

## **The Sunday Question**

### **First Day (Sunday) Worship**

Why do most Christians gather for public corporate congregational worship on the First Day of the week, commonly called Sunday? This is legitimate question to ask since the Decalogue, God's Ten Words, commonly known as the Ten Commandments, specify the 7<sup>th</sup> Day as the day of rest from common tasks to remember God as Creator and to commemorate the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. There have always been a small group of Christians who have continued to keep the Sabbath. In the first century some Jewish believers in Christ felt the Mosaic holy days, especially the Sabbath, should continue to be observed. But the fact is that as the Christian faith spread, incorporating more and more non-Jews, that is, Gentiles, the common day of gathered Christian worship assembly has been on the First Day. So the question is "Why?"

First is the fact. **The Messiah Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week.** We read in Mark 16: "When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup>And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. <sup>5</sup> And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him.

We read in Matthew 28: "Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ... <sup>v5</sup>the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for **he has risen**, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.

**Second, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ who had been crucified a few days earlier, appeared to various numbers of his disciples on this Day.** He demonstrated in various ways that he was risen bodily, physically from the dead and was now alive. He began in the morning with the women. Later he appeared to two disciples on their way home. The day came to a close the risen Jesus came into the room where Ten apostles had gathered. The next week on the first day evening he again appeared among them and

showed his body and the marks of his suffering and death to Thomas who had been absent the previous week.

**Thirdly**, it should be noted that Jesus came to Jerusalem on this third or 4<sup>th</sup> Passover during his ministry years. But this final time **he came to fulfill the meaning the Feast God had ordained in the Law of Moses**. Specifically, he was to be the Passover Lamb. As John the Forerunner had declared, “Behold the Lamb of God. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29 He was crucified for sin- the sins of his people. He became the atoning sacrifice.

That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation... For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24

<sup>7</sup> Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. **For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.** <sup>8</sup> Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Christ in his resurrection on the day after the Sabbath, the First Day of the week, also fulfills the Feast of the First Fruits. In fact, **Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:20

In summary, Christ arose on the First Day of the week, following the Sabbath of Passover week as the prophetic fulfillment of the Feast of Firstfruits.

Noting in these three facts concerning Jesus, his resurrection was on the First Day of the week.

He made his first appearances as the Risen Lord to a number of witnesses throughout that day. It ends thusly, “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them... Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus

came. <sup>25</sup> So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” <sup>26</sup> Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

Based on these facts in the Book of Acts, or Luke’s second volume, we see a pattern has emerged.

<sup>7</sup> “On the first day of the week, we assembled to break bread.” Acts 20:7

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.” 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

These two references are the only places outside of the resurrection narratives where the term “the first day of the week” is used. The Corinthian church was aware that the resurrection occurred on the third day which was the first day of the week. 1 Corinthians 15:1-8

If we see that believers are gathering on the First Day to break bread, we can directly relate this to the descriptions given of Christian worship in the New Testament. Acts 2:42 reads, “*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*”

1 Cor 11:20, “When you come together, it is not **the Lord's supper** that you eat.

Although this is the reason for their gathering, Paul states that the behavior of some of the people dishonored the Lord and fellow believers. This accounts for the negative form of this sentence.

The Lord’s Supper was central to their coming together. The sharing of Scripture, teachings, and songs for the offering of praise, prayer and instruction was to result in the church being strengthened. This is the purpose of the required meeting of the Christians.

God’s people are commanded to offer God worship in the context of the assembly, around the Word of God both spoken and enacted.

This emerging pattern of gathered assembly on the First Day is a fixed pattern by the time of the writing of the Apostolic Fathers. Listen to these quotations.

First from the Epistle of Barnabas (AD 70-130, Chapter 15): "*The True and False Sabbath*:"

"See how he is saying that it is not your present sabbaths that are acceptable to me, but with that (Sabbath) which I have made, in which, when I have rested everything. I will make the beginning of an eighth day-- that is the beginning of another world. Wherefore also we observed the 8th day as a time of rejoicing, for on it Jesus both arose from the dead and when he had appeared ascended into the heavens."

First Apology of Justin

Justin was a Christian Apologist

The *First Apology* is dated to between AD 155-157. He provides information on the weekly Sunday meetings of the congregation, consisting of readings from the Jewish prophets and "the memoirs of the apostles", prayers, and a meal.<sup>[17]</sup>

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"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 people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons."

"Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration."

These references show why John in the Apocalypse (Revelation), chapter 1, referenced to his being in the Spirit on the Lord's Day is interpreted to be a reference to the First Day of the Week, Sunday, as the day of gathered Christian worship.

Nowhere do the Scriptures or the early Christian writers say it is replacement of or transference of the Sabbath command of the law. It is the common day of Christian

worship following the pattern of Christ's post resurrection appearances to his apostles. Christ is our true Sabbath (Rest) and First Day (Sunday) is the usual day of assembled worship before the Lord.

Since the earliest days, after Christ's resurrection and ascension, why has the church of the Lord Jesus Christ worshipped on the first day of the week, that is on Sunday? Primarily because it is the day not only on which Christ arose, but the day on which he first appeared several times to various groups of his disciples.

A new and glorious day in God's plan to save his people had arrived, the old had passed away and the new had come, the Messiah had risen and appeared. On the next First Day he appeared again to his gathered disciples. This did not go unnoticed by his disciples. They began gathering for worship and instruction on every First Day since then. We have seen examples of this in the New Testament and in the later writings from early church history.

It is the day of spiritual rest for the people of God; we rest in the Messiah and his finished work for our salvation. So it began then, and continues till now. Let's come to the Father through Jesus the Risen Son and give him the glory for redemption and New Creation.

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