

# Is the Sabbath Commandment Quoted in the New Testament?

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## Introduction

The Greek word *sabbaton* (or *sabbata*) in its various forms occurs some 68 times in the New Testament. It is translated "Sabbath" 40 times from a Greek singular, 19 times from a Greek plural, and is translated "week" 3 times from a Greek singular, 6 times from a Greek plural. But these references to the Sabbath do not quote what the commandment says. They merely refer to the fact that there is such a commandment.

## Command and Explanation Clauses

The Sabbath commandment is the longest of the ten, with 55 words in the Hebrew original.<sup>1</sup> When we look for references to this particular commandment in later books of the Bible, and particularly in the New Testament, we have to know where to look or we will not find the references that are actually there. This is because the fourth commandment, and in fact each of the first five commandments, has two major clauses – a command and an explanation.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, each of the last five commandments does not have an explanation clause. See tables 1 and 2.

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<sup>1</sup> This word count ignores methegs. If the term "metheg" is unfamiliar to you, this note is irrelevant. Skip it. If you know what methegs are and counting them does matter, there are 13 methegs in the fourth commandment, which reduces the word count by 13. Of course there are methegs in other commandments as well, so their lengths relative to each other remain largely intact either way. For those who are interested, the number of methegs in the various commandments is as follows: 1 (3), 2 (6), 3 (7), 4 (13), 5 (3), 6 (0), 7 (0), 8 (0), 9 (1), 10 (1).

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of ways to divide up the commandments, but in my view Exod 20:2-3 are the command clause of the first commandment, while vs. 1 is the corresponding explanation clause. Thus the sequence of clauses in vss. 1-3 is explanation first, then command. In commandments 2-5 (vss. 4-9) the sequence is command first, then explanation.

Table 1  
Summary of Word Counts in Exod 20:2-11

Commandment	Command Clause	Explanation Clause	Total
1	7	9	16
2	21	22	43
3	7	10	17
4	29	26	55
5	5	10	15
Totals	69	77	146

Table 2  
Summary of Word Counts in Exod 20:12-17

Commandment	Command Clause	Explanation Clause	Total
6	2	N/A	2
7	2	N/A	2
8	2	N/A	2
9	5	N/A	5
10	13	N/A	13
Totals	24		24

The first clause of the Sabbath commandment is a command ("Remember the Sabbath . . ."), while the second clause is an explanation ("for in six days . . ."). The command clause is not quoted in the New Testament. So if our concept of the fourth commandment is that it consists of a command clause only, i.e., if we're looking only for, "Remember the Sabbath . . .," or such, in the New Testament, that artificially limits our search. The commandment is in fact quoted in the New Testament – over an extended number of words, exactly, and more than once. But the quotations that we find come from the explanation clause. The explanation is of course referred to in Heb 4:4 ("And on the seventh day God rested from all his work"), which corresponds to, "but he rested on the seventh day" (Exod 20:11, NIV). This much lies on the surface, but it is not what I have in mind.

## "Heaven(s)," "Earth," and "Sea(s)"

In order to find what else there is, we must ask what a quotation drawn from the explanation clause of the fourth commandment would look like. What I propose here is that whenever the words "heaven" (or "heavens"), "earth," and "sea" (or "seas") are all brought together in one verse, that is a reference to the fourth commandment.

The three main terms

It would be tempting to deny this assertion by appealing to the creation story. But the three words in question do not occur all in one place anywhere in Gen 1-2. So it is not just that the three terms "heaven(s)," "earth," and "sea(s) [*hayyam*]" all appear

together in Exod 20:11. They appear together there for the first time in Scripture. Exod 20:4 speaks of making "an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters [*bammáyim*] below," but, while close in meaning, the words *máyim* ("waters") and *yam* ("sea") are not the same. There are over 200 passages which refer in some way to "(the) heaven(s) and (the) earth," but that combination omits the word "sea." The first time the three words heaven(s), "earth," and "sea(s)" are all found together in one verse is Exod 20:11. There are eight passages from the Old Testament and seven from the New where all three of the target terms co-occur and therefore offer potential references back to the Sabbath commandment.

#### A fourth term

Each of the fifteen passages in question have all three of the terms we started out looking for, but otherwise differ widely among themselves. A convenient way to categorize them is on the basis of a fourth term that most of them add. There is a precedent for adding it. In Exod 20:11, after the reference to "heavens," "earth," and "sea" (אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם *et-haššāmáyim w<sup>e</sup>et-hā'āreš et-hayyām*), there is a fourth term, "and all that is in them" (וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם *w<sup>e</sup>et-kol-šer-bām*). This tag does not carry over into the fourteen later references in any uniform way, but a fourth term of some sort is generally present.

Among Old Testament examples there is some approximation of this tag in all seven cases. These range from Amos 9:6 (וַיִּשְׁפֹּךְ עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ, *wayyišp<sup>e</sup>kēm al-p<sup>e</sup>nē hā'āreš*, "and pours them out over the face of the land") where it is unclear whether there is an attempt to imitate the original tag or not, to Ps 146:6, which reproduces the original wording of the tag letter for letter. In both MT (וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם, *w<sup>e</sup>et-kol-šer-bām*) and LXX (καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς, *kai panta ta en autois*) Ps 146:6 reproduces the tag exactly ("and everything in them"), although it omits אֶת and the article from two of the three preceding terms (thus, אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם, *šāmáyim wā'āreš et-hayyām*, "heaven and earth, the sea"). For the full text of all eight Old Testament passages in question, see Appendix.

Among New Testament examples there is no tag in two cases (Rev 12:12; 21:1), a weak approximation of the tag in one case (Rev 14:7 [καὶ πηγὰς ὑδάτων, *kai pēgas hudatōn*, "and the springs of water"]) and a strong approximation in two others (Rev 5:13 [καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα, *kai ta en autois panta*, "and all that is in them"]; 10:6 [καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ, *kai ta en autē*, "and all that is in it"]). In Acts 4:24 and 14:15 the Greek LXX text of Exod 20:11 is reproduced throughout, with every letter and accent in place (τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς, *ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autois*). These verses are different in English translation, but not in the Greek that the English is translated from. For the full text of all seven New Testament passages in question, see Appendix.

Ironically, the passage with the closest rhetorical connection to the commandment (Rev 14:7) does not have the closest verbal connection. The tag in this case (καὶ πηγὰς ὑδάτων, *kai pēgas hudatōn*, "and the springs of water") does not

reproduce the wording of Exod 20:11, but does show that the earlier passage is probably in the mind of the writer by acknowledging that a fourth term is expected following the words, τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν, *ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai thalassan*, "the heavens and the earth, the sea".

## Discussion

Notice what the references I have listed take as their subject matter. Only one of them (Rev 14:7) makes any attempt to tell people what to do. Instead they all have to do with reminding us who God is – and they do it joyfully. Does this distinguish the thirteen non-imperative references from the commandment that nourishes them? I think not. This is precisely the function of the explanation clause in Exod 20. One might say that it is the function of the fourth commandment as a whole.

A Scripturally informed memory of who God is is surely the best reason anyone could have for worshiping God, or for keeping the Sabbath commandment. Because our God is the Creator of the heavens, earth, and sea, He merits our worship. Here is the reason why any type of idolatry is so hopelessly misguided. The things that we make cannot possibly have made us. And so for this reason they cannot possibly merit our worship. This is not a minor theme within Scripture. It is supremely important for all of humankind to remember who is God and who is not. By constantly reminding us that we owe our existence to Yahweh, the Sabbath commandment strikes at the heart of the entire concept of idolatry. This is not something we need to get rid of. It is something we need to cling to and cherish.

The one exception to the above rule that later references to the Sabbath commandment do not themselves command, but rather offer up praise, is Rev 14:7. This verse combines the ideas of commanding and praising. It says, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (NIV). Here, in an end time setting and speaking didactically, the angel commands all mankind to worship the God who made all things and to worship Him specifically in His capacity as our Creator.

No one would deny that Christians of every denomination worship the Creator already. They might not believe that the creation story is true, but the God they worship is the Lord. So what is the angel saying? Is there a way to worship God that focuses special attention on the fact that the Lord, and no other, is God because He is the Creator of all things?

There is. In the beginning God worked for six days creating the world and everything in it, but made the seventh day holy. The only people He could make it holy for at this time in history were Adam and Eve, and we all descend from them. If there is no distinction in Gal 3:26-29 between Jews and Greeks, there is certainly no distinction along these lines in Gen 2:1-3, where God makes the Sabbath holy for all mankind. Adam and Eve were neither Jews nor Greeks. They were simply our parents. By keeping the Seventh day holy in obedience to the fourth commandment we can show that we worship the Creator especially because of the fact that He is the Creator, and thus fulfill the angel's words in Rev 14:7.

## Conclusion

Because God is who He is and because He has set apart a day to be with us, we must set apart that same day to be with Him or show ultimately, by not doing so, that our hearts are not with Him. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21). If Jesus is our Treasure, we will want to spend time with Him. Is a whole day too long for this? Has Christ done nothing for us that would inspire this level of devotion in return? What will be our attitude toward Him in eternity? Forever is much longer than a day. His command to rest – physically as well as spiritually, for an entire twenty-four hour period, even if it is from sunset Friday evening to sunset Saturday evening – is not onerous if we love Him, and it is an invitation that we can, but must not, ignore.

## Appendix

### Text of the Passages Referred to in the Paper

Exod 20:11

<sup>WTT</sup> **Exodus 20:11**  
 וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי  
 עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֶׁהוּ: ס

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 20:11** For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Exodus 20:11** ἐν γὰρ ἕξ ἡμέραις ἐποίησεν κύριος τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ κατέπαυσεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἑβδόμῃ διὰ τοῦτο εὐλόγησεν κύριος τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἑβδόμην καὶ ἡγίασεν αὐτήν

Old Testament passages

<sup>WTT</sup> **Nehemiah 9:6**  
 אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר  
 עָלֶיהָ הַיָּם וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאֶת־הַמַּחִיָּה אֶת־כָּל־לֶמַּעַם וְצַבָּא  
 הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ מְשִׁתַּחֲוִיִּים:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Nehemiah 9:6** ¶ You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Nehemiah 9:6** ¶ καὶ εἶπεν Εσδρας σὺ εἶ αὐτὸς κύριος μόνος σὺ ἐποίησας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ πάσαι τὴν στάσιν αὐτῶν τὴν γῆν καὶ πάντα ὅσα ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῇ τὰς θαλάσσας καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐταῖς καὶ σὺ ζωοποιεῖς τὰ πάντα καὶ σοὶ προσκυνοῦσιν αἱ στρατιαὶ τῶν οὐρανῶν

<sup>WTT</sup> **Psalms 69:35**  
 יְהַלְלוּהוּ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ יָמִים וְכָל־רִמְשׁ בָּם:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalms 69:34** Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and all that move in them,

<sup>BGT</sup> **Psalms 68:35 [LXX numbering]** αἰνεσάτωσαν αὐτὸν οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἡ γῆ θάλασσα καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔρποντα ἐν αὐτοῖς

וְיִשְׂמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתִגַּל הָאָרֶץ יִרְעֵם הַיָּם  
 וְיִמְלְאוּ: <sup>WTT</sup> Psalm 96:11

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 96:11** Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it;

<sup>BGT</sup> **Psalm 95:11 [LXX numbering]** εὐφραινέσθωσαν οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἀγαλλιásthω ἡ γῆ σαλευθήτω ἡ θάλασσα καὶ τὸ πλήρωμα αὐτῆς

כָּל אֲשֶׁר-חָפֵץ יְהוָה עָשָׂה בַשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ  
 בְּיַמִּים וּכְלִתְהוֹמוֹת: <sup>WTT</sup> Psalm 135:6

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 135:6** The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Psalm 134:6 [LXX numbering]** πάντα ὅσα ἠθέλησεν ὁ κύριος ἐποίησεν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐν τῇ γῆ ἐν ταῖς θαλάσσαις καὶ ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ἀβύσσοις

שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ אֶת-הַיָּם וְאֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-בָּם  
 הַשֹּׁמֵר אֱמֵת לְעוֹלָם: <sup>WTT</sup> Psalm 146:6

[Nearly identical to the corresponding portion of Exod 20:11 in Hebrew.]

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 146:6** the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- the LORD, who remains faithful forever.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Psalm 145:6 [LXX numbering]** τὸν ποιήσαντα τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς τὸν φυλάσσοντα ἀλήθειαν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα  
 [Identical to the corresponding portion of Exod 20:11 in Greek, with one exception. There is no "and" before "the sea."]

כִּהֵּן אָמַר יְהוָה אֱסִימְדוּ שָׁמַיִם מִלְּמַעְלָה  
 וַיַּחְקְרוּ מוֹסְדֵי-אָרֶץ לְמַטָּה גַם-אֲנִי אֶמְאַס׃ בְּכָל-זֶרַע  
 יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ נְאֻם-יְהוָה: ׀

<sup>NIV</sup> **Jeremiah 31:37** This is what the LORD says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the LORD.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Jeremiah 38:35 [LXX numbering]** ἂν ὑψωθῆ ὁ οὐρανὸς εἰς τὸ μετέωρον φησὶν κύριος καὶ ἂν ταπεινωθῆ τὸ ἔδαφος τῆς γῆς κάτω καὶ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀποδοκιμῶ τὸ γένος Ἰσραηλ φησὶν κύριος περὶ πάντων ὧν ἐποίησαν

וַאֲנִדְתּוֹ (מְעֻלֹתָיו) [מְעֻלֹתָיו] וַאֲנִדְתּוֹ <sup>WTT</sup> **Amos 9:6**  
 עַל־אֶרֶץ יִסְדָּהּ הַקָּרָא לְמִי־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁפַּכְם עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ  
 יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Amos 9:6** he who builds his lofty palace in the heavens and sets its foundation on the earth, who calls for the waters of the sea and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Amos 9:6** ὁ οἰκοδομῶν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνάβασιν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς θεμελιῶν ὁ προσκαλούμενος τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ ἐκχέων αὐτὸ ἐπὶ πρόσωπον τῆς γῆς κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ ὄνομα αὐτῷ

כִּי כֹה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת עוֹד אֶחַת מְעַט <sup>WTT</sup> **Haggai 2:6**  
 הִיא וְאֲנִי מְרַעֵשׁ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־הַיָּם  
 וְאֶת־הַחֲרֵבָה:

<sup>NIV</sup> **Haggai 2:6** "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Haggai 2:6** διότι τάδε λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ ἔτι ἄπαξ ἐγὼ σείσω τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν ξηράν

### New Testament passages

<sup>NIV</sup> **Acts 4:24** When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Acts 4:24** οἱ δὲ ἀκούσαντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἤραν φωνὴν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἶπαν· δέσποτα, σὺ ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς,

[Fully identical to the corresponding portion of Exod 20:11 in Greek.]

<sup>NIV</sup> **Acts 14:15** "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Acts 14:15** καὶ λέγοντες· ἄνδρες, τί ταῦτα ποιεῖτε; καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμοιοπαθεῖς ἐσμεν ὑμῖν ἄνθρωποι εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν ματαίων ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα, ὃς ἐποίησεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς·

[Fully identical to the corresponding portion of Exod 20:11 in Greek.]

<sup>NIV</sup> **Revelation 5:13** Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"

<sup>BGT</sup> **Revelation 5:13** καὶ πᾶν κτίσμα ὃ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ὑποκάτω τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἤκουσα λέγοντας· τῷ καθήμενῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ ἡ εὐλογία καὶ ἡ τιμὴ καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ τὸ κράτος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Revelation 10:6** And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay!

<sup>BGT</sup> **Revelation 10:6** καὶ ὤμοσεν ἐν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ὃς ἔκτισεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ, ὅτι χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται,

<sup>NIV</sup> **Revelation 12:12** Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

<sup>BGT</sup> **Revelation 12:12** διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνεσθε, [οἱ] οὐρανοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες. οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν, εἰδὼς ὅτι ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Revelation 14:7** He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

<sup>BGT</sup> **Revelation 14:7** λέγων ἐν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· φοβήθητε τὸν θεὸν καὶ δότε αὐτῷ δόξαν, ὅτι ἦλθεν ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως αὐτοῦ, καὶ προσκυνήσατε τῷ ποιήσαντι τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ θάλασσαν καὶ πηγὰς ὑδάτων.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Revelation 21:1** ¶ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

<sup>BGT</sup> **Revelation 21:1** ¶ Καὶ εἶδον οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινὴν. ὁ γὰρ πρῶτος οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ πρώτη γῆ ἀπῆλθαν καὶ ἡ θάλασσα οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι.