

**The Bible
Sabbath:
Seventh Day
or First Day?**

The Bible Sabbath Association

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Seventh Day or First Day?

Nearly all Christians observe one day of the week as some sort of sabbath. The vast majority worship on Sunday, the first day of the week, but some keep the seventh day (Saturday). Which day is correct? Does it really matter?

As you read the paragraphs which follow, we invite you to study the Bible references—to see for yourself what the Word of God says on this important subject.

What the Bible Says about the Seventh Day

The seventh day of the week was ordained as the Sabbath at Creation—by God's very own example (Genesis 2:2,3; Exodus 20:11). The nation of Israel was instructed to keep it and chided for not doing so—even before the Law was given on Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:23-30). The Fourth Commandment, which specifies the seventh day as the Sabbath, was so important that God chose to place it at the very heart of the Ten Commandments; it is intimately associated with nine other moral precepts—which were given by the voice and finger of Yahweh Himself and which are appropriate for all humans throughout all generations (Ex. 20:8-11).

Jesus reinforced the Fourth Commandment when he said, "The Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27). His point was that the Sabbath was made as a blessing for the benefit of mankind—not as an oppressive legal yoke. It was made for *man*—not just the Jews. Jesus also proclaimed Himself Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28) and observed it regularly (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16-22). Though He frequently denounced the Pharisees for their man-made rules, Jesus always upheld the Sabbath and showed by His positive example how it should be observed as a day of rest, worship, freedom, and joy (Mark 3:4; Luke 13:15-16; Matthew 12:10-12). During His Olivet Prophecy, Jesus urged His disciples to pray that their flight (years in the future) would not be on the Sabbath (Matt. 24:20).

The disciples rested on the Sabbath while Christ lay in the grave; according to Luke, who recorded the fact many years later, they did so "...according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). Matthew and Mark, who also wrote long after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, spoke familiarly of the Sabbath as an existing institution (Matthew 24:20; 28:1; Mark 16:1).

It was Paul's custom to use the Sabbath for preaching (Acts 17:2). He did so in synagogues and elsewhere (Acts 13:14-15; 16:13). Gentile believers observed the Sabbath (Acts 13:42, 44). For a year and a half in Corinth, Paul worked during the week and reasoned in the synagogue every

Sabbath, teaching the Word of God (Acts 18:4, 11). James and Paul, along with Jesus, spoke very positively about the importance of the Ten Commandments, of which the Sabbath is an integral part (Romans 2:13, 21-22; 7:7-12, 22; James 2:8-12; Mark 10:17-19).

Finally, history reveals that early Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, continued to faithfully observe the seventh-day Sabbath for many decades after the Messiah's resurrection and ascension. And down through the centuries to our day, there have always been faithful Christians who have accepted Jesus as their Savior and have walked in the joy of the liberty of God's seventh-day Sabbath.

What the Bible Says about the First Day of the Week

The term "first day of the week" is used only eight times in the New Testament (the word "Sunday" is never used). Four of these occurrences (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1) are simple time references to the day following Jesus' resurrection, to the disciples' early morning discovery of the empty tomb. Note that the women brought spices to the grave of the Savior on the first day, something they would not do on the Sabbath (Luke 23:56). Two other first-day references relate to Jesus' later appearances on that same day (Mark 16:9; John 20:19). The second of these describes how the disciples were assembled behind locked doors for fear of

the Jews. Certainly this cannot be construed as some sort of Sunday "sabbath" celebration. Jesus gave not so much as a hint that the first day was to be kept holy.

Paul once preached on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7); this is generally understood to be a Saturday night since, according to Biblical reckoning, days began with the evening. The next morning, he continued his journey toward Jerusalem. No hint of Sunday observance here.

The Corinthians were commanded to take up a collection for the poor saints of Judea on the first day (1 Corinthians 16:2); but the phrase "lay by him in store" indicates this was a *private inventory* activity, not a *public religious* activity.

The above eight texts are the only ones which speak of the first day of the week. Carefully examined, they prove nothing at all in favor of Sunday as a day of worship or rest. In fact, they indicate the opposite.

History reveals that it was at least a century or more after the death of the Savior that the first day of the week gradually came to replace the Sabbath. This change was in response to anti-Jewish bias in the Roman Empire. In order to curry favor of Roman political leaders, the Roman church moved away from the pure religion of Jesus and the apostles; it moved to accommodate the pagan, Roman world, of which Sunday observance was a part. Many Catholic and some Protestant writ-

ers cheerfully admit that it was church tradition, not Biblical authority, which brought about the popular acceptance of the first day of the week for worship.

Summary of the Facts

1. The seventh day was set aside for all mankind at Creation.
2. The Fourth Commandment, embedded at the heart of the Decalog, specifies the seventh day.
3. Christ observed the seventh-day Sabbath; He did not so much as hint that it would ever be replaced by Sunday.
4. The apostles faithfully observed the Sabbath on the seventh day—never on Sunday.
5. There is not one word in the Bible in favor of Sunday as a holy day; rather it was given to man as the first of six days for labor.

The only thing that can be said in favor of Sunday is *postapostolic church tradition!* But one who truly loves God, who has accepted Jesus Christ as His Savior and Lord, will push aside tradition in order to seek his heavenly Father's will in all things. The Scriptures—Old and New Testaments alike—clearly reveal that God's will for all His children includes the liberty and refreshment of the seventh-day Sabbath.

For further information—

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The Bible Sabbath Association offers a wide variety of publications about the Sabbath; a partial list is given below. We invite you to write for a complete list with current prices. Sample copies of various tracts are available free if you send a self-addressed #10 envelope with postage for two ounces.

Books

History of the Sabbath & Sunday by John Kiesz (64 pp.)

The Sabbath in the New Testament by Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi (372 pp.)

Booklets & Tracts

Why the Seventh-day Sabbath? (12 pp.)

Roman Catholic and Protestant Confessions about Sunday (12 pp.)

Questions for Seventh Dayists Answered by Terri Littrell (18 pp.)

Has Sabbath Time Been Lost? by Joseph M. McGuire (10 pp.)

Search the Scriptures (1 p.)

Directory of Sabbath-observing Groups—231 pages of information about more than 180 different seventh-day groups around the world.

The Sabbath Sentinel—a monthly magazine with information by, for, and about the seventh-day Christian community. A free sample copy is available on request.

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The Bible Sabbath Association
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Dedicated to

- *sharing the Sabbath as one of the first of God's great gifts to mankind;*
- *promoting communication, understanding, and cooperation among all seventh-day Christians.*