

The Scientific Bureau of the University of Catania

THE NAMES OF
THE DAYS OF
THE WEEK



THE NAMES OF THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

Short answer

Sunday

Sunnandæg, Sun's day – the day of the sun, in Old Norse Sól, Sol.

Monday

Old English Monandæg, a combination of mona, meaning “moon”, and dæg, meaning “day.”

Tuesday

Tiwesdæg (Tiw's/Tyr's/Tew's -day – the day of the god of war and combat.

Wednesday

Woden's day – the day of the chief Anglo-Saxon god Woden, Norse Odin.

Thursday

From the Old English Purreddæg. Thor's Day – the day of the god Þunor or Thunor.

Friday

Frīgedæg (Frige's day – the day of the goddess Frige (Norse Frigg), wife to Woden.

Saturday

Old English Sæterdæg, or “Saturn's Day”.

The first day of the week

The first day of the week (for most people), Sunday is the '**day of the sun**' since **ancient Egyptian times** in honor of the sun-god, beginning with **Ra**. The Egyptians passed their idea of a 7-day week onto the Romans, who also started their week with the Sun's day, *dies solis*.

For centuries the Romans used a period of eight days in civil practice, but in **321 CE** Emperor **Constantine** established the seven-day week in the Roman calendar and designated **Sunday** as the first day of the week.

The first day of the work week in **Israel** is not Monday, but **Sunday** (יום ראשון). *יום ראשון* means first, and it's the first day of God's creation of the world: "And God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." So the Sun was created on Sunday, the first day of the week.

So the **seventh day of the week (Saturday)**, from even (evening) to even, is the Sabbath of the Lord our God. Evening is at sunset when day ends and another day begins. No other day has ever been sanctified as the day of rest. The Sabbath Day begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. From Genesis: *And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.*

The reason why Christians go to church on Sunday instead of Saturday is **that Jesus' resurrection occurred on Sunday**. The resurrection of Jesus Christ on Sunday is also known as the Lord's Day. Therefore, Christians celebrate the day of Christ's resurrection, which is a Sunday – not a Saturday.

<i>dies Solis</i>	Sun day		Sunday
<i>dies Lunae</i>	Moon day		Monday
<i>dies Martis</i>	Mars's day	Tiw's day	Tuesday
<i>dies Mercurii</i>	Mercury's day	Woden's day	Wednesday
<i>dies Jovis</i>	Jupiter's day	Thor's day	Thursday
<i>dies Veneris</i>	Venus's day	Frigg's day	Friday
<i>dies Saturni</i>	Saturn's day		Saturday

Long answer

The Babylonians tracked the Sun, Moon, and the five planetary bodies known to them. They believed that each of these seven celestial bodies was ruled by a god or goddess, who also shaped events on Earth. In the seven-day week of the Babylonian calendar, each day was influenced by a particular god or goddess.

Greeks from the Hellenistic period also created a seven-day “planetary” week, naming the days after their own deities (Helios, Selene, Ares, Hermes, Zeus, Aphrodite, Cronos).

The Jewish week was (and still is) also divided into seven days, but instead of being based on the planets, this system was tied to the account of Creation in the Hebrew Bible. These days had numbers, not names, with the seventh day being the Sabbath.

Influenced by these cultures and ideas, the ancient Romans eventually dropped their eight-day week and adopted a seven-day week, basing the day names on the known planets, Sun, and Moon and their own deities. This seven-day week system spread to other civilizations, which sometimes adjusted the names to their own language and beliefs.

Why did the Romans name the days of the week after their gods' names for the planets? Because they saw a connection between their gods and the changing face of the nighttime sky. The ones they were able to see in the sky each night were Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Those five planets plus the moon and sun made seven major astronomical bodies so it was natural to use these seven names when the seven-day week arrived.

Sunday

The first day of the week was named after the sun – *dies Solis* – day of the sun in Latin and later **Sunnon-dagaz** in old Germanic.

Sunnandæg (Sun's day – the day of the sun, in Old Norse Sól, Sol). Most Romance languages have used the Latin for "Lord's Day", as in the French *dimanche* and Spanish *domingo*.

Monday

Monday is the moon day – *dies Lunae* in Latin, becoming **Mon(an)dæg** in Old English. From the Old English **Monandæg**, a combination of **mona**, meaning "moon", and **dæg**, meaning "day." Most Romance languages use the Latin for "moon" – luna – as in the French *lundi* and Spanish *lunes*.

Tuesday

Whereas most English days of the week retain their associations with the Roman gods, some were substituted for the names of the equivalent Germanic gods, because English is a Germanic language.

Tuesday was named for the Roman god of war, Mars, so in Latin was known as *dies Martis*. However, the Germanic god of war was known as **Tiu** and the English day of the week is derived from this Germanic god's name instead, first known as **Tiwsday** and eventually Tuesday. Tiwesdæg (Tiw's/ Tyr's / Tew's -day – the day of the god of war and combat. Tiw, Tiu or the Norse Tyr, was also known as the sky god and was recognised as the most skilled in swordplay, despite having only one hand! He was also famed for his honour, justice and courage; Naming the second day of the week after a war god stems from the Romans' use of Mars for the same day, leading to, among others, the French *mardi* and Spanish *martes*.

Wednesday

The Germanic equivalent of the Roman god Mercury was the equally swift **Woden**. And so this day, which started out in Latin as *dies Mercurii* became **Woden's** day in old Germanic, eventually becoming Wednesday in English. **Wodnesdæg** (Woden's day – the day of the chief Anglo-Saxon god Woden (Germanic and Scandinavian god. Norse Odin). Also associated with war, Anglo-Saxon warriors would look to him to protect them on the battlefield. In particular they believed he could guide their spear arms, as the spear was Woden's sacred weapon; The name of this day, too, is borrowed from the Romans, who used the god Mercury for Wednesday. The French is *mercredi* and the Spanish is *miércoles*.

Thursday

Jupiter, also known as Jove, is the supreme Roman god and patron of the Roman state. He is the god that created thunder and lightning. **Thor** is the Norse god of thunder, often shown riding through the sky in a chariot. And it's from this Norse god that we see the Latin *dies Jovis* (day of Jupiter) become **Thor's** day and eventually Thursday. *Þunresdæg* (Thor's Day – the day of the god *Þunor* or *Thunor*). One of the most famous gods in Norse mythology, Thor is widely recognised as the hammer-wielding god associated with thunder, lightning and fertility. His hammer shaped amulets have been found in many Anglo-Saxon graves; From the Old English *Þunresdæg*. The Latin equivalent is named after Jupiter, as in the French *jeudi* and Spanish *jueves*.

Friday

Venus is the Roman goddess of love and beauty, and in Latin her day was known as *dies Veneris*. We get the English name for Venus' day from **Frigg**, the Norse goddess of love and the heavens, and possibly **Fria**, the Teutonic goddess of love and beauty. In Germanic we have **Frije-dagaz**, later becoming Friday in English. **Frigedæg** (Frige's day – the day of the goddess Frige - Norse Frigg), wife to Woden. Woden's wife was the goddess of love and was associated with all things to do with home, marriage and children. Recognised as the mother of the earth, the Anglo-Saxons would look to her to provide a good harvest. It is used in French as *vendredi* and in Spanish as *viernes*.

Saturday

Saturn is the Roman god of agriculture, known in Ancient Greece as Cronos. In Latin we have *dies Saturni*. *Sæternesdæg* (Saturn's day, whose festival "Saturnalia," with its exchange of gifts, has been incorporated into our celebration of Christmas). Unlike other English day names, no god substitution seems to have been attempted here; From the Old English *Sæterdæg*, or "Saturn's Day," this is the only day to have retained its Latin origins from the god of agriculture. In French it is *samedi* and in Spanish, *sábado*.

However southern Britain, or England as we now refer to it, was left in somewhat of a vacuum from the rest of Europe, when the occupying Romans quickly left the region in circa 410, leaving the natives to fend for themselves against the ravages of the invading Anglo-Saxons tribes.

In Norse mythology Sol and Mani were sister and brother, who first emerged when the world was forming. After the gods had created the sky, Sol drove her Sun chariot through the sky to light up the earth. Mani's chariot guided the course of the Moon, controlling its waxing and waning. Both chariots are depicted travelling at great speed through the skies pursued by wolves. It was believed that if the wolves caught up with the Sun and Moon, the stars would all disappear from the sky and it would signal the final battle between good and evil that could see the end of the world.

And just one final thought... Easter is obviously a Christian celebration, yes? No, the word Easter comes from the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and the dawn, **Eostre**, or **Ostara**, or **Eéstre**. According to the Venerable Bede, during Eostremonath (the old Anglo-Saxon name for April), folk would hold festivals in her honour to welcome the first warm spring winds.