

Torah Observant "SHOMER MITZVOT"

שומר מצות

A Series on Practical Messianic Living and Apologetics (halakhah)
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Does the Biblical Sabbath Day Correspond to Our Modern Seventh-day Saturday?

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The Scriptures are Reliable

Question: Given the antiquity of some of the details of the issues at hand, can we be reasonably sure that the biblical Sabbath day corresponds to our modern seventh-day Saturday?

Short Answer: Despite its age, if we are to take God's Word as trustworthy in its original autograph then, yes, we can be sure that the biblical Sabbath has been preserved as our modern seventh-day Saturday, based on at least 3500 years of reliable records-keeping and based on an accurate historical, grammatical understanding of the ancient near-Eastern tradition as a whole.

According to Old Testament Hebrew reckoning from time immemorial, and in keeping with ancient and Jewish practices, the days of the week are not named but instead are merely numbered, the Sabbath day being the only exception. When, no later than the second century, the Roman government decided to give the days of the week names, surprisingly our modern English-named day 'Saturday' has survived as the only day that retains its original connection to ancient Roman mythology; the other days' modern names find their roots in Germanic polytheism.

God established the universal seven-day weekly cycle in Genesis chapter one. This same God entrusted Moses with transmitting this information to greater Isra'el and eventually to her written Torah. This same Torah was verified as accurate for 1500 years of Jewish history until the time that Jesus Christ walked the Earth. Within a few hundred years the emerging Christian Church picked up and continued this accurate transmission of Truth right down to this very day.

Wikipedia has this to say about the weekdays as being numbered from Saturday:

For the majority of the Abrahamic religions the first day of the week is Sunday. Biblical Sabbath (originally corresponding to Saturday), when God rested from six-day Creation, made the day following Sabbath the first day of the week (corresponding to Sunday). Seventh-day Sabbaths were sanctified for celebration and rest. After the week was adopted in early Christian Europe, Sunday remained the first day of the week, but also gradually displaced Saturday as the day of celebration and rest, being considered the Lord's Day. The change of Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday has no biblical foundation.¹

An additional article from Wikipedia on Saturday has this record:

In Jewish Law, Saturday is the seventh day of the week, called Shabbat. Thus, in many languages the Saturday is named after the Sabbath. Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches distinguish between Saturday (Sabbath) and the Lord's Day (Sunday). Some Protestants call Sunday the Sabbath (see Sabbath in Christianity). Quakers traditionally refer to Saturday as "Seventh Day", eschewing the "pagan" origin of the name. In Islamic countries, Fridays are holidays, but they are considered as the sixth day of the week.²

Despite the obvious religious differences between Judaism and Christianity, both institutions do in fact agree that the [Old Testament] Scriptures are reliable, accurate, and trustworthy in their original autographs—and this includes the seventh-day Sabbath identity.

Introduction

Longer Answer: The Sabbath Day and its Relevance to Saturday and the Seventh Day

A fundamental examination of the Scriptural Sabbath day naturally includes the understanding that a day of rest is one of the primary purposes associated with its very institution. To be sure, according to nearly every reliable Bible dictionary and lexicon, the Hebrew noun '*shabbat*' finds its meaning in conveying a sense of ceasing, desisting, and resting in direct relationship to a day designated as such. In other words, among Jewish and Christian scholars alike, there is no question as to the veracity of the Biblical Sabbath Day and its representation of rest. Moreover, Modern Hebrew also conveys these very same meanings in its employment of the contemporary word '*shabbat*.' However, is the biblical rest to be equated with its ostensible designation as the 'seventh day'? Equally in question is the reliability of our modern Gregorian calendar with its designation of Saturday as the seventh day of the week—and that represented by the Sabbath in Jewish and Christian circles! Does the Bible give warrant allowing for designating our modern Saturday/seventh day as the original and true Sabbath?

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Week-day_names

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saturday>

What Seems to Be the Problem?

As I understand it, essentially two issues emerge: 1) the identity of the Sabbath as the seventh day, and 2) the identity of the Sabbath as our modern Saturday. To the first question surprisingly we need only to look to the Scriptures for our answer!

Numerous examples could serve our purpose, but for this brief study, let us parse and exegete Exodus 20:7-10 according to the Jewish numbering (Christian numbering has vv. 8-11):

8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (ESV).

Amazingly we could end our study here, for in the most basic of English translations from the original Hebrew, the answer to our first question has already been supplied! God in his infinite wisdom saw fit to allow English to convey exactly what the Hebrew is in fact communicating to us, namely, that most languages allow for an elementary, grammatical way of expressing both definite and indefinite articles.

A Lesson From Grammar

Allow me to let the (nationally renowned among US college students) Owl Purdue Online Writing Lab explain the English use of the definite article:

The definite article is used before singular and plural nouns when the noun is specific or particular. This signals that the noun is definite, that it refers to a particular member of a group. For example:

"The dog that bit me ran away." Here, we're talking about a specific dog, the dog that bit me.

"I was happy to see the policeman who saved my cat!" Here, we're talking about a particular policeman. Even if we don't know the policeman's name, it's still a particular policeman because it is the one who saved the cat.

"I saw the elephant at the zoo." Here, we're talking about a specific noun. Probably there is only one elephant at the zoo.³

³ <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/540/01/>

For our examination of the Hebrew article I turn to the well-respected Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament:

All West Semitic languages since the first millennium B.C. (Hebrew/Aramaic/Phoenician) plus Arabic have in their language a morpheme that functions as a definite article. In none of these languages is the definite article a separate word, as in English, but rather it is prefixed to the word it determines, except in Aramaic where it is affixed (i.e. postpositive)...The one form, *ha*, covers masculine and feminine, singular and plural. Nor is there in Biblical Hebrew any word for the indefinite article "a/an."⁴

What we have discovered when comparing English to Hebrew is simply that both languages have a definite article and that each language employs its definite article with expected accuracy and purpose.

Practical Application

In the passage quoted from Exodus above, we notice firstly that the English correctly identifies 'The Sabbath' as a definite noun in verse eight. Secondly, the passage continues by identifying 'The Seventh Day' as a definite noun in verse ten. Lastly, the passage supplies the reader with a perfect grammatical parallelism of 'The Sabbath' and 'The Seventh Day' by linking these two definite nouns together in meaning and purpose: "*rested on the seventh day...therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day.*" The conclusion is obvious: the seventh day *is* the Sabbath day! I have not supplied the Hebrew script in this study but those who can read the Hebrew script with some amount of accuracy may wish to go back and personally observe that the representations of the Hebrew definite article perfectly coincide with their English translation counterparts in this passage.

In regards to our two issues mentioned above, we would have to agree that the first one has now rightly been addressed.

As for the second issue, from this point we merely need to allow history to fill in the rest by supplying us with a name for the seventh day. Again, Wikipedia provides some assistance:

Saturday: the only day of the week to retain its Roman origin in English, named after the Roman god Saturn associated with the Titan Cronus, father of Zeus and many Olympians. Its original Anglo-Saxon rendering was Sæturnesdæg (pronounced [sæ.tur.nes.dæg] or [sæ.tur.nes.dæj]). In Latin it was dies Saturni, "Day of Saturn"; compare French samedi. The Spanish and Portuguese sábado, the Romanian sâmbătă, and the Italian sabato come from Sabbata dies (Day of the Sabbath).⁵

⁴ Harris, Archer, Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody Publishers, 1990), p. 203.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Week-day_names

Conclusions

We have seen and affirm from both modern and biblical Hebrew grammar that '*shabbat*' conveys the sense of rest and cessation. We have noticed that at least two questions commonly arise surrounding the clarification of the ancient, biblical Sabbath with regards to its relationship to the weekly seventh day and also in regards to its relationship to our modern day Saturday. We discovered that the biblical text was quite basic in its portrayal of '*the Sabbath*' as '*the seventh day*' and that one need only to consult the original Hebrew behind any given English translation to verify the presence of carefully placed definite articles and the corresponding nouns that they modify.

A lesson rooted in chronological reliability (as well as common sense) will demonstrate that the historically identifiable Saturday/Sabbath/seventh-day recognized by today's Judaism is the very same one recognized by the emerging, historic Christian Church—the very same one recognized by Jesus himself!—the very same one recognized by the various Judaisms of his day—the very same one handed down from Moses 1500 years earlier!—and the very same one established by God himself in the records of the Creation account.

Lastly, we documented that the Roman designations for the days of the week have indeed existed since antiquity and that these names were likewise adopted when Christianity also decided to employ the seven-day weekly cycle in agreement with God's already established seven-day weekly cycle as articulated in the first chapter of the book of Genesis.

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