

“Watchman, what of the night?”



“The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you, the hour and the end!” Ezekiel 7:6 (Moffatt)

► THIS ISSUE'S READING

**“THE BIBLICAL TESTIMONY
CONCERNING THE
SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRIST'S
RESURRECTION 'ACCORDING
TO THE SCRIPTURES'”
[ADDENDUM]**

Editor's Preface

In the last issue of WWN, we noted how post-Apostolic Christianity has focused the attention of the timing of our Lord's resurrection away from its festal "third day" fulfillment onto fanciful interpretations of "the first day of the week" (Sunday).

In this issue, we will present a concise listing of those earliest post-Apostolic "fathers" who are most universally recognized as bolstering and promoting the Sunday worship "Tradition."

“The Timing Of Christ's Resurrection: ADDENDUM”

Introduction —

Toward the close of the first century A.D. and into the second century onward, a body of ecclesiastical leaders, scholars, and theologians known as the 'church fathers' arose among the Christian congregation whose theological perceptions and teachings had an extensive effect on the doctrinal understanding within the Christian community. Progressively, throughout the post-Apostolic era, their influence overall has had a profound impact on shaping Christianity's thought and practice away from its true Hebraic (Jewish) / Apostolic foundation and unto a more amalgamated pagan / Greco-Roman foundation. One of those areas that has been significantly affected is the timing of our Lord's resurrection. The following examples taken from the writings of selected church fathers up to the First Council of Nicaea in 325



A.D. (Ante-Nicene) are certainly not exhaustive regarding this matter but do serve to represent the earliest and more prominent positions taken on the subject.

The church fathers are usually divided into three categories, namely the apostolic fathers, the Ante-Nicene fathers, and the Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers. They are also broadly classified as Greek fathers and Latin fathers depending on which language they wrote their documents - Greek from the Eastern segment of the church and Latin from the Western segment.

I. APOSTOLIC FATHERS

This category consisted of church leaders / Christian writers who lived in the first and second centuries. They appear to have been personally acquainted with the apostles and are traditionally divided into primary and secondary groupings.

Primary Fathers —

These include Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp. The authorship of their writings and their association with the apostles of Jesus are generally accepted by most scholars.

1. Clement of Rome (A.D. 30-100):

Very little is known about Clement. He was one of the early presbyters / bishops of Rome. In his *First Epistle Of Clement To The Corinthians* (commonly called, *I Clement*) he wrote:

"These things therefore being manifest to us, and since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, it behooves us to do all things in [their proper] order, which the Lord has commanded us to perform at stated times. He has enjoined offerings [to be presented] and service to be performed [to Him], and that not thoughtlessly of irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours. ... Those, therefore, who present their offer-

ings at the appointed times, are accepted and blessed; for inasmuch as they follow the laws of the Lord, they sin not." ¹

This statement has often been cited in support of the view that Sunday observance, in honor of Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week, began early on. Advocates of Sunday keeping have considered the words "stated times," and "appointed times and hours," as referring to Sunday observance. Contrariwise however, because the "stated / appointed times / hours" are not specifically listed in the text, it definitely cannot be objectively ascertained beyond any doubt that he was referring to Sunday. Rather, it is more probable that this terminology *may* be referring to scripturally based occasions like the seventh-day Sabbath, Passover / the Lord's supper, etc. (?).

2. Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 30-107):

Ignatius was a theologian and bishop of Antioch. He was apparently martyred during the reign of the Roman emperor Trajan. Ignatius is almost exclusively known through the seven letters he wrote to different churches and individuals while on his way from Antioch to Rome as a prisoner. This represents a witness to the life of the early church just after the apostles, which makes his writings significant. He wrote to the Christians in Rome not to prevent his martyrdom and was eventually thrown to the wild beasts and killed. In the letter to the Magnesian Christians, Ignatius wrote:

"If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death ..." ²

According to the context, the word "those"

refers to the prophets. Some scholars have pointed out that the word "Day" in the "Lord's Day" does not exist in the original work of Ignatius but that it is an addition in the work of translation. Those who hold this view say that instead of the "Lord's Day," it should be the "Lord's life.

However, in other parts of this letter, Ignatius made a clear distinction between the Sabbath and Sunday. He appears to be referring to Sunday as "the Lord's Day ... the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days [of the week] ... the eighth day." ² He urged the Christians to keep the Lord's Day after observing the Sabbath saying that it is on this day that their lives "both sprang up again, and the victory over death was obtained in Christ, whom the children of perdition, the enemies of the Saviour, deny." ² Yet, he also asserted that one should not keep the Sabbath in the Jewish but in a spiritual manner. ² Ignatius not only seems to have an anti-Jewish attitude but even expressed the ending of Judaism. He argued that both Judaism and Christianity cannot exist together. ³ It is apparent that the Christians of his days kept both Sabbath and Sunday. However, it is not clear whether they were to observe Sunday every week although this seems to be more likely. Again, since he expressed the ending of Judaism, it seems that the Christians wanted little to do with actual seventh-day Sabbath keeping because of Sunday. Most likely, Ignatius used the term "Lord's Day," to refer to Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection.

3. Polycarp (A.D. 69-100-155):

Polycarp was the disciple of John, the beloved disciple. He was bishop of Smyrna. He suffered martyrdom at the age of eighty-six. ⁴ In the Smyrnaean letter known as *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, it is recorded that Poly-

carp was arrested and killed on the "Great Sabbath," i.e., the Sabbath before the Passover or between the celebration of the death and the resurrection of Christ. ⁵ Based on this, some believe that the Smyrnaeans under Polycarp observed the Saturday Sabbath. This Great Sabbath was probably on February 22 or 23 of 155/6 AD. ⁶

Secondary Fathers —

These include the Epistle of Barnabas, the Didache, the Shepherd of Hermas, and others. Their authorship and association with the apostles is less known and agreed upon among scholars. Only two fathers are here presented.

1. The Epistle Of Barnabas (A.D. 100?):

It is not known whether the author was actually the biblical Barnabas, the Levite of Cyprus, and fellow-laborer of the apostle Paul. How it came to be called the Epistle of Barnabas is also unknown. Due to its (possible) reference to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, it is believed that it was likely written between AD 70 and no later than 132 AD. ⁷ The author wrote:

"He says to them, 'Your new moons and your Sabbaths I cannot endure.' Ye perceive how He speaks: Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made, [namely this,] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens." ⁸

Here, it is obvious that the author quotes from Isaiah 1: 13, which in context reveals God's displeasure with ancient Judah's use of faithless ritualism to cloak their sin and apostasy along with His call for revival and

reformation, to make a fanciful antitypical application to "a beginning of the eighth day ... a beginning of another world." This linking of the first day of creation week with "another world" (a reference to the new heaven and a new earth in the restitution of all things), with Sunday as the "beginning of the eighth day" with a corresponding result to now "keep the eighth day ... the day which Jesus rose again from the dead" (presumably as the 'eschatological' day of the new creation), is nowhere expounded upon in any such manner in the New Testament. Tragically, this typological speculation also seems to teach the end of true seventh day Sabbath observance. And though the statement does not explicitly say this, it has been understood by Sunday proponents as abolishing Sabbath in favor of Sunday.

2. The Didache (Late A.D. 100 - Early 200):

Though lost for centuries, a Greek manuscript of the Didache was re-discovered by Philotheos Bryennios, a Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Nicomedia in 1873 at Constantinople. It was considered as the "most important literary discovery in patrology" in the nineteenth century and the "oldest Christian document" outside of the New Testament. It is dated between 120 and 180 AD. In it is written:

"But every Lord's Day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure." ⁹

The identity of the Lord's Day is not specifically stated in the text. However, again, Sunday adherents believe this is referring to Sunday.

II. ANTE-NICENE FATHERS

The Ante-Nicene Fathers lived before the historic Council of Nicea in 325 AD. These fa-

thers did not have any contact with the apostles of Jesus. They include Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and others.

1. Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165):

Justin was born into a Greek (probably pagan) family in Palestine but became a Christian after his search for answers in philosophy failed to satisfy his quest. He is known for his Christian apologetical works, the *First Apology* and *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. Justin was beheaded for his faith in Rome, probably in 165 A.D. ¹⁰ About the early church, Justin wrote:

"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. ...

"But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration." ¹¹ Justin also mentioned, in his extant writings, certain Old Testament individuals such as Adam, Abel, Enoch, Lot, and Melchizedek who he said were considered righteous, just, and saved although they were not circumcised nor kept the "Sabbaths." Both circumcision and the Sabbath were practices meant only for the Jews. ¹² On the other hand, Christians have been given "not one particular Sabbath, but a perpetual Sabbath." ¹³

2. Tertullian (A.D. 155-220):

Tertullian was born in Carthage, North Africa. Educated in rhetoric and law, a master in Greek language, he was the first Christian to write extensively in Latin. A polemicist, he wrote on apologetics, dogmas, and Christian ascetism. Some of his best works include *Apology* and *Against Marcion*. In 207, he left the Catholic Church. However, his writings remain influential even within Catholicism.

Tertullian said that God hates the holy days of the Jews including the Sabbaths and new moons which are "strange" to Christians who have "a festive day every eighth day."¹⁴ He viewed both circumcision and the Sabbath as temporary practices which have already been abolished. Christians are not to observe only the seventh day, a "Sabbath temporal" but a "Sabbath eternal" "through all time" because Christ, the eternal Sabbath has already arrived. He saw the former as human and the latter as divine.¹⁵ Clearly defending the Christian faith against the Jews, Tertullian argued:

"Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray towards the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity." He further wrote that though the Jews accuse the Christians with "the sun and Sunday" they are not "far off from your Saturn and your days of rest."¹⁶ Tertullian noted that the Christians considered fasting and kneeling on the Lord's day as unlawful.¹⁷ He considered abstaining from secular work on Sunday as a Christian duty which Schaff points out is the "first express evidence of cessation from labor on Sunday among Christians."¹⁸

From these statements of Tertullian, one can conclude that he believed that the Sab-

bath was a Jewish institution and that Christians need not observe it. The Christians should rather observe Sunday which is superior, a day of rejoicing.

3. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215):

Clement of Alexandria, the first known Christian scholar was born in Athens. In his lifetime, he often engaged in debate with the Gnostics. The mainspring of his whole system of theology was the doctrine of the Logos. It is in *Stromateis (Miscellanies)* where we find Clement's views on the Sabbath. Clement is considered as the first man to unequivocally use the expression "Lord's Day" for the first day of the week. He said that Plato spoke of the Lord's Day as the eighth day. He quoted Plato who wrote in the tenth book of his *Republic*:

"And when seven days have passed to each of them in the meadow, on the eighth they are to set out and arrive in four days." He further pointed out that: "the seventh day is recognised as sacred, not by the Hebrews only, but also by the Greeks; according to which the whole world of all animals and plants revolve."¹⁹ He seems to say that the Lord's day is kept in honor of Christ's resurrection. The person so doing is "glorifying the Lord's resurrection in himself."²⁰

It is obvious that Clement identified the term "Lord's Day," with the eighth day, Sunday.

4. Irenaeus of Lyons (A.D. 120-140 - 202-203):

Irenaeus was born in Smyrna where as a youth he listened to Polycarp. He became the bishop of Lyons. One could almost place him alongside the Apostolic Fathers because through Polycarp he claimed contact with the apostolic generation and the tradition of the Elders. One of his famous works is *Against the Heresies*, aimed at Gnosticism.

Irenaeus regarded the Jewish Sabbath as merely a symbolical, typical, and temporary ordinance.²¹ Yet, he did not believe that Jesus had broken the Sabbath commandment when He healed the sick on the Sabbath nor did the disciples when they plucked grains on the Sabbath. He pointed out that circumcision was carried out on the Sabbath and that David and his men ate the holy bread from the sanctuary. These were not guilty of breaking the Sabbath. Then Irenaeus pointed out that what actually was prohibited were activities that were meant to earn wealth by trading and other worldly business. Finally, Irenaeus said that the priests performed work on the Sabbath in the sanctuary but were not guilty of breaking it because they were not doing any servile work but were engaged in the service of the Lord.²²

Aside from various questionable statements of Irenaeus, it is obvious that he only wrote about the true and false keeping of the Sabbath.

5. Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (4th Century A.D.?)

Also known as "Apostolic Constitutions," this fourth-century pseudo-Apostolic collection was intended to serve as a manual of guidance for the clergy, and to some extent for the laity. The Lord's Day is called as the day of the resurrection, a day of rejoicing and not mourning and one who fasts on it is guilty of sin. It further goes on to emphatically declare: "But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's Day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection."²³ This work encourages a dual observance of the Sabbath and Sunday.

Concluding Summary —

These excerpts clearly show, that the testimony of the fathers in support of Sunday is a varied mixture of truth and (often) specula-

tive typological error - not to mention possible textual and translation issues with some of the passages. However, all this aside, what needs to be noted particularly for the purpose of this study on the timing of Christ's resurrection is the *absence* of any exposition of the "third day" fulfillment of the Hebrew sanctuary / temple / festival type in the Old Testament *explicitly* stated in the New Testament as fulfilled by the "third day" antitype. We must always remember that the post-Apostolic tradition is not an inspired, infallible source of truth. Rather, it has been used with considerable success to promote false doctrines, a truth that the Bible warns was already happening *early in Apostolic times* (the first century A.D. - see 2 Thessalonians 2: 3-7; 1 Peter 2: 1; 1 John 2: 18; 4: 1). ❖ GLP

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*All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

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