

Saturday and Sunday – A brief review of the key texts

Compiled by Eric Louw with QnA from Mark Finley

Necessary Historical Context:

The Old Testament refers to two separate laws:

1. **The Ten Commandments** (Also known as the “Moral Law” or “Testimony”).
2. **Moses’ Book of the Law** (Known as the “Book of the Law”).
 - a. It included:
 - i. **Governmental Laws** - Regulations for a theocracy to maintain law and order
 - ii. **The Ceremonial Law** - Regulations for the sacrificial system and festivals
 - iii. **Health Laws** - Sanitary practices, food regulation, etc.

Moses’ Book of the Law - Placed beside the Ark of the Covenant (In the Sanctuary)

- **Deuteronomy 31:26** - “Take this *Book of the Law*, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you.”
- **Deuteronomy 29:21** - “And the LORD would separate him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this *Book of the Law*” (see through v.29 for the broader context).

Summary: It was placed beside the ark, referred to as “against you” or a “curse.” **Note:** This is critical context for reading Paul to recognize which law he refers to in each respective context. Paul’s language suggests he knew the difference.

The Ten Commandments - Placed inside the Ark of the Covenant (In the Sanctuary)

- **Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5** - God speaks the Ten Commandments.
- **Exodus 25:16** - Moses is told to put this testimony into the Ark of the Covenant.
- **Exodus 31:18** - And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God (See also Ex 32:15–16).
- **Deuteronomy 10:1–5** - The first set was destroyed after the Israelites worshipped the golden calf, and Moses threw them down in horror to demonstrate what they had done. Moses got a second set from God and placed them in the ark.

The Sanctuary:

- **Exodus 25:8** - God commanded Moses to build a Sanctuary (the Tabernacle) so that He might dwell among the people (see also Exodus 25:9, Acts 7:44).
- **Hebrews 8:1–5** - This Sanctuary was based on a pattern of the real Tabernacle in heaven.
- **Exodus 25:22** - The Mercy Seat upon the ark of the covenant was where God appeared (see also v.17–21). In effect, it represented God’s throne. The Ten Commandments were inside this throne, indicating importance and permanence.
- The chapters of Revelation are saturated with sanctuary imagery, suggesting that much of what John saw was from within the sanctuary in heaven.¹

Note on Salvation in relation to Works:

- **Ephesians 2:8–9** - We are saved by grace through faith, not works.
- **John 3:16** - Those who believe will not perish.
- **James 2:14, 17** - Those with faith without works perish. Genuine faith and belief result in works.
- **Romans 6:1–2** - “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”

¹ <https://www.perspectivedigest.org/archive/17-1/the-heavenly-sanctuary-in-the-book-of-revelation>

- **1 Corinthians 15:57; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Colossians 1:27; 2:10; Philippians 4:13; Jude 1:24** – Christ transforms and completes us, empowering victorious living.
- **John 15:5** - Without Jesus, we can do nothing.
- **1 John 5:1–5** - Love for God is expressly equated with keeping the commandments (v.3).

Sabbath & Sunday Texts:

New Testament Texts mention what we now refer to as Sunday:

- **Mark 16:2** - The women come to the tomb on the first day
- **Mark 16:9** - Jesus was risen on the first day
- **Luke 24:1** - The disciples visited the tomb to embalm His body on the first day
- **John 20:1** - Mary visits the tomb while it is yet dark
- **John 20:19** - The disciples were hiding from the Jews
- **Acts 20:7** - Saturday night meeting, then Paul travels on Sunday to Troas
- **1 Corinthians 16:2** - Paul was going around taking up money; he asked them to set aside money every Sunday (after Sabbath) for the collection, finalize bills, and settle accounts.

Summary: None of these texts speak of Sabbath observance or suggest any shift to Sunday.

New Testament Texts *commonly used* to suggest Sunday observance:

- **Colossians 2:16, 17**
 - Note especially v.14 - This refers exclusively to the ceremonial laws from Moses' book of the law.
 - Note also v.17 - The only law that served as a "shadow" was the ceremonial. See QnA.
- **Romans 14:5** - "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind."
 - This contextually refers to ceremonial-based festival days from Moses' *book of the law*. See QnA.
 - There is no contextual reference to the Sabbath.
- **Galatians 3:10** - "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'"
 - This explicitly refers to Moses' book of the law. The Ten Commandments were not this "book."
- **Acts 20:7** – "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."
 - No reference to Sabbath observance here. Days in Jewish reckoning began at sunset. See QnA.
- **Matthew 5:17–18** - Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it.
 - The only law that could be "fulfilled" was the ceremonial which served as a foreshadowing of what Christ would fulfill according to Hebrews 10:1 and Colossians 2:17.

Old Testament Evidence for Post–Cross observance:

- **Isaiah 66:22, 23** - In the new heavens and new earth we shall keep Sabbath each week.

NT Texts suggesting Saturday observance:

- **Luke 4:16** - Jesus was a faithful Sabbath keeper.
- **Mark 16:1–2** - Christ's followers attended to His body after resting on Sabbath.
- **John 14:15** - If we love Jesus, we'll keep His commandments.

New Testament Evidence for Post–Cross Observance:

- **Matthew 24:20** - Jesus predicted the Sabbath would be kept in 70 A.D. at the destruction of Jerusalem over 35 years after His death.
- **Acts 13:42–44** - Paul both kept the Sabbath himself and met to worship God with the whole city, Jews and Gentiles alike.
- **Acts 16:13** - In Philippi, Paul met privately with a group of believers in a country setting, since there was no established Christian church.

- **Revelation 1:10** - The Lord still has a special day at the end of the first century (Around 96 A.D.). Revelation 1:10 does not clearly reveal which day is the Lord's day, but Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:27–28, Luke 6:5, and Isaiah 58:13–14 do: Sabbath.
- **Matthew 12:8** - The Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath. If the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, the Sabbath must be the Lord's day.
- **Luke 23:54–56; 24:1** - This passage lists three days in succession showing that the Sabbath is the 7th day of the week.
- **Hebrews 13:8** - Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. There is no reason to believe the rest of the Ten Commandments should suddenly cease to have relevance, even when not a primary focus.

How do we know which day is the Sabbath?

- **Mark 15:42** tells us the preparation day was before the Sabbath, **Mark 16:2** tells us the women came to the tomb on the first day of the week. The Jewish preparation day is Friday, and most Christians recognize Sunday as the resurrection day. Thus, the Sabbath is unequivocally Saturday precisely as the Jews observed it, and they have never missed one. Calendar changes over may modify the number of days in a month, or even which day a calendar lists as the seventh, but they do not change the seven days of the week, nor the fact that the Seventh day is Saturday.

The Relevance of the Sabbath today:

- **Ephesians 3:9** - Since Jesus was the active agent in creation, Revelation's final call to worship the Creator is a call to give honor to Jesus.
- **Exodus 20:8–11** - We worship Him as the Creator by keeping His Sabbath.
- **Exodus 31:13, 17** - God intended the Sabbath as a *perpetual* sign between Him and His people *forever*.
- **Genesis 2:1–3** - The Sabbath was set apart from the creation of Earth. God rested upon the seventh day, blessed the seventh day, and made it holy.
- **Mark 2:27–28** - The Sabbath was given to the human race 2300 years before the existence of the Jews as a memorial for all mankind. (Cf. Gen 2:1–3).
- **Ezekiel 20:12, 20** - The Sabbath was established for all mankind as a sign of sanctification between God and His people.
- **Revelation 14:12** - God's last day people keep the 10 Commandments.

Evidence for Pre-Sinai Observance:

- **Genesis 2:2–3** - God blessed and made the seventh-day Sabbath holy at the end of the creation week.
- **Genesis 26:5** - God referred to Abraham as keeping “My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”
- **Exodus 16:4–5, 15–30** - After exiting Egypt, God immediately tests whether the people will keep “My law” suggesting it already existed. Manna falls 6 days, but never on the Sabbath. Using the manna also universally re-educated them on the Sabbath, if needed. This preceded Mt. Sinai and the Law written on the Ten Commandments.
- **Exodus 20:8** - The call to “Remember” the Sabbath supports the notion that the Sabbath command had been understood since before Mt. Sinai and that it was liable to be forgotten. Given Moses wrote the Pentateuch and cited the Sabbath’s significance in Genesis 2:1–3 (where God blessed and made it holy), this should be unsurprising.

Additional Texts:

- **Isaiah 56:2–8** - A blessing is given to those who keep from defiling the Sabbath, and they are kept by God.
- **Ezekiel 20:12** - While disallowing human works, Sabbaths were given to teach that God makes people holy.

Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

Q: Since Paul declares “Let no one judge you regarding the Bible Sabbath,” isn’t Sabbath-keeping unnecessary (Col. 2:16, 17)?

A: This passage, Col. 2:16, 17 is one of the most misunderstood passages in the Bible. One principle of Bible interpretation is that you do not allow what may be somewhat unclear to keep you from doing what you understand. The Bible is plain on the Sabbath. It was given at creation (Gen. 2:1–3), Jesus observed it (Lk. 4:16). Paul observed it (Acts 13:42–44), and it will be observed in heaven (Isa. 66:22, 23). The Bible mentions two kinds of sabbaths. The seventh-day Sabbath and the yearly sabbaths. The seventh-day Sabbath, instituted at creation and part of the Ten Commandment law, is a weekly reminder of the loving, all powerful Creator.

The yearly Sabbath relates specifically to the history of Israel. Col. 2:16, 17 specifically states “Let no one judge you regarding sabbath days which are a shadow of things to come.” The seventh-day Sabbath is a memorial of creation not a shadow of something to come. Heb. 10:1 connects the law of shadows with animal sacrifice. Ezek. 45:17 uses the exact same expressions in the exact same order as Col. 2:16, 17 and connects it all with the ceremonial systems of feasts and sacrifices (meat offerings, drink offerings, feasts, new moons, and sabbaths to make reconciliation for the house of Israel. Lev. 23:3 discusses the Seventh-day Sabbath. Lev. 23:5–32 discusses the ceremonial sabbaths (Passover, Lev 23:5; unleavened bread, Lev 23:6; wave sheaf, Lev 23:10; first fruits, Lev 23:17; trumpets, Lev 23:24; Day of atonement, Lev 23:27–32; tabernacles, Lev 23:34–36). Both the feast of trumpets (Lev 23:24), and the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:32) are specifically called sabbaths.

These annual sabbaths were intimately connected to events foreshadowing Christ's death and His Second Coming. They were designed by God to be shadows or pointers to the coming Messiah. Lev. 23:37 uses the language of Col. 2:16, 17 to describe these ceremonial sabbaths. Lev. 23:38 distinguishes the ceremonial sabbaths from the seventh-day Sabbaths by using the expression “Beside the sabbaths of the Lord.” Since Christ has come, the shadowy sabbaths of the ceremonial law have found their fulfillment in Him. The seventh-day Sabbath continues to lead us back to the Creator God who made us. God's people will keep it as a distinguishing sign of their relationship to Him (Rev. 14:12, Ezek. 20:12, 20).

Q: What about Rom. 14:5? “One man esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” Really, what difference does a day make?

A: Sometimes it's helpful to carefully notice what a Bible text does not say as well as what it does say. Rom 14:5–6 say nothing about either worship or the Sabbath. They simply talk about regarding a day. To say this particular day is the Sabbath is an unwarranted assumption. Rom. 14:1 sets the tone for the entire passage indicating that the discussion focuses on “doubtful disputations” or disputes on doubtful matters. Is the seventh-day Sabbath set apart by God at creation (Gen. 2:1–3) placed within the heart of the moral law (Ex. 20:8–11) a doubtful matter? Certainly not! Paul held the Sabbath in high regard and kept it consistently. The key to our passage is found in Rom 14:6 which states, “He that regards the day regards it unto the Lord, and he that regardeth not the day regards it not to the Lord. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord for He giveth God thanks, and he that eateth not to the Lord, he eateth not for he giveth God thanks.” The issue revolved around fast days not Sabbath days. Some Jewish Christians believed there was particular merit in fasting on certain days. They judged others by their own standards. The Pharisees fasted at least twice a week and boasted about it (Lk. 18:12). In Rom. 14, Paul is pointing out that to fast or not to fast on a certain day is a matter of individual conscience, not a matter of God's command.

Q: Didn't the disciples meet on the first day of the week? Acts 20:7.

A: The reason this meeting is mentioned in the narrative is because Paul was leaving the next day and worked a mighty miracle in raising Eutychus from the dead. It is clear that the meeting is a night meeting. It is the dark part of the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). In Bible times, the dark part of the day preceded the light part (Gen. 1:5).

The Sabbath was observed from Friday night at sunset to Saturday night at sunset. (Lev. 23:32, Mk. 1:32). If this meeting is on the dark part of the first day of the week, it is in fact a Saturday night meeting. Paul has met with the believers all Sabbath. He will depart the next day, Sunday, so the meeting continues late into Saturday night. The next day, Sunday, Paul travels by foot to Assos, then sailed to Mitylene. The New English Bible reading of Acts 20:7 also confirms this as a Saturday night meeting, with Paul traveling on Sunday. If Paul considered Sunday sacred in honor of the resurrection, why would he spend the entire day traveling and not worshipping? The record indicates that Paul was a Sabbath keeper (see Acts 13:42–44; 17:2; 16:12, 13; 18:4).

Q: Can we really tell which day the Seventh–day is?

A: There are at least four ways which we can tell for certain that Saturday is the Seventh–day:

1. The Bible clearly reveals that Jesus was crucified on the preparation day (Lk. 23:54). His closest followers rested as commanded the Sabbath day (Lk. 23:55–56) and Jesus rose from the dead the first day (Lk. 24:1, Mk. 16:9). Most Christians recognize Jesus died on Friday the preparation day, He rested the next day and rose the first day– Sunday. The Sabbath is the day between Friday and Sunday or the seventh–day– Saturday.
2. Language: In over 140 languages in the world, the word for the Seventh–day which we call Saturday is the word “Sabbath.” Language testifies to the Sabbath's preservation through the centuries.
3. Astronomy: The leading astronomers in the world testify to the fact that the weekly cycle has never changed. Centers like the Royal Naval Observatory in the U.S. and The Royal Greenwich Observatory in England affirm the fact of a constant weekly cycle.
4. History: The Jewish people have kept an accurate record of the Sabbath through the centuries. For over 4,000 years, they have preserved the true Sabbath on Saturday.

Q: I keep Sunday in honor of the resurrection. What's wrong with that? Didn't Jesus rise from the dead on Sunday?

A: Yes, Jesus certainly rose on Sunday! But He never commanded us to worship in honor of the resurrection. Just as the communion service symbolizes His death (1 Cor. 11:24, 26) baptism symbolizes His resurrection (Rom. 6:1–6). The symbol of Jesus' resurrection is not worship on the day of the sun adopted into Christianity from pagan Rome's sun worship, but a beautiful ceremony of baptism as a symbol of a new life transformed by the wonder working power of the Holy Spirit. In the watery grave of baptism, the old person symbolically dies and is buried while a new life is resurrected with Christ.

Q: Isn't one day in seven good enough? Why do you put so much emphasis on the Sabbath?

A: The issue is more than a matter of days. It is a matter of masters. Through a master stroke of deception, Satan has worked through apostate religion to change God's law (Dan. 7:25). He has cast the truth to the ground (Dan. 8:12). He has made a break in God's wall of truth. God calls us to repair the breach by keeping His Sabbath (Isa. 58:12, 13). We ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). To worship on the seventh day is to accept the authority of our creator Lord, who commanded the day be kept (Ex. 20:8–11). To knowingly accept a counterfeit day of worship is to accept an institution initiated and established solely by man contrary to scripture. The real question is, then, whose servants are we – God's or man's? (Rom. 6:16). All the celebrations the day before or the day after my birthday do not make these days my birthday. The world's birthday is the Bible Sabbath, the seventh day. It is a memorial to our loving Creator. No other day will do. Revelation makes it clear that God's people at the end of time keep His commandments (Rev. 14:12). This necessarily includes the 4th, because to break one is to break all (James 2:10).