

# **SABBATH vs. SUNDAY: WHICH SHOULD WE KEEP?**

Many sincere people feel that Sunday, the first day of the week, is the day on which Christians should meet to worship God. They think that the fourth commandment, which requires the Sabbath to be kept holy, was nullified by Christ and is therefore no longer binding on believers. There are various reasons why people believe that Sunday has replaced the Sabbath. Some believe that God's Law has been "nailed to the cross," and that it is no longer necessary to keep it. Most have been taught that Christ was resurrected on Sunday, and use this as justification for worshiping on the first day of the week. Others think the New Testament shows that early Christians kept Sunday instead of the Sabbath.

The only way to truly determine whether or not the Sabbath is obsolete is to honestly examine what the Bible says about the subject. Let's begin at the logical starting point, the beginning.

The Bible shows that the Sabbath was instituted by God during the week of creation. After spending six days fashioning the universe and everything in it, God rested on the seventh day:

GENESIS 2:2 By the **seventh day** God completed His work which He had done, **and He rested** [*veyishebot*] on the **seventh day** from all His work which He had done. 3 Then **God blessed the seventh day** and **sanctified** [*vayeqadesh*] it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (**NASU**)

The Hebrew word translated "and He rested" in verse 2 comes from the root **shabat** (Eng. "Sabbath"), which later became the official name for the seventh day of the week. The word "sanctified" in verse 3 comes from the root **qadash**, which literally means "to set apart as holy." Here is what the **Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament** says about the Hebrew concept of "sanctification" or "holiness":

A basic element of Israelite religion was the maintenance of an inviolable distinction between the spheres of the sacred and the common or profane (Num 18:32). That which was inherently holy or designated so by divine decree or cultic rite was not to be treated as common. The Sabbath was holy, and the restrictions connected with that day served to maintain its distinctive nature and to guard against its being treated as common (Exo 16:23-26; Isa 58:13, 14).

God blessed and hallowed the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). God did not rest because He was tired, for God never gets weary (Isa. 40:28). He rested to enjoy the creation He had just finished and to set an example for mankind.

Only God, who alone is holy, can make something holy. The Bible shows that the Sabbath was blessed and made holy in the very beginning. God intended it as a weekly memorial to His creative acts. By observing the Sabbath, humans would constantly be reminded every week who the true Creator is.

While serving as slaves in Egypt, the Israelites had not been able to keep the Sabbath. In fact, they had probably forgotten its significance. Exodus 16 shows that after freeing the Israelites from Pharaoh, God wanted to impress upon them the importance of observing His Sabbath:

EXODUS 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in **My law** or not." (**NKJV**)

As the ensuing passage clearly shows, the "law" being referred to in verse 4 is the command to keep the Sabbath holy:

EXODUS 16:21 Morning by morning they [the Israelites] gathered it [manna], as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted. 22 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, 23 he said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a **holy Sabbath** to the LORD; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.'" 24 So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a **Sabbath** to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you will gather it; but on the **seventh day**, which is a **Sabbath**, there will be none. 27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. 28 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep **My commandments** and instructions? 29 See! The LORD has given you the **Sabbath**, therefore on the sixth day He gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the **seventh day**." So the people rested on the **seventh day**. (**NRSV**)

The observance of the Sabbath rest was clearly one of God's laws **before** the Israelites were given the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai (Exo. 20). The Sabbath command was codified by its inclusion in the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites by God Himself when the Israelites reached Mount Sinai:

EXODUS 20:8 "Remember the **Sabbath day** to keep it **holy**. 9 Six days shall you labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the **Sabbath** of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your

cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the **seventh day**. Therefore **the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.**" (**NKJV**)

God's Sabbaths (weekly and annual) were so important to Him that He made their observance a separate covenant with Israel. The "Sabbath Covenant" was instituted **after** what came to be called the "Old Covenant" was ratified (Exo. 24:8):

EXODUS 31:12 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 13 "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely **My Sabbaths** you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. 14 You shall keep the **Sabbath**, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. 15 Work shall be done for six days, but **the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD**. Whoever does any work on the **Sabbath day**, he shall surely be put to death. 16 Therefore **the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant**. 17 **It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever**; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the **seventh day** He rested and was refreshed.' " (**NKJV**)

God made the Sabbath a perpetual covenant with the Israelites. By observing it every week, they would always remember that they were a special people to God. It would also serve as a weekly reminder that their God was the only true God, the One who had created all things.

The Sabbath is of major importance in the Old Testament. Therefore, the command to observe it is repeated numerous times:

EXODUS 34:21 "Six days you shall work, but on the **seventh day** you shall rest; even in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest [on the Sabbath]." (**Amplified Bible**)

EXODUS 35:2 "Six days shall work be done, but on the **seventh day** you shall have a **holy Sabbath** of solemn rest to the LORD." (**NRSV**)

LEVITICUS 23:3 "There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a **Sabbath** of rest, **a day of sacred assembly**. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a **Sabbath** to the LORD." (**NIV**)

DEUTERONOMY 5:12 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the **seventh day** is a **Sabbath** to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. 15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the

LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore **the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.** (*NIV*)

EZEKIEL 20:12 Moreover, **I gave them My Sabbaths, as a sign between Me and them,** that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. (*ESV*)

ISAIAH 58:13 "If you keep your feet from breaking the **Sabbath** and from doing as you please on **My holy day,** if you call the **Sabbath** a delight and **the LORD's holy day** honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, 14 then I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." (*NIV*)

ISAIAH 56:1 This is what the LORD says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for My salvation is close at hand and My righteousness will soon be revealed. 2 Blessed is the man who does this, the man who holds it fast, who keeps the **Sabbath** without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil." 3 Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from His people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." 4 For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep **My Sabbaths,** who choose what pleases Me and hold fast to My covenant - 5 to them I will give within My temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an **everlasting** name that will not be cut off. 6 And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve Him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship Him, all who keep the **Sabbath** without desecrating it and who hold fast to My covenant - 7 these I will bring to My holy mountain and give them joy in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on My alter; for My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." (*NIV*)

Failure to properly keep God's Sabbaths was one of the primary sins that caused the nations of Israel and Judah to be punished with foreign conquest and captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians:

II CHRONICLES 36:19 Then they [the Babylonians] burned down the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. 20 And those who escaped from the sword he [Nebuchadnezzar] carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah [Jer. 25:9-12], until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. (*NKJV*)

NEHEMIAH 13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah [after returning from the Babylonian exile], and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you **profane the Sabbath day?** 18 Did not our

fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city [Jerusalem]? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." (**NKJV**)

It's evident from the Old Testament that God took His Sabbaths (including the annual Sabbaths and the sabbatical years) seriously enough to punish Israel and Judah for not keeping them. But what about the Sabbath in the New Testament? Did Yeshua observe the Sabbath?

LUKE 4:16 When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, **he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom.** (**NRSV**)

LUKE 4:31 Then he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them **on the Sabbaths.** (**NKJV**)

MARK 6:1 Jesus . . . went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 **When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue,** and many who heard him were amazed. (**NIV**)

MARK 1:21 Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately **on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught.** (**NKJV**)

Plainly, the Scriptures above show that Yeshua customarily kept the Sabbath. He taught in synagogues and explained that the Sabbath was not supposed to be a burden, but rather a blessing. Because the Jews recognized that Jerusalem had been destroyed and their ancestors carried into captivity for Sabbath breaking, some built a hedge of rules around the Sabbath which tried to dictate its observance in minute detail. They made the strict keeping of the Sabbath according to **their rules** more important than the well-being of human beings:

MATTHEW 12:1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the **Sabbath.** And his disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the **Sabbath!**" 3 Then he said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the law that on the **Sabbath** the priests in the temple profane the **Sabbath,** and are blameless? 6 But I say to you that in this place is One greater than the temple. 7 But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For **the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.**" 8 Now when he had departed from there, he went into their synagogue. 10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the **Sabbath?**" - that they might accuse him. 11 Then he said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit

on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore **it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.**" 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other. (*NKJV*)

LUKE 13:10 **On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues,** 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. 14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the **Sabbath,** the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the **Sabbath.**" 15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the **Sabbath** untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the **Sabbath day** from what bound her?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing. (*NIV*)

LUKE 14:1 One **Sabbath,** when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the **Sabbath** or not?" 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. 5 Then he asked them, "If one of you has a donkey or an ox that falls into a well on the **Sabbath day,** will you not immediately pull him out?" 6 And they had nothing to say. (*NIV*)

JOHN 5:8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." 9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the **Sabbath.** 10 The Jews therefore said him who was cured, "It is the **Sabbath;** it is not lawful for you to carry your bed." 11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'" 12 Then they asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" 13 But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. 14 Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." 15 The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. 16 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill him, because he had done these things on the **Sabbath.** 17 But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." 18 Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only **broke the Sabbath,** but also said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. (*NKJV*)

JOHN 7:19 "Moses gave you the Law, did he not? But not one of you obeys the Law. Why are you trying to kill me?" 20 The crowd answered, "You have a demon in You! Who is trying to kill You?" 21 Jesus answered, "I did one great work and you were all surprised. 22 Because Moses ordered you to circumcise your sons (although it was not Moses but your ancestors who started it), you will circumcise a boy on the **Sabbath**. 23 If a boy is circumcised on the **Sabbath** so that Moses' law will not be broken, why are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the **Sabbath**? 24 Stop judging by external standards, and judge by true standards." (*TEV*)

JOHN 9:6 . . . He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with clay. 7 And he said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. 10 . . . They said to him, "How were your eyes opened?" 11 He answered and said, "A man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." 12 Then they said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." 13 They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. 14 Now it was a **Sabbath** when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." 16 Therefore some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, because **he does not keep the Sabbath**." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them. (*NKJV*)

Numerous times Yeshua tried to show the Jewish religious leaders that the Sabbath had been made for the benefit of man. It was not intended to be a burden, but rather a blessing. He often healed people on the Sabbath to show that mercy was not against the Law.

Although some of the Pharisees accused him of breaking the Sabbath (John 5:18; 9:16), he was in fact showing that the Sabbath should be kept, but in a different way than the Jews had been taught. Yeshua upheld the sanctity of the Sabbath and expanded upon the way it should be observed.

But what about Sabbath observance after the death of Yeshua? Did his disciples continue to keep the Sabbath?

LUKE 23:55 And the women who had come with him from Galilee followed after, and they observed the tomb and how his body was laid. 56 Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the **Sabbath** according to the commandment. (*NKJV*)

ACTS 13:14 . . . They [Paul and Barnabas] came to Antioch in Pisidia, and **went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day** and sat down. 15 After the reading of the Law and Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, "Men and brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on." 16 Then Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand

said, "Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen: . . ." 42 And when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them **the next Sabbath.** (*NKJV*)

The Scriptures above show without a doubt that Paul and Barnabas continued to keep the Sabbath and assemble on it to worship and teach about Yeshua. After preaching the risen Messiah to the Jews and Gentile proselytes in the synagogue, they spoke to those who had believed their message after the Sabbath service ended. The Gentiles, in particular, begged that more of this good news be preached to them.

If Sunday had replaced the Sabbath as the day for Christian fellowship and worship, Paul would have undoubtedly told the Gentiles that there was no need to wait until the next Sabbath to gather together to hear the gospel. He easily could have said, "Tomorrow is the Lord's Day, the day we should now meet for worship and instruction. Tomorrow, on the first day of the week, we will teach you more about Yeshua the Messiah." But he did **NOT** do that. Instead, the Bible shows that he met with them on the next Sabbath:

ACTS 13:44 And **the next Sabbath** almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. (*NKJV*)

Paul was simply doing the same thing that the Messiah had done. He told the Corinthian church that they should imitate him, just as he imitated the Messiah:

I CORINTHIANS 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (*NIV*)

The example that Yeshua set was customary worship on the Sabbath day, in obedience to the commandments of God. This was what Paul and the other disciples of Yeshua also did. The book of Acts shows several more examples of Sabbath observance:

ACTS 16:13 And **on the Sabbath day** we [Paul and his companions] went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there. (*NKJV*)

ACTS 17:1 . . . They came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. 2 **As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days** he reasoned with them from the Scriptures. (*NIV*)

ACTS 18:1 . . . Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. . . . 4 **Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue,** trying to persuade Jews and **Greeks.** . . . 11 So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the Word of God. (*NIV*)



Plainly, the Bible shows that Paul and the other disciples of Yeshua continued to keep the Sabbath after the Messiah's death and resurrection. Nowhere in the New Testament is the commandment to observe the Sabbath negated. Instead, the New Testament shows that the Sabbath was still kept by the early Christians. Those who look solely to the Scriptures for guidance can find no command regarding another mandated day of worship.

But what about the first day of the week? Most Christian scholars insist that Sunday superseded the Sabbath because they think Christ was resurrected on that day. They contend that "the Lord's Day" is the day on which Christians should worship, as the following quotations show:

**LORD'S DAY.** The first day of the week, Sunday, adopted by the early Christians as the day of worship. . . . In the mainstream of early Christianity, the Decalog's injunction against work on the Sabbath was spiritualized . . . it was not until the fourth century that the Sabbath commandment was applied to Sunday by Christians. . . . Christian worship on Sunday, "the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), was based on the occurrence of Jesus' resurrection during the early morning hours of a Sunday (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19). (p. 662, *The Eermans Bible Dictionary*)

**LORD'S DAY** - the first day of the week, or Sunday; the day especially associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. A special honor was reserved for Sunday, the first day of the week. This was the day on which Jesus was raised from the dead; every Lord's Day, therefore, is a weekly memorial of Christ's resurrection. . . . The Lord's Day is not to be confused with the SABBATH, the Jewish day of rest. The Jewish Sabbath corresponds with our Saturday, the seventh or last day of the week. This special day to the Jews commemorated the day on which God rested after the creation of the world. The Lord's Day is our Sunday, the first day of the week; it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. (p. 771, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*)

**LORD'S DAY,** the day especially associated with the Lord Jesus Christ . . . the first day of the week on which Christ arose. It was the resurrection victory on that day which marked it as distinct and sacred to the Christian Church. The Gospel emphasis upon the "the first day of the week" as the day of resurrection stresses its distinctiveness. . . . Sunday (the name is of pagan origin) as the day of special worship is a Christian institution and must be sharply distinguished from the sabbath. Nor were the OT sabbath regulations transferred to the Lord's Day as a "Christian sabbath." (p. 490, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*)

**THE LORD'S DAY.** This, the first day of the week in the Christian order, commemorates the new creation with Christ Himself as its resurrected head. It is not a mere changeover from the Sabbath, but a new day marking a new dispensation. The Sabbath related to the old creation (Ex. 20:8-11;

31:12-17; Heb. 4:4). . . . The term "Christian Sabbath" is scarcely biblically defensible. This day of grace marks the beginning of the week with a day of privilege, whereas the Sabbath came at the end of a week of labor, an order expected under the law. It must carefully be remembered that the Lord's Day, the term *Sunday* (which see) being of pagan origin, is strictly a Christian institution. (p. 782, ***The New Unger's Bible Dictionary***)

The phrase "the Lord's Day" appears only once in the New Testament:

REVELATION 1:10 I was **in the Spirit** [*en pneumatī*] **on the Lord's Day** [*en te kuriake hemera*], and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet. (**NKJV**)

In Revelation 1:10, the Greek word translated "on" (**en**, "on the Lord's Day") can also be translated "in." In fact, the preceding phrase "in the Spirit" is **en pneumatī**. A more consistent translation of **en pneumatī en te kuriake hemera** shows that John was "in spirit in the Lord's Day."

The "Day of the Lord" is a period referred to numerous times in Old Testament prophecies (cf. Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; 34:8; Jer. 46:10; Eze. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; Amos 5:18, 20; Oba. 1:15; Zep. 1:7-8, 14, 18; 2:2-3; Zec. 14:1). All these prophecies deal with the end of this age, leading up to and including the second coming of Messiah.

Since the book of Revelation is about the events leading to the return of Yeshua from heaven to end the age of mankind and initiate the kingdom of God, it appears likely that this is "the Lord's Day" that John was "in." He probably was not referring to any particular day of the week.

Yet had he been referring to a specific day of the week, which day could lay claim to being "the Lord's Day"? Yeshua himself specifies only ONE day in the Bible that he was master over:

MATTHEW 12:8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the **Sabbath**." (**NIV**)

MARK 2:28 "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the **Sabbath**." (**NKJV**)

LUKE 6:5 And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the **Sabbath**." (**ESV**)

Yeshua declares himself to be Lord of the Sabbath. If we are to let the Scriptures teach us, we have to admit that this is the only day that can legitimately be called "the Lord's Day."

The impetus for Christians keeping Sunday as "the Lord's Day" did not come from any scriptural command. Nowhere in the Bible is the fourth commandment (Exo. 20:8-11) nullified or replaced with a command to keep Sunday. As all the scholars above admit, Christians base their

reverence for Sunday on the belief that Yeshua was resurrected on the first day of the week.

But what if Sunday **wasn't** the day on which Yeshua arose from the dead? What if the Scriptures really show that the Messiah was resurrected on another day?

In the remainder of this article, we'll look at the "first day of the week" passages in the New Testament. In doing so, we'll consult the original Greek text of the New Testament to determine what the Scriptures actually say about the day on which Yeshua was raised from the dead.

In most modern English translations of the Bible, the "first day of the week" is mentioned six times in the Gospels (with two additional occurrences elsewhere in the New Testament). Let's look at each of them in detail:

MATTHEW 28:1 Now after the Sabbath, as the **first day of the week** [*mian sabbaton*] began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. (**NKJV**)

MARK 16:2 Very early in the morning, on the **first day of the week** [*mias sabbaton*], they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. (**NKJV**)

MARK 16:9 Now when he rose early on the **first day of the week** [*prote sabbatou*], he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. (**NKJV**)

LUKE 24:1 Now on the **first day of the week** [*mia ton sabbaton*], very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. (**NKJV**)

JOHN 20:1 On the **first day of the week** [*mia ton sabbaton*] Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. (**NKJV**)

JOHN 20:19 Then, the same day at evening, being the **first day of the week** [*mia ton sabbaton*], when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." (**NKJV**)

Almost all English translations render the Greek phrases **prote sabbatou**, **mian sabbaton**, **mias sabbaton**, and **mia ton sabbaton** as "first day of the week." However, the Greek word for "day" (**hemera**) does not appear in any of these verses. If we look at a literal rendering of these phrases, we see that they would be better translated "First Sabbath" (**prote sabbatou**) or "First of the Sabbaths" (**mian sabbaton**, **mias sabbaton**, and **mia ton sabbaton**).

Let's review **Young's Literal Translation**, from the respected 19th-century biblical scholar J.N. Young, to see how he translates these same verses:

MATTHEW 28:1 And on the eve of the **sabbaths** [*sabbaton*], at the dawn, toward the **first of the sabbaths** [*mian sabbaton*], came Mary the Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre, (**YLT**)

MARK 16:2 And early in the morning of the **first of the sabbaths** [*mias sabbaton*], they come unto the sepulchre, at the rising of the sun, (**YLT**)

LUKE 24:1 And on the **first of the sabbaths** [*mia ton sabbaton*], at early dawn, they came to the tomb, bearing the spices they made ready, and certain {others} with them, (**YLT**)

JOHN 20:1 And on the **first of the sabbaths** [*mia ton sabbaton*], Mary the Magdalene doth come early (there being yet darkness) to the tomb, and she seeth the stone having been taken away out of the tomb, (**YLT**)

JOHN 20:19 It being, therefore, evening, on that day, the **first of the sabbaths** [*mia ton sabbaton*], and the doors having been shut where the disciples were assembled, through fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith to them, 'Peace to you;' (**YLT**)

MARK 16:9 And he, having risen in the morning of the **first of the sabbaths** [*prote sabbatou*], did appear first to Mary the Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven demons; (**YLT**)

Apparently trying to be consistent, Young translated **prote sabbatou** as the plural "first of the sabbaths" in Mark 16:9. However, this is grammatically inaccurate. Both the Greek adjective **prote** and the noun **sabbatou** are singular. A more accurate translation would be "First Sabbath," as shown below:

MARK 16:9 And he, having risen in the morning of the **First Sabbath** [*prote sabbatou*], did appear **first** [*proton*] to Mary the Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven demons; (**literal translation**)

As you can see, in all the Gospel accounts of the resurrection, Young translates the resurrection passages to show that Yeshua was raised on the "First of the Sabbaths." What would "First of the Sabbaths" or "First Sabbath" have meant to a 1st-century Jew? Was there such a thing that would have been understood by those living at that time in Judea?

Absolutely! As documented in Leviticus 23:15, there were seven weekly Sabbaths between Passover and Pentecost that were to be counted every year:

LEVITICUS 23:15 'And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the [annual Passover] Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: **seven Sabbaths shall be completed.**' (**NKJV**)

At the time of Yeshua, there was an annual date right after Passover known as the "First Sabbath." This was the first weekly Sabbath after the Passover high Sabbath.

Johnston M. Cheney, in his harmony of the Gospels, sheds additional light on this "First Sabbath":

Seven sabbaths were to be counted from the Feast of First-fruits or Passover. Consequently, these came to be known as "First Sabbath," "Second Sabbath" etc., down to the seventh. And according to Julian Morgenstern, former President of Hebrew University, this practice continued in Galilee till the time of Christ or the Common Era. It is still observed by some groups in Palestine today. Thus, there was an annual date known as "First Sabbath," just after Passover. (p. 230, ***The Life of Christ in Stereo***)

The "First of the Sabbaths," mentioned by all of the Gospel writers (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19), refers to this very "First Sabbath" after Passover! In fact, when English translators render the Greek phrases ***mian sabbaton***, ***mias sabbaton***, and ***mia ton sabbaton*** as "first day of the week," they do so primarily because of tradition. The most logical translation would be the literal one: "First of the Sabbaths."

If we take the original Greek text at face value, we can see that it is very likely that Yeshua was resurrected early on the morning of the **first weekly Sabbath** after the Passover high day (John 19:31)! This would mean that there is absolutely no support for Christians venerating Sunday as "the Lord's Day"! (For a detailed study of the chronology of Yeshua's death and resurrection, refer to my article "[When Was Christ Resurrected?](#)")

Two other "first day of the week" passages are generally cited by Christians to show that the early Church met on Sunday: Acts 20:7 and I Corinthians 16:2. We'll begin by closely examining Acts 20, where Paul's journey from Philippi to Troas is described:

ACTS 20:6 But we sailed away from Philippi **after** [*meta*] the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, **where we stayed** [*ou dietripsamen*] for seven days. 7 On the **first day of the week** [*mia ton sabbaton*], when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. (***ESV***)

The Greek word translated "after" in Acts 20:6 is ***meta***. Friberg's ***Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (ALGNT)*** says that ***meta*** is a "preposition with basic meaning *in the midst of*." So instead of "after," let's translate ***meta*** as "in the midst of" in this verse.

Additionally, we need to examine a couple of other Greek words that are used in Acts 20:6. The phrase "where we stayed" comes from the Greek adverb/verb pair ***ou dietripsamen***. ***ALGNT*** says ***ou*** is an "adverb of negation to an alleged fact, used predominantly in the NT with the indicative *no, not*." According to ***Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the***

**New Testament (Thayer)**, the indicative verb **dietripsamen** comes from a root word which literally means "to wear away, consume" or "to spend, pass time." Often it is simply translated "stay" or "remain."

So how did a phrase that should literally be translated "not consuming" or "not spending" end up being translated "where we stayed"? There appears to be two possible answers:

First, it seems that the translators rendered **ou** incorrectly. This Greek adverb can either be "no/not" or "where," based on the differing accent marks above the final letter. The Majority Greek text has **ou** accented to indicate "not." Additionally, in a very few Alexandrian Greek manuscripts, the phrase **ou dietripsamen** has been replaced by **opou dietripsamen**. The Greek word **opou** denotes place, and is translated "where." However, the vast majority of Greek manuscripts do not have this word, but rather **ou** ("not").

So what does all this mean? Changing these words to their best literal translation in Acts 20:6 significantly changes the meaning of the verse:

ACTS 20:6 But we sailed away from Philippi **in the midst of** [*meta*] the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, **not consuming** [*ou dietripsamen*] seven days. (**literal translation**)

When we examine verse 7 in the Greek, we see again that the text says "First of the Sabbaths," not "first *day* of the week":

ACTS 20:7 And on the **First of the Sabbaths** [*mia ton sabbaton*], when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. (**literal translation**)

These verses show that Paul and his companions sailed away from Philippi during the seven days of Unleavened Bread. However, the phrase **ou dietripsamen** indicates that the entire seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were "not consumed" (i.e., not spent sailing). In other words, they arrived in Troas within five days, before the seven days of the Feast had ended. This would mean that they had to set sail early during the Feast, probably on the second day. Luke specifically tells us that Paul and his colleagues arrived in Troas in time to spend the first of the seven weekly Sabbaths between Passover and Pentecost with the brethren there.

Many scholars place this trip in the year 56 C.E. This dating is very important, as the graphic below shows. In the year [56 C.E.](#), the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread began on a Friday night. The following graphic shows how Acts 20:6-7 should be understood chronologically:

First Day of UB at Philippi	Paul & company sail from Philippi to Troas in five days during the seven days of Unleavened Bread					Last Day of UB at Troas	1st of the Sabbaths at Troas	Paul departs at daybreak
Fri. night/ Sat. day	Sat. night/ Sun. day	Sun. night/ Mon. day	Mon. night/ Tue. day	Tue. night/ Wed. day	Wed. night/ Thu. day	Thu. night/ Fri. day	Fri. night/ Sat. day	Sat. night/ Sun. day
Nisan 15	Nisan 16	Nisan 17	Nisan 18	Nisan 19	Nisan 20	Nisan 21	Nisan 22	Nisan 23

With a correct understanding of the time sequence of this passage, it's apparent that Paul spent the First Sabbath speaking to the brethren at Troas, NOT Sunday. There is no significance to be found for the first day of the week in this passage, because Sunday isn't even mentioned here.

The final place in the New Testament where Sunday allegedly appears is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

I CORINTHIANS 16:2 **On** [*kata*] **the first day of the week** [*mian sabbaton*] let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. (**NKJV**)

Is Paul speaking of a weekly collection to be set aside by the Corinthians every Sunday so a sufficient amount would be available when he arrived? Or is it possible that Paul had something else in mind?

The key to understanding this whole passage is the Greek word **kata**, which begins verse 2. **Thayer** says **kata** is: "a preposition denoting motion or diffusion or direction from the higher to the lower . . ."

This Greek word is frequently rendered "after" by translators ("down from" = "after"). Let's look at the difference it would make to translate this word as "after" instead of "on" in this verse:

**"On** the first *day* of the week" **becomes** **"After** the First of the Sabbaths."

Here is a literal rendering of the first two verses of I Corinthians 16:

I CORINTHIANS 16:1 Now concerning the collection that is for the saints, as I directed to the churches of Galatia, so also you do. 2 **After the First of the Sabbaths** [*kata mian sabbaton*], let each one of you beside himself put something aside, storing up whatever he may have prospered, in order that when I come then collections may not be made; (**literal translation**)

A close reading of I Corinthians shows that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were important to the context of Paul's instructions to the church there (I Cor. 5:7-8). It is likely that Paul wrote this epistle just before the arrival of the spring Holy Days. Paul's encouragement to begin gathering a collection "after the First of the Sabbaths" was likely intended to plainly tell the Corinthians WHEN to begin setting aside their offering so they would have it completed by the time he arrived. Once again, the most

logical view of this Scripture does **not** include a recognition of Sunday worship.

## **CONCLUSION**

The scriptural evidence indicates that it is very likely that Yeshua was raised from the dead on a SABBATH morning, **not** Sunday morning! In fact, it doesn't appear that the "first day of the week" is mentioned in the New Testament at all! Since the resurrection of the Messiah is the primary reason given by most Christians for exalting Sunday and worshiping on that day, the evidence presented in this article has seriously weakened (if not destroyed outright) any alleged biblical support for observing the first day of the week.

Today, most Christian churches routinely break the Sabbath command. To them, it is the least of the commandments (Matt. 5:19), one not worthy of observing. They choose to forget the day God specifically said to remember (Exo. 20:8). They ignore the day God made holy at the beginning of creation (Gen. 2:3), and instead observe Sunday, a day long venerated by pagan sun worshipers. The weight of human tradition has firmly embedded "the Lord's Day" as the day of worship in the minds of millions.

But a remnant (Matt. 22:14) has discovered the biblical truth about the Sabbath and keep it holy as God commanded. The decision to observe the Sabbath must be made through faith. Hopefully, this article has provided you with enough information to make an informed choice.

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