



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #16: "Sunday in the New Testament"

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 24:1-47

Memory Verse: "He will magnify the law, and make it honourable" Isaiah 42:21.

Jesus came to earth that man might have an accurate knowledge of God (John 1:18). He made it clear that to know Him, our Lord and Saviour, was to know the Father (*John 14:7*).

By the advent of Christ in human flesh, the character and the law of God were magnified and the will of God was interpreted to men. Isaiah said of Christ. "He will magnify the law, and make it honourable" (*Isaiah 42:21*). Looking through the life and teachings of the Holy Saviour, we see God more clearly, and the beauty and application of His sacred law are made wonderfully clear and plain.

Through Christ we gaze into the depths of God's law as illustrated in Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28. Here we see that the law of God takes into account not only what we do but what we think or would do if we could. The law, rightly interpreted, has to do with the heart as well as with the outward conduct.

Yes, Jesus came to make the law honorable. The way to make the fourth, or Sabbath, commandment honorable is found in Isaiah 58:13. We are to "call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him." This, Jesus did while He was here on earth. But at that time the Jews had made the Sabbath a burden with their exaggerated ideas of Sabbath observance. They had added so many man-made laws to the Sabbath commandment that it no longer was a "delight," but became more and more a yoke of bondage. As such, it misrepresented the God whom Jesus came to reveal to men.

For example, no one was permitted to eat an egg that was laid on the Sabbath because the hen had violated the fourth commandment in doing work on the Sabbath. People were prohibited from walking on the grass for fear they might thresh out a few seeds. If they wore shoes with nails, it was considered as bearing a burden. They were permitted to write one letter of the alphabet, but not two letters. They could not carry a mouthful of food two steps on the Sabbath without bearing a burden.

It was such laws that Jesus ignored. But He did not ignore the Sabbath law itself as given in the Scriptures. Rather, He kept the Sabbath as a "delight," so that He might give an example in true Sabbathkeeping.

In the light of these facts, we ask, was there any need for abolishing the Sabbath of God? No! The real need was to abolish the Sabbath regulations of the Jews. And this Jesus did.

But Christ never made any change in God's Ten Commandment law. Would He who came to "magnify the law, and make it honourable," change it instead? How about the Sabbath commandment? Did He give any instruction about another day, telling us which day it is, what it commemorates, and how to keep it? If Jesus had changed the Sabbath, He would most certainly have made it known, and the record would be found in His New Testament, which contains the story of His life. Let us now turn to the record itself for the answer.

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The first day of the week is mentioned eight times in the New Testament. This day we call Sunday. Did Christ intend that this day should replace the Bible Sabbath?

1: THE TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW

Matthew mentions the first day of the week but once.

Matthew 28:1: "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."

This is a simple statement in connection with the story of the resurrection. It clearly sets forth the Sabbath as distinct from the first day of the week. The original Greek of Matthew 28: 1 has been misused in an effort to prove that the Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week, but only the uninformed, or those who wish to mislead the uninformed, would ever try to erect a Sabbath change on Matthew 28: 1.

So we see that Matthew is silent on the sanctity of the first day, or Sunday. And Jesus said nothing about the day at all, according to Matthew.

2: THE TESTIMONY OF MARK

Mark mentions the first day of the week two times.

Mark 16:1-2: "And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had brought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun."

Mark 16:9: "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,"

Now let us look at these verses closely:

1. The Sabbath is "past" before the first day of the week begins.

Mark 16:1-2: "When the Sabbath was past. . very early in the morning the first day of the week."

2. Jesus was buried on the day before the Sabbath.

Mark 15:42-46: "And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is. the day before the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathaea, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus. And Pilate marvelled if He were already dead: and calling unto him the centurion, he asked him whether he had been any while dead. And when he knew it of the centurion, he gave the body to Joseph. And he bought fine linen, and took Him down, and wrapped Him in the linen, and laid Him in a sepulchre which was hewn out of a rock, and rolled a stone unto the door of the sepulchre."

3. Christ rested in the tomb during the Sabbath.

4. He rose from the dead the first day of the week.

Mark 16:9: "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week,"

5. He appeared first unto Mary.

Mark 16:9: "He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils,"

6. She told others who believed not.

Mark 16:10-11: "She went and told them that had been with Him. as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that He was alive. and had been seen of her, believed not,"

7. He appeared unto two followers.

Mark 16:12: "After that He appeared in another form unto two of them. as they walked, and went into the country."

8. They reported to the disciples, who believed not.

Mark 16:13: "And they went and told it unto the residue: neither believed they them,"

9. Jesus appeared and upbraided the disciples for unbelief.

Mark 16:14: "Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen."

Jesus never mentioned the first day of the week as far as Mark's record is concerned. If Jesus did say anything about the matter, Mark did not consider it important enough to record. Mark does say that the Sabbath "was past"; therefore it is the day before the first day of the week. Ten years after Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, Mark knew nothing whatever of any change, and incidentally mentions the first day of the week twice.

Both Mark and Christ are silent on the sanctity of Sunday.

3: THE TESTIMONY OF LUKE

Luke mentions the first day of the week but once.

Luke 24:1: "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."

According to Luke, Jesus' followers kept the Sabbath day before the first day came.

Luke 23:55-56: "And the women also, which came with Him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulchre, and how His body was laid. And they returned. and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment. "

The day before the Sabbath was the preparation day which we commonly call Friday.

Luke 23:54: "And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on" (Mark 15:42).

Luke, like Mark, tells us of Jesus' appearance to two followers on the first day.

Luke 24:13-16: "And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know Him." (Read the rest of the story in verses 17-32.)

Christ appeared to the terrified disciples on the first day. Read Luke 24:33-43.

Luke gives no record that Jesus ever referred to the first day of the week. He does point out that some of Jesus' followers "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment" Naturally, this was according to the fourth commandment, but these close friends of Jesus never heard of any Sabbath change to Sunday. Both Mark and Luke give testimony that the disciples, on that resurrection Sunday, did not believe that Jesus had risen.

Luke and the Christ of his Gospel are silent on the sanctity of Sunday.

4: THE TESTIMONY OF JOHN

John mentions the first day of the week twice.

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."

John 20:19: "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."

Now let us get the picture here: Mary Magdalene came to the sepulcher early the first day.

John 20:1: "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early."

Later Jesus appeared to her (*John 20:11-17*).

Jesus appeared later that day to the disciples (*John 20:19*).

But they were not celebrating His resurrection that day, for they did not yet believe He had been raised from the dead.

To some degree, it seems that John had a deeper understanding of Jesus than his fellow disciples. However, John gives no record that Jesus ever mentioned the first day of the week. John and Christ are silent on the sanctity of Sunday. So the four Gospel writers who give us the record of Jesus' life are absolutely silent on any change of the Sabbath or any sanctity of Sunday.

5: THE TESTIMONY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

The first day of the week is mentioned only once in the book of Acts.

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."

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The book of Acts records eighty-four Sabbath services and only one first-day service. This latter service is recorded in Acts 20:7-14. Paul spent a week at Troas. The evening after the Sabbath (Saturday night) he held a farewell meeting. It was night; there were lights, and he preached till midnight. The only way that it could be night and also be the "first day of the week" would be that this meeting at Troas was held on what we today call Saturday night. Bible days begin at sundown. When the sun goes down on Saturday, the first day of the week begins. Thus Paul's meeting was on Saturday night. The next day, Sunday morning, Paul walked nineteen miles to Assos to meet his fellow workers who had departed by ship and sailed thence. There is no Sunday sacredness here.

Conybeare and Howson: "It was the evening which succeeded the Jewish Sabbath" (The Life and Epistles of the Apostle, 520).

Now they broke bread, but the disciples broke bread daily (Acts 2:46). If this "bread breaking" was the Lord's Supper, it still would have no bearing upon Sunday sacredness; for it commemorates Christ's death that took place on Friday, but not His resurrection, because that took place on Sunday. The Lord's Supper may be celebrated on any day (1 Corinthians 11:26, for positive evidence).

So we see the book of Acts is silent on Sunday sanctity.

6: THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL

Paul's epistles mention the first day of the week just once.

1 Corinthians 16:1-3 "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. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem."

Many have honestly supposed that this text indicated a weekly gathering.

However, it teaches just the contrary, "Let every one of you lay by him in store," which means privately or at home. Greek scholars testify to this. The believers would normally keep the Sabbath; and, after it was past, they figured their earnings of the week and set aside a gift portion for the poor.

Weymouth's translation (3rd ed.) reads, "Let each of you put on one side and store up at his home." Translation after translation could be given to support what your own Bible clearly teaches. There is no evidence for a Sunday gathering of any kind. This was a collection that Paul desired to see accumulating in the homes of the Corinthian believers over a period of time, and that he wished to take to Jerusalem for poor believers. And so it is clear that Paul mentions the first day but once. And in that text he is utterly silent on first-day sanctity.

7: FACING THE ISSUE SQUARELY

Jesus, our Creator and gracious Redeemer, gave us His holy Sabbath as a sign of creation and redemption. He gave it to us to be a delight. The Sabbath hours were given to afford time to reflect on the character of

God, to attend divine worship, and to perform acts of love and mercy.

He who is our example kept the Sabbath. He did not keep Sunday. In all the New Testament, there is no record that He personally ever once mentioned the first day of the week.

The custom of Sunday-keeping is a purely human invention, though millions of sincere Christians have kept the first day of the week with no knowledge of their responsibility to the true Sabbath. God has

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accepted the worship of these dear children of His. But when light comes, responsibility to walk in that light comes with it (1 *John* 1:7).

God is seeking to restore His Sabbath to its rightful place in the plan of redemption. And in your life, He is watching for that token of loyalty to truth that will lead you to honor Him fully. You will not disappoint Jesus, will you?

Regarding Acts 20: 7: In his travels, Paul held meetings day after day. After the night meeting on the first day in Troas (Acts 20:7), Paul held a meeting on Tuesday in Miletus (Acts 20:17-38). But no one considers that meeting sacred.

Regarding 1 Corinthians 16: 1-3, Paul told them to do their finances at home at the start of each work week, and get their donations ready, since he did not want to hold any meetings when he passed through town on his way to Jerusalem.