



DISCOVERING REVELATION

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!”