

Signs of The Times--November 25, 1886

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Why Should Sunday Be Kept?

p. 1, Para. 1, [WHYSUNDY].

What reason does the Scripture present for the keeping of the first day of the week? Does the word of God present any reason at all for so doing? Does the Scripture say that anybody should keep it holy? Does the Scripture say that it ought to be kept? Does the word of the Lord say of this thing, "Happy are ye if ye do it"? Does the Bible say any one of these things in regard to the first day of the week? Is there in the word of God a command or any direction that anybody should keep the first day of the week for any cause whatever? If there is any such command, it ought to be easy enough to point it out. If there be any reason given, it ought to be readily referred to. p. 1, Para. 2, [WHYSUNDY].

For keeping the seventh day, there is a plain, direct commandment from the Creator of all,--a commandment spoken with his own voice and written with his own finger. To that commandment the Lord attached a reason why the seventh day should be kept,--a reason that sanctions the obligation to keep the seventh day, and cannot be made to sanction the observance of any other day. The fourth commandment says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." If any one should ask which day is the Sabbath, the commandment plainly answers the question: "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God." The commandment also says, "In it [the seventh day] thou shalt not do any work." If any one should ask why, the commandment again gives a complete answer: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore [for this reason] the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it." For the keeping of the seventh day as the Sabbath of the Lord, therefore, the Lord has not only given a plain, direct commandment, but he has also given a reason why the seventh day is the Sabbath, how it became the Sabbath, and why it should be kept so. That is, the Lord has not only given a reason for keeping the commandment, but he has given a reason for the existence of the commandment. p. 1, Para. 3, [WHYSUNDY].

How can the first day of the week show any one of these

things in behalf of the claim that it should be kept holy? Is there a commandment to keep it holy? Is it holy at all? If it is where is the record that God hallowed it? What reason has he given for hallowing it? Most assuredly, if the first day of the week lacks these things it lacks every element essential to its obligation, and there rests upon men no moral nor religious duty whatever to keep it. A proper question therefore is, What saith the Scripture about the first day of the week? p. 1, Para. 4, [WHYSUNDY].

1. "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." Matt. 28:1. Here all that is said is, that two women went to the sepulchre, on the first day of the week. Well, what reason for keeping the first day of the week lies in that fact? None at all. 2. "And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun." Mark 16:1,2. Can anybody tell what there is about this text that shows that the first day of the week is the Sabbath? How can the first day of the week be the Sabbath, and yet the Sabbath be past before the first day of the week begins? For it matters not how early the first day of the week may begin, even "very early," yet the Sabbath is past. 3. "Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they [the women who came from Galilee] came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them." Luke 24:1. 4. "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre." John 20:1. p. 1, Para. 5, [WHYSUNDY].

Notice that these four statements--one by each of the Gospel writers--are not four records of four distinct things, but four distinct records of the same thing, and of the same time, even the same hour. Each one tells what occurred in the morning of a certain first day of the week, and the only fact stated in all four of the records, about the first day of the week, is that certain women came to the sepulchre very early in the morning. Then what is there in all this upon which to base any reason for keeping the first day of the week? Just nothing at all. p. 1, Para. 6, [WHYSUNDY].

In the Gospels there is mention made of the first day of the week, only twice more. These are in Mark and John. And the record in John and the close of the record in Mark again speak of the same time precisely, only it is in the evening, whereas the other was in the morning of that same first day of the week. p. 1, Para. 7, [WHYSUNDY].

5. Here is Mark's record: "Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. And she went and told them that she had been with him, as they mourned and wept. And they, when they had heard that he was alive, and had been seen of her, believed not. After that he appeared in another form unto two of them [Luke 24:13-48], as they walked, and went into the country. And they went and told it unto the residue; neither believed they them. Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." Mark 16:9-14. p. 1, Para. 8, [WHYSUNDY].

6. Of this same time John says: "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." John 20:19,20. p. 1, Para. 9, [WHYSUNDY].

Here, then, are all the instances in which the term "first day of the week" is used in the Gospels, and the manifest story is simply this: When the Sabbath was past, the women came to the sepulchre very early in the morning on the first day of the week, and found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre, and Jesus risen. Then Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, and she went and told the disciples that Jesus was risen, and they "believed not." Then Jesus appeared to two of the disciples themselves as they went into the country, and they went and told it to the others, who yet believed not. Then Jesus appeared to all the company together and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart because they had not believed them which had seen him after he was risen, he showed them his hands and his side, and said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see... Have ye here any

meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them." Luke 24:39-43. p. 1, Para. 10, [WHYSUNDY].

Now take this whole narrative from beginning to end and where is there a word in it that conveys any idea that anybody ever kept the first day of the week, or that it ever should be kept as the Sabbath or for any other sacred or religious purpose whatever? Just nowhere at all. The Scriptures throughout show that the purpose of the repeated appearances of Jesus was not to institute a new Sabbath, for there is nothing at all said about it, but to convince his disciples that he really was risen, and was alive again, that they might be witnesses to the fact. The words above quoted show this, but Thomas was not there with the others, and he still did not believe, and so at another time, "after eight days," Thomas was with them, and Jesus came again for the express purpose of convincing him, for he simply said to the company, "Peace unto you," and then spoke directly to Thomas, saying: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." John 20:24-27. p. 1, Para. 11, [WHYSUNDY].

This is made positive by the words of Peter: "Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead." Acts 10:40,41. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." Acts 2:32. And that evening of the day of his resurrection, when he said to the eleven to handle him and see that it was he, and when he ate the piece of broiled fish and of an honeycomb, he said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:... and ye are witnesses of these things." Luke 24: 46-48. Once more, Peter said, Ye "killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." Acts 3:15. p. 1, Para. 12, [WHYSUNDY].

They were witnesses that Christ was risen from the dead because a living Saviour, and faith in a living Saviour alone, could be preached. How did they become such witnesses? Christ showed himself to them, and "did eat and drink with them after he rose from the dead." Then what was the purpose of his appearances on this first day of the week mentioned in the four Gospels, and his appearance to

Thomas afterward? To give them "infallible proofs" that he was "alive after his passion." Acts 1:3. Then where does the first-day-of-the-week Sabbath come in? Nowhere. In these texts, in the four Gospels, which speak of the first day of the week where is there conveyed any idea that that day shall be kept as the Sabbath? Nowhere. The other two places where the first day of the week is mentioned will be noticed next. p. 1, Para. 13, [WHYSUNDY].

Having examined all the places in the Gospels where the first day of the week is mentioned, and found no sign of a reason for the keeping of it with any kind or degree of sacredness, we now take up the only other instances in the New Testament where the day is named. The first of these is in Acts 20:7, and that we may discuss it with the best advantage to the reader we copy the whole connection:--"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow and continued his speech until midnight. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. And there sat in a window a young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed." Verses 7-11. p. 1, Para. 14, [WHYSUNDY].

Upon the face of this whole narrative it is evident that this meeting was at night. Let us put together several of the statements: p. 1, Para. 15, [WHYSUNDY].

(1) "Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together. . . there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together." p. 1, Para. 16, [WHYSUNDY].

(2) "Paul preached unto them. . . and continued his speech until midnight." p. 1, Para. 17, [WHYSUNDY].

(3) At midnight Eutychus fell out of the window, and Paul went down and brought him up, and then he took bread and ate, therefore we may read, "The disciples came together to break bread," and after midnight the bread was broken. p. 1, Para. 18, [WHYSUNDY].

(4) After that Paul "talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed." Therefore we may read: p. 1, Para. 19, [WHYSUNDY].

(5) Upon the first day of the week, the disciples came together, and there were many lights where they were gathered together. They came together to break bread, and after midnight the bread was broken. Paul preached unto them until midnight, and even till the break of day. When the disciples came together, Paul was ready to depart on the morrow, and when he had talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. There can be no room for any reasonable doubt that the meeting referred to in Acts 20:7 was wholly a night meeting, and not only that but that it was an all-night meeting. p. 1, Para. 20, [WHYSUNDY].

This meeting being therefore in the night of the first day of the week, the question properly arises: According to the Bible, what part of the complete day does the night form? Is the night the first or the last part of the complete day? The Bible plainly shows that the night is the first part of the day. There was darkness on the earth before there was light. When God created the world, darkness was upon the face of the deep. Then "God called the light day, and the darkness he called night." As the darkness was called night, as the darkness was upon the earth before the light, and as it takes both the night and the day--the darkness and the light--to make a complete day, it follows that in the true count of days by the revolution of the earth, the night precedes the day. This is confirmed by the scripture: "The evening [the darkness, the night] and the morning [the light, the day] were the first day." p. 1, Para. 21, [WHYSUNDY].

This is the order which God established in the beginning of the world; it is the order that is laid down in the beginning of the book of God; and it is the order that is followed throughout the book of God. In Leviticus 23:27-32, giving the directions about the day of atonement, God said that it should be "the tenth day of the seventh month," and that that was from the ninth day of the month at even; "from even to even, shall ye celebrate your Sabbath." Thus the tenth day of the month began in the evening of the ninth day of the month. And so according to Bible time every day begins in the evening, and evening is at the going down of the sun. Deut. 16:6. Therefore as the meeting

mentioned in Acts 20:7-11 was in the night of the first day of the week, and as in the word and the order of God the night is the first part of the day, it follows that that meeting was on what is now called Saturday night. For if it had been on what is now called Sunday night it would have been on the second day of the week and not on the first. So Conybeare and Howson, in "Life and Epistles of Paul," say: "It was the evening which succeeded the Jewish Sabbath." And that is now called Saturday night. p. 1, Para. 22, [WHYSUNDY].

This meeting, then, being on what is now called Saturday night, as Paul preached till midnight, and after the breaking of bread talked till break of day and departed, it follows that at break of day on the first day of the week, at break of day on Sunday, Paul started afoot from Troas to Assos, a distance of twenty miles, with the intention of going on board a ship at Assos and continuing his journey, which he did. For says the record: "We [Paul's companions in travel, Acts 20:4] went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take Paul; for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene." Verses 13, 14. Paul not only walked from Troas to Assos on Sunday, but he appointed that his companions should go before and sail to that place--about forty miles by water--and be there by the time he came so that he could go on without delay. And when he reached Assos he went at once aboard the ship and sailed away to Mitylene, which was nearly forty miles further. That is to say, on the first day of the week Paul walked twenty miles and then sailed nearly forty more, making nearly sixty miles that he traveled; and he appointed that his companions--Luke, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, Gaius, Aristarchus, and Secundus--should sail nearly forty miles more, making nearly eighty miles travel for them, all on Sunday. And this is exactly how these Christians kept the first day of the week of which mention is made in Acts 20. p. 1, Para. 23, [WHYSUNDY].

But nowadays men try to make it appear that it is an awful sin to travel on Sunday. Yes, some people now seem to think that if a ship should sail on Sunday, the sin would be so great that nothing but a perfect miracle of grace would keep it from sinking. Paul neither taught nor acted any such thing, for says the record, "We went before to ship, and sailed;. . . for so had he appointed." Paul and his

companions regarded Sunday in nowise different from the other common working days of the week. For, mark, the first day of the week they sailed from Troas to Mitylene, "the next day" they sailed from Mitylene to Chios, "the next day" from Chios to Samos and Trogyllim, and "the next day" to Miletus. Here are "the first day of the week," "the next day," "the next day," and "the next day," and Paul and his companions did the same things on one of these days that they did on another. They considered one of them no more sacred than another; they considered the first day of the week to be no more of a sabbath than the next day, or the next day, or the next day. True, Paul preached all night, before he started on the first day of the week; but on the fifth, or sixth day of the week he preached also at Miletus, to the elders of the church of Ephesus. p. 1, Para. 24, [WHYSUNDY].

The only remaining mention of the first day of the week is in 1 Cor. 16:2. "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." What this means is explained by Paul in 2 Cor. 9:1-5: "For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many. Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready; lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting. Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness." p. 1, Para. 25, [WHYSUNDY].

All there is therefore in 1 Cor. 16:2, is that on the first day of the week every one was to "lay by him" what he chose to give for the help of the poor saints at Jerusalem. Rom. 15:26-28. And when the time came for Paul to take it to Jerusalem, that it might be ready for him when he came, he sent brethren before to Corinth to "make up" this bounty that each one had laid by him, according to Paul's directions. p. 1, Para. 26, [WHYSUNDY].

We have now examined every one of the eight instances in

which the first day of the week is mentioned in the Bible, and we ask, Where can any person find in any of them any statement that that day should be kept as the Sabbath, or for any other sacred purpose? Where is there in any reason given for keeping the first day of the week? The only true answer that there can be is, Nowhere. We do not ask whether men can give any reason for it, because men can give a multitude of reasons for a thing, and which may seem to them very satisfactory reasons, but which at the same time do not rest upon any just basis whatever. Bible reasons-- that is, reasons framed in Bible language--alone are the just basis of Bible duties. Do you ask us why we keep the seventh day? We answer, Because God said "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work." So we might go on through a long list of duties. We do not ask men to do any duty toward God the reason for which we cannot give in the very words of God. But we do ask, Where is there a person who can give, in the words of the Bible, the Bible reason for keeping the first day of the week? Never yet have we seen any such person. p. 1, Para. 27, [WHYSUNDY].

Again we say, Bible reasons alone are the just basis of Bible duties. If there is no Bible reason for keeping Sunday, then there is no duty resting upon anybody to keep it. And if there is no Bible reason for it, why in the world do you do it? p. 1, Para. 28, [WHYSUNDY].