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## Revelation's Forgotten History

There are only eight texts in the New Testament that mention the first day of the week, or Sunday:

(1) John 20:19 — Here is a meeting of the disciples on the first day of the week. Some have supposed that this was a religious meeting, but the text clearly says that they were assembled “for fear of the Jews.” They were hiding, because they were afraid that they might be the next ones to hang on a cross! There is nothing here to suggest a change in the day of worship.

(2) 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2 — Some have understood this text to say that the Christians were all gathered on Sunday, and they took up an offering. But read it carefully. Paul instructs them to “lay by them in store.” In other words, they were to put something aside for the offering while they were working! Acts 18 reminds us that Paul worshiped with the Corinthian church every Sabbath, not on Sunday. Here Paul is simply reminding them to put something aside right away, at the beginning of the week, so that he wouldn't have to run around collecting money when he arrived. Again, there is nothing here to suggest a change in the fourth commandment.

(3) Acts 20:7-12 — Because this story clearly takes place on the first day of the week, some have come to the conclusion that the early church was in the habit of worshiping on Sunday. But read the story carefully—it doesn't actually say that. Paul preached until midnight, and then Eutychus died. After Eutychus was raised from the dead, he kept on preaching until daybreak.

Does that mean that Paul preached all day Sunday and kept preaching until Monday morning? Not at all. In Paul's day, they didn't observe days from midnight to midnight. They observed them from sunset to the following sunset. The first part of the day was the dark part! (See Genesis 1, where days are described as “evening and morning”—the dark part first.) The first day of the week actually began on Saturday evening, when the sun went down. Paul was preaching on a Saturday evening! Notice how the translators of the New English Bible translated this verse: “On the Saturday night, in our assembly for the breaking of bread, Paul who was about to leave the next day, addressed them, and went on speaking until midnight” (Acts 20:7, NEB).

Paul spoke until midnight on Saturday, then raised Eutychus, and then continued preaching until Sunday morning. Then on Sunday, he walked 19 miles to catch a ship! (Acts 20:13, 14) This meeting was not a regular church service. It was simply a farewell meeting for Paul.

(4-8) The next five references to the first day of the week are simple to review: Luke 23:56-24:1; Mark 16:1, 2; Mark 16:9; John 20:1 and Matthew 28:1. Each of these passages refer to Jesus rising from the dead on the first day of the week—but again, there is no hint of a change in the day of worship! There is nothing to be found in the Bible to suggest that Sunday is holy. Nowhere is there a command to change the day of worship.

There are a couple of other passages in the Bible that have sometimes confused the issue a little bit:

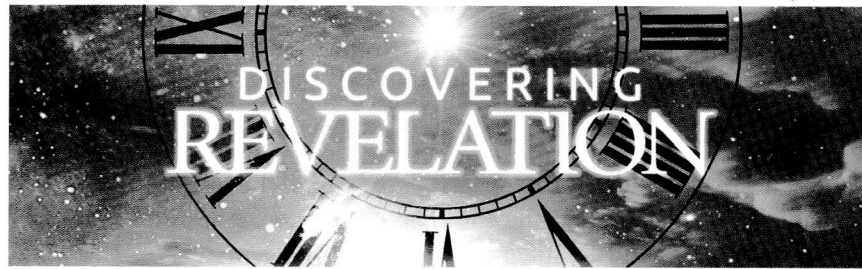
(1) Colossians 2:16, 17 — This passage seems to suggest that the Sabbath has been abolished, but look at it carefully. The “sabbaths” Paul describes are a “shadow of things to come.” The seventh day Sabbath was not designed as a shadow pointing forward; it was designed as a memorial, pointing us back to the creation. This is talking about something else.

In the Old Testament, there was more than one kind of Sabbath. In addition to the weekly Sabbath, there were also several *annual* sabbaths. Leviticus 23 describes these special sabbaths—the Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Tabernacles, and so on. These feasts took place on the same *date* but not the same *day of the week* each year—kind of like Christmas or your birthday. They were distinct from the the seventh day Sabbath. Leviticus 23:38 points out that these special annual sabbaths were “beside the sabbaths of the Lord,” or in addition to the weekly Sabbath. They were not part of the Ten Commandment *moral law*; they were part of the *ceremonial law* which had to do with sacrifices, rituals, meat and drink offerings (see Leviticus 23:13, 37), etc. They were a *shadow* of something to come, pointing to the work of Jesus. Hebrews 10:1 points out that the *ceremonial law*, or the law dealing with sacrifices and annual feasts, was a shadow of things to come.

When you look carefully at Colossians 2:16, 17 with this background, it is obvious what Paul is talking about. He mentions meat and drink (remember the meat and drink offerings), and sabbath *days* (plural) which are a “shadow of things to come.” He is not talking about the weekly seventh day Sabbath at all. This passage deals with the special *annual* sabbaths that pointed to Christ and were no longer necessary after the cross.

(2) Romans 14:5, 6 — Here Paul seems to say that whether or not you keep the Sabbath is a matter of personal choice. But look at the context of these verses carefully. He doesn't mention the Sabbath at all. In verse 1, Paul makes it clear that he is dealing with “doubtful disputations.” If you read the rest of Paul's letter to the Romans, it's clear he had no doubts whatsoever as to the validity of God's Ten Commandment moral law! (See, for example, Romans 3:31; 6:1, 2, 14, 15; Romans 7:7, 12). So what is Paul talking about? The context makes it clear. Notice that Paul discusses both *eating* and *regarding a day* in the same breath (verse 6). In the early church, some of the Jewish converts to the Christian faith were insisting that the Gentile Christians observe Jewish rituals. There is a good example of this in Acts 15, where the issue of circumcision was hotly debated. Another example is found in 1 Corinthians 8, where the issue was whether or not it was appropriate to eat food that the pagans had offered to idols. In Romans 14, the issue seems to have been whether or not everyone should be required to observe ceremonial days of fasting. The immediate context of these verses and the context of the Bible makes it clear that Paul is not discussing the observance of the weekly Sabbath. The Sabbath, entrenched so firmly in God's Ten Commandment moral law, is not a doubtful matter.

God gave us the Sabbath to give us rest, and He is waiting to bless you. There is something special about a day that *God* sets apart for worship. It will enrich your walk with Jesus and deepen your love for Him. Isaiah 58:12-14 promises that if we shake off tradition and help restore what most of the world has forgotten, and keep His holy day, He will cause us to ride on the high places of the earth! Are you tired? Do you struggle with worry? “Come unto Me,” says Jesus, “and I will give you rest!”



## Revelation's Forgotten History

As Jesus stood before Pilate, the Roman official asked Him, "What is truth?" (John 18:38)

Was Pilate serious when he asked that question? We don't know. But whatever Pilate may have meant, his question is one of the most important questions anyone can ask. Truth matters. But what is truth? How can we know?

### THREE STANDARDS FOR DETERMINING TRUTH

1. What did Jesus say about Himself? (John 14:6)

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First of all, truth will be in harmony with the life and teachings of Jesus. Is the seventh-day Sabbath in agreement with Jesus' life and teachings? Yes. It was His custom, while on earth, to worship each Sabbath. (Luke 4:16) Jesus said that He is the Lord of the Sabbath—that it is His special day. (Matthew 12:8)

2. What did Jesus say about His Father's Word, the Bible? (John 17:17)

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The second standard for determining truth is: Does it harmonize with the Bible? The Bible is clear that God created and blessed the Sabbath at Creation. (Genesis 2:1-3) He made it holy and set it apart as a sign of His creative and redemptive power. (Exodus 31:12, 13) God's Word teaches the importance of the seventh-day Sabbath.

3. What does the Bible say about God's law? (Psalm 119:142)

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The third standard for determining what truth is: Does it harmonize with God's Ten Commandment law? In the very heart of that law is

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the fourth commandment telling us to keep the Sabbath holy, because God is our Creator and Redeemer. (Exodus 20:8-11)

### **DOES SUNDAY-KEEPING COME FROM THE BIBLE?**

Many sincere Christians today observe Sunday, not the seventh-day Sabbath. They are sure that after the cross, Jesus and the apostles changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week. Is that true? If so, we should be able to discover it easily, because there are precisely eight texts in the New Testament that mention the first day of the week. Let's take a look at them.



4. On what day of the week did Jesus rise from the dead? (**Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1, 2; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1-3; John 20:1**)

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These are the first five New Testament texts that mention the first day of the week. They each tell us that Jesus rose from the dead early on the first day of the week. None of these five texts say anything about the Sabbath being changed from the seventh day to the first day of the week.

5. What were the disciples doing on the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead? (**John 20:19**)

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Some have said that the disciples were holding a religious service that evening, thus showing that the first day of the week is now the day on which we should worship. But the text says that they were hiding in fear with the doors shut! They were afraid they might be the next ones to hang on a cross. There is nothing here to suggest a change in the day of worship.

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6. On what day did the Apostle Paul have a meeting with believers at Troas? (**Acts 20:7-12**)

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This is clearly a religious meeting on the first day of the week. But does this mean that Paul and the other New Testament Christians understood that the Sabbath had been changed? Did they now worship on Sunday? The Bible is clear that Paul and the New Testament Christians consistently continued to observe God's seventh-day Sabbath. (Acts 13:14, 42-44; 16:13; 18:4)

In fact, the more closely you look at this meeting, the more you realize that it was not a regular church service. It occurred at night, because Paul was leaving early the next day. Simply holding a religious service doesn't make a day holy.

7. What does Paul counsel the Corinthian believers to do on the first day of the week? (**1 Corinthians 16:1, 2**)

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Some think Paul is talking about taking up an offering in church on Sunday. But read the text carefully. Paul was collecting money from the Christians in different cities for the believers in Jerusalem. So he reminds the Corinthians to put something aside at the beginning of the week, storing it up so that it would be ready when he arrived. Acts 18 tells us that Paul worshipped with the Corinthian church on Sabbath—not Sunday.



We have looked at all eight New Testament verses that mention the first day of the week, and we have found nothing to suggest a change in God's day of worship from the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday.

### **THE ISSUE OF WORSHIP IN THE LAST DAYS**

Worship is an important issue that comes up repeatedly in the prophecies of Revelation. A "beast" power arises in chapter 13, and the whole world

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worships it. (Revelation 13:1-4) A second beast makes an image to the first beast and tries to force the world to worship that image. (Revelation 13:11-15)

8. In contrast to the worship demanded by these powers who oppose God, John sees an angel calling for everyone on earth to worship

\_\_\_\_\_ (Revelation 14:7)

9. What characteristic will identify God's people in the last days?  
(Revelation 12:17)

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The issue of worship will be an important one just before Jesus returns. Those who "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" (Revelation 14:4), will be keeping God's commandments—including the fourth commandment regarding the seventh-day Sabbath. It's a matter of allegiance and love. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)

Do you love Jesus enough to follow His truth in all things?

### **MY DECISION**

- I want to be among God's faithful people who keep His commandments, including the seventh-day Sabbath.

### **MY PRAYER**

*Father, help me as I take my stand to follow You in all things. I claim Your promise to be with me and strengthen me. Bless me as I step out in faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.*