

When does Sabbath mean Week?

Sabbaton, Sabbata: Rest Day and Week

- a) The Aramaic word for Sabbath is "sabbata" (singular).
- b) This was adopted into Greek so that "sabbata" (singular in meaning) in Greek also means "Sabbath".
- c) Many Greeks did not understand the origin of the word, and to them "sabbata" sounded like the plural of an imaginary Greek word "sabbaton", so they started using the word "sabbaton" (neuter, singular) to mean "Sabbath", so both "sabbata" and "sabbaton" meant "sabbath".
- d) When Greeks wanted to say "sabbaths", they took the plural of "sabbaton", which is "sabbata" (neuter plural).
- e) So "sabbata" means both "sabbath" and "sabbaths"!
- f) The concept of "week" was often represented in both Hebrew and Greek by the word "sabbath" which was the most distinctive feature of the week, and which is also, in Hebrew, similar to the word for "seven". Thus the term "Sabbaton" can mean "week", e.g., "fast twice in the week" (Luke 18:12), (perhaps matching what is stated in *Didache* 8:1 [150 A.D.?] "Mondays and Thursdays are their days for fasting".)

There are a number of phrases translated "first day of week" in KJV:

Similar in Greek: Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7.

Different in Greek: Mark 16:9, 1 Cor. 16:2.

I. As an example, let's look at Matt. 28:1, transliterated:

"Opse de sabbatōn, te epiphōskouse eis mian sabbatōn..."

- 1. all Greek manuscripts agree on this.
- 2. "sabbatōn" is the genitive form of "sabbata" (meaning sabbath, sabbaths or week).
- 3. "Opse" usually means
 - a) noun: "late in the day" or "at evening" (Mark 11:19)

So Matt. 28:1 could mean: "opse de sabbatōn" = "at evening of the sabbath(s)"

b) preposition (with genitive): "late in", or "after"

opse de sabbatōn = "late in sabbath(s)" or "after sabbath(s)"

("de" means "but", often omitted as unnecessary in English)

4. "te epiphōskouse eis" means literally "at the shining into", "at the dawning into", but then figuratively "at the commencing of"

5. "mian" means "one" (feminine). The Greek word for "day" is feminine, so that "mian" is generally understood to mean "day number one". This first occurs in Gen. 1.5, ("first" day of the Creation week) in the *Septuagint*.

6. "mian sabbatōn" most obviously means "day number one of the week", or possibly "day number one of the sabbath(s)". Then "day number one of the sabbath(s)" meaning "one day of the sabbath(s)" could be synonymous with "one sabbath day". Alternatively, if this referred to a Sabbath day, then Matt 28:1 refers either to just as the Sabbath starts (sunset) or as the sun rose on the Sabbath.

7. The wording "day number one of the sabbath(s)", meaning "first sabbath", though possible to us, would be jarring to Jewish readers (and authors) of the NT to whom the term "sabbath" would be closely tied to the concept of "day number seven".

8. Which particular sabbath might be identified by a special day called the "day number one of the sabbath(s)" is ambiguous. Matt. 28:1 is during ULB, Acts 20:7 is after ULB.

II. The Greek of I Cor. 16:2 is slightly different, "kata mian sabbatou", ("mian" is feminine, "sabbatou" is neuter singular). The translation "day number one of the sabbath" is awkward. "sabbath number one" is impossible. It most obviously means "day number one of the week".

III. The Greek of John 20:19 has the word "day" in parallel to "one", so any translation not equivalent to "late on that day, on day number one of the sabbath(s)/week" is against the natural sense.

IV. The obvious Greek for "one sabbath" (hen sabbaton) does not appear in the NT.

V. Luke 6:1 uses "prōtō" (first) not "mian" (number one) to say "first sabbath".

VI. Mark 16:19 says "prōte sabbatou" meaning "on the first (feminine form), so "day") "of the sabbath/week".

VIII. Most places in KJV that say "sabbath day" merely have "sabbath" in Greek.

IX. Luke 4:16, Acts 13:14 have "the day of the sabbath(s)"

Luke 13:14, 16; 14:5 have "the day of the sabbath"

John 9:14 has "it was the sabbath, in the day, when ..."

John 19:31 has "for it was a great day of that sabbath ... "

X. Luke 23:46 says "rested the sabbath" (singular).

XI. Luke 24:1 says "on day number one of the week/sabbath(s)". The the context indicates "day after the sabbath", i.e., "day number one of the week".

In summary,

a) "mian sabbatou" means "first day of the week" (I Cor. 16:2, only occurrence).

b) "mian sabbatōn", "one (day) of the sabbath(s)/week", most naturally means "first day of the week". Grammatically it cannot be short for "one sabbath of the sabbath(s)". By context, it cannot mean a particular sabbath called the "first day of the sabbath(s)" because then it would be used of different sabbaths during the year in the NT. It cannot mean "one day of the sabbath(s)", i.e., "one sabbath day", because in Luke 24:1 it refers to the day after the sabbath rest.

We welcome additions, corrections and clarifications.