

THE BIBLICAL ORIGINS
OF
THE SABBATH AND SUNDAY
AS
DAYS OF WORSHIP

BY:

DAVID M. OWENS
3528 N. Tillotson
Apt. 326
Muncie, Indiana 47304
(317) 288-5915

FOR:

DR. DAVID ANNIS
Course: ID 499
Department of Philosophy
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana 47306

-Summer Quarter, 1982-

consumption, and the perceived danger of offending the religious community. Higbee's Company of Cleveland, Ohio, exemplifies a retailer who could not withstand the pressure to open on Sunday.⁷ In 1973,, the company openly campaigned against Sunday hours as illegal, un-American, and ultimately harmful to the employees. In 1976, however, the company reluctantly agreed to open on Sunday. Higbee's cited customer demand and the perceived profits of their competition in making the policy change.

2) "Hectic activism of contemporary American lifestyles." With little doubt, Americans are both participants and captives of a technical/computer culture. In somewhat of a schizoid manner, people divide their time, energy, and money among a multitude of activities. William A. Clebsch claims that most Americans are, in a figurative sense, residents of a "poly-politan" environment in which they participate in several different spheres at the same time.⁸ Combine these wide interests with the complex and fast-moving nature of our society and the result is difficulty in maintaining the deliberate character of by-gone Sundays.

3) "Increasingly sophisticated forms of recreation." With a shortened work week, people have more time to devote to pleasure than they once had. Also, with the growing complexity of most occupations is noted an increase in the complexity of recreation activities available. Finally, the ease of fast transportation encourages weekend commuting to far distant recreation resorts for a mere weekend excursion. With credit-cards and interstate highways, the ski-trip, the cruise, and the lake cottage are within reach of most Americans, financially and geographically.

4) "A loosening social structure." The most obvious change is in our domestic relationships. We have lost much of the emphasis once placed on the family structure. The nuclear family structure still exists, but, the relationships are much more fluid than they once were. Contributing to this change in character are working mothers, day-care centers, private schools, and longer life spans. Where once the family was maintained for material survival, the current adhesive is emotional support and nurture.

5) "The increasing secularization^{4F} of American culture." While statistical data can often be manipulated, there is a clear change in the way Americans perceive religion. In a culture that stresses individualism, many are questioning the value of traditional religious practices. In seeking to leave the confines of traditional worship, the religious community often meanders haplessly trying to find the common ground between the needs of the people and the capabilities of the church. The Roman-Catholic Church has recently begun to accept the hearing of Sunday mass on Saturday night.⁹ The tradition of Sunday worship is dying faster than we think.¹⁰

Other factors could easily be listed as possible threats to the traditional observance of Sunday. Currently, the legal system is embroiled in a vast number of cases that challenge the special legal status accorded to Sunday. The "blue laws" that were written by Puritanical "bluenoses" to protect the sanctity of Sunday are quickly dropping aside. In their zeal to protect Sunday, the laws made were obviously discriminatory. For example, a law in Rhode Island provides for the Sunday sell of film, but, to sell flashbulbs is clearly beyond the law.¹¹ As these laws are abandoned, there occurs a "pendulum" effect which not only permits commerce on Sunday, but also, sweeps historic prohibitions concerning the day. (Such as the selling of liquors.)

Oddly enough, leading the fight for repeal of blue-laws and for complete secularization of the legal system are the Seventh Day Adventists and the Jewish community. Their arguments are based on rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.¹² To these groups, any designation granting a special status to Sunday based on religious grounds is blatant religious discrimination.

A past editorial in Christianity Today¹³ suggested that all denominations should agree to set aside a certain day each week for religious activities. The Jews and the Seventh Day Adventists hold Saturday to be ordained by God as holy. While most denominations use Sunday as the day of worship. The editorial states that the majority of denominations could easily accommodate the minority

and change their recognised holy day because the celebration of Sunday worship is based on tradition and not dogma.

The different perspectives of the sanctity of Sunday cause not only broad ethical confrontations, but also, more practical difficulties for the individual adherents of a faith. When the government attempts to clarify the details of illegal religious discrimination there is a clamor for separation of church and state based on the First Amendment.¹⁴ If the law is present in religious matters-that is wrong. To make another law to clarify the first only compounds the problem. So in the absence of a massive body of legislated legal codes, the individual is left to their own wisdom or litigation.

It is clear that the traditional Sunday is an institution in jeopardy. There are a variety of conflicts; moral, ethical, social, business, emotional, and theological, to which there are no easy solutions. While not wanting to abandon their faith, adherents to many religious creeds have begun to question the validity of Sunday as a day of particularly pious worship. There is a clear need to re-examine the origins of Sunday worship as presented in the Bible and to evaluate the source of the sanctity that we accord to Sunday.

THE SABBATH OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Our most ancient reference to the word "sabbath" is found in Exodus 16:23. The situation is that God is directing the Hebrew people to use the same pattern for labor used in the creation. That is, to work for six days and to rest on the seventh. (Genesis 2:2) In this incident in the wilderness, a double portion of manna was provided on the sixth day to free the people from the labor of gathering the manna on the seventh day. While there was extra manna available for gathering every day, any not used immediately would on the following morning be filled with maggots and have a foul stench. (Exodus 16:24) The manna gathered on the sixth day,

however, would miraculously be fresh until the first day of the week.

That Exodus 16:23 is the initial institution of the sabbath for the Hebrew people is confirmed by the tone and tense of the writings. As Moses speaks in 16:23 it is clear that he is relating the latest in a series of communications that he has received directly from God. When the leaders come to him in 16:22 they are questioning why the people are gathering extra manna. Moses command did not make sense because the people and leaders were aware that extra manna had spoiled on other occasions. Apparently, the command to gather extra had went out early in the morning hours. The people had obeyed, but now, were pressing their leaders for an explanation. The idea of a sabbath is not familiar to them.

There is speculation that the sabbath of 16:23 had been practised informally by the Hebrew people before that event.¹⁵ No doubt the creation narrative was known to some part of the population through oral transmission. It is therefore not completely unlikely that the seventh day of the week was recognised as special. Supporting this conclusion is the common translation of the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8) "Remember the sabbath and keep it holy." The scripture clearly indicates a fore-knowledge of the sabbath.

The actual word "sabbath" is a direct translation of the Hebrew word "shabbath" and has basically the same meanings. Both words are descendants from the Hebrew word "shabath" (שָׁבַת) which means "rest".¹⁶ While there is some conjecture that "sabbath" also designated the seventh in a series,¹⁷ this theory is generally rejected.

A review of the scriptures, however, indicate several different nuances of the word. In Leviticus 23:24-25, God commands the Hebrew people to celebrate the Feast of the Trumpets and the day of the feast is designated as a sabbath. Likewise, the Feast of Atonement is also called a sabbath. In Leviticus 23:39, an ordinance is listed creating a Feast of Tabernacles and here to is a sabbath designated. Finally, the seventh year is also designated as a sabbath year in which the fields are to lay fallow. (Leviticus 25:2)

According to D. Shelby Corlett there are two distinct sabbath meanings to be identified.¹⁸ First, is the sabbath that commemorates the rest of God after laboring for six days performing the creation. This is a sabbath to be recognized and honored by all people. Secondly, Corlett identifies a concept of sabbath related only to the Jewish people. The Jewish sabbath is a commemoration and celebration of the covenant between God and Abraham. Corlett further identifies three significant memorials that are marked by the Jewish sabbath:

"First, it was a memorial of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt; 'And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord brought thee out....Therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day' (Deut.5:12-15). Second, it signified Israel's sacred relation to God and His rulership over them: 'Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you....whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death' (Exodus 31:13-15). Third, it was a sign of a perpetual covenant with Israel: 'Israel shall keep the sabbath, throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever' (Exodus 31:16,17)."¹⁹

Corlett's implications are clear. Since the decalogue is an affirmation of the covenant between Israel and God, and since the codes following it are in direct application only to the Jewish people, the compliance with the second type of sabbath is required only of Jews.

That the Jews were committed to observance of the sabbath is clear by the punishment awaiting violators of the day's sanctity. In Exodus 35:2, Moses relates God's judgement of death to any who work on the sabbath. In Jeremiah 17:27, God(Yahweh) promises an unquenchable fire to the palaces and city of Jerusalem if the people do not cease their labors on the seventh day. The punishment of death is carried out for one hapless Jew who is discovered in the wilderness picking up firewood on the sabbath day. By order of Moses, he is stoned to death by all the members of the community. (Numbers 15:32)

However, the scriptures clearly record two instances of military action taken on the sabbath by the Jews. In Joshua 6:3-13, the city of Jericho is under seige by an Israelite army under the command of Joshua. God(Yahweh) himself orders a ceremonial marching around Jericho that is to culminate on the sabbath. On that day the efforts of the Israelites were rewarded when the walls came "tumbling" down. In II Kings 11:5-9 is recorded a remarkable story of political intrigue. Our interest is in the fact that Jehoiada, the chief priest in the Jerusalem temple, orders the military guard to participate in a sabbath day ceremony to announce the new king of the land. In verse 8, he even orders that anyone approaching to closesly to the king be put to death.

In addition to rest, other sabbath practices became common during Israel's post-exodus period. The giving of offerings: Leviticus 24:8, Numbers 28:9, and Ezekiel 46:4. The singing of songs: Psalms 92, Psalms 118:24. Also, the communal worship of God by the people: Ezekiel 46:1-3. One authority adds, "Post-exile Jewssaw the sabbath as so special that tradition held that on the sabbath, even the damned in hell enjoy a respite from their torments."²⁰

A final ironic note must be included in the examination of the Old Testament and Jewish sabbath. In the last centuries before the Christian era, an interesting interpetation of the sabbath gained popularity called the "End of Days".²¹ According to its adherents, each day recorded in the creation narrative represents one Earth eon and thus, the end of Earth's life was the sabbath or seventh eon of the creation. Contributing to the acceptance of the "End of Days", was the difficulty of Jewish life between 300 B.C. and 135 A.D.. Rome ruled the land by oppression and an iron fist. Poverty was widespread and taxes were unbearable. The Jews were eager to believe that their plight would improve. With some minimal "calculation" it was easily contrived that apoc-
 alypse was at hand. The sabbath was the mystical sign given in the creation of the "End of Days" and the weekly sabbath was to be a reminder of history's culmination.

THE JEWISH SABBATH DURING THE ERA OF CHRIST

The first century found Israel as a conquered nation living under the heavy hand of Rome. While the official leadership of the country was by a series of "procurators" appointed by Rome, the Israelites themselves identified with any of the three main political/religious parties: Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenes. By this time, religion had become inter-mixed with the politics and legal system of the Israelites to the point where they were inseparable.²²

The main difference between the three parties was in the perception of the will of God. The Pharisees contended that there existed an unwritten "oral interpretation" to the law that must be given equal footing with the written laws of the Pentateuch. From these oral interpretations, the Pharisees created the Mishnah, which is today esteemed at least equal to, if not above the Old Testament writings.²³ The writing of the Mishnah began in 200 B.C..²⁴ While the Pharisees did have other unique beliefs, it is the sabbath writings found in the Mishnah which are of importance to this discussion.

The Mishnah is divided into six major "Orders" called "Seder". The second of these is the Mo'ed (appointed time) Order and deals with laws of the sabbath and the major festivals. It was with the Mo'ed that Jesus often found himself in conflict.²⁵ The Mo'ed is the major source of first century Jewish sabbath customs. Three kinds of sabbath law are included in the Mishnah:²⁶

- 1) The thirty-nine prohibited forms of labor, with their derivatives. These prevent mixing Sabbath action with normal weekday labor.
- 2) Laws called "shevut", acts not considered truly labor, but not considered consistent with the sanctity of the Sabbath.
- 3) Laws called "muktzeh" (set apart). The handling of certain items and articles was prohibited on the Sabbath, even though no labor was involved. Both appearances and the inner feelings of the individual were involved.

Among the items prohibited on the sabbath was the wearing of hairnets by women (Shabbat 6:1), carrying a sword or a bow (Shabbat 6:4), putting out a lamp to save the oil (Shabbat 2:5), and the wearing of sandals made with nails (Shabbat 6:2). Robert H. Gundry reports several other extremes:²⁷

"Some of the rabbis of the Pharisees forbade spitting on the bare ground during the Sabbath lest the action constitute plowing and therefore Sabbath-breaking work. A woman should not look in the mirror on the Sabbath lest she see a gray hair, be tempted to pluck it out, yield to temptation, and thereby work on the Sabbath. One could not carry his clothes in his arms out of a burning house on the Sabbath, he could put on several layers of clothing and bring them out by wearing them.

A Pharisee was not supposed to travel on the Sabbath more than three-fifths of a mile from his home. But if he wished to go farther, on Friday he deposited food for two meals three-fifths of a mile from his home in the direction he wished to travel. The food made that place his home away from home, so that on the Sabbath he could travel yet another three-fifths of a mile."

The Sadducees were a party committed to tradition and ritual. They were opposed to almost all that the Pharisees supported. Particular offensive to the Sadducees was the notion of oral transmission of the law and the resulting Mishnah. But the Sadducees were also ultra-legalistic in that they followed the teachings and codes of the Pentateuch to the extreme. "As this was the sect of the rich, the aristocrats, and the priests, they wielded great political power in spite of their small numbers."²⁸

NOTE: The other Jewish party, the Essenes, was comprised of isolated communities of mystics who had minimal effect on the customs and culture of the day.²⁹

The Jewish sabbath of the first century was still celebrated in many of the same ways as in the Old Testament. Still present were the scripture reading, the singing of songs, and the giving of offerings. But, there were changes taking place. Obviously, the Pharisees and the Sadducees taught a legalism that pervaded every aspect of Jewish life. Also, the building of the temple in Jerusalem changed

much of the traditional Jewish approach to religion and provided a stability to the nation.

In a final note, it should be clarified that the majority of the first-century Jews were not loyal members of any of the three major parties. But the power of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes was so great that a common man could ill-afford to not be at least passively cooperative. Charles H. Kraft lists the six most likely interpretations that the common Jew held for obedience to sabbath legalism:³⁰ 1) Devotion to God, 2) A formal obedience to God's law, 3) A formal obedience to Hebrew religion, 4) Fear that disobedience might bring disfortune, 5) Rigid legalism provides stability and timelessness, and 6) Self-pride in living up to the letter of the law. The trend to legalism was centered on a minority of the people, but the implicit acceptance of legalism by the majority of the Jews must be recognized.³¹ It was in the midst of this legalism that the earthly ministry of Jesus took place.

JESUS AND THE SABBATH

It is clear from the scriptures that the early life of Jesus was rooted deep in the customs and practices of the first century Jewish culture. Both accounts of his genealogy³² give evidence of his descent from Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. He was circumcised and presented in the temple as proscribed by Jewish law.³³ His parents annually went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover.³⁴ As an adult, he often went to the synagogues and the temple to teach and meditate.³⁵ He celebrates all the major Jewish festivals.³⁶ Finally, his burial was hastened because of the approaching sabbath day.³⁷ This then, is the starting point for any interpretation of Jesus' teachings about the sabbath. That he was a Jew and fully aware of all Jewish laws and traditions.

At several points in the scriptures we find Jesus' ministry to people either taking precedence over or at least questioning the Jewish sabbath laws. It is the healing of the sick on the sabbath which Jesus repeatedly uses to assail the legalists. Christ performs

at least seven healing miracles on the sabbath: 1) Invalid at Bethesda, John 5:1-18. 2) Demoniac in the synagogue, Mark 1:21-28. 3) The mother-in-law of Peter, Mark 1:29-34. 4) The man with the withered hand, Mark 3:1-6. 5) Man born blind, John 9:1-41. 6) The crippled woman, Luke 13:10-17. and 7) The man with dropsy, Luke 14:1-4. The examination of the healing of the invalid at the Pool of Bethesda will identify much about Jesus' interpretation of the sabbath.

As this scene (John 5:1-18) opens we find Jesus in Jerusalem for an unidentified festival. He is not at the temple, but at a place called Bethesda located almost one-half mile away.³⁸ While it might be argued that Jesus was passing near Bethesda as he took the road from the North into the temple,³⁹ verse 14 indicates Jesus had blended back into the crowd, giving the impression he was taking deliberate action to contact other sick people. So, while Jesus did include going to the temple on the sabbath, he also included direct ministry to the sick as part of his activities of the day.

When he healed the invalid he presented a direct confrontation to the religious laws of the temple leaders. First, there were allowances made in the Jewish law to permit sabbath treatment of people with life-threatening illnesses.⁴⁰ However, since verse 5:5 tells that the man had been sick for thirty eight years, his illness did not fall in the category of life-threatening. Secondly, the scripture (5:3) lists the illnesses which consumed the sick at the pool. The Jews, however, who question Jesus make no charges against him of ritual impurity from dealing with the sick. Finally, the charge against Jesus was not mysticism, but rather, that he had labored on the sabbath(5:7).

Jesus reply to the charges of the Jews is remarkable in that so much is said and implied by so few words. He states, "My Father goes on working, and so do I." How does this compare with the creation narrative which reports God resting on the seventh day? Dr Joseph H. Mayfield explains in the Beacon Bible

Commentary,⁴¹ "The sabbath rest of the Father, rightly understood, is the unimpeded activity of love, so that in deeds of mercy wrought on the sabbath, the work of the Father and the Son is at one." So the statement by Jesus immediately presents an entirely different concept of God's sabbath activity.

Samuele Bacchiocchi presents the argument that with the statement, Christ implied that his was an occupation fully allowed for on the sabbath.⁴² That is, a direct connection between the labor of his ministry and that of the Levite priests in the Temple. Indeed, the actual labor of members of the priesthood was increased on the sabbath as they ministered directly to the people. Of the thirty-six⁴³ known miracles that Jesus performed, at least seven took place on the sabbath. Far more than can conclusively be linked with any other day of the week. In another sabbath healing controversy (Luke 13:10-21), Jesus argues to show that, "the sabbath was the most appropriate day of the week for acts of mercy since it was a weekly release from the bondage of labor and a foretaste of final and complete release from all the effects of sin."⁴⁴

In John 7:23, Jesus refers back to the healing at the pool of Bethesda and presents more evidence in behalf of sabbath healing. His argument centers around the Mosaic law requiring Jewish males to be circumcised eight days after birth, even if the eighth day is a sabbath.⁴⁵ Jesus asks, "If on the sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the sabbath I made a man's entire body well?" (R.S.V. translation) Clearly, if the law allows for circumcision on the sabbath, it must be extended to meet the needs of the entire man.

A later event helped clarify still further Jesus' interpretation of the sabbath. On a sabbath, Jesus and his disciples were walking through the fields of wheat.⁴⁶ As his disciples were hungry, they began to oblige themselves to samples of the grain. The observing Pharisees immediately charged the group with violation of sabbath law. Bacchiocchi identifies five major themes in the defense Jesus made for his disciples:⁴⁷ 1) "Necessity knows no

laws"-Jesus recounts David's eating of the shewbread from the temple.⁴⁸ 2)"Fourth commandment does not preclude, but contemplates, intensive ministry to the needs of people." 3)"Ordering of priorities."-Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6,"I desire mercy, not sacrifice." 4)"Sabbath is for man's well-being, restrictions usually place limits on that well-being." and 5)"Jesus is messiah over the sabbath."

As if to further emphasize Jesus' interpretation of the sabbath, each synoptic gospel immediately follows the grainfield incident with an account of another confrontation with the Pharisees.⁴⁹ Jesus is in a synagogue on the sabbath when he comes upon a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees watch, hoping for a violation of the sabbath with which they can accuse him. In an extremely intense moment, Jesus turns and angrily glares⁵⁰ at the Pharisees for their obstinance. This is the only time recorded in the New Testament in which Jesus is angered.⁵¹ Citing the accepted practice of rescuing animals who have fallen into a pit on the sabbath, Jesus states in Mathew 12:12, "Of how much more value is a man than a sheep?" The accounts of this same event found in Mark and Luke also report Jesus asking, "Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm?" The implication of this question is "that by delaying to heal the man he would be inflicting an injury."⁵²

Another direct reference to the sabbath is made by Jesus in Matthew 24:20. The statement is part of a general description of the end of the world. The disciples are told, "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day..." With a note of pathos, Jesus is acknowledging the difficulties which could confront the fleeing people. If the end comes on a sabbath, the legalistic Jew will face a dilemma not of his own making. By showing compassion to those facing such a dilemma, Jesus is again questioning the law that confines the Jew.

The final lesson of Jesus' sabbath interpretation came in the actions, or inactions, following the resurrection.

Jesus, at his death, was a Jew. A few hours before the crucifixion, he celebrated the Passover, and after his death, was entombed in a manner consistent with Jewish customs. At the moment of resurrection, Jesus ceased to be a Jew. In the ten appearances following his resurrection,⁵³ there is no common element of timing. The appearances are random, with five coming on the day of resurrection at or near Jerusalem, one a week later in Jerusalem, and then four appearances in which no definite time can be ascertained. There is no mention of the resurrected Jesus appearing on the sabbath.

SUNDAY BECOMES THE LORD'S DAY

It is upon the death and resurrection of Christ that there begins to appear a movement within the first century church to celebrate a day of worship separate from the Jewish sabbath. Since the gospels were basically narratives of the life of Christ, their use in the study of the sabbath would offer very little material not covered in the preceding section. While there are many New Testament writings that provide subtle information and obscure inferences about the sabbath, this discussion will limit itself to passages that speak directly to the subject.

There are basically three passages of scripture citing evidence for Sunday's observance in the first century church:⁵⁴

1) 1Cor. 16:2, "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." Paul is relating to the church of Corinth a plan for saving money to aid the poor of Jerusalem. The plan had already been ordered to the churches of Galatia. Upon examination, the scripture offers little evidence for the institution of Sunday worship.

The most glaring weakness is that no mention is made of the Corinthians assembling in a common place for worship.

It seems clear that the savings plan is self-managed and personal.⁵⁵ There is no connection made between the giving of an offering for charity and having an offering as part of a worship service. This plan is one of charity between members of the Christian community. Finally, Paul designates the day of saving to be on the "first day of the week" instead of using the designation "the Lord's day." This is a clear indication that special religious significance was not tied to the day. Later in the same epistle, Paul denotes the eucharist as the Lord's supper,⁵⁶ making its observance all the more glaring and meaningful.

- 2) Acts 20:7-12, ⁷And 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. ⁸And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. ⁹And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. ¹⁰And Paul went down and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. ¹¹When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, ¹²so he departed. ¹³And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

This passage is very useful in that it is the only clear New Testament reference to a Christian gathering conducted on "the first day of the week...to break bread." Unfortunately, the events depicted are improperly construed by most readers. Essential to the exegesis of this scripture is a clear understanding of the time of the day in which the events took place. There is controversy whether the author Luke uses the Jewish calendar (which calculates a day from sunset to sunset) or the Roman calendar (which identifies a day as midnight to midnight). Either method raises questions. If Luke was using the Jewish calendar, then the group met at the time we would call Saturday night, Paul's departure in verse 12 would have been on Sunday morning, and

Paul used Sunday as a day of travel. If Luke used the Roman calendar, the group did not gather on Sunday morning, but rather, Sunday evening and the breaking of bread did not occur till Monday morning.

Almost as crucial as the timing of the assembly, was the activity for which they had gathered, the breaking of bread. Since Acts (circa 95 A.D.)⁵⁷ was written much later than Corinthians (circa 54 A.D.)⁵⁸ why did Luke not continue Paul's custom⁵⁹ of referring to the Eucharist as the Lord's supper? The phrase "breaking bread" is used fifteen times in the New Testament⁶⁰ and only in five of these instances could it be construed to mean the partaking of the Lord's supper. Some authorities make no connection between the partaking of communion and the gathering for worship.⁶¹ The usage in this passage indicates a shared meal rather than, the partaking of the Lord's supper.

3) Revelation 1:10, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet."

The usefulness of this scripture is extremely limited by its brevity. Since the book of Revelation was written circa 95 A.D.,⁶² to accept the passage at face value would be confirmation of a specifically designated day known as the Lord's day before the end of the first century. So much is left unsaid by the author of Revelation about the nature of this Lord's day that the passage serves only to confuse. Is the "Lord" referred to the God/Yahweh of the Old Testament or is it Jesus. Note that there is no mention of assembly or deeds of worship by the residents of Patmos. In some of the non-apostolic writings written shortly after Luke, the Lord's day refers to the annual Easter celebration.⁶³ Indeed, the connection between Lord's day and the Christian worship on the first day of the week does not come until the second century writing of the Didache (14:1), Ignatius' Epistle to the Magnesians (9:1), and the Gospel of Peter (35:50).⁶⁴

However, by using other scriptures we can discover information about the worshipping of God by the first century church. In Hebrews 10:24-25 it states, "and let us consider one another to

provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

In this passage the author is encouraging the Hebrews (Jews) to continue to meet together for mutual support and criticizing those who are ignoring the meetings. Since this letter to the Hebrews was written around 70 A.D.⁶⁵ it provides solid evidence of the first century church meeting for the purpose of worship and support.

Another relevant passage is found in Romans 12:3-8. In this passage Paul delineates the importance of different church offices. By naming teachers, preachers, and almsgivers, he implies that there is a formal church structure which holds regular meetings. In verse 56, Paul writes, "as parts of it (one body) we belong to each other." This is further evidence of the sense of "community" shared by early Christians. Christopher Kiesling writes, "Sunday worship originated in a deep awareness of the need to build up the body of the risen Christ and for early Christians it was extremely important that the whole community assemble. Indeed, this corporate worship was so important to them that during persecutions they risked their lives to meet for it."⁶⁶

Paul in several of his writings refutes the legalistic approach to the worship of God. While many believe the resurrection of Christ is to be celebrated by outward show of worship, Paul argues in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12-13 that we are to honor the resurrection "existentially" by walking in the "newness of life."⁶⁷ Then in Colossians 2:16 a great paradigm of New Testament Christianity is set forth: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day or of the new-moon, or of the sabbath days." Similar statements are made in Galatians 4:10 and Romans 14:6.

While it is difficult to connect early Christians with worship on the "Lord's day", there do appear the first rudiments of several later developing trends. There are several examples of

groups of believers gathering in a common place in the New Testament scriptures.⁶⁸ In Acts 1:14 the meeting includes a time of prayer and in Acts 1:15 there is an address by a speaker.

A final passage, Acts 16:13, provides an interesting insight into the problems that characterized the first century believers. On the sabbath, Paul and his traveling companions choose not to go to the synagogue, but instead, go to a place on a nearby river where the believers commonly meet for prayer. While these people did not choose to follow the current Jewish custom of going to the synagogue, they neither felt comfortable completely ignoring the sabbath and continuing their travels. The Christians didn't have a place to meet other than at a believer's home or outdoors. We can only speculate why no other men were at the riverside meeting place. Perhaps, they had opted to appear at the synagogue.

A significant problem of the early church was identification separate from the traditional Jewish customs and culture. While this problem will be discussed at a later time, the event in Acts 16:13 is typical. In what is otherwise an excellent book on the history of the Christian Sunday, Samuele Bacchiocchi's "From Sabbath to Sunday" errors in the interpretation of the event at the river. Bacchiocchi attempts to argue that the original koine Greek of the word for prayer (προσευχη) implies a connection with the temple, the synagogue and the Jewish religion itself.⁶⁹ Thereby, raising doubts as to whether the women were Jews or Christians or both. The further implication is that the gathering beside the river was merely the women's extension of the synagogue service.

Two sources argue convincingly to the contrary. Dr. William Magrath, chairman of the Department of Classical Studies at Ball State University states⁷⁰ "the verb προσευχη carries neither connotation nor implication of a connection to the practice of Jewish religion." He further confirms that the word is properly used to mean a prayer of any nature. Also, easily identified in a concordance of the Greek New Testament are at least thirty-four times⁷¹ in which προσευχη is used in a wide range of settings. While the early church had a problem with identity, the nature and purpose of the prayer on that sabbath was not necessarily related to the synagogue.

SUMMARY

Sunday is an institution of special value in our society. Connected with it are subtle meanings and common associations that go beyond merely the designation of a certain day. The traditional Sunday has in recent times come into conflict with the way we choose to spend our leisure time and the manner in which we relate to God. Changes in business, the general pace of life, leisure activities, domestic relationships, and the way we worship have all contributed to a change in our perception of Sunday. No less responsible is the verbal warfare being waged within religion itself to justify the sanctity of the day. The very nature of the Constitution makes it very difficult for the government to either increase or decrease the amount of Sunday-related legislation already enacted. Voices from all sides call for a re-examination of the role of Sunday in the religious life of the nation. This re-examination must begin with analysis of the origin of Sunday as found in the Bible.

The comprehensive study of the origin of Sunday worship must begin with the "sabbath-day" that was kept by the people of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament. The most ancient record of a special "sabbath" emphasis was in connection with the gathering of manna by the Israelites during the exodus. When the fourth commandment is given in Exodus 20:8, the sabbath becomes a central feature in the Jewish way of life. There is some speculation that the commandment merely formalized what the people were doing already informally. Corlett clarifies two distinct systems of keeping the sabbath: 1) Following the pattern of work/rest demonstrated by God in the creation narrative; or 2) The sabbath that was commanded to the Israelites as a means of commemorating the covenant between God and Abraham. The two systems become inter-twined into one legalistic institution maintained by Theocracy. To break any law was a transgression against God.

The role of the sabbath is central to the degree of national identity and community that is the cohesive of the Israelites. The dawning of the "Common Era" finds Israel living as a conquered nation under the heavy rule of Rome. Even though they are captives, the

people are still allowed to practice their historical religion. Since there was little outlet in the political arena, the people of the country occupy themselves with religious debate. Two sects are in constant conflict, the Sadducees and the Pharisees. Their main point of rivalry is the method by which man continues to know the will of God. There is a legalistic one-up-manship that pervades every point of Jewish life. The keeping of the sabbath provides fertile ground for the legalists to "dwell" upon. The Sadducees are guilty of extending the simple Mosaic code into a complex of confusing laws. The Pharisees emphasize an oral tradition of law that is slowly being codified and put into writing. The common people among the nation's populace wish to avoid the entire system created by the legalists. However, the power and influence of the Sadducees and the Pharisees cannot be avoided. Their every whim is a possibility for a new law. Stated again, the breaking of the law in Israel, is a transgression against God himself.

The identification of Jesus as a Jew is central to all observations about his life and more explicitly, his interpretation of the sabbath. In several instances, and especially while performing miracles, Jesus acts in a deliberate manner to leave no doubt as to his intentions. His bitterest conflicts with men appear in passages dealing with the sabbath. While his conflicts are usually with the Pharisees, his words also cut at the legalism of the Sadducees. In the healing of the invalid at Bethesda (John 5:1-18), several facts are revealed: 1) God is working even on the sabbath; 2) Jesus' ministry is especially relevant to sabbath activities; and 3) God is more concerned for the well-being of man, than the maintenance of a law. In several other instances, Jesus attacks sabbath legalism. Jesus was a Jew up until the instant of his death. After that moment, he is free of the Jewish identity and the accompanying legalism. After the resurrection, there is no attempt by Jesus to honor any day as being holy above the others. Both the sabbath (Saturday) and Sunday are generally ignored by Jesus after his resurrection.

It is not until after the ascension of Jesus that a few reports begin to appear about the occurrence of Christian gatherings and assemblages. Most authorities cite three passages for evidence of Sunday worship in the early church: I Corinthians 16:2, Acts 20:7-12, and Revelation 1:10. Through "exigesis" of these passages, it is apparent that they have been misinterpreted. While other passages provide insight, there is no passage taken by itself, that identifies the manner or existence of first century Sunday worship.

Indeed, Paul argues strongly for the abolishment of any designation of a special day of worship. Paul's mission was to the "Jew first and then to the Gentile." (Romans 2:9) Inconsistencies among Paul's writings are clarified by identifying the audience to which he is speaking. Thus, he could be found both speaking to Jews in the Temple, and to the Christians in meetings at their homes. The brief passage in Acts 16:13 identifies some of the problems faced by the early Christian in finding a suitable meeting place.

CONCLUSION

The scriptures found in the Bible offer very little conclusive evidence for the origin of Sunday worship. The Old Testament offers only a vague admonishment to follow the work/rest pattern used by God during the creation. The decalogue's fourth commandment is clearly applicable only to Jewish commemoration of the covenant between God and Abraham. The Jewish culture of the first century reflected a legalistic extreme which Jesus often questioned. However, when Jesus attacks the Jewish legalistic sabbath, he offers no alternative. Paul, the evangelist to the Gentiles, warns strongly against any legalistic "works" to obtain God's favor. Our final conclusion can only be, that there is little Biblical evidence to mandate the designation of Sunday as a day holy above any other day.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 1176.
- ²William Bridgwater, ed., The Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia, p. 1055.
- ³Webster's, op. cit., p. 1176.
- ⁴"Whereas, an ordinary ice-cream was good enough for a weekday, only this special kind was good enough for a Sunday." Aristides, "Observing the Sabbath," American Scholar, 46:159, Spring, 1977.
- ⁵Ibid., p. 162.
- ⁶pp. 5-11.
- ⁷"Never on Sunday is a Thing of the Past," Business Weekly, August 16, 1976, p. 52.
- ⁸From Sacred to Profane America, pp. 16-21.
- ⁹Samuele Bacchiocchi, From Sabbath to Sunday, P. 313.
- ¹⁰Christopher Kiesling, The Future of the Christian Sunday, p. 32.
- ¹¹"Sunday Selling: The Picture is Spotty," American Druggist, 182:46, July, 1980.
- ¹²"Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."
- ¹³"Consider the Case for Quiet Saturdays," Nov. 5, 1976, p.42.
- ¹⁴"Working on the Sabbath," Time, 109:50-1, June 27, 1977.
- ¹⁵William Smith, A Dictionary of the Bible, p. 574.
- ¹⁶Ernest Weekley, Entymological Dictionary of Modern English, p.738.
- ¹⁷D. Shelby Corlett, The Christian Sabbath, p. 4.
- ¹⁸Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 9.

²⁰Tilden Edwards, Sabbath Time, p. 14.

²¹Danial Jeremy Silver, A History of Judaism, p. 245.

²²Max I. Dimont, Jews, God, and History, p. 98.

²³Smith, op. cit., p. 508.

²⁴Dimont, op. cit., p. 158.

²⁵It is a moot point whether the Mo'ed was completely written at the time of Christ, since the oral tradition was deeply entrenched as the written codes.

²⁶Eugene J. Lipman, ed., Selected Passages from the Mishnah, p. 80.

²⁷Robert H. Gundry, A Survey of the New Testament, pp. 48-49.

²⁸Dimont, op. cit., p. 99.

²⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 181.

³⁰Christianity in Culture, p. 96.

³¹Gundry, op. cit., p. 48.

³²Mathew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-28.

³³Luke 2:21.

³⁴Luke 2:41.

³⁵Mathew 4:17, John 2:13, John 6:22.

³⁶Mathew 6:17-20, John 7:2-11.

³⁷Luke 23:54.

³⁸Smith, op. cit., Appendix Map #17.

³⁹Ibid., Appendix Maps #13 and #17.

⁴⁰Shabbat 2:5, The Mishnah, (The principle of "Pikkvah Nefesh" 'mortal danger' transcended the laws of the sabbath in the mitzvah hierarchy.).

⁴¹Vol. VII, p. 79.

⁴²Bacchiocchi, op. cit., p. 303.

⁴³Gary C. Wharton, Compiler, The New Compact Topical Bible, p.321

⁴⁴Gundry, op. cit., p. 166.

⁴⁵Shabbat 18:3, The Mishnah, (Actually, the circumcision can take place on the eighth through the twelfth day after birth, but the eighth day is suggested.).

⁴⁶Mathew 12:1-8, Mark 2:23-28, Luke 6:1-5.

⁴⁷Bacchiocchi, op. cit., p. 60.

⁴⁸I Samuel 21:1-6.

⁴⁹Mathew 12:9-14, Mark 3:1-6, Luke 6:6-11.

⁵⁰Mark 3:5.

⁵¹James Strong, Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, p. 66.

⁵²John A. Broadus, An American Commentary on the New Testament, p. 262.

⁵³Ibid., p. 590.

⁵⁴Bacchiocchi, op. cit., p. 90.

⁵⁵Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Handbook, p. 644.

⁵⁶I Corinthians 11:20.

⁵⁷Carl F. Andry, Paul and the Early Christians, p. 10.

- ⁵⁸Ibid., p. 19.
- ⁵⁹I Corinthians 11:20.
- ⁶⁰Bacchiocchi, op. cit., p. 108.
- ⁶¹Roger T. Beckwith and Wilfred Stott, This is the Day, p. 36.
- ⁶²Ralph Earle, Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. X, p. 458.
- ⁶³Didache 14:1, Apostolic Constitutions 7:20.
- ⁶⁴Bacchiocchi, op. cit., p. 113.
- ⁶⁵Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., The New Oxford Annotated Bible, p. 1455.
- ⁶⁶Kiesling, op. cit., p. 117.
- ⁶⁷Bacchiocchi, op. cit., p. 316.
- ⁶⁸Acts 1:14, Acts 2:1, Acts 16:13.
- ⁶⁹op. cit., pp. 137-139.
- ⁷⁰personal interview, 4/28/83.
- ⁷¹Charles F. Hudson, A Critical Greek and English Concordance of the New Testament, p. 458.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Andry, Carl F. Paul and the Early Christians. Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981. 146 pages.
- Aristides "Observing the Sabbath." American Scholar. 46:159-163; Spring, 1977.
- Bacchiocchi, Samuele A. From Sabbath to Sunday. Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977. 369 pages.
- Beckwith, Roger T. and Wilfred Stout This is the Day. Greenwood, S.C.: The Attic Press, 1978. 185 pages.
- Bridgwater, William, ed. The Columbia-Viking Desk Encyclopedia. New York: The Viking Press, 1968. 1262 pages.
- Broadus, John D. An American Commentary on the New Testament. Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886. 610 pages.
- Clebsch, William A. From Sacred to Profane America. New York: Harper & Row, 1968. 328 pages.
- "Consider the Case for Quiet Saturdays." Christianity Today. 21:42; November 5, 1976.
- Corlett, D. Shelby The Christian Sabbath. Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1939. 31 pages.
- Dimont, Max I. Jews, God, and History. New York: The New American Library, 1974. 472 pages.
- Earle, Ralph Beacon Bible Commentary Vol. X. Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1967. 542 pages.
- Edwards, Tilden Sabbath Time. New York: The Seabury Press, 1982. 210 pages.
- Gundry, Robert H. A Survey of the New Testament. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970. 400 pages.
- Hudson, Charles F. A Critical Greek and English Concordance of the New Testament. Boston: Repository Press, 1870. 751 pages.
- Kiesling, Christopher The Future of the Christian Sunday. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970. 285 pages.
- Kraft, Charles H. Christianity in Culture. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979. 285 pages.

- Lipman, Eugene J., ed. Selected Passages from the Mishnah. New York: W. W. Worton and Company, 1970. 318 pages.
- May, Herbert G. and Bruce M. Metzger, eds. The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973. 1928 pages.
- "Never on Sunday is a Thing of the Past." Business Weekly. pp. 51-53. August 16, 1976.
- Silver, Danial Jeremy A History of Judaism Vol 1. New York: Basic Books, 1974. 476 pages.
- Smith, William A Dictionary of the Bible. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975. 922 pages.
- Strong, James Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon, 1894. 1850 pages.
- "Sunday Selling: The Picture is Spotty." American Druggist. 182:46; July, 1980.
- The Bible, King James Version.
- Unger, Merrill F. Unger's Bible Handbook. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966. 930 pages.
- Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, Massachusetts: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1974. 1535 pages.
- Weekly, Ernest Entymological Dictionary of Modern English. London: John Murray, 1924. 925 pages.