

THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

The first day of the week is observed by most Christian churches as their day of worship. Virtually all of them claim it is a sacred day, 'the Lord's Day', and some even refer to it as the 'Sabbath'. Most admit that there is no commandment in the Old or New Testament for keeping it but still try to justify its observance. In this booklet, we will look at the Bible verses that mention the first day of the week and scrutinize them to see if they support observance of that day as holy unto God.

Sunday, or the first day of the week as it is called in the Scriptures is mentioned eight times in the New Testament. Of these eight, six times refer to the resurrection, once to the meeting of Christians on the evening of the first day and once in general to the first day. Let us review these verses and see if there is any reasonable justification to be found for observing the first day of the week as a sacred day.

The first mention of the first day of the week in the New Testament:

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." Matthew 28:1

It should be noted that the King James Version quoted here states "in the end of", however, the Greek word is "OPSE" and literally means "late". The American Standard Version translates it correctly as "Late on the sabbath day". The verse tells us that the Sabbath was followed by the first day of the week but there is no indication that the first day is special or holy in any regard. If we read verse six of the same chapter, it states: ***"He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."*** We need to bear in mind that verse one told us it was late on the Sabbath, but not yet the first day of the week. Thus, when we read verses one and six together, it tells us that Jesus was NOT risen on the first day because the women visited the tomb late on the Sabbath and he was already gone. This negates the justification of observing Sunday because Jesus had risen on the first day.

The second mention of the first day of the week is found in Mark 16:2, and the third is found in the same chapter, verse 9. Let's read Mark 16:2:

"And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun."

There is no discrepancy in verse two. The women brought sweet spices to anoint Jesus on the first day of the week because this was a work day, and the Sabbath was already past. However, in verse nine, there is a discrepancy:

"Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils."

The issue with this verse is that many English translations have the comma after "the first day of the week", but some scholars have said that the comma should have been placed after "risen" so that the verse reads: ***"Now when he was risen, early the first day of the week he appeared first..."*** If not familiar with the Greek language, you should be aware that ancient Greek did not have punctuation so commas would not have been in the original writings. The Interlinear word-for-word English translation is as follows: ***"Having risen and early first day of week he appeared to Mary the Magdalene"***. The original Greek is "early the first day of the week" but scholars tell us that in Mark 16:9, "early" qualifies with "appeareth" and not "risen" and the version spoken of reads as follows: ***"Now when he appeareth early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to..."*** It should be noted here that some English translations of the New Testament do not have Mark 26:9 to 20 in them because these verses are not in some of the oldest manuscripts. We see in Mark a strong effort by translators to try and have the Bible say that Jesus rose on the first day of

the week in order to support their stance for Sunday worship, but there is no proof here that Jesus rose on Sunday, but only that he appeared to Mary on the first day of the week. Even if Jesus had rose on Sunday, there is still no command or instruction to keep Sunday as a sacred day. God never changed His holy Sabbath for another day.

The fourth reference to the first day of the week is in Luke 24:1 to 3:

“Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus.”

Nothing in this passage states anything special about the first day of the week; it was simply the time which it was discovered that Jesus was already risen and gone. Again, there is nothing about Jesus having risen on the first day of the week.

The fifth reference is in John 20:1:

“The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.”

Once again, no evidence that Jesus had risen on Sunday but simply the time that it was discovered Jesus was risen and gone.

The sixth reference to the first day of the week is found in John 20:19:

“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.”

This verse again says nothing special about the first day of the week but simply as the time that Jesus appeared unto his disciples as they were assembled together.

The seventh reference can be found in Acts 20:7:

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”

This verse is one of the more commonly used verses to try and justify worshipping on Sunday. Some try to say that Paul and the disciples gathered every Sunday but this was not so – this verse did not describe a church service but was Paul’s farewell greeting. They were even breaking bread together. Paul we are told continued his speech unto midnight. This gathering of the disciples did not take place during daylight hours but shortly after the Sabbath ended at sundown. There is no mentioning of holy services being conducted but that simply they had come to breakdown before Paul started off on his journey.

The last mention of the first day of the week in the Bible is found in I Corinthians 16:1, 2:

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”

This verse, like all the others before it, doesn’t suggest that the first day was set aside to replace the seventh day as the Sabbath. In this verse, Paul discusses finances of the church, or administrative work, not Sabbath services. He advised them to lay aside church donations on the first day of the week. Some may suggest that the verse shows that the first day of the week was

set aside for a special purpose but no it wasn't; it was a work day for the people of that nation and it was only suggested by Paul that the people use that day to account for offerings of the church members. There is no evidence that Sunday replaced the seventh-day Sabbath.

It is interesting to note that the Roman Catholic James Cardinal Gibbons, former Archbishop of Baltimore, when writing on the subject of Sunday-keeping versus Sabbath-keeping, wrote the following in his book, *"Faith of Our Fathers"*, 11th edition, pages 72, 73: *"But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelations, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify."* What else can be said – the Archbishop says it clear as can be that Sunday observance is not supported Biblically at all.

In closing, the observance of the first day of the week, Sunday, or day of the Sun, was the day that Gentile ancestors worshipped upon. Many of those who worshipped the Sun on the first day of the week during the early years of the church came into the Catholic church and did not have to give up their day of worship. As we have shown in this booklet, there is no justification nor support to be found in the Bible for the keeping of the first day of the week as a day of worship. If you wish to follow Jesus' example, then you should be keeping the seventh-day of the week as holy unto God, which is the day he sanctified at the time of Creation.