. He was

going to punish the inhabitants of Canaan in the conquests of Joshua. But he was also going to show that the *physical* promises relate to **conditional** promises. Israel was a tenant of the land, and he was to obey the law if he wanted to continue to stay in it. It could therefore be taken away, and it was in the exile.

But that land, and this is what Dispensationalism often misses, pointed to a greater land, an eternal land. This eternal land belongs to the new heavens and new earth. Spiritually, the sons of Abraham are “the meek,” and they will inherit “**the earth**” (**Matt 5:5**). Paul says that in this promise Abraham was promised “**the whole world**” (**Rom 4:13**). And so the promise is indeed forever, in the eternal sense of the new heavens and new earth, even if it could be taken away on a temporary basis, because of typology.

At any rate, I bring up this difficult topic of land in order to prepare you for **the third speech**, which is also the center of the chiasm, and the most important part of the story. God now says, “**As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations**” (**Gen 17:9**). There is something conditional here, though the verb is not an imperative (command), but an imperfect (incomplete action). The passage now specifies what that keeping entails.

“Every male among you shall be circumcised” (10). What is circumcision? “You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins” (11). Ouch. Of course, this painful practice involves cutting off the foreskin of the male genital in a very bloody ceremony. It is strange to me how so many people go off on a tangent here of the health reasons for why God did this, and for why we should do it today. Whole sermons have been preached on this. Whether true or not, it misses the main point. Why would God give this practice—common among many cultures in the ANE (such as Egypt)—as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant? (And by the way, before I answer that, ask yourself where baptism is in this chapter. It isn’t here. But see below).

Here are a couple of things to think about. First, as I said earlier, when you first enter into a covenant, you would “cut” (*karath*) a covenant. Here, they are cutting-off their flesh as each new generation enters into the covenant. So it is a very potent way of reminding each new generation that they are still in covenant with God. This permanent sign seen every day (until death), would be a constant reminder of God’s everlasting promise. This should have been good news.

There is also a fascinating pun here with the Flood. When God gave the promise of that covenant it said that “all flesh” was “cut off” by the waters of the flood (Gen 9:11).

Paedobaptists are right that there are *overlaps* in the symbolism of circumcision and baptism, and this proves that. This is implied in **Col 2:11** as well. But baptism is not in *this* chapter. And it is a far cry from saying that signs have overlaps to saying that baptism replaces circumcision. I won't get into that here today.

Instead, I will go in another direction, one that is more relevant to our story. I will start by showing that circumcision is related to another sign, even though it does not “replace” that sign either. This is the overlap between **circumcision and the Sabbath**. No one believes that the Sabbath “replaces” circumcision.

Most think of the Sabbath as “rest,” and this is true, of course. However, *sabbath* does not *merely* mean to rest (especially as in sleeping or napping). **In its transitive form is actually means to “put an end to” or—importantly—“to sever.”**¹⁰ “Take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: ‘How the oppressor has ceased (*shabath*), the insolent fury ceased (*shabath*)!’” (**Isa 14:4**; cf. **24:8**)¹¹ Severing is exactly what is going on in circumcision, and so the sign is a kind of

¹⁰ See Theophile James Meek, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 33 (1914): 201-12 (03). https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/02-exodus/text/articles/meek-sabbath-jbl.pdf

¹¹ Curiously, “How the oppressor has ceased! How the flood has receded!” (Isa 14:4 CEB).

picture of resting, which is ironic, because the Jews ended up turning the whole program into working rather than resting.

The word “sign” is the very heart and center of the chiasm. Like types, signs are physical symbols that point to spiritual realities. We have seen them before in Genesis. The **lights** in the key are “signs” (**Gen 1:14**). They become the sign of the creation covenant. The **rainbow** is the sign of the flood (**9:12**). It becomes the sign of the Noahic covenant. Now, circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant.

But it is not just circumcision that is its sign. What I’m about to say is very important, and is usually lost in discussions of circumcision. It was not merely circumcision that was the sign. Chiastically, the sign is surrounded by both circumcision and the eighth day (**Gen 17:12a**). This was not any old circumcision, such as the pagans had. This was *eighth day circumcision*.

- A. Keep the covenant (17:9-10a)
 - B. Every male (10b)
 - C. Circumcised Flesh (11a)
 - D. —→ Sign (11b)**
 - C.¹ Eighth Day (12:a)
 - B¹. Every male: whether born or bought (12:b-13)
- A¹. Broken my covenant (17:14)

Why does this matter? This question gets at the heart of this sermon. This week I had a conversation with our old church planter, Tony Jackson. He said, “Have you ever noticed that Jesus says the Pharisees were circumcising on the Sabbath according to the law of Moses? (John 7:22-23).” I said, “No.” He asked, “Does anything about that sound strange to you?” Let me ask you the same question. On what day do we normally think of the OT Sabbath as occurring? The *seventh* day. But God here says that circumcision is to occur on the *eighth* day. In fact, the law says the same thing. “And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Lev 12:3). The Pharisees were not disobeying the law; they were keeping it. Therefore, Jesus is calling the eighth day the Sabbath.

Does that sound strange? Believe it or not, this is actually in agreement with the OT. “On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest (*shabbathon*)” (Lev 23:39). There were special feast days where the Israelites would gather together to feast, to hear the Word of God, and to celebrate in worship. This particular feast is the **Feast of Booths**. Notice how the “first” and “eighth” are both Sabbaths. Why? Because in a seven day week, they both take place on our Sunday. In other words, right here, in the law of Moses, Sunday is called Sabbath.

Let's turn our thinking for a moment to the Lord's Day. Today, on the first day of the week, we gather together. Why? Most everyone agrees that it has to do with the Resurrection. "Very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb" (Mark 16:2). But of course, Jesus was not there, because he had risen. So the Christians celebrated the resurrection on this same day.

But now here is what I want to suggest. All the way back as early as Genesis 17, this was foreshadowed. First day worship is embedded into the rite of circumcision. How? Well, we have seen the "eighth day" motif already. Then there is the idea of what circumcision pointed to. Many Christians think that it somehow points to baptism. As you know, because baptism was around both before and after circumcision in the OT, I do not take that view. Instead, seeing that types and antitypes must be organically related, I see circumcision of the flesh as being sign of circumcision of the heart.

God said, "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" (Deut 10:16).¹² But they were not able to do such a thing for, "To this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear" (Deut 29:4). God hardened them in this way in order

¹² "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts" (Jer 4:4).

to point forward to something in the future, a mighty gracious promise, “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6).

This promise of the circumcision of the heart is made a reality in the new covenant. So the Apostle says, “A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Rom 2:29). Certainly, OT saints had their hearts circumcised by God’s spirit. However, this was done in anticipation of the legal way God could do this without overriding his justice in the days when he passed over former sins (Rom 3:25).

Ezekiel prophecies, “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek 36:26-27). He is predicting the new covenant. “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and

I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31-34).

When is this new covenant made a reality? It is made a reality in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is when the new covenant became legal and God could look upon it without doing harm to his justice in saving his people, for the new covenant was enacted on perfect promises, oaths, and cut with a perfect sacrifice. As to his death, “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:14-15). This death is commemorated in a *feast* that was celebrated by the churches when they assembled together on the first day of the week. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25). “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread...” (Act 20:7). “Let us therefore celebrate the feast” (1 Cor 5:8 NAS). Remember that the first and eighth days were *feast* days?

Why are the Christians meeting on the first day? Not because the seventh is being replaced by the first, but because the first was *already* a sabbath, a sabbath that is foreshadowed right here in the eighth day ceremony of circumcision. When

is circumcision of the heart made a legal reality? In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When did the Spirit first come to the disciples? On the day Jesus rose from the dead, on the first day of the week (**John 20:22**). When was the new covenant cut? In Jesus death. When was it enacted for us? On the first day of the week.

With all of this in mind, let us quickly look at the remainder of our passage, for what it shows is most remarkable in how it teaches us about Christ and his church. First, as the chiasm starts to move back out, we see that “every male” (**vs. 10**) becomes “Every male ... whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised” (**12-13**). In other words, what at first seems like it will only be Jews becomes both Jew and Gentiles—as they are together “in Abraham.” Throughout the long history of Israel, we see that many Gentiles joined up with the Israelites and were at the moment of circumcision considered Jews. This foreshadows the church of Jesus Christ, who is greater than Abraham.

[A brief comment on **vs. 14**. “Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” There you

have the wordplay on cut off foreskin and cut off from the covenant people of God. The Apostle takes this exact idea and throughout Romans 11 argues that the physical Jews were cut off, out of the nourishing root of Christ because they did not have faith. But he then uses this as a warning even to Gentiles who are grafted in that if they do not “continue in God’s kindness” they too will be “cut off” (Rom 11:22). Christians are circumcised in the heart, by the Spirit through faith in Christ. Period. Therefore, we must continue to live by faith, not turning to works. Think again of how circumcision is a picture of *sabbath*, but how the Pharisees, Galatians, and others perverted it to turn it into not rest, but work. We work because we rest in Christ, we do not work in order to rest in Christ.]

At this point, the **fourth divine speech** of Genesis 17 occurs. God now says to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name” (Gen 17:15). Sarai, who had fallen like Eve, gets the same gracious treatment as Abram who had fallen like Adam. NO longer will her name be “contentious queen” but rather simply “princess.”¹³ The contention, the strife (as far as God is concerned at least) is over.

¹³ Curiously, Eve is named only *after* her fall (Gen 3:20).

Moreover, the LORD will “bless her” and “give you a son by her” (Gen 17:16). Repeating the idea of kings coming is now something that will not merely be for Abraham through Ishmael, but through a son of Sarah! Who is this son who is king? “Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle!” (Ps 24:8). What battle? At the cross and tomb, “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col 2:15). Do you see how the text itself is pointing you forward, relentlessly onward to the fulfillment of the ages? The whole chapter is about Christ!

Suddenly, Abraham falls on his face (again as part of the chiasm) and laughed. He said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” (Gen 17:17). I have one step-grandparent left. She is just about 90. I can’t imagine her giving birth. I would laugh to. But Abram didn’t dare tell the LORD what he was thinking (as if he could hide it anyway). “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” (18). Abram, like Isaac later, loves his firstborn son. “What about him, God?” What a strange thing to say in the face of such a promise. But he clearly did not understand all things yet, for that we must wait several more stories.

In the **fifth and final speech**, God says, “I have heard you. Ishamel will be blessed and fruitful and I will multiply him. He shall father twelve princes. He will become a great nation” (20). This anticipates the genealogy of Ishmael in **Gen 25:13-16**. But this is not a story about Ishmael.¹⁴

“No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call him name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant” (17:19). He will be the one through whom the promise continues, not Ishmael.

Why? Do you know what Hebrews calls Isaac? He is called the “**only begotten son**” (**Heb 11:17**). This is because he is a type of Christ. More Christ here. Abraham does not understand. This has to be accomplished by a miracle, so that no one can boast or say that it happened any other way than by God’s power. And so it is finally confirmed, “**Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year**” (**Gen 17:21**). And it says “**When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham**” (22). This strange language is used of the Angel of the LORD with Manoah.

¹⁴ Wenham writes, “The literary parallels between chs. 17 and 16 help to show that “the promise of Isaac’s birth far outstrips the promises about Ishmael in importance.” Wenham, 28.

Then all goes quiet. God is gone. Again. Did it really happen? Was he really here? Did he really say those things? Yes!

The last part of the chapter records Abraham's response. It is the response of a man of deep and profound faith. He who is 99 years old, takes Ishmael his son who is 13 years old, all those born in his house, and all those bought with his money, every single male, and together—as one—they are circumcised. Ouch. These are not eight day old babies who won't remember. These are grown men. This they will never forget.

But I am struck by the repetition of the last few verses. It seems almost too much. They are all circumcised (23). Abraham is circumcised (24). Ishmael is circumcised (25). Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised (26). All the men of his house and all bought with money are circumcised (27). Why the repetition? I think there are two reasons.

First, it is emphasizing **Abraham's obedience**. Because God told him to do this (23) and so that very day he did it (26). And by the way, he did it at great personal pain, and the pain of all those in his family. He would not let any of them escape it, either. What must *they* have been thinking? This is the obedience that comes from faith. This obedience can sometimes be quite painful, can't it? Faith does not merely

believe, it believes and then does. It does not do and then believe. The doing comes later. But faith does result in obedience. Abraham was circumcised in his heart by faith already. This became a sign to him of the righteousness that he had by faith (**Romans 4**).

Second, this is a picture of the **church**. Biological children. Foreigners... Gentiles. Those who were bought (“**You were bought with a price;**” **1 Cor 6:20**). This is the final word that seeks to reinforce all that has been said in the chapter. Beloved, only a God could write something like this chapter with all of its connections to what has come before, and what has not even yet been written. Only he could foresee the incredible fulfillments that would take place in our day before they happened. But the church has seen that these things have been fulfilled. She has been worshiping the risen savior for 2,000 years out of thankfulness of all that he has done. The promises have all come true. We are witnesses to that truth. May this whole chapter of God’s great covenant with Abraham be a sign to you that God keeps his promises, all of which are Yes and Amen in Christ.

Appendix 1: Another Chiasm:

- A Sarah will bear a son ... Isaac (19a)
- B I shall confirm my covenant with him (19b)
- C Ishmael (20)
- B¹ I shall confirm my covenant with Isaac (21a)
- C¹ Sarah will bear next year (21b)

Appendix 2: The Origin of the Christian Sabbath

Note: As I was preparing this sermon, I wrote the following article to more fully expand on our thoughts regarding the eighth day, circumcision, and the Christian Sabbath.

First Day Worship

The LBC 1689 teaches:

As it is the law of nature, that in general a proportion of time, by God's appointment, be set apart for the worship of God, so by his Word, in a positive moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a sabbath to be kept holy unto him, which from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ was the last day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which is called the Lord's day: and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath, the observation of the last day of the week being abolished (22.7).

The paragraph says that God has a right to set the time of his worship, that he has done so by a positive moral and perpetual commandment, that this

commandment transcends the law of Moses thereby binding all men in all ages to it, and that in the OT it was kept on the seventh day but that it was changed to the first day of the week whereby it continues in perpetuity.

Reformed Christians believe that the very idea of sabbathing (“resting”) is part of the moral law of God which has existed since the beginning of the world. Moral law is always binding upon all people. It is always wrong to take life unlawfully, to covet your neighbor’s things, or to take the Lord’s Name in vain. The commandment belongs to this general category. The fourth commandment itself roots the *sabbath* in creation rather than the Law of Moses saying, “**For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy**” (Ex 20:11). This refers back to Genesis 2:2 where God “rests,” an idea that does not intimate sleep or a nap (as if God were tired), but rather taking his seat as the King enthroned above his creation.¹ Since moral law is always binding, it is always incumbent upon people to take their rest in the Lord. However, all Christians (save those of the “seventh-day” variety) have to explain why the earliest church began gathering on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7) and give offerings (1 Cor 16:2), and why they (especially the Christian Jews) stopped doing this on the seventh day.

There have been two basic answers to this question. The first is the one set forth in the LBC. Most Reformed people have generally argued that the day of sabbathing *changed* according to the rules of the new covenant. Hence, they often call it the “Christian Sabbath.” Others, not seeing *sabbath* as a moral command at all (and some not seeing moral commands in general as applying to the new covenant, unless Jesus repeats them), simply see the Lord’s Day as something *brand new*, not rooted in the principle of OT *sabbath*. There is no Christian Sabbath for them. There is only meeting on the first day of the week to worship Jesus. Intertwined with these two very different views are the practical

¹ For an exegesis of this, see my sermon on this passage.

applications of what a person is or is not allowed to do on Sunday. Do all of the laws of the OT seventh day carry over to Christians on the first day, do only some of them, or do none of them because there is complete discontinuity and a carryover would be nonsense? In this paper I want to address the origin of the Christian Sabbath.

Sabbath in the OT

The first thing to do is establish the timing of *sabbath* in the OT. I do not say “The Sabbath,” but “sabbath,” and the reason will be made clear now. First, there was one day in seven that was called “The Sabbath Day.” This was a weekly *sabbath* occurring on the last (seventh) day of the week (our Saturday). God sent the Manna in the wilderness on six days, but not the seventh in order to ingrain (pun intended) this weekly Sabbath keeping in the minds of the Israelites. But there were more *sabbaths* than this in the Law of Moses.

The association of the new moon with *sabbath* is found throughout the Scripture (Amos 8:4ff; Hos 2:13; Isa 1:13ff; 66: 23; 2 Kgs 4:23).² The New Moon and Full Moon also were “**feast days**” (Ps 81:3). Other sabbaths were also considered part of feasts (cf. 1 Chron 23:31; Neh 10:33; Ezek 45:17). For instance, during the feast of booths “on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD seven days. On the first day shall be a solemn rest (*shabbathon*), and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest (*shabbathon*)” (Lev 23:39). Thus, different days of the week could be called sabbaths.

We find the same true with years. “The seventh year shall be a Sabbath (*sabbath*) of solemn rest (*shabbathon*) for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD” (Lev 25:4). Then, after a series of seven sevens of years (49 years), the fiftieth year

² In a lunar calendar such as Israel had, the new moon would fall on either the 14th or the 15th of each month. For the 15th, see below.

(beginning a new cycle as a “first” year) was the year of Jubilee where “in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines” (Lev 25:11). In other words, it was a Sabbath Year. Actually, it was to be an unprecedented year of rest.

What we see in this is that five numbers are regularly associated with sabbath: one, seven, eight, fifteen, and fifty. We will try to make sense of some of these shortly. For now, a fitting way to summarize all of this is in the words of Yahweh himself, “You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD” (Lev 26:2). There was not just one *sabbath* in the OT.

Things “Done” on Sabbath

Besides “rest” (which was heavily regulated under the Mosaic Law of the weekly Sabbath), feasting and gathering together in assembly in the house of God to hear the word of God are things we find associated with sabbathing, especially on more irregular seventh and eighth day sabbaths. “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations” (Lev 23:4). “New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations-- I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly” (Isa 1:13 ESV). “For seven days you shall present food offerings to the LORD. On the eighth day you shall hold a holy convocation and present a food offering to the LORD. It is a solemn assembly; you shall not do any ordinary work” (Lev 23:36). “And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule” (Neh 8:18).

One more thing done on *sabbath* will surprise many. It was circumcision. Jesus says, “Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If on the Sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you

angry with me because on the Sabbath I made a man's whole body well?”³ (John 7:22-23).⁴ The ESV translates the anarthrous (that is, without the definite article) Greek word *sabbatō* as “the Sabbath.” This might lead us to think that the Pharisees were circumcising on the seventh day. But they were not. They were obeying the Law of Moses, not disobeying it.

Moses says, “And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Lev 12:3). This idea goes all way back hundreds of years before the Law of Moses to the commandment given to Abraham, “He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised” (Gen 17:12). Whether they were circumcising the boys eight days after they were born or on “the eighth day,” the symbolism (that we will look at in a moment) was the same. That symbolism will be explored below. But what is important here to notice is that the eighth day is called by Jesus himself a Sabbath. In fact, the Greek word is the identical word used in the fourth commandment of the Septuagint for Sabbath. It is the Greek word *sabbaton*. Thus, both the seventh *and eighth days* are called Sabbaths explicitly.

The same is necessarily true of the first day, since in a seven day week, both the first and the eighth days are identical (our Sunday). Thus we read again, “On the first day shall be a solemn rest, and on the eighth day shall be a solemn rest” (Lev 23:39; cf. 2 Chron 29:17; Neh 8:18). The same would be true of a fifteenth day or the fiftieth day which appear occasionally (see above). And so—in the Old Testament—the first/eighth/fifteenth/fiftieth can all be regarded as Sabbath.

Circumcision and the Eighth Day

Returning to this idea of circumcision for a moment will help us in a rather unexpected way come to understand why Christians began to gather on the first

³ We can see a simple chiasmic structure here: Moses – circumcision – sabbath ... sabbath – circumcision – law of Moses.

⁴ This paper really owes its origin to Tony Jackson who had this insight from John 7 and told me about it. In many respects it is therefore truly his paper.

day of the week, their day of assembly, their day of feasting (the Lord's Supper), their day of collecting money. Circumcision is, of course, a bloody rite of cutting the foreskin off of the male sex organ. It was given to Abraham as the sign of his covenant. Notice how covenant, circumcision, the sign, and the eighth day all converge, “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised” (Gen 17:10-12). In this way, not only is circumcision related to the covenant with Abraham, *so also is the eighth day*. Abraham was not given regular old pagan circumcision, but *eighth day circumcision*.

Curiously in this regard, the word *shabbath* does not merely mean to rest (again, as in sleeping or napping). In its transitive form it actually means to “put an end to” or—importantly—“to sever” (Isa 14:4; 24:8).⁵ Of course, severing is exactly what is happening in circumcision, as is “cutting off.” When a covenant was made, it was usually said to be “cut” (karat). They would “cut” a covenant, and here, God is quite literally having Abraham and his descendants cut the foreskin as the sign of the covenant, and a sign of resting.

Circumcision of the Heart and the First-Eighth Day

Now, circumcision was never meant to be an end to itself, though unfortunately this is how many Jews took it: If a man is physical circumcised, then he is “good to go” in eternity. But circumcision was a physical *sign*. Signs in the Bible always point to a spiritual reality. What was the spiritual reality to which physical circumcision pointed? It was the circumcision of the heart “**Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn**” (Deut 10:16).⁶

⁵ See Theophile James Meek, “The Sabbath in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 33 (1914): 201-12 (03).

https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/ted_hildebrandt/otesources/02-exodus/text/articles/meek-sabbath-jbl.pdf

⁶ “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts” (Jer 4:4).

But they were not able to do such a thing for, “To this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (Deut 29:4). God hardened them in this way in order to point forward to something in the future, a mighty gracious promise, “The LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6).

This promise of the circumcision of the heart is made a reality in the new covenant. So the Apostle says, “A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Rom 2:29). Certainly, OT saints had their hearts circumcised by God’s spirit. However, this was done in anticipation of the legal way God could do this without overriding his justice in the days when he passed over former sins (Rom 3:25).

Ezekiel prophecies, “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (Ezek 36:26-27). He is predicting the new covenant. “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah ... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31-34).

When is this new covenant made a reality? It is made a reality in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As to his death, “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:14-15). This death is commemorated in

a *feast* that was celebrated by the churches when they assembled together on the first day of the week. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25). “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread...” (Act 20:7). “Let us therefore celebrate the feast” (1 Cor 5:8 NAS).

As for the resurrection, it is not a coincidence that this took place on the “first day of the week,” which also happens to be the “eighth day” after he entered Jerusalem. “Toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb” (Matt 28:1). “And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb” (Mark 16:2). This is the beginning of the circumcising of the hearts for the church in a legal, covenantal sense, for it on this day that Jesus breathed the Spirit of God upon the Disciples (John 20:22).

Eighth Day and New Creation

The first/eighth day is also symbolic of the new creation which begins the eternal age, especially in the Early Church. A note in Schaff’s *Church Fathers* says, “The Fathers take the eighth to mean the new creation.”⁷ The Epistle of Barnabas (post 70 A.D.) can be a segue here as he connects the circumcision of the heart (ala Ezekiel’s prophecy) to the new creation. “[God] made a second creation in the last days. And the Lord says: ‘Behold, I make the last things as the first’ ... we have been created anew, just as he says once more in another prophet: ‘Behold,’ says the Lord, ‘I will take away from these their stony hearts, and put in hearts of flesh’” (Barn 6:13-14).⁸ Later, the same author writes of a Sabbath where God will begin creating the new world on the day Jesus rises from the dead:

⁷ Philip Schaff, ed., *Saint Augustin: Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 8, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), p. 44, n. 10.

⁸ The translation of this and the next Barnabas quote comes from Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999).

Finally, he says to them: “I cannot bear your new moons and sabbaths.” You see what he means: it is not the present sabbaths that are acceptable to me, but the one that I have made; on that Sabbath, after I have set everything at rest, I will create the beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world. This is why we spend the eighth day in celebration, the day on which Jesus both arose from the dead and, after appearing again, ascended into heaven.

(Barn 15:8-9)

So also does Didymus the Blind (c. 313–398): “This psalm [Psalm 6] is sung ‘for the end’ because these are the most perfect contemplations concerning the eighth⁹ ... Just as he who is circumcised in the flesh has removed a certain part of his body, so also he who casts off every care of life is circumcised in his heart and is like the true pure ones who dwell earnestly on thoughts of the Lord. On the eighth day the circumcision is completed” (*Fragments on the Psalms* 6.1).¹⁰ Augustine calls the eighth day “the eternal age” (Augustine, *on Psalm 12*). Pseudo-Ignatius writes, “After the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week]. Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, ‘To the end, for the eighth day’”¹¹ (Ignatius, *Magnesians* 9).¹²

⁹ The LXX translates the intro, “For the choir director; with stringed instruments, upon an eight-string lyre” as “For the End, a Psalm of David among the Hymns for the eighth.” “The Eighth” was taken to refer to the octave, and was used as a symbol of the eighth day or new creation by many (including Athanasius [*Treatise on the Psalms*], “What is the octave? It is the day of the Lord’s resurrection on which we receive the fruit of our labors;” and Eusebius of Caesarea [*Commentary on the Psalms*], “The octave is the day of Christ the Lord’s salvific resurrection ... also symbolic of an infant’s circumcision ... This day is better than the seventh because on it the Law is dissolved”).

¹⁰ Craig A. Blasing and Carmen S. Hardin, eds., *Psalms 1–50*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 48.

¹¹ This quote refers to the LXX of Psalm 6:1.

¹² The Catechism of the Catholic Church reflects this old theology, “The *eighth day*. But for us a new day has dawned: the day of Christ’s Resurrection. The seventh day completes the first creation. The eighth day begins the new creation. Thus, the work of creation culminates in the greater work of redemption. The first creation finds its meaning and its summit in the new creation in Christ, the splendor of which surpasses that of the first creation.” CCC Part 1, Sec. 2, Ch. 1, Art. 1, Para 5.2.349.

One more curious feature is associated with this first/eighth day is worth mentioning. This is the feature of naming/renaming, especially as it relates to circumcision. On the very day that God gave Abram the covenant sign of circumcision (on the same day he was circumcised; Gen 17:26); he changed Abram's name to Abraham (17:5) and Sarai's name to Sarah (15).¹³ On the day that John the Baptist was circumcised, this was the day he was also given his name (Luke 1:59-60). The same is true of the Lord Jesus (Luke 2:21). The naming signifies the newness of the covenant order on the first/eighth day.¹⁴

Conclusion

What is the first/eighth day called in the Law of Moses when it relates to circumcision? The Sabbath. What was the sign of the Abrahamic covenant? Circumcision. What did this sign point us towards? The eighth/first day, the new covenant, and the new creation. What did Israel do on these days? They feasted. They assembled. They heard the Word of God. They worshiped. They sabbathed.

Therefore, we are able to make proper sense of what was going on in their minds when the first Christians (nearly all Jews) assembled on the first day of the week, the day that was known to them as the "Lord's Day" (Rev 1:10).¹⁵ Unlike those who think there is no continuity with the OT here, the early church understood the symbolism of the Abrahamic covenant, of circumcision, of the eighth day, and of sabbathing. They knew that all of the OT looked forward to the events that took place in their days. For them, to meet on the first day of the week was not an abolishing of the law, but the greatest possible fulfillment of the law—the

¹³ In the narrative, this day of circumcision takes place 13 years after the immediately preceding story wherein God comes to Hagar after the story presents Abram and Sarai as having a "fall" that parallels Adam and Eve (see my sermon on Gen 16. Curiously, just after the fall of Adam, he names his wife "Eve" (Gen 3:20).

¹⁴ This appears in a unique way in the Noah story, wherein after Noah's "fall" (Gen 9:20-23), the covenant is reaffirmed, and will now come through "Shem" which means "Name" (Gen 9:26-27).

¹⁵ Throughout the Church Father's we find this day being called the Lord's Day.

very same law that Israel was herself keeping when she sabbathed on the special days.

But the church has confused the eighth day as badly as they have the sign of circumcision itself. Much of the church sees baptism as the fulfillment of circumcision. I've argued in other places that instead, baptism comes from baptism.¹⁶ There is no replacement going on. There is simply a change in priesthood, with the same covenantal sign of baptism carrying over into the NT. Similarly, there is no replacing of the seventh day with the first day, much less no relationship with the OT at all in the keeping of the first day Sabbath of Christians. Rather, Lord's Day worship continues on from the law in a transformed, renewed, greater sense than ever from the feast-assembly-rest days of Israel's law which was all foreshadowed in the circumcision on the eighth day in the sign of Abraham. This was not the highly regulated seventh day Sabbath of Israel, but the first/eighth day Sabbath first symbolized in circumcision, and then later on in the Law, through various special Feasts of Israel.

This kind of continuity helps us make sense of why Jewish Christians would have little trouble gathering on the first day of the week for worshipping through a feast, to hear the expounding of the word of God, to give to those in need, and other acts of corporate worship.¹⁷ By making the right connections, it can also help us make sense of why NT sabbathing is not as harsh in its

¹⁶ See Douglas Van Dorn, *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Publishing, 2009).

¹⁷ We have seen from Acts how the early church met for the Supper on the Lord's Day. This same idea continues very early in the post-NT church in a document that dates between 80-160 A.D., "But every Lord's day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice [the idea is of a spiritual sacrifice, see Rom 12:1-2] may be pure" (The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles 14:1). Or, "Because the fast of Epiphany chances to fall on a Lord's day, let us take a few dates, and so break our fast, and honour the Lord's day" (*The Prospobnesus of Theophilus, Archbishop of Alexandria* [d. 412 A.D.], *When the Holy Epiphanies Happened to Fall on a Sunday*, Canon 1).

regulations as was the weekly seventh day observance of Israel, even while understanding that it is still a day of rest from “laborious work”¹⁸ (Lev 23:36).¹⁹

The LBC is correct in what that it says. God has an appointed time of worship by way of positive moral commandment, binding in all ages. The first day of the week is the “one day in seven” principle of the OT and the Confession. The first day is not a replacement (the Confession never actually says that it is), but is a continuation in the new covenant of the feasting, gathering, celebrating, and resting that Israel had foreshadowed and remembered in her own history. The semi-annual first/eighth day feast sabbaths become the weekly NT sabbath in accordance with the fulfillment of all things in Christ. The church now

¹⁸ The idea of “work” which accompanies this law was dealt with relatively early in a formal manner as we find in one of the Canons of the Synod of Laodicea (circa 365 A.D.), “Here the Fathers order that no one of the faithful shall stop work on the Sabbath as do the Jews, but that they should honour the Lord’s Day, on account of the Lord’s resurrection, and that on that day they should abstain from manual labour and go to church. But thus abstaining from work on Sunday they do not lay down as a necessity, but they add, ‘if they can.’ For if through need or any other necessity any one worked on the Lord’s day this was not reckoned against him.” (*Ancient Epitome of Canon XXIX*).

¹⁹ The word “laborious” is *abodah*. It refers to the work of a slave (Lev 25:39); the duty of carrying gifts (Num 18:7); agricultural labor (1 Chron 27:26); the performance of a duty (Lev 23:7); service that is rendered to someone (Josh 22:27; Gen 30:26; 2 Chron 12:8); and so on. In an important early work called *The Paschal Canon of Anatolius of Alexandria* (230–270 A.D.) where the date of Easter begins to be formally established, we see the connection of this exact law to the Lord’s Day. Here is the extended text with relevant parts underlined, “Moreover, the allegation which they sometimes make against us, that if we pass the moon’s fourteenth we cannot celebrate the beginning of the Paschal feast in light, neither moves nor disturbs us. For, although they lay it down as a thing unlawful, that the beginning of the Paschal festival should be extended so far as to the moon’s twentieth; yet they cannot deny that it ought to be extended to the sixteenth and seventeenth, which coincide with the day on which the Lord rose from the dead. But we decide that it is better that it should be extended even on to the twentieth day, on account of the Lord’s day, than that we should anticipate the Lord’s day on account of the fourteenth day; for on the Lord’s day was it that light was shown to us in the beginning, and now also in the end, the comforts of all present and the tokens of all future blessings. For the Lord ascribes no less praise to the twentieth day than to the fourteenth. For in the book of Leviticus [Lev 23:5–7] the injunction is expressed thus: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of this month, at even, is the Lord’s Passover. And on the fifteenth day of this month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the Lord. Seven days ye shall eat unleavened bread. The first day shall be to you one most diligently attended and holy. Ye shall do no servile work thereon. And the seventh day shall be to you more diligently attended and holier; ye shall do no servile work thereon.” And hence we maintain that those have contracted no guilt before the tribunal of Christ, who have held that the beginning of the Paschal festival ought to be extended to this day. And this, too, the most especially, as we are pressed by three difficulties, namely, that we should keep the solemn festival of the Passover on the Lord’s day, and after the equinox, and yet not beyond the limit of the moon’s twentieth day” (*Paschal Canon* 11).

remembers new things, better things, especially the circumcision of the heart by the Spirit of God who now resides within Christ's people and Christ's church.

Truly, this is a day of rejoicing. It is the Christian Sabbath.