

The Lord's Day in the Didache

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But every **Lord's day** [*kata kuriakēn de kuriou*] gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned. For this is that which was spoken by the Lord: In every place and time offer to me a pure sacrifice; for I am a great King, says the Lord, and my name is wonderful among the nations. (Didache, chap. 14)¹

Introduction

The Didache nowhere uses the word "Sabbath," but it does use the expression "Lord's day," as we see in the above passage from chap. 14. In regard to other parts of the ten commandments, the Didache gives quite a list. I here quote chap. 2.

And the second commandment of the Teaching; You shall not commit murder [#6], you shall not commit adultery [#7], Exodus 20:13-14 you shall not commit pederasty [cf. #7], you shall not commit fornication [cf. #7], you shall not steal [#8], Exodus 20:15 you shall not practice magic, you shall not practice witchcraft, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten [cf. #6]. You shall not covet the things of your neighbour [#10], Exodus 20:17 you shall not forswear yourself, Matthew 5:34 you shall not bear false witness [#9], Exodus 20:16 you shall not speak evil [cf. #9], you shall bear no grudge. You shall not be double-minded nor double-tongued; for to be double-tongued is a snare of death. Your speech shall not be false, nor empty, but fulfilled by deed. You shall not be covetous [cf. #10], nor rapacious, nor a hypocrite, nor evil disposed, nor haughty. You shall not take evil counsel against your neighbour. You shall not hate any man; but some you shall reprove, and concerning some you shall pray, and some you shall love more than your own life.²

The commandments we find here are drawn from the entire second table, in a model where #5 belongs with the first table rather than the second.³ In addition there are some commandment lookalikes. So we find #6 (murder) and something that resembles #6 (abortion), #7 (adultery) and two things that resemble #7 (pederasty and fornication), #8 (stealing), #9 (lying) and something that resembles #9 (evil speaking), #10 (coveting) and something that resembles #10 (being covetous).

The author of the Didache is very much at home with the idea of obedience. There is nothing here about allegorical interpretations or spiritualizing the commandments. More than

¹ <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm>.

² Ibid.

³ Philo divided the commandments 1-5, 6-10, and so, apparently, did Jesus. In His sermon on the mount Jesus in Matt 5 discusses commandments #6 (vss. 21-26), #7 (vss. 27-32), #9 (vss. 33-37), #8 (vss. 38-42), and #10 (vss. 43-47). For discussion see <http://www.historicism.org/Documents/LawMatt.pdf>. See also <http://www.historicism.org/Documents/10CommExplEngNIV.pdf>.

just meeting the commandments head on, the author adds some of his own for good measure, just to make sure people catch the point. The Didache comes from an extremely early period of church history. As such, we can't automatically assume that "Lord's day" meant then what it means now, or even what it would mean in the second century. I argue here that when the church first started using this term it was a Christian code word for the Sabbath and was later adapted for use with another day as the Christian day of worship gradually shifted from the seventh day to the first. The key word here is gradual. The day of worship at first was very clearly the Sabbath.

The Apostles and the Lord's Day

Evidence from Acts 1-7

Consider the following facts: (1) In Acts 4:14 and 21 the Jewish leaders didn't know how to punish Peter and John. If these disciples had been Sabbath breakers, the leaders would have known how to punish them.⁴ (2) In Acts 5:15 people put their sick out on the street where Peter and his companions were known to pass by so their shadow would fall on them and they would be healed. The level of esteem in which the disciples were held by the people of Jerusalem at this time can't be accounted for under the hypothesis that they had stopped keeping the Sabbath. (3) In Acts 6:7 "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." There is no indication that when these men became Christians they stopped being priests. (4) The rapid growth of the church in general during the three and a half years or so between the cross and the death of Stephen, in a solidly Jewish environment, argues against anything remotely resembling a change in the day of worship.

At his trial in Acts 7 notice that the council sat in silence while Stephen recounted the course of Jewish history, including his point that Moses was a type of Christ (vss. 39-43). A turning point came, however, when he said,

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! ⁵² Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— ⁵³ you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." (Acts 7:51-53)

Recall that in chap. 6 Stephen's accusers "produced false witnesses, who testified, 'This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law'" (Acts 6:13). Now the accused becomes the accuser. The "'law that was put into effect through angels'" (vs. 53) is a transparent reference to the ten commandments and now Stephen accuses the Jewish nation – prominently including its leadership seated before him – of disobedience and apostasy. It would be a mistake to place this on the same level as his earlier references to Israel's rebellion in the wilderness. Mention of past failings could be tolerated. In saying what he did, however, Stephen was no longer describing past failings. He was addressing the court directly. In effect Stephen accuses his judges of being less faithful to the law than he was. They were trying him, but were more guilty than he. No one stood up at this point to say, You can't make that claim! It's unfair, because we keep the Sabbath but you don't. If such a charge had been possible, Stephen's trial

⁴ See <http://www.historicism.org/Documents/EndOfTheLaw.pdf>, pp. 3-5.

would have come much sooner and been much shorter. The fact that he lived long enough to appear before the Sanhedrin at all (i.e., the fact that chap. 7 is part of the book of Acts) is evidence that Stephen was a Sabbath keeper.

In the three and a half years leading up to AD 34,⁵ did Stephen have one rule of faith and practice and the apostles another? The fact that only Stephen was brought into court argues strongly that the other leaders of the church were also Sabbath keepers, just as he was. If Sabbath breaking was an actionable offense and if in that context the Sanhedrin brought no charge against the apostles, it follows they were unable to do so. The will was there, but not the ability. I submit that the apostles kept the Sabbath holy, just like all the other Jewish people around them. If this had not been their rule they would have been stoned long since by the people, quite apart from the Sanhedrin.

After the martyrdom of Stephen

There is a question what happened after AD 34. "On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). Many of the apostles eventually also left. Peter and John traveled through Samaria (vss. 14-25), Peter went to Lydda (9:32), Joppa (9:38-39), and Caesarea (10:23). He returned to Jerusalem (11:2), where he was imprisoned by one of Herod's sons and set free by an angel (12:3). He then went elsewhere (12:9, 16). We know that Peter eventually made his way to Antioch, because that's where he was when Paul opposed him to his face (Gal 2:11). Other disciples went farther than this. Philip is said to have gone west to North Africa (Carthage), Matthew south to Ethiopia, Andrew north to Ukraine or even Russia, Thomas east to India. John became the leader of the church in Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Not all of the apostles left Jerusalem. James apparently remained for the duration as the leader of the mother church in Jerusalem (see Gal 2:12).

No one can successfully claim that the apostles failed to keep the Sabbath while in Jerusalem. All the evidence we have points to their keeping it faithfully. Nor will it do to say that they kept the Sabbath when surrounded by Jews, but not among Gentiles. The apostles did not have a double standard – one for public consumption and another held privately. If they erred at all it was in being slow to appreciate the needs of Gentile converts. The Jerusalem church was always a bastion of strict observances and law keeping among Christians. This attitude comes to the surface in a number of passages. For example,

When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. (Acts 21:20-24)

Consider also that James addresses his epistle "to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (Jas 1:1). He was not writing to Jews. The first part of his salutation says, "James, a

⁵ F. F. Bruce proposes an even earlier date (c. 33) and suggests that the death of Stephen could not have occurred as late as 37 (*New Testament History* [Garden City: Anchor, 1972], pp. 294, 225).

servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, . . ." Instead he is asserting that Christians are a spiritual Israel to God. This is how the entire community saw itself. F. F. Bruce comments as follows:

The ringleader [of the Christians] escaped their hands by his appeal to Caesar, but the central Nazarene community lay within their jurisdiction, there in Jerusalem. Yet little fault could be found with them; they were humble, pious and patriotic Jews, led by a man [James] whose asceticism and holiness of life won him the esteem of all who knew him.⁶

Until manuscript evidence comes to light with an apostolic statement to the effect that the original twelve kept another day after Jesus' death, I challenge that they did. The apostles kept the seventh-day Sabbath to the day of their respective deaths.

Some will ask, If the Sabbath was so important, why didn't Jesus rise from the tomb on that day? The answer does not have to do with its importance, but with its significance. The word "Sabbath" means "cessation," or "rest." Christ continued to honor the Sabbath in death, as He always had in life, by resting on it. My question, countering the first, is, If the Sabbath were so *unimportant* that it could be set aside, why didn't God tell us so? He gives the Sabbath amid thunder and lightning and abolishes it without so much as a whisper? There is no "thus saith the Lord" to support the popular view. If God set the Sabbath in place, He is the only One who can annul it. He hasn't done that yet. Until He does, the Sabbath remains. As for the apostles, their position was the same as the one I have just expressed. "Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!'" (Acts 5:29).

There were ceremonial sabbaths and these fell away at the cross, but this is because Christ was the reality to which they pointed forward. The weekly Sabbath pointed forward to nothing. On the contrary, what the commandment says is, "Remember the Sabbath day . . ." Which part of "Remember" looks forward to a future event? If it doesn't, it can't be displaced by a future event. What could nullify or displace your birthday? Even when people die, it is still the case that they were born on a certain date. People celebrate Mozart's birthday on January 17, 1756, and if we're all here ten years from now they'll still be doing it. Nothing he did later, or that we have done later, can change the fact that he was born when he was. So how could anyone change the memorial of God bringing the world into existence? The Sabbath is the birthday of the world, celebrated on a weekly cycle. Nothing can change that.

Early Christian Literature

How early is early?

After the apostles died I grant that the church started losing its way doctrinally. The second century is known as an age of heresy. Early Christian documents such as the apocryphal Epistle of Barnabas, Justin Martyr, and the Shepherd of Hermas all demonstrate that there was a shift away from Sabbath observance. We can't merely assume, however, that because the church eventually started keeping Sunday, it always kept Sunday, or that it kept Sunday from the first century onward. If the Didache was written c. AD 80-90 it predates even the book of Revelation and the gospel of John. If it was written at a time when one of the

⁶ Bruce, *History*, p. 373.

apostles was still alive, our starting assumption should be that the Sabbath was still being kept then.

Sources which refer to the Didache include Eusebius (d. 339), Lactantius (d. 320), Cyprian (d. 258), Origen (d. 254), Clement of Alexandria (d. 215), Irenaeus (d. 202), Theophilus of Antioch (c. 185), Tatian (d. 180), Justin Martyr (d. 165), the Shepherd of Hermas (c. 150), and the Epistle of Barnabas (c. 130).⁷ There is a question whether Epistle of Barnabas was written in the last part of the first century contemporaneously with the Didache or later in the early second century. Scholars debate this, but I doubt that Barnabas was written as early as the Didache.

The Didache is mentioned by Eusebius after the books of Scripture (*Church History* III.25.4): "Let there be placed among the spuria the writing of the Acts of Paul, the so-called Shepherd and the Apocalypse of Peter, and besides these the Epistle known as that of Barnabas, and what are called the Teachings of the Apostles, and also . . . the Apocalypse of John, if this be thought fit . . ." St. Athanasius and Rufinus add the "Teaching" to the sapiential and other deuterocanonical books. (Rufinus gives the curious alternative title "Judicium Petri".) It has a similar place in the lists of Nicephorus, Pseudo-Anastasius, and Pseudo-Athanasius (Synopsis). The Pseudo-Cyprianic "Adversus Aleatores" quotes it by name. Unacknowledged citations are very common, if less certain. The "Two Ways" appears in Barnabas, cc. xviii-xx, sometimes word for word, sometimes added to, dislocated, or abridged, and Barn., iv, 9 is from Didache, xvi, 2-3, or vice versa. Hermas, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen seem to use the work, and so in the West do Optatus and the "Gesta apud Zenophilum". The Didascalia Apostolorum are founded upon the Didache. The Apostolic church ordinance has used a part, the Apostolic Constitutions have embodied the Didascalia. There are echoes in Justin, Tatian, Theophilus, Cyprian, and Lactantius.⁸

The Didache does not refer to the Sabbath or to Sunday as the "eighth day." It uses the term "Lord's day,"⁹ which both sabbatarians and Sunday keepers claim as their own. So there is a question what is and is not being said. I grant that "Lord's day" eventually came to mean Sunday, but we can't automatically assume that it had this meaning at first. Another thing we can't automatically assume is that the author says "Lord's day." There is a question about the translation.

We return to the matter of how to translate the Greek below, but in regard to what the Lord's day was in the first century, the testimony of the gospels must be taken into account. Jesus says that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28; see also Matt 12:8; Luke 6:5), so in these passages the Sabbath is the Lord's day. Given this definition, and in view of its Source, we would need very strong evidence before concluding that "Lord's day" always meant Sunday to all Christians starting on crucifixion week-end. In the synoptic gospels the idea if not the term itself is clearly used to refer to the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. And so somewhere between the time when Jesus made the above statement and the end of the second Christian century, there was a period of transition. How long did it last? That must be established by investigating early sources.

⁷ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02299a.htm>.

⁸ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04779a.htm>.

⁹ Actually there is a question whether it does or not. See below.

Relationship of Didache to Jewish sources

Some scholars (below) believe the Didache drew on Jewish sources. Another major source was the gospel Matthew.¹⁰ Are these two sources compatible with each other? The author apparently thought they were. The Didache is definitely Christian in its final form, and yet it contains points of contact with Jewish thought.

It is held by very many critics that the "Two Ways" is older than the rest of the Didache, and is in origin a Jewish work, intended for the instruction of proselytes. The use of the Sibylline Oracles and other Jewish sources may be probable, and the agreement of ch. ii with the Talmud may be certain; but on the other hand Funk has shown that (apart from the admittedly Christian ch. i, 3-6, and the occasional citations of the New Testament) the O. T. is often not quoted directly, but from the Gospels. Bartlet suggests an oral Jewish catechesis as the source. But the use of such material would surprise us in one whose name for the Jews is "the hypocrites", and in the vehemently anti-Jewish Barnabas still more. The whole base of this theory is destroyed by the fact that the rest of the work, vii-xvi, though wholly Christian in its subject-matter, has an equally remarkable agreement with the Talmud in cc. ix and x. Beyond doubt we must look upon the writer as living at a very early period when Jewish influence was still important in the Church. He warns Christians not to fast with the Jews or pray with them; yet the two fasts and the three times of prayer are modelled on Jewish custom. Similarly the prophets stand in the place of the High Priest.

The part of the Didache of greatest interest here is not the "Two Ways" of chaps. 1-5, but the oblique reference to worship in chap. 14. This chapter, quoted at the beginning of the present paper, is only three verses long. I repeat it here for the reader's convenience.

On the Lord's Day of the Lord [*kata kuriakēn de kuriou*] come together, break bread and hold Eucharist, after confessing your transgressions that your offering may be pure; 2 but let none who has a quarrel with his fellow join in your meeting until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice be not defiled. 3 For this is that which was spoken by the Lord, "In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great king," saith the Lord, "and my name is wonderful among the heathen."¹¹

The Greek words *kata kuriakēn de kuriou* raise more than one question for the translator. First, how should *kata* with the accusative be understood? Does it mean "on" (as it would with a noun describing time), or does it mean "according to" (as it would with a noun describing fitness, reference, or conformity)? Only context can decide such issues. In the first case, "on" is an acceptable rendering. But does the governing noun in the above phrase have to do with time? Actually there is no governing noun. What follows is an adjective (*kuriakēn*). This brings us to our second question. What does *kuriakēn de kuriou* mean? Literally these words say " [the] Lord's of [the] Lord." But what does that mean? Kirsopp Lake inserts the word "day" after *kuriakēn*, which makes it appropriate to translate *kata* as "on," thus, "On the Lord's [Day] of the Lord." With equal

¹⁰ See Huub van de Sandt and Jürgen K. Zangenberg, eds., *Matthew, James, and Didache: Three Related Documents in Their Jewish and Christian Settings*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 45 (Atlanta: SBL, 2008).

¹¹ <http://www.ccel.org/lake/fathers/didache.htm>. This is the Kirsopp Lake translation (*Apostolic Fathers*, Loeb Classical Library, 1912). For the Greek see <http://www.ccel.org/lake/fathers/didache.htm>.

correctness we could translate, "According to the Lord's [command] of the Lord." Here the meaning would be, Celebrate the eucharist according to the Lord's instruction.

The words we've been wrestling with (*kata kuriakēn de kuriou*) have a vague similarity to *tē kuriakē hēmera*, commonly translated "On the Lord's day" in Rev 1:10. But the two phrases are not identical. One problem with translating "Lord's day" in Didache 14 is that the text doesn't include the word "day." Elsewhere in the paper I accept the popular gloss "Lord's day" for discussion, suggesting that it refers to a day, but not to Sunday. If the reference is to time in Didache 14, it would almost certainly refer to the Sabbath, following the biblical formula that "the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). Even if the Greek of the Didache really does mean "Lord's day," which needs to be established rather than taken for granted, it would also need to be established that "Lord's day" in the late first century means Sunday. In view of Rev 1:10 and Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; and Luke 6:5 this is most unlikely.

The Epistle of Barnabas

There is a question about the date for the Epistle of Barnabas, just as there was for the Didache. I suggest that it comes from about the time of Hadrian (r. 117-38). Scholars debate which comes first and which quotes the other. The one thing we can be sure of is that one writer or the other is doing some quoting. We don't know with certainty which one, but I suspect that it was the author of Barnabas.

Barnabas 4. Didache 16:2 and Barnabas 4:9 both express the thought that having faith for only a while is not enough; we must endure to the end.

But be frequently gathered together seeking the things which are profitable for your souls, **for the whole time of your faith shall not profit you except ye be found perfect at the last time;** (Didache 16:2)

(And though I wish to write much, I hasten to write in devotion to you, not as a teacher, but as it becomes one who loves to leave out nothing of that which we have.) Wherefore let us pay heed in the last days, **for the whole time of our life and faith will profit us nothing, unless we resist,** as becomes the sons of God in this present evil time, against the offences which are to come, that the Black One may have no opportunity of entry. (Barnabas 4:9)¹²

Barnabas 18-20. The Didache begins with a discussion of the "Two Ways" (chaps. 1-5, possibly 1-6) The same topic is discussed in Barnabas 18-20. Isolated words or phrases, parallel in the Greek, lie scattered here and there, but the clearest parallel is this one from the introduction to the topic of the "Two Ways."

There are two Ways, one of Life and one of Death, and there is a great difference between the two Ways. (Didache 1:1)

There are two Ways of teaching and power, one of Light and one of Darkness. And there is a great difference between the two Ways. (Barnabas 18:1)

¹² All references to the Epistle of Barnabas are from <http://www.oldwritings.com/writings/barnabas.html>.

Notice the Didache speaks of Life and Death, while the Epistle of Barnabas speaks of Light and Darkness, but this minor variation is not a difference. The concept and terminology of the "Two Ways" is borrowed (in my view) by the Epistle of Barnabas from the Didache, and (according to some scholars) by Didache from an earlier Jewish source. If the ultimate source is Jewish, it has been well covered over with references especially to the gospel of Matthew, especially in Didache 1-3.

Barnabas 15. Barnabas chap. 15 is entitled "The Sabbath." It is of interest that Sunday is not called the "Lord's day" in Barnabas. Instead it is called the "eighth day." This is an early term which falls away when the expression "Lord's day" stops meaning Sabbath and starts meaning Sunday. I leave for future research the question whether and to what degree the terms "eighth day" and "Lord's day" are used in parallel within the same documents. My hypothesis is this would not happen frequently, i.e., that a given writer would choose one term or the other.

Barnabas chap. 18 (The Sabbath): 1 Furthermore it was written concerning the Sabbath in the ten words which he spake on Mount Sinai face to face to Moses. "Sanctify also the Sabbath of the Lord with pure hands and a pure heart." 2 And in another place he says, "If my sons keep the Sabbath, then will I bestow my mercy upon them." 3 He speaks of the Sabbath at the beginning of the Creation, "And God made in six days the works of his hands and on the seventh day he made an end, and rested in it and sanctified it." 4 Notice, children, what is the meaning of "He made an end in six days"? He means this: that the Lord will make an end of everything in six thousand years, for a day with him means a thousand years. And he himself is my witness when he says, "Lo, the day of the Lord shall be as a thousand years." So then, children, in six days, that is in six thousand years, everything will be completed. 5 "And he rested on the seventh day." This means, when his Son comes he will destroy the time of the wicked one, and will judge the godless, and will change the sun and the moon and the stars, **and then he will truly rest on the seventh day.** 6 Furthermore he says, "Thou shalt sanctify it with clean hands and a pure heart." If, then, anyone has at present the power to keep holy the day which God made holy, by being pure in heart, we are altogether deceived. 7 **See that we shall indeed keep it holy at that time,** when we enjoy true rest, when we shall be able to do so because we have been made righteous ourselves and have received the promise, when there is no more sin, but all things have been made new by the Lord: **then we shall be able to keep it holy because we ourselves have first been made holy.** 8 Furthermore he says to them, "Your new moons and the sabbaths I cannot away with." Do you see what he means? The present sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but that which I have made, in which I will give rest to all things and make the beginning of **an eighth day, that is the beginning of another world.** 9 Wherefore we also celebrate with gladness the eighth day in which Jesus also rose from the dead, and was made manifest, and ascended into Heaven.

Notice that that the argument in Barnabas is primarily an argument against the Sabbath, rather than in favor of Sunday. The author doesn't want to keep the Sabbath because he is not "pure in heart," and suggests strongly that the same is true of all his readers. As William H. Shea insightfully points out, "The Fourth Commandment [in Barnabas] is not fulfilled and done away with, it is unfulfilled and yet future."¹³ So Barnabas is not wrestling with the question whether the Sabbath is still holy (it is), or whether it has a valid claim on human obedience (it does). The problem is not with the Sabbath at all, but with those who wish to keep it, since no

¹³ "The Sabbath in the Epistle of Barnabas," *AUSS* 4 (1966), p. 158.

one is pure enough or holy enough to do so. Keeping the Sabbath holy is not something the writer dismisses, but merely defers until a later world age or thousand year period. "See that we shall indeed keep it holy at that time" (vs. 7).

This is a significant argument on the writer's part. When we understand it we will have a better idea why he avoids using the expression "Lord's day" to describe Sunday. He doesn't make such a connection, because he has no thought of replacing the Sabbath. Similarly, he has no thought of instituting Sunday worship.¹⁴

Wherefore we also celebrate with gladness the eighth day in which Jesus also rose from the dead, and was made manifest, and ascended into Heaven. (vs. 9)

Notice that the above sentence has a main clause and a subordinate clause. The main clause says, "Wherefore we also celebrate with gladness the eighth day." Having reported this fact, the subordinate clause adds that this is the day "in which Jesus also rose from the dead, and was made manifest, and ascended into Heaven." He does not appeal to divine authority, or to human authority. Nor does he seek to replace the Sabbath with another day. He just doesn't want to be encumbered with keeping it. He points out that the "eighth day" (Sunday) is celebrated with gladness, but this is not presented as an obligation.

The fact that the author of Barnabas argues against the Sabbath pushes the date for his book forward out of the first century; the fact that in doing this he doesn't try to replace the Sabbath outright pushes the date back into the early years of the second century.

Although he overstates the evidence, it is interesting that a non-Sabbatarian scholar such as Westcott denies [that Barnabas dates from the first century] on the basis of the anti-Sabbatarian 15th chapter, "the letter . . . also affirms the abrogation of the Sabbath, and the general celebration of the Lord's day, which seems to shew that it could not have been written before the beginning of the second century." B. F. Westcott, *A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the New Testament* (7th ed.: London, 1896), pp. 41, 42.¹⁵

Actually saying "abrogation of the Sabbath" might be too strongly worded when dealing with the Epistle of Barnabas, because abrogation would involve setting the Sabbath aside, whereas Barnabas speaks only of postponing its observance until a later time – during the seventh period of one thousand years. His argument is based, not on the resurrection of Christ, but on a theory of seven successive millennial world ages.

¹⁴ Perhaps for this reason, "Later writers such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen often quoted the Epistle of Barnabas as Scripture, but they never used it in their argumentation for Sunday-keeping, suggesting that they did not understand it to support Sunday observance" (Aecio E. Cairus, "Sabbath and Covenant in the Epistle of Barnabas," *AUSS* 39 [2001]:122). No one would suggest that Barnabas represents an attempt to keep Christians from losing sight of the Sabbath. Sunday would soon replace the Sabbath for many Christians. The only question is how far the document goes in the inevitable direction we see taking shape all around it. According to Cairus it does not go as far as we might have thought.

¹⁵ Shea, "Barnabas," p. 149, n. 2.

Ignatius, Letter to the Magnesians

Magnesians 4. Chapter 4 is normally not one we think about in connection with the history of Sunday sacredness. But it has much to teach us.

It is fitting, then, not only to be called Christians, but to be so in reality: as some indeed give one the title of bishop, but do all things without him. Now such persons seem to me to be not possessed of a good conscience, seeing they are not steadfastly **gathered together according to the commandment**.¹⁶

Perhaps this is a commandment to obey bishops recorded in some early document, but if "the commandment" refers to one of the ten commandments, only one of these has to do with worship and, by implication, with gathering for worship.¹⁷ Context will have to be a determining factor here.

Magnesians 8-9. Chapters 8-9 are those that most commonly figure in discussions of the history of the Sabbath, and especially chap. 9.

Chapter 8 (Caution against false doctrines): Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables, which are unprofitable. For if we still live according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace. For **the divinest prophets** lived according to Christ Jesus. On this account also they were persecuted, being inspired by His grace to fully convince the unbelieving that there is one God, who has manifested Himself by Jesus Christ His Son, who is His eternal Word, not proceeding forth from silence, and who in all things pleased Him that sent Him.

Chapter 9 (Let us live with Christ): If, therefore, **those who were brought up in the ancient order of things** have come to the possession of a new hope, **no longer observing the Sabbath** [*mēketi sabbatizantes*], **but living in the observance of the Lord's Day** [*alla kata kuriakēn zōntes*], on which also **our life** has sprung up again by Him and by His death— whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained faith, and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master— how shall we be able **to live** apart from Him, whose disciples the prophets themselves in the Spirit did wait for Him as their Teacher? And therefore He whom they rightly waited for, having come, raised them from the dead.¹⁸

It's clear that Ignatius is saying something about the Sabbath in chap. 9 and that it is not positive in nature, but what exactly is it? It will help to tighten up the translation. The words "no longer observing the Sabbath" are literally, "no longer sabbatizing"; those translated "but living in the observance of the Lord's Day" are literally, "but living [*zōntes*] according to the Lord's . . ." Another noun is expected at the end of the clause. Which one does the author intend? Inserting "day" would make sense in view of the earlier reference to misuse of the Sabbath. Inserting "life" would also make sense because of the later reference to "our own [Christian] lives" which follows in the next clause, i.e., "on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His

¹⁶ <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0105.htm>.

¹⁷ See <http://www.cogwriter.com/ignatius.htm>. In this URL COGwriter stands for Church of God writer. This individual is not a Seventh-day Adventist, but has a number of good pro-Sabbath arguments from early church history.

¹⁸ Ibid.

death." The words "on which" could also be in which "in which." The word "which" is feminine singular in Greek, which would fit with either day (*hēmeran*, feminine accusative singular) or "life" (*zōēn*, feminine accusative singular). Both interpretations offer reasonable accommodations to context so far. Is there a way to choose between them?

At this point the evidence becomes murky. Richard B. Lewis refers the phrase "those who were brought up in the ancient order of things" (chap. 9) back to "the divinest prophets" (chap. 8),¹⁹ but this is not the only available interpretation. Saying the ancient Jewish prophets stopped keeping the Sabbath and kept Sunday instead would be wildly anachronistic, as Lewis points out.²⁰ There seems to be a contrast between them ("those who were brought up . . .") and us ("on which also our life has sprung up . . ."). But Ignatius were talking about Jewish Christians instead, who no longer live in the Jewish manner but "according to the Lord's [life]," that would make sense in the context. All the more so since the next clause says, "on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death."

Magnesians 9 does not give us an early witness to the term "Lord's day," as many suppose. Despite popular translations that imply otherwise, the term simply does not appear in the letter to the Magnesians. What we have is not *kuriakē hēmera* ("Lord's day"), but *kata kuriakēn zōntes* ("**living** according to the Lord's [**life**]"), "on which our own **life** has sprung up. . . ." What's there that makes people think of "Lord's day" is "Lord's"; what's missing from "Lord's day" is "day." It's a crucial omission.

Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho

Justin Martyr wrote widely and died c. AD 165. His Dialogue with Trypho is explicit and urgent in its argument against keeping the Sabbath, but he, like Barnabas, calls Sabbath "Sabbath" and Sunday the "eighth day."

The command of circumcision, again, bidding [them] always circumcise the children on the eighth day, was a type of the true circumcision, by which we are circumcised from deceit and iniquity through Him who rose from the dead on the first day after **the Sabbath**, [namely through] our Lord Jesus Christ. For **the first day after the Sabbath**, remaining **the first of all the days**, is called, however, **the eighth**, according to the number of all the days of the cycle, and [yet] remains **the first**. (Trypho 41)²¹

Here two different days are clearly referred to, but Sunday is the "eighth day," not the "Lord's day." Like Ignatius before him, he does not use the term "Lord's day." In the passage quoted it would appear that the Sabbath was still revered to a degree in Justin's time, but was now on the same level as Sunday, with Sunday perhaps taking precedence over the Sabbath. One could never fast on Sunday ("eighth day"), almost never on the Sabbath. Notice that Justin's argument for Sunday observance is based again, not on the resurrection of Christ, but on an allegory involving circumcision. Sunday worship represents the true circumcision, performed – not on the Lord's day – but on the eighth day.

¹⁹ "Ignatius and the "Lord's Day," *AUSS* 6 (1968): 44-59.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 58.

²¹ <http://www.oldwritings.com/writings/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html>.

Conclusion

Today "Lord's day" means Sunday to a large majority of Christians. As early as the late second century it meant Sunday. From this does it follow that it "Lord's day" meant Sunday in the early second century and beyond that in the late first century? Such a conclusion goes beyond the evidence.

The gospels are part of the documentary evidence bearing on this question. They must be allowed to have their input. When they do, it is clear that the "Lord's day" in the earliest Christian decades was not the first day of the week, but the seventh (see Rev 1:10; Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). If this is the case, the change occurred later. When? On one level it really doesn't matter. If Jesus kept the Sabbath and if the apostles kept the Sabbath, the essential point has already been yielded. What later Christians do or did is irrelevant in view of this early precedent. Appeals to early Christian practice fall short if they do not include the church's earliest practice. But to answer the question, the change occurred for the most part during the late second century. In this Alexandria and Rome led the way.