

# Weekly Encouragement

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## What's the Lord's Day?

By Peter Eng

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A common Christian practice is to keep the Christian Sabbath (Sunday) rather than the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday). One challenge to this common practice is the argument that we should retain the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday). Some Christians use the term "Sabbath" to refer to Saturday and "Lord's Day" to Sunday. In this case, we don't keep the Sabbath but the Lord's Day.

One of the strangest arguments I heard, which I could not forget since the day I heard it, was this: (1) Jesus said, "For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath Day" ([Mt 12:8](#); cf. [Lk 6:5](#)). (2) This means the Sabbath is the same as the Lord's Day. (3) The early Christians kept the Lord's Day. (4) Today, we should also keep the Lord's Day, that is, the (Jewish) Sabbath.

In the NT, the term "Lord's Day" is found only in [Revelation 1:10](#). John the apostle said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." There is nothing in the text to tell us which day of the

week is meant here. But it is clear to John's audience. He did not have to explain the Lord's Day to them. So we look to what Christians meant by the "Lord's Day."

One early Christian book written before Revelation (but not part of Scripture) called the *Didache* (80-90 AD) used the term this way, "And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's Day, meet more diligently." It is clear that the Lord's Day here refers to the day of Jesus' resurrection (Sunday); and it is clear that Christians were asked to set aside Sunday as the day to meet.

Ignatius (110 AD), *To the Magnesians* (chapter 9): "We have seen how the former adherents of the ancient customs [i.e. Jews] have since attained to a new hope; so that they have given up keeping the Sabbath, and now order their lives by the Lord's Day instead (the day when life first dawned for us, thanks to him and his death.)" Here it is clear that the Jewish Sabbath is contrasted to the Lord's Day.

There are myriad references from early Christian and secular writers that tell us incidentally, in various ways, that Christians met on the first day of the week (Sunday) for all the activities we associate with worship and the setting aside of a holy day.

The term the "Lord's Day" is used by Christians to mean the day Jesus resurrected from the dead. In the Old Covenant, God's people set aside the seventh day to reflect God's rest on the seventh day. In the New Covenant, God's people set aside the resurrection day to proclaim the redemption of creation.

There can be little dispute from the biblical evidence that Christians met on the first day of the week. If we follow the progression from the birth of the church, we find the first day of the week to be highly significant, starting with the resurrection of Christ.

The resurrection of Christ was on the first day of the week, Sunday ([Mt 28:1](#); [Mk 16:2,9](#); [Lk 24:1](#); [Jn 20:1](#)).

Jesus first appeared to all his disciples (less Judas and Thomas) on the first day of the week ([Jn 20:19](#)).

Jesus appeared to the disciples with Thomas eight days later (normal Jewish counting is inclusive), meaning on the next first day of the week, Sunday.

When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, it was a Sunday ([Lev. 23:15-16](#)). Pentecost is always on a Sunday by counting off from the Passover. (*Pentēkoste*, Greek for "fiftieth" day; Hebrew term is Feast of Weeks).

The church was launched at Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-40](#)), meaning that the birth of the church was on a Sunday.

Christians met on the first day of the week to break bread and to listen to preaching as seen in the meeting at Troas ([Acts 20:7](#)).

Paul asked the Christians in Corinth to take a collection on the first day of every week, just like the Galatians, to help the Christians in Jerusalem ([1 Cor 16:1-2](#)). It is apparent that the collection was part of the gathering, and the people did not come just to take a collection. This was asked of the Corinthians, and they were to take this collection like the Galatians.

In contrast, we do not have any statement that Christians met on Saturday for a Christian meeting. This is significant silence. Another significant silence is the lack of dispute. The early church was Jewish and would have been used to keeping the Jewish Sabbath. The fact that there was no dispute in the church on the keeping of the first day of the week is powerful testimony that this was done

universally between both Jewish and Gentile Christians.

We have overwhelming evidence that the Christians kept Sunday (Lord's Day, first day of the week) instead of Saturday. In short, they kept Sunday special for worship and in some significant ways transposed certain Jewish practices and abandoned others. What we can be confident about is that we have unbroken Christian tradition from the birth of the Church at Pentecost that the Lord's Day is our day of worship.

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