

The Lord's Day

For the majority of Christianity, the most highly regarded day other than Christmas and Easter is the weekly service known as the Lord's Day. Religious leaders and enthusiasts point to scriptures like Luke 24:1, Acts 20:7 and Revelations 1:10 in the Bible to show that the Lord's Day or references to the first day of the week is one and the same Sunday service, and the day on which Christ was resurrected.

On the other hand, Sabbaterians, Christians who worship on the seventh day Sabbath and those who keep the Holy Days in Leviticus 23, breeze by the Revelations passage ignoring it totally or rewording the passage using the phrase the Day of the Lord with the explanation that the Apostle John was saying that he meant he was transported into the "day of the Lord".

But are either of these approaches correct? Surely, if one believes in the Bible as the inspired word of God, then neither can one assumed the Sunday service is one and the same or ignore and reword the passage. Can it really be proven and is there a more realistic possibility? Surely if the Bible speaks of it, there had to have been a Lord's Day.

Immediately some will say, for instance, in Acts, if Luke wouldn't have mentioned the timing, i.e. the day of the week if it hadn't been of importance. And the choice of what is taken from the scripture is in itself a bit strange. But for the sake of prudence and for the time being, that argument will be accepted and examine the scripture after a little background.

The book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. Both works are written to someone named Theophilus, i.e. they were not written per se to be the historical documents they have now become. Although, most religious authorities on the Bible say the identification of Theophilus is unknown, the addressee of the books may have been Theophilus of Antioch, the second century Christian writer, who wrote between A.D.115-168-181. This would assume that Theophilus was a very young man, when Acts was written or the book was written considerably later than A.D. 63 - 80 time-frame. Of course, this is mere speculation. However, the facts that can be gleamed from the scriptures is that Luke and maybe others of the disciples had interacted with Theophilus, thought very highly of him and was giving him a review of what the young man had previously been taught.

Luke 20 tells of one of Paul's missionary journey, his third, where Luke describes visits to Macedonia, then Greece and then the return trip. In Verse 3, Luke indicates that he and Paul were in Greece for three months. In Verse 4 and 5, he indicated the people accompanied Paul and that they traveled ahead and waited for them in Troas. In verse 6 and 7, he continues:

But we sailed away from Phillippi after the Days of
Unleavened Bread and in five days joined them

at Troas, where we stayed seven days. Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

One observation that can be made about the description is Luke is being very specific about the time-frame. For example, he does not say that they hung around for a couple of day after the Days of Unleavened Bread, then meet the others in Troas. He seems to be giving the young man an impression of their journeys, letting him know how long it took to arrive certain places and how long they stayed in each place. Perhaps the young man had expressed an interest in accompanying them on a trip. Luke might have even been giving himself a little pat on the back for the endurance it took to do all that traveling.

Another observation is that Luke doesn't explain the Days of Unleavened Bread to Theophilus, which would leave the impression that Theophilus knew what he was talking about, i.e. he was familiar with both the observance and the time-frame.

Historians placed the time-frame of Paul's third missionary journey, between A.D. 50 - 60; some say A.D. 54, others say A.D. 57. Be that as it may, during that time-frame, and probably any time-frame, it is very difficult to leave any place after the Days of Unleavened Bread, traveled for five days to arrive somewhere, stay there for seven days, have a very lengthy meeting, leave the next day and still have the day of the lengthy meeting to have been the first day of the week. In fact, Luke doesn't say that meeting occurred on the first day of the week.

The word *day* is italicized, indicating a word added to make the English read easier. But read the passage without the word *day* and the English reads just fine. The inclusion of the word *day* seems to do more to satisfy the religious convictions of the translators of the King James Bible, then it is to improve on the scripture's readability. The same tendency is found in the passages in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John where Christ's opened and empty tomb is discovered by Mary Magadene and company. All of these scriptures are examples where the translator allowed their own religious convictions, belief in a Sunday observance of the Lord's Day and the resurrection day, to impact the work at hand, namely a unadulterated translation of the Bible. The same transgression occurs in some of the Early Christian writings, however, it doesn't seem to be as pronounced. Perhaps the number of people translating or the number of people who ever actually see or read the Early Christian writings is the reason.

Remaining is the reference in Revelations 1:10. The Apostle John begins:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

The rest of the book is John's description of his vision. It can be noted here that the phrase, the Lord's Day, is not italicized and from that it can be assumed that it appears in the original manuscript. Also note, there is no mention of when the day was observed, so it is obvious that the recipients of the book of Revelation, the seven churches in Asia, would know to what John was referring. Let's see what the Early Church said about the Lord's Day.

From Early Church Writings

In his Epistle to the Magnesians, written between A.D. 30 - 107, Ignatius writes, in a passage explaining the correct and spiritual manner in which the Sabbath should be kept says the following of the Lord's Day:

And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week].²² Looking forward to this, the prophet declared, "To the end, for the eighth day," on which our life both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ whom the children of perdition, the enemies of the Saviour, deny, whose god is their belly, who mind earthly things, who are "lovers of pleasure, and not lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.

Ignatius states that the queen of days is the Lord's Day, and by inference that the Sabbath is the king of days, the phrase, "after the observance of the Sabbath" is a ranking of days. The phrase is ambiguous if taken as an indication of when the day was observed--how long after the observance of the Sabbath--fifteen minutes later, a few hours later, at sundown?

In the Epistle of Barnabas, in a passage describing the proper keeping of the Sabbath, there is the following:

"Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot endure."²³
Ye perceive how He speaks: Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made [namely this]²⁴ when giving rest to all things, I shall make

a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.

Note again the reference to an observance of the eighth day. Although Barnabas doesn't refer to it, the translators would have us believe this is proof that the Lord's Day, i.e. the Sunday observance thereof, was observed from early times.

Both the Constitution of the Apostles and the Teaching of the Apostles, or the Didache, mention a Lord's Day observance, but gives no information about when it was observed.

The first indexed reference in the Constitutions, Book II, Section VII, Paragraph LVII is a description of a church assembly which includes celebration of the Lord's Supper. There is no reference to it as the Lord's Day nor that it occurred on the first day of the week. It is not a general assembly of the church members as the description expressly states:

...but let the door be watched, lest any unbeliever, or one not yet initiated, come in.

This would indicate that the assembly was only for baptized Christians, i.e. it could have been a Passover service or a service from a religion similar to Christianity.

The Bible suggests that there was some kind of insurrection and departure from the New Testament Church by people who wanted to look like the rest of the world. There are several scriptures which alluded to this fact.

1 Cor 10:18-22 (NKJV):

Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?

1 John 5:2-5 (NKJV):

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Jude 1:3 - Jude 1:4 (NKJV)

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jude 1:16-19(NKJV)

These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling *words*, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.

The rest of the world was practicing Mithraism, the religion of the Roman Empire. This religion, whose beginnings have been traced to the ancient Persians, had as its god, Mithras, the god of light, truth, and loyalty to covenants. The rites, rituals and doctrines of the religion had many similarities to Christianity such as purification through a ritualistic baptism and a ceremony in which the faithful drank wine and ate bread to symbolize the body and blood of the god. Sundays were held sacred and the birth of the god was celebrated on December 25th. The god is even said to have died and been resurrected.

In his First Apology, Justin Martyr, A.D. 110-165 is the first of the Early Christian writers to allege that Christ died on a Friday and was resurrected on the following Sunday. Others who were of the same opinion were either his disciples or disciples of his disciples. In this Apology he describes a religious service:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the assent, saying Amen; ...

Note that Justin does not use the term "The Lord's Day." Why not? Writing several years after the Apostle John, why wouldn't Justin have used the same popular term? Could this be because he is not speaking about the same day?

In his Dialogue with Trypho, he alleges that the holy days were initiated because of sin. His knowledge of Old Testament and Jewish traditions is filled with errors.

Strangely enough, it is unknown from whom Justin Martyr learned Christianity. His own account of his conversion from Platonism to Christianity is only that it was taught to him by an old man he met while alone in a forest. The name of the old man is never given. The details of what he was told about the law or prophets are unknown. The point to be made here is that there is no link between he and the Apostles or any disciple of theirs.

The terminology in Justin's description of a religion ceremony is quite significant. The term "president" implies an elected office. This is significant because one element of Gnosticism was that they did not take kindly to authority. Some believed that authority was derived from the counterfeit God who created and governed the world. Others believed that authority blocked one's arrival to gnosis. Because of these beliefs, it was the norm in Gnostic worship for lots to be drawn to decide who, for that occasion, would take the role of priest, offer the sacrament, read from the scriptures or deliver the sermon. It is far more likely that the service Justin Martyr described was some type of Gnostic service.

Yet, it is also Justin Martyr who is one of the first writers to discuss the duplication and desecration of the Christian doctrine by demons. One passage he talks about the cup of Christ being duplicated in the mysteries of Mithras. In his Second Apology, he states:

For I myself, when I discovered the wicked disguise which the evil spirits had thrown around the divine doctrines of the Christians, to turn aside others from

joining them, laughed both at those who framed these falsehoods, and at the disguise itself, and at popular opinion...

This may have been a retraction of his previous statements and an admittance of having at one time been deceived. Before closing his Second Apology, he names the doctrine of Simon Magus:

And I despised the wicked and deceitful doctrine of Simon of my own nation. And if you give this book your authority, we will expose him before all that, if possible, they may be converted.

Another retraction? Perhaps. However, it may have been too little too late. But it is not meant herein to retract from the life of Justin Martyr. As his name indicates, he was martyred, in the defense of Christianity.

Conclusion

The Sunday observance of the Lord's Day was influenced by the pagan Mithraism religion of the Roman Empire. As most of references in the Bible and in Early Church writings to the first day of the week have been attached to them by proponents of the Sunday observance of the Lord's Day, there doesn't appear to be a direct link with the day observed by the Apostles.

Still again, since it is mentioned both in the Bible and the Early Church writings so often, one would think that it would be an exact indication of when it was observed. And indeed, it had been written down. The reference to the observance of the eighth day, provides us with a clue. Leviticus and other scriptures in the Old Testament describes the festival which in Judaism is called Shmini Atzeret, a one day festival observed after the seven days of Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles. Shmini Atzeret, apparently has no defined meaning in Judaism, except that it means "gathering of the eighth day". Due to the Sunday observance, those Sabbaterian Churches that celebrate this day referred to it as "The Last Great Day".

Sukkot and Shmini Atzeret are both autumn festivals, so how could they relate to Christ's resurrection? This is the most interesting point. The Bible indicates that the Passover was observed on the fourteen day of the second month--the second month in the Jewish year is Nisan, the supper for which is was eaten the evening before. If one believes the Gospel account, Christ was crucified the following day or Passover day after having observed the Passover supper the previous evening. The Early Church observed the Passover on the 14th of Nisan. In A.D. 30. the 14th of Nisan occurred on a Wednesday. The only sign given proving Christ was the Messiah was the sign of Jonah--he would be in the ground, three days and three nights and then rise again. This would mean

that Christ rose on Saturday, the Sabbath, making the resurrection day a Saturday. In A.D. 30, Shmini Atzeret also occurred on a Saturday.

Of course, the Holy Day calendar changes from year-to-year, i.e. the Passover does not occur on the same day every year. But this doesn't affect the signs. The resurrection day always occurs on whatever day of the week corresponds with three days after the Passover. When Passover, the 14th of Nisan is on a Monday, as it was the year 2004, the resurrection day is on a Thursday. When Passover is on a Saturday, the resurrection day is on Tuesday.

If one believes that the Holy Day season pictures God's plan, then the acid test for this conclusion regarding the Lord's Day must stand up. The next milestone in God's which Jesus Christ' must fulfill is His Return. The Feast of Trumpets pictures Christ's Return. Then Jesus Christ will usher in the Millennium, pictured by the Feast of Tabernacles. The First Day of the Feast of Tabernacle begins on the same day on the resurrection day. And lastly, Shmini Atzeret, the "gathering of the eighth day" also begins on the same day of the week as the resurrection day. This pictures the end of the millenium, the White Throne Judgment and ultimately Christ turning over the Kingdom to His Father.

In the final analysis, there is no need to reword scripture. God's Word and His Holy Days stand on their own.

²² Brackets and bracketed words were inserted by the translators.

²³ Isaiah 1:13

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