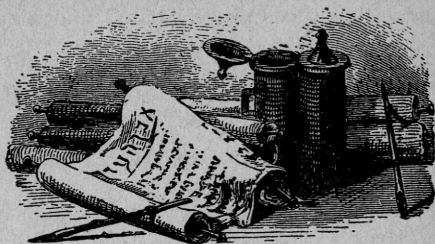


# THE SABBATH IN GREEK

A scholarly and authoritative consideration of Matthew 28:1 and other disputed passages, from the viewpoint of the Greek of the New Testament, its original language.

by

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**E**VERY true doctrine of the Bible will stand a grammatical as well as a theological test. And the doctrine of the seventh-day Sabbath is by no means an exception to this rule. Some have sought to prove that after the crucifixion of Christ, the first day of the week displaced the seventh day as the day of rest for the Christian. In order to find proof for their point, they have questioned the translation of the Greek of Matthew 28:1 and other passages, as we find it in our English Bibles. It is the aim of this tract to show that the passages of Scripture under consideration only give further substantiation to the Bible doctrine of the perpetuity of the seventh-day Sabbath.

We shall not treat the word *σάββατον*, Sabbath, in a polemical style, but to give such facts regarding the word as will serve to make clear its history, declension, meaning, and grammatical use, and thus provide a setting for its study in connection with the doctrine of the Sabbath.

## History of the Word "Sabbath"

The word *σάββατον* is of Semitic origin. It is transliterated from the Hebrew word *shābbāt*, which is translated "rest," "the Sabbath." It has been styled a Hellenized Semitic word. That is to say, the Hebrew idea has been expressed in the Greek language by a word of similar sound, declined after the Greek model. It is first found in the Septuagint, where it occurs more than one hundred times. It is used twenty-five times in the singular where it is translated "Sabbath day," and forty-six times in the plural it is translated "Sabbath day." It is used thirty times in the plural where it is translated "Sabbaths," and once in the singular it is translated "Sabbaths." This covers its use in the Greek Old Testament. In the New Testament,

σάββατον occurs sixty-eight times. The word is translated fifty-nine times as "Sabbath" and nine times as "week."

### The Declension of the Word

Σάββατον is declined after the model of the second and third declensions. The gender is neuter.

#### SECOND DECLENSION

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Nom.	σάββατον	σάββατα
Gen.	σαββάτου	σαββάτων
Dat.	σαββάτῳ	σαββάτοις
Acc.	σάββατον	σάββατα

#### THIRD DECLENSION

	SINGULAR	PLURAL
Nom.	(σάββατ)	σάββατα
Gen.	σαββάτου	σαββάτων
Dat.	σαββάτῳ	σάββασι
Acc.	(σάββατ)	σάββατα

Two forms of the dative plural, σαββάτοις and σάββασι, are found in the New Testament. This is an illustration of a tendency of some Greek words to change from one declension to another, but in no sense affects the meaning of the word.

### The Word "Sabbath" Defined

The testimony of the lexicons on the meaning of σάββατον will now be given:

LIDDELL AND SCOTT:

1. The Hebrew Sabbath; *i. e.*, rest. Hence the seventh day or day of rest. Also in plural.

2. A period of seven days. A week.

DAWSON:

The Sabbath day, the day of rest, a week. (In the plural it has the same signification as in the singular.)

GREENFIELD:

Cessation from labor, rest; the Sabbath, *i. e.*, the Jewish Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, both in the singular and in the plural, a period of seven days, a week, singular and plural.

THAYER:

1. The seventh day of each week.

a. Singular. The institution of the Sabbath, the law for keeping holy every seventh day of the week.

b. Seven days, a week. The plural is used in the same sense.

SABBATH		WEEK	
Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Matthew 12:2 12:5 12:8 24:20	Matthew 12:1 12:5 12:10 12:11 12:12 28:1		Matthew 28:1
Mark 2:27 2:27 2:28 6:2 16:1	Mark 1:21 2:23 2:24 3:2 3:4	Mark 16:9	Mark 16:2
Luke 6:1 6:5 6:6 6:7 6:9 13:14 13:14 13:15 13:16 14:1 14:3 14:5 23:54 23:56	Luke 4:16 4:31 6:2 13:10	Luke 18:12	Luke 24:1
John 5:9 5:10 5:16 5:18 7:22 7:23 7:23 9:14 9:16 19:31 19:31			John 20:1 20:19
Acts 1:12 13:27 13:42 13:44 15:21 18:4	Acts 13:14 16:13 17:2		Acts 20:7
	Colossians 2:16	1 Corinthians 16:2	
40	19	3	6

## STRONG:

The Sabbath (*i. e.*, Shabbath), or day of weekly repose from secular avocations (also the observance or institution itself); by extension a se'nnight, *i. e.*, the interval between two Sabbaths; likewise the plural in all the above applications:—Sabbath (day), week.

## SOUTER:

(Semitic), singular and plural, *the Sabbath*, a night and day which lasted from about 6 P. M. Friday until about 6 P. M. Saturday: πρώτη (μία) [τῶν] σαββάτων ([τοῦ] σαββάτου) (Hebraistic); *the first day after the Sabbath, the day following the Sabbath*, that is, from about 6 P. M. on Saturday till about 6 P. M. on Sunday, *Sunday*.

This list of definitions could be extended; but a sufficient number has been given to show that *σάββατον* is used in the New Testament in the sense of "Sabbath," "the seventh day," and "week," in both the singular and the plural. This will be made clear by the accompanying diagram, which displays every use of the word in the New Testament, in both the singular and the plural, with the translation as given in the Authorized, the Revised, and the American Revised Version. These three great versions, together with many others, agree exactly on the translations as displayed in this table.

A few observations should now be drawn from the table. The word *σάββατον* is used forty times in the singular, in five different books, to denote the Sabbath day; and nineteen times in the plural, by four different authors, to denote the Sabbath day. Again it is found three times in the singular and six times in the plural meaning a period of seven days, a week. These are the translations given the word by all the great English versions, even including Wycliffe's version published in 1380.

But some ardent supporters of the Sunday as the Sabbath have endeavored to show that all the translators, grammarians, lexicographers, and philologists were wrong when they translated *σάββατον* as "week." One of these enthusiasts, who evidently had more zeal than knowledge of Greek, put the case thus: "The origin of the heresy (translating εἰς μίαν σαββάτων, the first day of the week) lies deeper, in a false translation incorporated into lexicons and grammars and cyclopedias for more than a thousand years, and even reflected on the sacred page by revisionists of the New Testament. The lexicographers and grammarians who thought that they had discovered an

idiom, or an exception, entitling them to say 'one of the Sabbaths,' as meaning the first day of the week, evidently only found a blunder in the Septuagint. In two thousand years this blunder has grown hoar with age, and now it is so deeply rooted in philology that it defies the world."

Well may it defy the world. Let us discover the reasons.

### Some Objections Considered

The controversy usually centers around the translation of Matthew 28: 1. We now cite the passage in Greek, with a transliteration into English, and a literal word-for-word translation, and the translation of the American Revised Version:

Ὁψὲ δὲ σαββάτων, τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων  
 "Opse de Sabbatōn, tē epiphōskousē eis mian Sabbatōn."

"Late from now (the) Sabbath, on the (hour) dawning into (the) first (day) of the week."

"Now late on the Sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week."

In this passage, σαββάτων is found twice. Once it is translated "Sabbath" and once "week." The question may fairly be asked, "Why translate the same word in the same verse with two such different meanings?" or, "Is it allowable to translate the Greek of Matthew 28: 1, 'At the end of the Sabbaths, as it began to dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths?'" This would be interpreted by some, "At the end of the Sabbaths (the Jewish Sabbaths), as it began to dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths (the Sunday Sabbaths)." This translation is offered by a few would-be Greek scholars in lieu of the translations given by all the great Greek scholars and translators from Wycliffe on down to the translation of the American Revised Version.

Let us examine the text in order to discover the reason that led the translators of the New Testament to render the word both "Sabbath" and "week" in Matthew 28:1. The word is found twice in the plural in the passage under consideration.

1. By reference to the table, it will be seen that the word is found nineteen times in the New Testament in the plural referring to the Sabbath. It is clear that three of these passages refer to more than one Sabbath and should be translated "Sabbaths" or "Sabbath days." The remaining sixteen texts are rendered in the singular "Sabbath" or "Sabbath day" in the Revised Version. The fact that *σάββατα* in the plural is rendered sixteen times by "Sabbath" or "Sabbath day" in the singular is sufficient reason why no one should insist upon

translating it in the plural in Matthew 28:1. In fact, all the circumstances make it clear that only one Sabbath is referred to, and that was the Sabbath during which Christ lay in the tomb; and that likewise only one first day of the week is referred to, and that was the one on which Christ was resurrected.

2. The people of Palestine in the time of Christ were bilinguals. They spoke both the Aramaic and the Greek. Aramaic was a local language restricted to Palestine and certain adjacent areas. The use of Greek was prevalent throughout the Roman world. If the New Testament had been written in Aramaic, it would have been restricted in its circulation, for territorial reasons and because of prejudice against the Jews. Therefore, in the providence of God, it was written in Greek, a language that was used in all the countries bordering on the Mediterranean Sea. Greek could be read by practically all the literate people in the Roman Empire. About two centuries before the time of Christ, the Old Testament in Hebrew had been translated into the Greek language; and this version was known as the Septuagint. It must have been extensively used and quoted by Christ and His apostles, because in the writings of the New Testament, we find 101 verses quoted verbatim from the Septuagint, or only changing the person, number, *et cetera*. The writers of the New Testament, therefore, were influenced in the choice of idioms by the Greek, the language in which they were daily reading the Old Testament, and by the Aramaic, the language in which they were daily speaking to the people.

### It Is Correctly Translated "Week"

With this brief introduction, we shall now consider the reasons for translating *σάββατον* as "week." The first day of the week is first mentioned in Genesis 1:5, "And the evening and the morning were the first day." Expressed in Greek, the words are *ἡμέρα μία* or "day one." Here the cardinal "one" is used for the ordinal "first." The translators of the Septuagint evidently copied verbatim the Hebrew idiom that reads "day one" because the "Hebrew and after it the Aramaic had no ordinal corresponding to 'one.'" Clearly the New Testament writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul, follow the lead of the Septuagint translators and use some case of *μία* ("one") instead of *πρώτη* ("first"). Let us now restate the fact in other words: The New Testament authors use the cardinal "one" instead of the ordinal "first" in imitation of the Septuagint translation, which in turn imitated the Hebrew version, which was compelled



to use the cardinal because there was no ordinal ("first") in that language. The author referred to thinks that a grave mistake was made by the translators of the Septuagint, in translating the Hebrew. His comment reads thus: "This blunder in the Septuagint is the upas tree of Sabbath interpretation, and its secretions and exudations are very poisonous. This tree of false interpretation shoots down its roots into the lexicons and grammars, and pushes its branches into every nation where the Bible is known, and poisons the very air breathed by the Christian church." But let us suppose that there had been in the Hebrew an ordinal corresponding to "first." Then the Septuagint would have used it, and the writers of the New Testament would have followed the example; and in English, we should have the word "first," and that is the exact word used in the phrase "first day of the week."

### Why the Word "Day" Is Supplied

The word "day" is not found in the Greek; and the question may properly be asked, why this particular word was supplied in this case. It follows a law of Hebrew grammar. "Certain substantives employed in designation of *weight, measure, or time*, are commonly omitted after numerals; e. g., Genesis 20: 16, 'a thousand (shekels) of silver'; and likewise this passage, "the first (day) of the week"; or as we say, "the twentieth of the month," in which the word "day" is supplied in thought. A prime reason for supplying the word "day" is found in the fact that the word ἡμέρα is a feminine noun in Greek, and therefore μία, which is a feminine adjective, agrees with it. If a noun is to be supplied after an adjective, a noun must be selected which will agree with that adjective in gender, number, and case, in accordance with the rule governing such relationship. This fact forever precludes the translation "the first of the Sabbaths." The text expanded would then read, "the first Sabbath of the Sabbaths." But the word σάββατον is neuter gender, and the adjective "first" would have been neuter to agree with its noun. It is clear, then, that inasmuch as μία is in the feminine gender, the supplied noun must be feminine; which fact excludes the possibility of using σάββατον, which is neuter.

This brings us to a consideration of the second σαββάτων, which is translated "week" in this passage and in eight other passages in the New Testament. (See table.) The first σαββάτων and the adjective μίαν in Matthew 28: 1 were evidently employed by Matthew and the other New Testament writers in imitation

of the Septuagint or Greek version of the Old Testament; but the second σαββάτων to mean week is clearly employed in imitation of an Aramaic usage. A writer in the *Methodist Review*, May, 1899, in an article entitled "Must Syntax Die That the Sabbath May Live?" makes this statement: "In the West Aramaic language we have the names of the days of the week as Mary taught them to her Son Jesus. One in the Shabba (Sabbath), second in the Shabba, third in the Shabba," *et cetera*, on to "eve of the Shabba," and "the Shabba." The author of this article, although expressing sympathy with "every legitimate argument to establish the sanctity of the Lord's day," says: "This widely heralded Klondike discovery as to *mian Sabbatōn* turns out to be only the glitter of fool's gold. It rests upon the profoundest ignoring or ignorance of a law of syntax fundamental to inflected speech, and especially of the usage and influence of the Aramaic tongue, which was the vernacular of Jesus and His apostles. Must syntax die that the Sabbath may live? As a vital or corroboratory part of an argument for the sanctifying of the Lord's day, this travestied exegesis, instead of being a monumental discovery, is but a monumental blunder."

In Luke 18: 12, the Pharisee said, "I fast twice in the week" (νηστεύω δις τοῦ σαββάτου). This passage is positive proof that *σάββατον* can be translated "week," as it would be manifestly absurd for the Pharisee to say, "I fast twice on the Sabbath." Again, a further proof that *σάββατον* may be translated "week" is found in the fact that the modern Greek Testament uses *ἑβδομάς*, "week," instead of *σάββατον*, in every one of the nine passages where *σάββατον* is used in the expression "the first day of the week."

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be noted that the translation "the first day of the week" instead of "the first of the Sabbaths," has the backing of the translators of the Authorized, the Revised, and the American Revised Version. These translation committees represent the ripest New Testament Greek scholarship of their respective times. No genuine Greek scholar has ever attempted to make an argument in favor of the Sunday-Sabbath theory by manipulating the translation of Matthew 28: 1 and kindred passages. Only novices have made such an attempt, and these have been rebuked by their more scholarly brethren who observe the Sunday as the Sabbath.

Syntax shall not die, and the true Sabbath shall still live.