

## *Christ and the First Day*

The previous chapters must not be forgotten. What have we gleaned? We have seen that the early churches treated the first day as the day for church life; in my view, calling it the Lord's day. Above all – and the evidence is unmistakable – the early churches, though initially composed of converted Jews – did not assemble on the sabbath.<sup>1</sup> Why not? This, to my mind at least, is the most significant fact in this entire debate. It merits a closer look. Why did the early churches not keep the sabbath? Why did they never use the word 'sabbath' for their day of assembly? And why did they keep the first day?

Let me develop this point about the sabbath a little. As I do, I must stress that I am not in the slightest straying towards the notion of 'the Christian sabbath'. Not at all! So important is this point, I must say it again, and with all the emphasis I can muster: ***I am not in the slightest straying towards the notion of 'the Christian sabbath'.***

Why did the first believers drop the sabbath? Why did they use another day? Why did they no longer have a ceasing day, but have a day filled with spiritual activity?<sup>2</sup> Why did they

---

<sup>1</sup> Paul would go to the synagogue or elsewhere on a sabbath wherever Jews assembled so that he might address them with the gospel (Acts 9:20,29; 13:5,14-52; 14:1; 16:13; 17:1-2,10; 18:4; 19:8; see also Acts 18:24-26; 28:17-31), but this is a far cry from saying that, as a believer, he observed the sabbath in accordance with the Mosaic law.

<sup>2</sup> The sabbath was certainly not a day of assembly for the exercise of the all-body ministry within the priesthood of all believers! The old covenant had no such concept. Nor was the sabbath primarily a day of worship. This may surprise most sabbatarians, but the sabbath was, from first to last, a day of rest. Indeed, this fact immediately brings the advocates of 'the Puritan Sunday, the Christian sabbath', with their talk of that day being 'the market-day of the soul', into conflict with the very law they so staunchly claim to be enforcing! The pattern of weekly worship did not exist under

## *Christ and the First Day*

give up centuries of timekeeping to use a different way of measuring days? The reason behind all this must have been substantial. After all, the practical alteration in life-pattern which this involved for an erstwhile-Jew was enormous. After conversion, among the many changes conversion brought about – ‘in Christ... old things have passed away... all things have become new’ (2 Cor. 5:17) – the ex-Jew gave up the sabbath and assembled with other believers<sup>3</sup> on the Lord’s day, the first day of the week, and did so after a lifetime of sabbath observance. A phenomenon indeed! Think, reader, of the interruption this must have caused in family and work life. Interruption? How weak a word to describe a revolution of this magnitude! To have kept Friday sunset to Saturday sunset within a rigid framework of law all one’s life, based on torah and tradition, and then to switch to using the first day according to the principles of the new covenant! The mind boggles! And they all did it! How can we account for this dramatic (a word hardly strong enough to describe it!) end to the sabbath, and the use of the first day – the complete absence of sabbath-day assembly for all the churches in the New Testament – especially in the light of the huge cost that this must have entailed in many cases?<sup>4</sup>

---

the old-covenant law. The synagogue introduced it in the inter-testamental period. Even in the era of synagogue-attendance, rest and sabbath were synonymous. While still under the old covenant, resting is precisely what the women did on the day after Christ was crucified: ‘And they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment’ (Luke 23:56). It is not said that they worshipped. As for Isa. 66:22-24; Ezek. 46:1-12; Zech. 14:16-21, I read all such as old-covenant prophecies of the new covenant. Pre-millennialists will probably expect them to be literally fulfilled in the millennium. I don’t. But none of this alters the fact that the sabbath was not a day of worship. It was, from first to last, a ceasing day, a day of rest. In the new covenant, the believer’s sabbath is his rest in Christ. See my *Sabbath Questions*; *Sabbath Notes*; *Essential*; *Horne*.

<sup>3</sup> These assemblies were, of course, made up of converted Jews and Gentiles. That, too, was another earth-shattering change!

<sup>4</sup> See my ‘Does Acts 21 Confirm Sabbath Keeping for Believers?’

## *Christ and the First Day*

Imagine, a Jewish man converted, but his Jewish wife not – or *vice-versa*. What upheavals and causes of conflict in domestic affairs this would have caused! Marriages would have been put under the heaviest of strains, and exposed to serious risk of breakdown. As we know they were (1 Cor. 7:12-16).

True, some controversy over the observance of days, including the sabbath, did develop in some churches, but this came about largely through false teachers, specifically those who wanted to bring back the Mosaic law and impose it upon believers. But it was only a minority who wanted to go back to the sabbath in some form or another. It was never mainstream teaching or practice. Certainly it was never taught or supported by the apostles. Quite the reverse. Wherever Paul spotted it, he dealt with it very firmly and nipped it in the bud.<sup>5</sup> In other words, sabbath observance is noteworthy in the New Testament churches *only by its absence*. The choice, in contrast, of the first day for *ekklēsia* meeting is clear.

Perhaps a parallel case might help; I refer to the end of old-covenant sacrifices. The letter to the Hebrews is explicit – the sacrifices, washings, priesthood, the feasts, and all the rest of old-covenant form and worship have been abolished in Christ. But it is clear, is it not, that right from the start the churches of the New Testament never thought of using old-covenant symbols and shadows. The saints immediately gave them up – immediately, unannounced and without dissension! The silence as to their demise is deafening. It was only later, when false teachers wanted to take the church back to Judaism and the Mosaic law, that the inspired writers of Scripture set out the definitive position.<sup>6</sup> It was false teaching on the law, this call for the reinstatement of the law, which led to Paul's stand at Galatia (Acts 15:1-2) and

---

<sup>5</sup> I will look at the relevant passages in the next chapter.

<sup>6</sup> This applies to nearly all the New Testament after Acts, which was written, largely, against error which was being introduced into the churches.

## *Christ and the First Day*

Antioch (Gal. 2:11ff), his stands at Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 15:2-29), and contributed to (in the case of the Galatian churches, dominated) his letters to the believers in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi and Colosse. When he wrote to Timothy, among other matters, he had to deal with the same issue (1 Tim. 1:3-11). Especially did the problem come to the surface in the letter to the Hebrews, which was written to Jewish believers who had forgotten the glory of the new covenant, and so were drifting back to old-covenant ways. Incidentally, this drift probably (I would say ‘certainly’) included misunderstandings on the sabbath. Hence the need for Hebrews 3 and 4 – to remind the saints that Christ is our sabbath.

My question is this: how was it that the early churches so dramatically ceased Jewish practice to adopt new-covenant practice in the matter of sacrifices and priesthood? And did so in one leap? The answer is obvious: Christ’s death and resurrection fulfilled and abolished the entire Jewish system, of course. Yes! The letter to the Hebrews teaches it. *But this not the point I am making.* The fact is, the New Testament churches knew all this long before Hebrews was written! To go to the letter to the Hebrews in order to explain how the very first Christians did not keep the sacrifices is to miss the thrust of what I am saying, to miss by a mile the remarkable nature of what happened in the very early days of the church. Remarkable? The changes were staggering!

None of the first saints ever thought, for instance, that the Jewish priesthood compared to that of Christ. They all, without exception, gave up the Jewish priesthood and adopted the priesthood of Christ (with the priesthood of all believers). Certainly, the letter to the Hebrews gives the reasons why, but the actual cessation of the Jewish system had occurred long before. Indeed, by the time the letter to the Hebrews was required to be written, some Jewish saints were beginning to question the common practice of the churches. And that is why the writer penned his letter. The fact is, the first (Jewish) believers understood that the old covenant had gone and gone for good. They made no attempt to use old-

## *Christ and the First Day*

covenant shadows in the new. The point is this: where are the plain passages which told them not to use Jewish ways in the new age?

They do not exist! This is what we have to get to grips with. The early churches gave up old-covenant practices and adopted the new, *without chapter and verse* for it. Christ, it is true, in his teaching before his death, had given hints about the changes to come (see, for example, John 4:20-24), but these hints were only put into written form, and found their way into general circulation, long after the time I am talking about – years, even decades, later. The first believers, it has to be recognised, gave up Judaism and Judaistic forms *in toto*, and did so without any scriptural verses to tell them to do it. Where is the verse which told the New Testament churches not to sacrifice at the Passover, for example, or to keep Jewish feasts? We know that at the time there was a highly-developed Jewish system in place (John 2:14, for instance), in which the Jewish believers would have been reared and steeped, and by which they were still surrounded. The Levitical priesthood, though obsolete along with the entire covenant (Heb. 7:12,18-22; 8:7-13; 10:15-18), was still functioning. But the believers (Jews as well as Gentiles) washed their hands of it all, turning away from it. How and why? The fact that the first believers immediately and totally gave this up – in the case of Jewish converts, after a lifetime of doing it – speaks volumes. How did they come to it? And why did they all come to the same view?<sup>7</sup>

We must not forget the long list of the occasions when Christ confronted the Jews over the sabbath. And ‘confronted’ is the word. See Luke 6:1-11; 13:10-17; John 5:1-18; 9:14, for instance. That repeated confrontation, surely, must have left some impression on his disciples. But, of course, Christ by his death and resurrection, by the rent veil, and above all (I suggest) by his teaching in the weeks between his resurrection and ascension, had showed them

---

<sup>7</sup> As for the puzzling events of Acts 21, see my *Sabbath Notes* pp92-96; ‘Does Acts 21 Confirm Sabbath Keeping for Believers?’

## *Christ and the First Day*

that the end of the old covenant had come. After all, we are expressly told by Luke as he closed his Gospel (Luke 24:27,45): ‘And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, [Christ] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself... and he opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures’. Then, as he started his early history of the church (Acts 1:1-3), Luke recorded:

The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which he was taken up, after he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom he had chosen, to whom he showed himself alive after his suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

In light of this, even though we do not have a record of what Christ said in those teaching times,<sup>8</sup> it is only reasonable to trace the practical outworking of the dramatic end of the old covenant – in the lives of the believers – to this source. The full and recorded teaching in Scripture on the matter, I say again, came about mainly as a result of error – deviation from the universal pattern of the first churches – and the need to correct it. In other words, the letters confirm the norm which was solidly in place – even though we do not have any textual support to tell us precisely how and when that norm was established.

The same, in my opinion, explains the end of the seventh day – the sabbath. The sabbath after all was part and parcel of the old covenant, which fell along with the sacrifices, the priesthood, and so on. Indeed, the sabbath was a principal part, being that special marker given by God to Israel to distinguish them from all other people (Ex. 31:12-17; Neh.

---

<sup>8</sup> But due account must be taken of John 20:30; 21:25. What else did Jesus teach his disciples on the mountain in Galilee, in addition to what is recorded in Matt. 28:16-20? and in Acts 1:4-8? Nor must John 16:12-15 be forgotten. Jesus, of course, did not predict that all the things taught by the Spirit would be recorded in Scripture. Compare Mark 7:19 (NIV rightly in brackets, as an aside), showing that the disciples had got Christ’s meaning.

## *Christ and the First Day*

9:14; Ezek. 20:12).<sup>9</sup> What about the believers and the first day? What about the new covenant and the first day? The fact that there is no express teaching on the first day in the letters to the churches of the New Testament, implies (to put it no stronger) that there was no need for it since all those churches, from the start, had assembled on the first day, as a consequence of Christ's showing them what was required. This is the only construction I can place on it.<sup>10</sup> Christ must have taught them that they were no longer under the old covenant. Indeed, Christ had raised the subject long before:

No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved (Luke 5:36-38).

Moreover, Christ had taught his disciples that they had liberty in himself: 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free... If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed' (John 8:32,36). And of course, he had confronted the Jews over the sabbath, deliberately provoking them over the issue, times without number (Luke 6:1-11; 13:10-17; John 5:1-18; 9:14, for instance). Coupled with this, the disciples would never forget the dramatic opening to Christ's ministry in his Sermon on the Mount: 'You have heard that it was said... but I say to you' (Matt. 5:21-22,27-28,31-32,33-34,38-39,43-44).

Following Pentecost, plain and detailed teaching on the fulfilment and end of the law was not required until Judaistic teachers, infiltrating the churches, led some into bondage by making them go back under the law, so that, among other

---

<sup>9</sup> See my *Sabbath Questions; Sabbath Notes; Essential; Horne*.

<sup>10</sup> It is not strictly a case of arguing from silence. I have produced evidence of the churches keeping the first day, and I am going on to show how Christ pointed the believers to the first day.

## *Christ and the First Day*

things,<sup>11</sup> they began to abandon the first day, and return to the sabbath, or add sabbath-keeping to the first day. When this happened, Paul, and others, stepped in and laid down definitive markers on the subject; in the churches at Galatia and Colosse, and possibly Rome, for instance, there was a danger of it – and Paul wrote to all these churches to get them back on to the straight path.<sup>12</sup>

So much for the preamble. Now for the evidence of the way in which Christ taught his disciples that the sabbath was gone, and that they should keep the first day as their assembly-day.

Christ was raised from the dead on the first day of the week. The resurrection, without any question, was *the* major event in the New Testament.<sup>13</sup> In saying this, I do not wish to be misunderstood. The life, death, resurrection, ascension, intercession and coming again of Christ are all of a piece. Furthermore, salvation from sin comes through the shed blood of Christ, the sacrificial death of Christ, and without his death there would be no salvation (Rom. 5:19). But the same goes for his resurrection. After all, ‘Jesus Christ our Lord... was... declared to be the Son of God with power... *by [as a result of, NASB margin] the resurrection from the dead*’ (Rom. 1:3-4). And the answer Jesus gave to the Pharisees when they demanded ‘a sign’ from him was ‘the sign of the prophet Jonah’; namely, his resurrection (Matt. 12:38-40 with Matt. 16:21). Moreover, Christ was raised for his people’s justification (Rom. 4:25).

For when Paul set out the great doctrine of justification by faith in the first five chapters of Romans, he dwelt much upon the death, the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:21-31; 4:1-25; 5:1-21). In particular: ‘For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one

---

<sup>11</sup> The other things included circumcision, dietary laws and eating habits (Acts 15:1,5,10,24,20; Gal. 2:4,11-14; 5:3, and so on).

<sup>12</sup> As above, see the following chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Check out ‘resurrection’, ‘raised’, and so on in a concordance.



## *Christ and the First Day*

man's obedience many will be made righteous' (Rom. 5:19). But he also explained that the resurrection of Christ plays a vital part in this work. Abraham believed, and through saving faith was fully justified; the righteousness of Christ was imputed to him (Rom. 4:1-22). 'Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in him *who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*, who was delivered up because of our offences, *and was raised for our justification*' (Rom. 4:23-25). See how Paul enlarged upon this in Romans 5 and onward (Rom. 5:9-10; 6:4-11; 7:4; 8:11,34). Do not miss the rising note – the 'much more... much more then... and not only that' – in this:

God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. *Much more then*, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, *much more*, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. *And not only that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Rom. 5:8-11).

I say again, the resurrection was the pivotal event in the New Testament; this is how it was regarded by the early Christians. Christ's resurrection – and the consequent and coming resurrection of all the saints – figured massively in their reckoning:

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures... he was buried, and... he *rose again* the third day according to the Scriptures... Now if [better, since] Christ is preached that he *rose* from the dead, how do some of you say that there is no *resurrection* of the dead? But if there is no *resurrection* of the dead, then Christ is not *risen*. And if Christ is not *risen*, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God... And if Christ is not *risen*, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is *risen* from the dead,

## *Christ and the First Day*

and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... (1 Cor. 15:1-58).

...that I may know him and the power of his *resurrection*... if, by any means, I may attain to the *resurrection* of the dead (Phil. 3:10-11).

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3).

See also Acts 24:15,21; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 11:19,35; 1 Peter 3:21 and many, many more passages. The early church wanted to fill the place left by Judas. What for? ‘One of these must become a witness with us of [Christ’s] *resurrection*’ (Acts 1:22). The Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost – how and why? Peter explained:

Jesus of Nazareth... whom God *raised up*... He would *raise up* the Christ to sit upon his throne, [David], foreseeing this, spoke concerning the *resurrection* of Christ, that his soul was not left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has *raised up*, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you now see and hear (Acts 2:22-36).

What I am saying is that the resurrection of Christ figured very largely in the thinking of the first believers.<sup>14</sup> And when I read the accounts of their experiences the day it happened, and subsequently, I am not at all surprised.

---

<sup>14</sup> Sadly, by going along with Christendom’s institutionalisation of the resurrection into Easter (Astarte), many believers have effectively lost the sense of the resurrection. Funerals, too, often enforce this, by highlighting the intermediate state and thereby muting, if not missing, the biblical emphasis on the resurrection. See John 11; 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess. 4, for instance. See my ‘Watershed of the Ages’ for a similar point with respect to Christmas.

## *Christ and the First Day*

The resurrection must be seen in the context of the Old Testament; this, after all, was the context for the first believers: they saw Christ's resurrection through spectacles coloured by the Old Testament. And what did they know of the resurrection from the Old Testament? Very little, in truth. Of course, it is there. It is taught, and promised and prophesied both directly and by implication (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 16:9-11; 49:15; Isa. 26:9; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 12:39; Acts 2:24-32). Nevertheless, notwithstanding Mark 12:24-27 and Luke 20:34-38, the resurrection (as with many other principles, doctrines, and, especially, old-covenant shadows – Colossians 2:17) is only dimly seen in the Old Testament. True, Christ had taught the disciples about it, and its connection with his death (Matt. 26:29,32; Mark 14:25,28, John 1:51; 2:19-22) – but they had not understood him (Matt. 16:21-23; Mark 8:31-33; 9:31-32) until it had happened and been explained to them in the light of the event (Luke 24:5-8,19-27; John 2:22). The disciples' response, therefore, when they were confronted by the staggering fact of Christ's resurrection – which followed hard on the bewildering fact of his crucifixion – was affected by this dim and ill-defined expectation of the resurrection. How did it show itself?

They simply could not believe it! The (male) disciples thought the women were mad. Mary Magdalene told the mourning and weeping disciples that the risen Christ had appeared to her, 'and when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe' (Mark 16:9-11) When the two Marys 'told these things to the apostles... their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them' (Luke 24:10-12). When the two on the Emmaus road were talking to the (unrecognised) Christ, they told him the women's story had 'astonished [them]' (Luke 24:22). And when in turn they 'went and told' their own experience 'to the rest... they did not believe them either' (Mark 16:9-13). Yes, and when Christ appeared to the gathered disciples, 'they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit' (Luke 24:37). And even

## *Christ and the First Day*

after Christ had gently chided them: ‘Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts?’, and had lovingly demonstrated that it was really himself, ‘they still did not believe for joy, and marvelled’ (Luke 24:37-43). And, of course, there was Thomas, and his now infamous doubting (John 20:24-29).<sup>15</sup>

What has all this to do with the question in hand? A great deal. The experience of Christ’s resurrection made that day the most important and memorable day in the lives of the first believers. The day of Christ’s resurrection was *the* red-letter day to them, and remained so ever after. It was their day of days. It changed their lives, literally for ever. All their sadness was removed; all their disappointed hopes reinstated and refined; all their future – their eternity – secured. Take for instance, their fears concerning the state of the believing dead – a very real and pressing source of torment unless – unless they fixed their thoughts on... on what? On Christ’s resurrection. See where Paul starts; listen to him:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if [better, since] we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus... (1 Thess. 4:13 – 5:11).

The day of Christ’s resurrection was, I say again, *the* day of days to the first believers – as it ought to be to us, of course. But it most definitely was to them.

Now the point is made in Scripture – expressly made – that it was *after* the sabbath, when the sabbath was past, on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, when Christ was raised (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1-2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:10). This fact is stressed in Scripture; it is recorded in all four Gospels. The writers were making an unmissable

---

<sup>15</sup> Thomas was a man for whom seeing is believing, and I, for one, am glad that the Spirit recorded this episode in Scripture. It shows the reality and honesty of both Scripture and the early disciples; it encourages me in my feeble faith; and we have Thomas’ glorious testimony.

## *Christ and the First Day*

point for their readers; at least, making a point they did not want them to miss! Christ appeared to several disciples at that time. Later in the day – ‘that same day’ – still the first day of the week – Christ appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13). They enjoyed rich fellowship with their risen Lord; a fellowship they came to appreciate fully, however, only after he had vanished from them. During their conversation, he had taught them the meaning of the Old Testament, the old covenant – ‘and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself’ (Luke 24:15-32, especially verse 27). After he had gone, immediately – ‘that very hour’ – they rushed back to Jerusalem where they found the disciples ‘gathered together’ (Luke 24:33).<sup>16</sup> That same evening – still the first day of the week<sup>17</sup> – Jesus came among them, spoke to them, showing them his wounds, and so on (Luke 24:36-43). Depending where the passage stops, he might have done more than that during this same evening (Luke 24:44ff; see also Mark 16:14ff). This account is repeated in John 20:19ff. The point is made – it was ‘the same day at evening... the disciples were assembled’. Christ commissioned his disciples at the same time (Luke 24:21-23).

Thomas, we know, was not there, and when told about Christ’s coming among them, he stoutly refused to believe the news on the say-so of the disciples. Christ graciously offered him a special and individual testimony when the

---

<sup>16</sup> Why were they gathered together? See Mark 16:14; John 20:19.

<sup>17</sup> This is a crucial passage for the Jewish or Roman timekeeping debate. When Christ met the disciples late on that first ‘first day’, it was by then, according to Jewish reckoning, the *second* day of the week; but for the believers it was still the *same* or *first* day. This is how John – significantly a life-long Jew before conversion – described it. It furnishes proof that Roman timekeeping had become the norm for Christians. A Jew would have described that day as the *next* day since it was after sunset. Even though John’s Gospel was written years later, this does not affect the argument. I have already noted the significance of the timekeeping.

## *Christ and the First Day*

disciples were gathered together. When? ‘After eight days’ (John 20:26). This is a Hebraism; it was the next ‘first day of the week’.<sup>18</sup> After eight days, on the eighth day, means there were seven complete days in between: ‘a week later’ (NIV); a week, please note – not ‘*about* a week later’. Christ appeared on the next first day. Why did Christ choose that day? Why were the disciples ‘again inside’ (John 20:26)?

Furthermore, all the events of another day of high significance – the day of Pentecost – took place on the first day of the week, when the saints were gathered together (Acts 2:1). Why were they gathered on the first day?

All this tells me that following the resurrection of Christ, Jewish timekeeping had very rapidly declined, if not altogether gone for the believers, that Christians assembled on the first day, and that Christ drew special attention to the day by meeting with them at that time. He fulfilled his promise to them, the promise of his presence in their gatherings (Matt. 18:20), particularly *and repeatedly* on the first day. Right from the start of the new covenant, the first day was intimately connected with Christ’s resurrection, the gatherings of his people, and the consequent outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:24,32-33). How wonderful that this all took place on the *first* day! Why should *all* of it have occurred on the first day?

And, when they came to give it a name,<sup>19</sup> what better name could have been chosen for the first day of the week, other than the Lord’s day? It is easy to see why they gave it such a Christ-honouring title. It was (is), after all, the day he was raised, the day which he honoured by his repeated appearances to his disciples, the day on which he gave his

---

<sup>18</sup> See Mark 8:31 with Matt. 16:21, and Luke 2:21 with Phil. 3:5.

<sup>19</sup> Begging the question for a moment, since Luke did not use the term ‘the Lord’s day’ in Acts 20:7, it (almost) certainly indicates that it had not yet come into use. I see nothing to be afraid of in admitting this: things were in a constant state of development throughout the New Testament. I have remarked upon this already. Was the Lord’s supper called such from its institution? The disciples were not called Christians until Antioch (Acts 11:26).

## *Christ and the First Day*

Holy Spirit to them, breathing on them on the first day of the week saying: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ (John 20:22), and then, being ‘raised up... being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you now see and hear’ (Acts 2:32-3). All this took place on the first day of the week! Surely by all this Christ was proclaiming the importance of this day in the new covenant.<sup>20</sup> If a comparison is made with the events just preceding and after Sinai – when God enforced the sabbath for the Jews – how fitting that Christ should so enforce and distinguish the special day for his church. I fail to see how those converted Jews could have missed the point; the significance of days was ingrained in their Jewish psyche; they had just celebrated the Passover; Pentecost was one of their feasts; inevitably they would have picked up the point Christ was making. Besides which, I have only spoken of what we know of Christ’s teaching as it is recorded in Scripture. As to what lengthy explanations and instructions he gave when he spoke with them for hours – who can say? I remind you, once again, reader, of Acts 1:1-3.

Take this hymn by John Berridge and Samuel Pearce:

*On this sweet morn my Lord arose,  
Triumphant o’er the grave;  
He died to vanquish all my woes,  
And lives again to save.*

*I bless his name and hail the morn,  
It is my Lord’s own day;  
And faithful souls will surely scorn  
To sleep the hours away.*

---

<sup>20</sup> We constantly convey a message without uttering a word, sometimes far more forcibly than mere words – ‘body language’. How great an impression can be given merely by a look – ‘if looks could kill’, ‘his eyes were daggers-drawn’. In saying this, I do not detract from the point I have made about Acts 1:1-3. I simply say that the fact that Christ chose the first day to meet with his disciples, and chose it repeatedly, *in itself* would have sent an unmistakable message to them.

## *Christ and the First Day*

*These are the precious, sacred hours  
On which my Lord I've seen;  
And oft, when feasting on his word,  
Delighted I have been.*

*I come, I hear, and sing, and pray;  
How sweet these days of love!  
But what a resting<sup>21</sup> shall I keep  
When I shall rest above!*

*Oh, if my soul, when death appears,  
In this sweet frame be found,  
I'll clasp my Saviour in my arms,<sup>22</sup>  
And leave this earthly ground!*

*On all thy flock thy Spirit pour,  
All saving grace convey;  
A sweet refreshing Lord's-day shower  
Will make them sing and pray.*

I have observed that in Scripture our attention is drawn specifically to the obvious point; namely, the first day of the week was *after* the sabbath (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1). Quite! I do not think I overstretch the argument when I say that, just as the gospel came after the law (John 1:17), and Christ came after Moses (John 1:17) and after John the Baptist (Mark 1:1-15), so the Lord's day came after the sabbath. The parallels are strong, very strong. In the experience of the early Jewish-believers, the sabbath disappeared at once – in both day and name – and the first day appeared. At the very least, the two days were – are – different: the first day came after the sabbath, the seventh, and their purposes were radically different. Thus, the first day should never be called the sabbath. The early churches never called it such, never; the confusion would have been intolerable. Of far greater importance – and abiding importance for us today – they

---

<sup>21</sup> Berridge and Pearce had 'sabbath'. The thought is 'rest'. 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord... that they may rest from their labours' (Rev. 14:13; see also Rev. 6:11; see also the AV (KJV) for *anesis* in 2 Thess. 1:7).

<sup>22</sup> Jesus clasps his people in *his* arms!



## *Christ and the First Day*

knew the first day was a new day for the new age. They would keep this first day, not in the old style or with the old trappings, not trying to put new wine in old wineskins (Matt. 9:17), but in newness of life.<sup>23</sup> To grasp the radical nature of the change which Christ introduced by his resurrection and his appearances, try to put yourself, reader, in the sandals of a converted Jew who was present on those ‘first days’ at the start of the new age. I do not think you would have missed the point of what was going on.

Such is the evidence for the use of the Lord’s day, the first day of the week. Many writers, of course, have made the same points as I have, and have come to similar conclusions.

I admit once more that I have not *proved* the link between the resurrection and the Lord’s day. And I am only too well aware that care and caution are needed. Even so, speaking for myself, the evidence is strong enough for me to talk of ‘the Lord’s day’ as the day of assembly meeting, and to convince me that Christ set his stamp upon the day by his example and teaching in between his resurrection and Pentecost. Such is my ‘personal statement’.

---

<sup>23</sup> Compare 1 Cor. 5:8.