



DISCOVER
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

21

Can the
Majority Be
Wrong?



IN GUIDE 16, we discovered that experiencing Sabbath rest is an important antidote to today's stressful living. Since God understands our every need, He established each seventh day for our physical rest and spiritual refreshment. Genesis 2:1-3, states that, after creating our world in six days, God rested on the seventh day, blessed it, and sanctified it (made it holy).

When God gave the Ten Commandments, He placed the commandment to observe the seventh-day Sabbath at the heart of His law (Exodus 20:8-11). According to this commandment, the Sabbath is a memorial of God's creative power. It's a day to pause and think about the beauties and wonders of His created works, a day to relax and come close to our Creator.

During Jesus' human life on earth, He too kept the Sabbath (Luke 4:16) and endorsed it as a day that benefits Christians (Mark 2:27, 28). Several texts in the book of Acts make it clear that Christ's disciples worshipped on the Sabbath after His resurrection (Acts 13:14; 16:13; 17:2; 18:1-4, 11).

1 | A Puzzling Question

This brings us to a subject that many people find perplexing. The Christian world has for some time observed two different days. On one hand, most Christians sincerely observe Sunday, the first day of the week, which they believe to be a memorial of Christ's resurrection. On the other hand, a large group of Christians, equally sincere, believe that the Bible recognizes only the seventh day as the Sabbath and nowhere affirms the sanctity of Sunday.

Does it really make any difference which day we observe as the Sabbath? As sincere people who want to know the truth, we must always ask ourselves: "What matters to *Jesus*? What does *Jesus* want me to do?"

After all, we want the assurance of following Bible truth and obeying God's instruction when He says, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

In coming to a decision about God's day of worship, several important questions need to be answered: Who changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week? Did the Bible authorize such a change? If so, did God, Christ, or perhaps the apostles make the change?

2 | Did God Change the Day?

Is there any pronouncement from God that changes the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week? Most Christians accept the Ten Commandments, given by God at Sinai, as a valid guide to live by. Moses reminded Israel:

"These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and

the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me" (Deuteronomy 5:22).

The Ten Commandments are the only message God has ever personally written out for the human race. They are so important that He wrote them on stone with His own finger (Exodus 31:18).

In the fourth commandment, God instructs us:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work. . . . For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11).

When God created our world, He set apart the seventh day as the "Sabbath of the Lord" by three divine acts (Genesis 2:1-3). God:

- ▶ **Rested on the seventh day from all His work.**
- ▶ **Blessed the seventh day.**
- ▶ **Sanctified it.**

Again at Sinai, when He gave the Ten Commandments, God reiterated these same truths. He also made it clear that no human being should revise or edit the instruction from His holy lips.

"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deuteronomy 4:2).

God Himself pledges not to alter His commands:

"My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips" (Psalm 89:34).

The Bible is clear that God did not change the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week.

3 | Did Jesus Change the Sabbath?

According to Jesus, the Ten Commandments and all the moral principles in the Old Testament Scriptures are not subject to change; they are to continue to guide His followers:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Jesus faithfully honored and observed the Sabbath. He is our example in Sabbath-keeping.

“He [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (Luke 4:16).

Looking to the future, Jesus wanted His disciples to continue experiencing the joys of true Sabbath-keeping. He instructed them to pray that, during the siege, they would not have to flee from Jerusalem on the Sabbath.

“Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath” (Matthew 24:20).

Jesus was speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem—an event that took place in AD 70, nearly 40 years after His resurrection.

Jesus did not change the Sabbath commandment, nor any of the other commandments. In fact, He instructed the rich young ruler to obey the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:16-22). It is clear from Jesus' teaching and example that we still need the Sabbath for rest, relaxation, and spending time with God.

4 | Did the Apostles Change the Sabbath?

James, the first leader of the early Christian church, wrote concerning the Ten Commandments:

“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10, 11).

Luke, a physician and evangelist in the early church, reports:

“On the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there” (Acts 16:13).

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who wrote much of the New Testament, affirms:

“For He [God] has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’ [see Genesis 2:2]. . . . There remains therefore a [Sabbath] rest for the people of God” (Hebrews 4:4, 9).

The New Testament book of Acts mentions 84 different Sabbaths observed by the apostles, all of them more than 14 years after the resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 13:14, 42, 44	2 Sabbaths at Antioch
Acts 16:12, 13	1 Sabbath at Philippi
Acts 17:1, 2	3 Sabbaths at Thessalonica
Acts 18:1, 4, 11	78 Sabbaths at Corinth
A total of 84 Sabbaths celebrated by Christ's followers	

John, the last of the 12 apostles to die, wrote five books of the Bible—one gospel, three epistles (letters), and the prophetic book of Revelation. He died about AD 100, approximately 70 years after the resurrection of Jesus. Nowhere in all of his writings does he speak of a change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day of the week. In fact, John himself kept the Sabbath. He wrote:

“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (Revelation 1:10).

According to Jesus, the Lord’s Day is the Sabbath:

“The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath”
(Matthew 12:8).

A search of the scriptural evidence reveals that the apostles made no attempt to change God’s day of rest from the seventh to the first day of the week. The New Testament mentions the first day of the week only eight times. In none of these instances is the first day of the week spoken of as a holy day, nor is it even hinted that we should observe it as a day of worship.

A careful examination of the eight texts referring to the first day of the week clarifies what occurred during these Sunday events:

- 1. The women came to Jesus’ tomb on the first day of the week** (Matthew 28:1).
- 2. “When the Sabbath was past,” the women brought spices to anoint Jesus’ body “very early in the morning, on the first day of the week”** (Mark 16:1, 2).

3. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene “early on the first day of the week” (Mark 16:9).

4. After resting on the Sabbath “according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56), the women came to Jesus’ tomb early “on the first day of the week” (Luke 24:1).



5. Mary Magdalene went to the grave of Jesus and found the tomb empty “on the first day of the week” (John 20:1).

6. The disciples gathered together “for fear of the Jews” (not for worship) on the first day of the week (John 20:19).

7. Paul asked church members to take account of their funds “on the first day of the week,” and “lay something aside” for the poor at Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2). The passage does not mention any religious meeting.

8. In Acts 20:7 Luke speaks of the disciples coming “together to break bread” and of Paul preaching “on the first day of the week” at an impromptu farewell meeting. Elsewhere, Luke describes the early Christians as coming together “daily” to fellowship, break bread, praise God, and pray (Acts 2:41-47).

None of these verses suggest that the apostles intended to stop observing the seventh-day Sabbath and begin worshipping on Sunday. There is clearly no New Testament evidence for a change of the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week. The change came after the days of Jesus and the apostles, so we must turn to history to see when and how this change came about.

5 | Where Did Worship on Sunday Come From?

The apostles warned that some Christians would drift away from the doctrines of New Testament Christianity. Paul said:

“I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:29, 30).

And that is exactly what happened. Credible historians clearly record how Christians began to stray from apostolic purity. Traditions and doctrines that Paul, Peter, and the other founders of the Christian church had never endorsed gradually crept into the church.

“From simple beginnings the church developed a distinct priesthood and an elaborate service. In this way Christianity and the higher forms of paganism tended to come nearer and nearer to each other as time went on. . . . They tended to merge into one another like two streams which had been following converging courses” (James Harvey Robinson, *An Introduction to the History of Western Europe*, p. 31).

The change from Sabbath observance to Sunday observance took place after the New Testament was completed and all the apostles had died. History records that Christians eventually shifted from worshipping and resting on the seventh day to the first day of the week.

“A history of the problem shows that in some places, it was really only after some centuries that the Sabbath rest really was entirely abolished, and by that time the practice

of observing a bodily rest on the Sunday had taken its place” (Vincent J. Kelly, *Forbidden Sunday and Feast-Day Occupations*, p. 15).

Of course, believers didn’t stop observing the seventh-day Sabbath on a given weekend and then suddenly begin keeping Sunday as the Lord’s Day. The earliest authentic instance of Sunday observance by Christians occurred in Italy, in the middle of the 2nd century after Christ. For a long time after that, many Christians observed both days, while still others kept the seventh-day Sabbath only.

On March 7, AD 321, Constantine the Great issued the first civil Sunday law, compelling all the people in the Roman Empire, except farmers, to rest on Sunday. This, with five other civil laws decreed by Constantine concerning Sunday, set the legal precedent for all civil Sunday legislation from that time to the present. In the 4th century, the Council of Laodicea urged Christians to honor Sunday by abstaining from work on that day if at all possible, and prohibited them from abstaining from work on the Sabbath.

History shows that Sunday worship and observance is a man-made tradition. The Bible gives no authority for doing away with the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment. In the Old Testament, the prophet Daniel predicted that during the Christian era, a deceptive power would attempt to change God’s law. The *Focus on Prophecy* course—which you can request from us and study after you finish the *Discover* course, presents a detailed explanation of that prophecy.



6 | Who Made the Change?

Who officially moved the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day of the week? The Catholic Church claims to have done so. In an attempt to save the crumbling Roman Empire, well-meaning church leaders compromised and attempted to change the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. A catechism of the Roman Catholic Church reads:

“Q. Which is the Sabbath day?

“A. Saturday is the Sabbath day.

“Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

“A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church . . . transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday” (Peter Geiermann, *The Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, p. 50).

The Catholic Mirror of September 23, 1893, reported:

“The Catholic Church for over one thousand years before the existence of a Protestant, by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.”

Here are two additional statements by Roman Catholic leaders:

“You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify” (James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers*, p. 89).

“The holy day, the Sabbath, was changed from Saturday to Sunday. . . . not from any directions noted in the Scriptures, but from the Church’s sense of its own power. . . . People who think that the Scriptures should be the sole authority,

should logically become 7th Day Adventists, and keep Saturday holy” (*Saint Catherine Catholic Church Sentinel*, May 21, 1995).

Nothing could be plainer. The Catholic Church readily announces that human church leaders made the change.

7 | What Do Some Protestants Say?

Official documents outlining the beliefs of several Protestant denominations agree that the Bible provides no authority for Sunday observance.

Early Lutheran church leaders wrote in *The Augsburg Confession* (1530):

“They [Roman Catholics] allege the Sabbath changed into Sunday, the Lord’s Day, contrary to the Decalogue [the Ten Commandments] . . . neither is there any example more boasted of than the changing of the Sabbath day. Great, say they, is the power and authority of the church, since it dispensed with one of the ten commandments.”

Methodist theologians Amos Binney and Daniel Steele observed:

“It is true there is no positive command for infant baptism. . . . nor is there any for keeping holy the first day of the week” (*Binney’s Theological Compend*, pp. 180, 181).

Nicholas Summerbell, a Christian church historian, wrote:

“The Roman Church . . . reversed the fourth commandment by doing away with the Sabbath of God’s Word, and instituting Sunday as a holy day” (*A True History of the Christian and the Christian Church*, pp. 417, 418).

A leading Protestant church historian wrote:

“The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a divine command in this respect, far from them, and from the early apostolic church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday. Perhaps at the end of the second century a false application of this kind had begun to take place; for men appear by that time to have considered laboring on Sunday as a sin” (Augustus Neander, *The History of the Christian Religion and Church During the Three First Centuries*, p. 337).

8 | What Is the Real Issue?

This brings us face to face with the question: Why do so many Christians observe Sunday without Bible authority?

Even more importantly: Which day shall I keep? Shall I follow those who say, “I don’t think it makes any difference which day I observe as long as I keep one day in seven”? Or shall I observe the day Jesus, our Creator (Colossians 1:15-17), established when He created our world (Genesis 2:1-3)—the day God pointed out in the Ten Commandments when He said, “The seventh day is the Sabbath” (Exodus 20:10)?

We are dealing here with more than just an outward observance—it is a matter of which day is biblically correct. The essential issue is one of obedience to Jesus. It involves our fundamental allegiance: Whom shall I obey? When it comes to the day I keep holy, shall I obey Christ, the Son of God, or human tradition?

God is not arbitrary. At creation and in His Ten Commandments, He had a reason for asking us to observe the

seventh day of the week as the Sabbath (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus “rested” on the Sabbath and established it as a memorial to His creative power. Our Creator set aside the Sabbath as a “holy” day, a time for us and our families to come closer to Him for strength and refreshment.

Some believers say, “I keep *every* day holy.” Of course we should worship God in our hearts every day of the week, but the fact is, God made the seventh day of the week “holy.” On the Sabbath, He comes near to us in a unique way; He blessed the day with His special presence and asks us to devote the whole day to Him.

Evidence shows there is no support for Sunday observance in the Bible. The issues are plain. Which day we worship on *does* make a difference. The choice is clear: the teachings of men or the commands of God? The words of men or the Word of God. A human substitute or a divine command?

God is calling His people back to obedience. He invites them to keep the Sabbath as a symbol of loyalty and love to Him. Jesus promises fullness of joy to those who love Him enough to obey His commands:

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:9-11).

Christ longs for us to experience the fulfillment that a truly surrendered life brings. He also wants us to experience the joy of Sabbath rest. He wants us to trust Him enough to obey Him in all things. If you answer God’s call and obey all of His commandments, you will experience the promise of Jesus that His joy will

Continued on page 16

WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. In addition to pointing to God as our Creator, what else does the seventh-day Sabbath represent? (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12)

2. Was the seventh-day Sabbath intended for only one race of people or for all of humanity? (Mark 2:27)

3. What does the Bible say about the redeemed worshipping on the seventh-day Sabbath in heaven? (Isaiah 66:22, 23)

4. What should motivate us to keep Jesus' commandments? (John 14:15)

5. What does the Bible say about those who knowingly refuse to obey God's commandments? (James 4:17)



be in you, and your joy will be full (John 15:11). That joy will transform your life.

Have you discovered the beauty of Sabbath rest?

When people obey God and begin to keep the Sabbath, some face work or family difficulties. Remember that Jesus

can and will give you grace and power to solve these problems. The way may not be easy, but Jesus will give you sustaining power and a richer Christian life. He will fulfill His promises. His unseen presence will be with you, and your joy will be full.

My Decision

- I love Jesus and want to follow Him in everything He asks me to do. I want to obey all His commandments and keep His seventh-day Sabbath holy.
- Pray for me as I continue to study the subject of the Sabbath. I want God to guide me as I continue to study.

My Prayer

Our Father in heaven, thank You for the promise of eternal life. Thank You for Your Word, which guides my life as a Christian. Thank You for revealing to me the truth about the Sabbath. Help me to always be honest with You and with my own heart. Help me to stand on Your side. In all the problems that I may face, please send Jesus to be by my side and help me live always for Him. In His wonderful name, Amen.

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BIBLE STUDY GUIDE 21

Voice of Prophecy | www.vop.com
PO Box 999, Loveland, CO 80539, USA

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Editor: Kurt Johnson | Design: Michelle C. Petz

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