

# Understanding “Mia Ton Sabbaton”

## I. Introduction

A. Christians are familiar with the phrase “first day of the week” as it is used throughout the New Testament in reference not only to the day of our Lord’s resurrection, but also to the day on which the disciples assembled.

B. However, there are some people in the religious world who are questioning the English translation which says “first day of the week,” arguing that the Greek text is actually pointing to the observance of the Sabbath. It is vital that we learn how to combat this error (2 Cor. 10:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:15)

C. The phrase “first day of the week” is derived from the Greek phrase “mia ton Sabbaton” which literally means “one of the Sabbaths.” For some, this is an open and shut case, as the word Sabbath is found in the original text. Many Christians may initially be shocked to discover that the word week is derived from “Sabbaton.” As we will see, however, the phrase “mia ton Sabbaton” does indeed refer to the first day of the week, or Sunday.

## II. The Hebrews’ Method Of Counting Days

### A. The word “Sabbaton” or *Sabbatou*.

1. By itself, the Greek word Sabbaton can be used in reference to the Sabbath day. This we do not deny! (Mt. 12:2; Ac. 18:4)

2. But as seen in its definition, the word Sabbaton can also refer to a week (which is measured by the Sabbath day itself). Strong’s #4521 says, “the Sabbath, or day of weekly repose from secular avocations (also the observance of the institution itself)...*the interval between the Sabbaths...week.*”

### B. “Sabbaton” In Reference To A Week?

1. To further understand the above definition from Strong’s, let us consider a quote from Apologetics Press online: “According to R.C.H. Lenski, since ‘[t]he Jews had no names for the weekdays,’ they ‘designated them with reference to their Sabbath’ (1943, p. 1148). Thus, *mia ton sabbaton* means ‘the first (day) with reference to the Sabbath,’ i.e., the first (day) following the Sabbath (Lenski, p. 1148), or, as we would say in 21st century English, ‘the first day of the week.’” ([www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3157](http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3157))

2. And so while the word Sabbaton can refer to the Sabbath day, when the Greek says “one of the Sabbaths” or “second of the Sabbaths,” it refers to the day of the week as it relates to the Sabbath, or the first day between two Sabbaths.

3. Consider Luke 18:12, a parable in which a Pharisee said, “I fast *twice a week*...” The italicized phrase is derived from the Greek *dis tou sabbatou*. Jesus was not saying that the Pharisee fasted twice on the Sabbath day, but that he fasted twice a week.

## III. The Resurrection Of Christ

### A. “Mia ton Sabbaton” was used to describe Jesus’ resurrection.

1. Matthew 28:1 says, “In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the *first day of the week.*” The italicized phrase is again derived from the Greek “mia ton Sabbaton,” which literally means “one of the Sabbaths.” We all know that Jesus was raised on the first day of the week, or Sunday, so clearly, this could not be referring to the Sabbath. This ought to confirm the points that have already been made in this study regarding the use of “Sabbaton.”

2. Consider the other resurrection accounts (Mk. 16:9; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1).

B. Jesus was raised on the first day of the week, not Saturday.

1. let us show that He was raised on Sunday, the day *after* the Sabbath. Mark 16:1 says, "And when the Sabbath was past," and then in verse 9, "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week." He died and was buried on Friday, remained in the grave on the Sabbath day, and then was raised on Sunday.
2. Perhaps the most effective passage in making this point is Luke 24:1-21. It says in verse 1, "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning," and then in verse 13, "And, behold, two of them went that *same day* to a village called Emmaus." In verse 21, the same disciples who traversed the road to Emmaus said, "Today is the third day since these things were done." As seen in verse 7, Jesus would raise the third day. All of this points to the first day of the week as the day of Christ's resurrection.

C. What does all of this mean?

1. We are simply pointing out that the phrase "mia ton Sabbaton" refers to the first day between the Sabbaths, not the Sabbath itself. This point is confirmed by Strong's definition as well as a majority of Greek scholars.
2. The question is simple- was Jesus raised on Saturday or Sunday? The evidence obviously points to Sunday as the resurrection day, not the Sabbath.

IV. The Significance Of Sunday.

A. The disciples in Troas assembled on Sunday.

1. In Acts 20:6-7, we learn that Paul tarried in Troas for an entire week and then came together with the disciples in that area for the purpose of breaking bread.
  - a. In response, those who support Sabbath observance will try to discredit the translation, saying that the translators changed the text to highlight the first day of the week rather than the Sabbath.
  - b. First, we have presented reasoning to support the decision of the translators.
  - c. Second, we must accept that "the word of the Lord endureth forever." (1 Pet. 1:25) Would God allow such a crucial point to be mistranslated?
2. This was not a common meal, but rather the observance of the Lord's supper. The common meal was eaten in verse 11. The assembly in verse 7 was spiritual in nature.
3. 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 explains the nature of the Lord's supper.
4. The phrase "first *day* of the week" refers to Sunday, not Saturday.

B. The collection was to be taken on Sunday.

1. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, "Now concerning the collection for the saints...upon the *first day of the week* let every one of you lay by him in store." In other words, local churches are to gather money each Sunday.
2. Is it a coincidence that both Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 involve the first day of the week? I think not. Clearly, Sunday was a day on which the early Christians assembled for the purpose of worship. (1 Cor. 14:23, 26; Heb. 10:25)

IV. The Sabbath Not Commanded In The Law Of Christ

A. Verses that deny the necessity of Sabbath observance.

1. Colossians 2:14-16 includes the Sabbath in the "handwriting of ordinances" that was nailed to the cross. We are no longer judged according to the law of Moses, but rather the "body (substance) is of Christ."
2. We are told in 2 Corinthians 3:7, "But if the ministration of death, *written and*

*engraven in stones*, was glorious...which glory was to be *done away*.” Also, Paul identifies the ten commandments, namely the command to not covet and says that we have been delivered from the “oldness of the letter. (Rom. 7:1-7)

B. Did the early Christians observe the Sabbath?

1. Jesus and His apostles did because they lived under the law (Gal. 4:4).
2. After the establishment of the church, the apostles would often go into the synagogues on the Sabbath day *for the purpose of evangelism*, not to religiously observe the Sabbath (Ac. 13:14-15; 16:13-14; 17:2; 18:4).
3. Romans 14:6 also indicates that many of the early Christians chose to observe certain aspects of the Sabbath day and other days, but this was done on an individual level as a matter of liberty and weak conscience.

C. Extra-Biblical Evidence (not authoritative).

1. Early Christians did not observe the Sabbath:

- a. 180AD ACTS OF PETER.- “Paul had often contended with the Jewish teachers and had confuted them, saying 'it is Christ on whom your fathers laid hands. He abolished their Sabbath and fasts and festivals and circumcision.’” (1: 1)-2
- b. 200AD TERTULLIAN: “It follows, accordingly, that, in so far as the abolition of carnal circumcision and of the old law is demonstrated as having been consummated at its specific times, so also the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary.” (An Answer to the Jews 4:1, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 3, page 155)
- c. 200AD TERTULLIAN: “To us Sabbaths are foreign.” (14:6)
- d. 250 AD IGNATIUS: "If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death.
- e. 300 AD VICTORINUS "The sixth day [Friday] is called *parasceve*, that is to say, the preparation of the kingdom. . . . On this day also, on account of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, we make either a station to God or a fast. On the seventh day he rested from all his works, and blessed it, and sanctified it. On the former day we are accustomed to fast rigorously, that on the Lord's day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks. And let the *parasceve* become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews . . . which Sabbath he [Christ] in his body abolished." (The Creation of the World).

2. Early Christians DID assemble on Sunday:

- a. 100 AD BARNABAS "We keep the eighth day [Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead." (The Epistle of Barnabas, 100 AD 15:6-8).
- b. 150AD JUSTIN: "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over

which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration." (First apology of Justin, Weekly Worship of the Christians, Ch 68)

c. 200AD BARDESANES: Wherever we are, we are all called after the one name of Christ Christians. On one day, the first of the week, we assemble ourselves together." (On Fate)

d. 200AD TERTULLIAN: "We solemnize the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath." (Tertullian's Apology, Ch 16)

e. 225 AD The Didascalia "The apostles further appointed: On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and the oblation, because on the first day of the week our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week he will appear at last with the angels of heaven" (Didascalia 2).

f. 250 AD IGNATIUS: "If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death."

## V. Conclusion

A. In this study, we have explained the meaning of "mia ton Sabbaton." As we have shown, it is not referring to the Sabbath day itself, but rather to the first day of the week, or Sunday. Ample evidence has been provided to establish this point.

B. The first day of the week was a significant day to early Christians. They assembled on this day to take the Lord's supper and lay by in store, among other things. Contrary to what some are saying, they did not observe the Sabbath day religiously.

C. Thank you for considering this material. I hope that it has been helpful.