

LORD'S DAY

Lord's day observance in weekly commemoration of Jesus' [resurrection](#) on "the first day of the week" began at an early point in the apostolic age and in the post-apostolic age involved transfer of Mosaic [law](#) to new [covenant](#) structures and norms.

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1. Introduction.

Discussion of the Lord's day treats the development leading to second-century and later Sunday [worship](#) in relation to the Jewish sabbath. Was there a transfer during the apostolic age wherein a [creation ordinance](#), involving the principle of one day in seven, was shifted along with the fourth "word" of the [Decalogue](#) to the Lord's day (e.g., Beckwith and Stott; Murray)? Or did a shift from sabbath to Sunday begin only in the second century in the context of increasing anti-[Judaism](#) in the [church](#) and in direct contravention of the practice and teaching of the [Lord](#) and his [apostles](#), who had upheld sabbath observance (Bacchiocchi; Strand)? Or did Lord's day observance arise during the apostolic age alongside sabbath observance and essentially independently from it, while the Mosaic sabbath was seen to find its fulfillment in the work of [Christ](#) broadly conceived (Carson)? The discussion thus involves the interrelationship of both historical and theological issues. Recent study has tended to highlight the sparsity and ambiguity of the earlier historical evidence, and this article will devote most of its space to that side of the question, followed by a briefer treatment of related theological issues.

2. Linguistic Considerations.

The [adjective](#) *kyriakos* first appears in Greek literature in [1 Corinthians 11:20](#) and elsewhere in the NT only in [Revelation 1:10](#). Nor is it used in non-Christian Jewish literature. In secular Greek, where the word begins to appear A.D. 68, after but independent of Paul's usage, it almost always refers to the [emperor](#) and has the sense of "belonging to the emperor" or "imperial."

Among second-century Christian writers the [phrase](#) *kyriakē hēmera* or *kyriakē* alone means "the Lord's day" in the following passages: [Didache](#) 14.1; [Ignatius Magnesians](#) 9.1; *Gospel of Peter* 35, 50; Dionysius of Corinth ([Eusebius Hist. Eccl.](#) 4.23.11 [PG 20.388C]); *Epistula Apostolorum* 18 ([Coptic](#)); *Acts of Peter (Actus Vercellenses* 29–30); *Acts of Paul*; Melito of Sardis ([Eusebius Hist. Eccl.](#) 4.26.2 [PG 20.389A]); [Irenaeus](#) Fragment 7 (PG 7.1233); and Valentinian ([Clement of Alexandria Excerpts from Theodotus](#) 63 [PG 9.689B]). In [Clement of Alexandria](#) the [phrase](#) *kyriakē hēmera* occurs twice: *Stromateis* 5.14 (PG 9.161A) and 7.12 (PG 9.504C). In addition *kyriakos* is used several times in other

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connections. For further linguistic considerations see LSJ 1013; MM 364; BAGD 458; PGL 785–86; Louw-Nida, 1:139; Bietenhard, 518; Fitzmyer, 331; Foerster; Spicq; Stott *NIDNTT* 3:411–12.

Examination of usage leads to the conclusion that “in *meaning* the word *kyriakos* is simply synonymous with (*tou*) *kyriou* in all cases where (*tou*) *kyriou* is used adjectivally with a noun, with the exception of the [objective genitive](#)” (Bauckham, 224); *kyriakos* and (*tou*) *kyriou* seem to be interchangeable. The sparse usage of the [adjective](#) in the NT (twice) corresponds to contemporary usage in general and is probably not due to any special meaning. The expression “Lord’s day” was not likely in use when 1 Corinthians and [Acts](#) were written, so that its absence in those works does not count as evidence against any custom. The use of the [adjective](#) *kyriakos* in this particular expression does become relatively common, however, probably due to the fact that *hēmera (tou) kyriou* was already a technical expression for the [eschatological Day of the Lord](#) (see [Day of the Lord](#)). There is also no linguistic support for the thesis (Rordorf 1968) that the use of the same [adjective](#) in [1 Corinthians 11:20](#) and [Revelation 1:10](#) indicates that the Lord’s day grew out of the Lord’s [Supper](#). The terminological correlation could have been noted already in the first century, but the thesis that the name of the day grew out of the name of the meal is unproven (Bauckham, 226–27, 233–36).

3. Historical Considerations.

It will be taken for granted that many Christians would have kept sabbath throughout the apostolic period and beyond (e.g., Bacchiocchi, 132–64); Jesus himself had done so, and Easter was observed annually in connection with the Passover (Jeremias, 900–904). The question is not whether Christianity created a rival “feast” but whether there is any evidence for a practice, within the apostolic period, of meeting to “break bread” on the first day of each week due to the fact that the [Messiah’s resurrection](#) had occurred on that day.

3.1. [1 Corinthians 16:2](#). At a fairly early date Paul directs the Corinthians to provide for his collection campaign by following a rule that he had also established for the churches in Galatia, that is, to lay up an amount of money weekly, specifically on “the first day of the week” ([1 Cor 16:2](#)). The traditional approach to the passage has been to assume that the last detail has no rationale unless Paul is assuming that this day was already a special occasion for the [church](#). The chief objection to this interpretation has been that Paul directs the Corinthians to lay up funds privately. No regular gathering or common coffer (cf. [Acts 4:34–5:2](#)) in connection with an assembly is mentioned, let alone commanded.

This point can nonetheless be made to prove too much if it is made to suggest that the [church](#) did not meet on that day. The fact remains that Paul specifies “the first day of the week” and takes for granted that the choice of this particular day would have made sense to the Corinthians (as it also had to the churches in Galatia). Did Paul pick that day at random, simply wanting to encourage regular giving? Possibly. Did he select it due to budgetary principles? Perhaps, though the argument is at best conjecture and possibly special pleading (nor is there evidence that the first day was pay day). If we have

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not excluded on dogmatic grounds the possibility of a regular assembly on the day in question, then some such custom remains the most likely explanation.

First, it should not be overlooked that the [phrase](#) “the first day of the week” occurs in the NT outside of [1 Corinthians 16:2](#) and [Acts 20:7](#) only in the [resurrection](#) narratives ([Mk 16:2](#); [Mt 28:1](#); [Lk 24:1](#); [Jn 20:1, 19](#); in the LXX only the title to [Ps 23 \[24\]](#)) and that in spite of the passion prediction concerning the “third day.” Given that the planetary week was in general use at the time (Bacchiocchi, 238–51), it is reasonable to expect that Paul’s casual usage of the Jewish name of the day with a predominantly Gentile audience has behind it some further explanation. We may assume what is probable ([1 Cor 11:23–26](#); [15:1–8](#), though Paul alludes to the “third day”), namely, that this [church](#) has in some fashion been exposed to the narrative traditions that would later with one voice identify the day of the [resurrection](#) and appearances as the “first day of the week” (and John does so emphatically; see 3.4 below). We may also note the usage (and nonusage) of the expression in the literary remains of apostolic Christianity and observe the contextual proximity of [1 Corinthians 16:1–4](#) to the discussion of the [resurrection](#) in the previous chapter (although no thematic link is demanded). In view of the absence of any other explanation for the selection of this day, it is no matter of [eisegesis](#) to find hints of “[resurrection](#) day” in Paul’s use of the expression in [1 Corinthians 16:2](#).

Second, Paul invested this collection with far-reaching theological significance (e.g., [Rom 15:27](#)). Such a *diakonia tēs leitourgias* (ministry of service; [2 Cor 9:12](#); cf. [Rom 15:27](#)) and a gathering for celebration of the [Eucharist](#) would presumably be mutually augmentative and fittingly joined on the day of the [resurrection](#), even if they did not transpire at the same time on that day. Even if the [church](#) met other days as well it remains suggestive that Paul singled out this day for the purposes of personal participation (weekly) in a profoundly spiritual act. It therefore seems better to conclude that Christians did customarily meet on the “first day of the week” and to infer that there is a good [reason](#) for the private nature of the collection than to assume that the private nature of the collection excludes any meeting. Even so, at best the text only assumes a custom of meeting on the first day, and the directions regarding the collection would seem to highlight that day’s observance; there is no imperative stated or assumed.

3.2. [Luke 24:1](#). In his account of the [resurrection](#) Luke records the appearance of Jesus to two disciples on the way to Emmaus ([Lk 24:13–35](#)), noting that this took place on the same day as the [resurrection](#) ([Lk 24:13](#)), that is, “on the first day of the week” ([Lk 24:1](#)). Upon arriving at the village, Luke reports, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them ([Lk 24:30](#)). The wording is quite similar to that of [Luke 22:19](#), and we may with some confidence take this as an allusion to the Last Supper. Whether we have here an account of the founding of first-day observance cannot be demonstrated. Yet from the standpoint of Luke’s Gospel we have a celebration of the Lord’s Supper on the day of the [resurrection](#) (the two are not unrelated), specifically, “on the first day of the week.” No custom is indicated, nor is there any basis for finding here details of eucharistic [liturgy](#). But the memory of Lord’s Supper observance on that particular “first day of the week” is fixed in [tradition](#).

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3.3. [Acts 20:7](#). This text contains a remarkable convergence of three suggestive ideas: the expression “the first day of the week”; a “gathering” for the purpose of “breaking bread”; a story revolving around a [resurrection](#). In view of the fact that the Jewish expression “the first day of the week” is used by the Gentile author and that it is used only in [Luke 24:1](#) and [Acts 20:7](#) (concerning a [Gentile church](#)), both times associated with the breaking of bread, there might be yet more [justification](#) for sensing here an allusion to Jesus’ [resurrection](#) in the use of this expression. This is all the more likely in view of a key motif of the story for which Paul’s [discourse](#) and the burning lamps are stage props: the “[resurrection](#)” of the sleepy lad. The expression “to break bread” is not a typical Jewish expression for a meal (versus “to eat bread”) but is more likely a peculiar way of referring to the Lord’s Supper, in this case probably combined with an actual meal. This likelihood is increased by the combination of “to break bread” with “gathering” (cf. [1 Cor 11:20, 24](#); *Did.* 14.1; Ign. Eph. 20.2). We have to do, then, with a formal gathering of the [church](#) on the first day of the week, the stated purpose of which is to celebrate the Lord’s Supper rather than to say farewell to Paul.

Though it is no longer clear whether the evening in question would have fallen on Saturday (after sabbath, by Jewish reckoning) or Sunday (by Roman reckoning), the issue is immaterial since practice may have varied; from Luke’s point of view the meeting took place on “the first day of the week.” A journey on Sunday would have given no offense since it was not a Christian sabbath, but a Roman reckoning is more likely (see [Acts 3:1](#); further Turner, 129–30), and the delay of the meal until early Monday morning in spite of the stated purpose ([Acts 20:7](#)) is a merely circumstantial delay.

All of this does not establish that there was a weekly pattern of holding a special meeting on Sunday. In favor of such a custom it can be noted that as Luke phrases it the gathering is not for the purpose of giving Paul an opportunity to speak but for the purpose of “breaking bread.” Though the timing of the meeting could have been occasioned by Paul’s imminent departure, Luke does not say that. Rather, he mentions that Paul was going to be leaving the next day by way of explaining the [discourse](#), especially its length (its content is of no interest). It is also improbable that Luke mentions which day of the week it was merely by way of indicating chronology, as in that case he leaves too many gaps. Without any other satisfactory explanation either for mentioning that it was the first day of the week (beyond the [resurrection](#) of the lad, which is itself suggestive of a particular regard for that day) or for stating what the purpose of the gathering was, we are left with the likelihood that the clause (“we gathered together to break bread”) is the natural accompaniment to the prepositional [phrase](#) (“on the first day of the week”); in other words there is an assumed and close relationship between them. The suggestion is strong that this type of gathering was customary on that particular day.

Again there is no imperative, nor does this look like this is intended to be a normative [model](#). We cannot say how representative this account is of what was practiced at the time by other churches in other areas. It does indicate, however, the existence of a custom in Troas and presumably among Luke’s intended readers (see [Worship](#)).

3.4. [John 20:1, 19](#). Twice John underlines the day of the week on which Christ arose and appeared (“the first day of the week”; [Jn 20:1, 19](#)). [John 20:19](#), in which Jesus appears to his gathered disciples, is Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

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especially emphatic insofar as the [phrase](#) “the first day of the week” follows a demonstrative [pronoun](#) pointing back to [John 20:1](#). Is it merely coincidental that the next appearance of Jesus in the midst of his gathered disciples is exactly one week later ([Jn 20:26](#)), that is, on the first day of the week? This must be phrased as a question, for the matter is left unclear, but the suggestion is very strong. We need only suppose that “the first day of the week” had already come to carry a special meaning in the gatherings of the John’s churches to appreciate how this passage would have resonated with them.

3.5. [Revelation 1:10](#). The cause of our uncertainty in this passage, as it will be in the early postapostolic period, is that the writers take for granted that the readers know what the [referent](#) is while the form of the statement requires only the idea of a specified day. A day does not, however, need to be twenty-four hours long, and it can be specified in different ways: by calendar (weekly, monthly, etc.) or some other established reference point (e.g., an expected event). The [adjective](#) in [Revelation 1:10](#) narrows the options, but only to a point. The three primary alternatives (leaving aside the sabbath) are the eschatological [Day of the Lord](#), Easter, and the weekly meeting on the first day of the week, or Sunday.

The difficulty that any argument runs into is that the relevant passages from the first through the early second century must be treated as mutually corroborative precisely because of their ambiguity. The thesis that [Revelation 1:10](#) refers to Easter gains its force from arguing that the NT evidence we have already surveyed does not indicate the existence of first-day observance prior to [Revelation 1:10](#) and that the early- second-century evidence (esp. *Did.* 14.1 and Ign. Magn. 9.1) refers to an annual observance. On the contrary, we have shown it is likely that weekly observance was already a custom before Revelation (see [Revelation, Book of](#)) was written. The general argument that Easter observance preceded and precipitated Sunday observance is problematic, and [Didache](#) and [Ignatius](#) probably also refer not to Easter but to Sunday (Bauckham, 227–31). This means that only a short while before [Ignatius](#) makes mention of weekly observance under the name “Lord’s day” and in the same geographical area (the province of Asia), John uses the same expression in [Revelation 1:10](#).

Might not John’s reference be to the [Day of the Lord](#)? G. W. H. Lampe cites one instance in which the [adjective](#) refers to the “last day” ([Origen Comm. Joh.](#) 10.35), but it may not be an equivalent expression for “the [Day of the Lord](#)” (Stott 1965, 71) and is in any event the exception that proves the rule. There are many ways of referring to the [Day of the Lord](#), and [Revelation 1:10](#) may be one more. But given that the semantic content of the [phrase](#) would be the same, whether it is formed with the [adjective](#) or the [genitive](#), there is no apparent [reason](#) for John to depart from the standard form. This manner of expression would become all the more confusing if the same form of words had already come into use in Asia as a name for the first day, as [Didache](#) and [Ignatius](#) might indicate. It is also to be observed that the content of Revelation is not concerned exclusively with the [Day of the Lord](#) ([Rev 1:1–3:22](#); [Rev 21–22](#)), and the standpoint of the [vision](#) does not appear to be consistently from that “day.” Thus neither the word or [phrase](#) nor the context of Revelation would indicate to the reader that the [Day of the Lord](#) is in view.

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There may be no [exegesis](#) without presuppositions, but a *prima facie* reading of [Revelation 1:9–10](#) suggests that we are being told the historical where and when of John’s vision regarding the seven churches. Patmos does not appear to be a [metaphor](#) for an eschatological reality, and we do not expect the Lord’s day to be mentioned in that connection either. Given the considerations already raised against the other alternatives, particularly in view of the probable preexistence of first-day observance (possibly even under the name of “Lord’s day”), a reference to the first day of the week is most likely.

Why did the day come to be called the “Lord’s day”? The thesis that the name of the day stemmed from the name of the [Eucharist](#) (Rordorf 1968) is possible but unproven. The suggestion that the name was chosen in conscious contrast to the use of *sebastē* as a name for the monthly “emperor’s day” and that the regular (weekly) observance of the day was due to the same (Deissmann, 357–61; Charles, 1:22–23) is plausible but essentially conjectural. That the [adjective](#) was chosen because the alternative phrasing ([genitive](#) of the noun, [kyrios](#)) was already a technical expression when used with “day” is likely but leaves unexplained why this day should be characterized as “the Lord’s.” A general allusion to the decisive victory won by the Lord of lords on the first day of the week with a view to its eschatological and final achievement is most probable in the context of Revelation and is suggestive as a setting for the reception of the vision. Outside of that context there are any number of possible connotations.

3.6. Postapostolic Literature.

3.6.1. Didache 14.1. The [Didache](#) is notoriously difficult to date, not least because it seems to have grown over time, and [Didache](#) 14.1-3 appears to some scholars to be an intrusion into the flow of community instructions. Most, however, are probably inclined to date some form of the document around or just before the turn of the century and to locate it in Syria or Syro-Palestine. The expression used in [Didache](#) 14.1 is difficult: *kata kyriakēn de kyriou* (according to the Lord’s [?] of the Lord). It has been taken as equivalent to the Jewish “Sabbath of the Lord” (Clemens, 708), as the Lord’s teaching, as Easter and as the Lord’s day (i.e., Sunday). Elsewhere when the noun is implied it is “day,” and this is how the *Apostolic Constitutions* (7.30.1; c. 380) interprets [Didache](#). There are serious problems with the argument for an Easter allusion (Bauckham, 230–31), and the context does not indicate that these are anything other than ordinary meetings centering in the breaking of bread. “Lord’s day” is the likely alternative of choice. There is no hint of sabbath [theology](#) here.

3.6.2. Ignatius Magnesians 9.1 (c. 100–110). The expression used (following the Latin text with most: *mēketi sabbatizantes alla kata kyriakēn zōntes*; “no longer sabbatizing but living according to the Lord’s [day]”) is again opaque, and it is not clear whether it is a comment on OT [prophets](#) or [Jewish Christians](#) (Schoedel, 123, favors the latter; see [Jewish Christianity](#)). The concern is with ways of life (*kata*) so that it is not possible to be sure, but an allusion to weekly Lord’s day observance gets the nod over annual observance in view of the parallel with what is probably centered in weekly sabbath observance (Bauckham, 228–29). This would be confirmed if it could be shown that the choice of the verb (*aneteilen*; “arose”), more often associated with the rising of the sun than with the [resurrection](#), was a play on the name *Sunday*. The text may oppose and so give evidence of Gentile sabbath observance, but it is also possible that the sabbath is introduced simply to make a point. It is also possible that [Ignatius](#)

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knew and was partially dependent on [Didache](#) 14.1 (Jefford). If so this would confirm not only an earlier date for [Didache](#) 14.1 but also that the two passages have the same idea in mind. It should be noted that observance of the day is connected to the [resurrection](#). Again there is no trace of transfer [theology](#), and in this case sabbath observance seems to be universally excluded.

As for the remaining usages of *kyriakos* noted above, *Gospel of Peter* 35 and 50 (Syria; mid-second century) cannot be definitely construed as allusions to Sunday observance, and the title to [Melito](#) of Sardis's work provides little information, but the other instances are clearer in their reference to Sunday. To these can be added Pliny's letter to Trajan (c. 112; Bithynia in Asia Minor), which refers to meetings of Christians on an appointed day (*stato die*) in both morning and evening (Pliny *Ep.* 10.96). Pliny gives no reference point by which we can fix the "appointed day" (it need not have been the same day each week), but taken together with the other evidence of regular meetings in that geographical area it is reasonable to suppose that the reference is to Sunday. Certainly *Barnabas* 15.9 (c. 130–35, possibly earlier; [provenance](#) uncertain) uses the [phrase](#) "eighth day" to refer to Sunday. His comment grounds the significance of the day in the [resurrection](#) and seems to assume that the day's observance is a longstanding custom. Like [Ignatius](#), *Barnabas* desires to exclude sabbath observance entirely, yet without transferring the sabbath to Sunday. Finally [Justin Martyr](#) (c. 100–165) not only makes definite mention of Sunday but also provides details of the day's activities (*Apol.* 1 67; see [Worship](#)).

3.7. Conclusions and Further Observations. The evidence for or against a weekly commemoration of the [resurrection](#) in the apostolic age is ambiguous, especially when each passage is examined in isolation. Yet one hypothesis does fit comfortably over all the data and for that [reason](#) is to be favored. From a very early point, at least some believers recognized the "first day of the week" as a special day for the celebration of the [Eucharist](#). The [resurrection](#) of [Messiah](#), the [Son](#) of God, does not happen often and would itself be sufficient cause for the establishment of a novel, Jewish custom. In a Jewish setting a weekly rhythm is natural, all the more so among believers who may not have anticipated a long delay before their Lord's return.

We cannot say that within the apostolic period this practice was universally recognized or that it was uniform with respect to how the day was reckoned, by Jewish or Roman calculation. It did not necessarily exclude gatherings on other days of the week and it existed peacefully alongside sabbath observance for many Christians (see the analogous practice of [Acts 2:46](#)). There is no indication in the NT evidence that the day displaced or rivaled the sabbath, that it was a day of rest, that it had anything to do with the Fourth Commandment or that it involved any sort of transfer [theology](#). If the NT evidence for it gives any explanation for the fact of the day's observance and of its significance, it is in the [resurrection](#).

By the turn of the first century it can be taken for granted not only that the weekly observance of Jesus' [resurrection](#) is customary but even that it can be referred to intelligibly in shorthand fashion ([adjective](#) only) as the Lord's (day). The early postapostolic literature also confirms that the absence of evidence for a transfer [theology](#) in the NT is not accidental. There is not only a lack of evidence for connecting the Lord's day to the OT sabbath command, but also there is evidence against it (e.g., in the Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

fact that the Lord's day was not a day of rest; see below). The tendency visible in [Ignatius](#) and *Barnabas* to oppose the Jewish and Christian days has been put in its proper perspective when viewed as a facet of the "partings of the ways" of [Judaism](#) and Christianity (Bacchiocchi; see [Christianity and Judaism](#)), but it must be stressed that there is no evidence for an anti-[Judaism](#) motive behind Lord's day observance in the NT itself, and it would be a serious mistake to read that type of opposition into the apostolic period. In any event the Fathers' polemic leaves no room for the thesis that they construed Sunday as the Christian sabbath.

As to how the day was observed, we have nothing solid to go on in the NT beyond the rather sure point that the celebration of the [Eucharist](#) was central. [Acts 20:7–36](#), with its evening meeting, is no sure guide to what was universally customary (nor is it clear whether in that case it was the evening following sabbath or Sunday evening), and the [resurrection](#) narratives do not clearly point to an evening meeting. During the second century, however, the picture gains detail. The [Didache](#) alludes to a (public?) rite of [confession](#) preceding the [Eucharist](#). Pliny's letter indicates that in his area (c. 112) believers met before dawn, probably on Sunday, to sing a hymn and take an oath and then come together again in the evening for a meal. Following Trajan's edict outlawing dinners of unlicensed clubs the evening meeting was eliminated. [Justin Martyr's](#) account (*Apol. I* 65–67) supplies further details of the service, including (in this order) reading of Scripture, instruction and exhortation, rising for [prayer](#) (versus remaining seated as on other days; cf. [Tertullian De Orat.](#) 23; [canon 20](#) of the [Council of Nicea](#)), celebration of the [Eucharist](#) and a collection for the needy. [Tertullian](#) (c. 160–225) is the first on record to suggest that business be deferred so as to enhance [worship](#) (*De Orat.* 23), but otherwise Sunday was a work day, and cessation from other activities on that day was not widespread until about the third century (Cyprian *Ep.* 64.4). Even then there is no connection with the fourth Commandment (on the Fourth Commandment and the sabbath rest in postapostolic Christianity see Bauckham, 252–87), and the point is to clear more time for [worship](#). Only with [Constantine's](#) edict in 321 does Sunday, the "venerable day of the sun," become an official day of rest (at least partially). Ambrose (*Ps.* 47) and [Chrysostom](#) (*Gen. Hom.* 10.7) firmly attached the rest of Sunday to the Fourth commandment (versus the imperial edict), and following the fourth century there is a steady move toward identifying the sabbath with Sunday.

The different names of the day—first day of the week; Lord's day; eighth day (e.g., Barn. 15.8-9; [Justin Martyr](#) Dial. Tryph. 41.4; 138.1; [Origen](#) *Selec. Ps.* 118.164 [PG 12.1624] Ambrose *Exp. Ev. Luc.* 5.49 [PL 15.1735]; *Abr.* 2.11 [PL 14.494]); Sunday—are briefly discussed by Rordorf (1982).

4. Theological Considerations.

Thorough treatment of this matter is beyond the scope of this summary article. A few words are in order, however, if only as an indication of a necessary part of the discussion of our [topic](#).

In three passages Paul makes specific comments that transfer Mosaic sabbath observance from the realm of law to that of [adiaphora](#) ("matters of indifference") that positively oppose the legal imposition of the sabbath on believers of any ethnic background and that by extension also oppose investing Lord's day observance with normative force. The meaning of these passages is debated, and they must be

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discussed in the broader context of the law-[gospel](#) discussion, but we will only mention them. The upshot of [Galatians 4:8–11](#) in its context is that sabbath observance is not to be imposed on any believer in the name of the Mosaic law, nor is it to be taken up on legal grounds as a promise of anything beyond that which already belongs to believers in Christ. To violate this rule is in Paul's argument to make Christ's [death](#) purposeless ([Gal 2:21](#)). [Romans 14:5–6](#) gives passing notice to the sabbath issue but makes evident that observance of days, sabbath and Lord's day included, is now a matter of [conscience](#) rather than law. Nor is it possible to reconcile a one-in-seven principle with [Romans 14:5–6](#), at least when it is grounded in law. Legal imposition of sabbath observance as a condition of spirituality is likewise assumed to be inappropriate in [Colossians 2:16](#), for the sabbath was properly a shadow of the eschatological reality that is Christ (cf. Dunn, 171–87, 23–35).

None of these comments proscribes observance of days, and such observance can be a manifestation of either "weak" or "strong" [faith](#). Yet it is not possible against that background to find any grounds for treating the Mosaic sabbath as a continuing legal requirement for Christians. Taken together with the historical evidence, it is difficult to find any basis for transferring the legal force and theological content of the sabbath to the Lord's day. There is certainly no positive evidence for such a transfer or even for a new holy day as such. At the same time these comments of Paul comport with both the historical decline of the sabbath and the initially low profile of Lord's day observance.

Does the NT indicate, then, that the sabbath, of so much theological import in the OT, was only a cul-de-sac? That, robbed of its covenantal-legal force, it was destined merely to come to a close, having been effectively replaced by something unrelated to it? To the contrary, the NT indicates that the sabbath followed its own channel and found its goal in Christ's redemptive work. Here is where [John 5:17](#) should be discussed (cf. also [Jn 7:23](#)), as also [Colossians 2:16](#), to which we have already referred, and [Matthew 11:28–12:14](#). It is less evident that controversy over sabbath observance gave any impetus to that treatment of the [topic](#) in [Hebrews 3:7–4:11](#) (Laansma), yet there at least we are pointed to the ultimate goal of the [creation](#) sabbath (here an exclusively future *Heilsgut*) and are thus reminded that the sabbath was by no means a cul-de-sac.

It is true to the NT to say that the Mosaic sabbath as a legal and weekly matter was a temporary symbol of a more fundamental and comprehensive [salvation](#), epitomized by and grounded in God's own [creation](#) sabbath, and brought to fulfillment (in already-not yet fashion) in Christ's redemptive work. Believers are indeed to "keep sabbath," no longer by observance of a day of the week but now by the upholding of that to which it pointed: the [gospel](#) of the [cross](#). Along independent lines the Lord's day emerges as a nonmandatory but increasingly revered custom by which the central import of the cross is commemorated and its final realization anticipated. It thus augments that which was ordained, the Lord's Supper.

The label used in [Revelation 1:10](#) suggests an underlying, profound regard for what that day of the week symbolically represented and what it would presently come to represent. That in itself, to the extent that it was appreciated, would fill that day with significance and lift it above the others in the

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hearts of many believers. Yet that this label suggested that the day as such had been claimed by the Lord for religious observance is probably outside of Revelation's horizons.

See also [Lord](#); [Lord's Supper, Love Feast](#); [Resurrection](#); [Worship and Liturgy](#).

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