

“THE LORD’S DAY” OF REVELATION 1:10 IN THE CURRENT DEBATE

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John the Revelator begins the main body of his ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ by stating that he was on the island of Patmos in tribulation because of his faithful testimony to the gospel. He states further that, while there, he came to be ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (Rev 1:10), at which time he encountered the resurrected Christ. The phrase ἐν πνεύματι unequivocally refers to the first visionary experience the Revelator had on Patmos (cf. 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). He was about to be shown a representation of events and forces affecting God’s people, which were already at work in his own time and would lead into the time of the end.

The phrase ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ has been widely debated among expositors of the Apocalypse in the last fifty years—particularly during the 1960s, when there were a number of exchanges of opinions in scholarly journals.¹ The difficulty with this enigmatic expression is twofold. First, it is a *hapax legomenon*: the exact phrase in Greek occurs nowhere else in the NT, the LXX, or in early Christian writings (coinciding with the time of the writing of Revelation). Second, the context does not give any indication, or even a hint, regarding which day of the week the text is referring to. In addition, Christian sources contemporaneous with Revelation are not particularly helpful.

Furthermore, there is no occurrence of the adjective κυριακός in the LXX.² Formerly, the word was considered as Christian in origin; however, it has been attested in Greek papyri and inscriptions preceding Christianity.³

¹C. W. Dugmore, “The Lord’s Day and Easter,” *Neotestamentica et Patristica in honorem sexagenarii O. Cullmann, Supplements to Novum Testamentum* 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 272-281; Fritz Guy, “‘The Lord’s Day’ in the Letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians,” *AUSS* 2 (1964): 1-17; Lawrence T. Geraty, “The Pascha and the Origin of Sunday Observance,” *AUSS* 3 (1965): 85-96; Wilfrid Stott, “A Note on the Word *kyriakē* in Rev. 1.10,” *NTS* 12 (1965): 70-75. For a response to Stott, see Kenneth A. Strand, “Another Look at ‘Lord’s Day’ in the Early Church and in Rev. 1.10,” *NTS* 13 (1966): 174-181; see also Paul K. Jewett, *The Lord’s Day* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 57-67; R. J. Bauckham, “The Lord’s Day,” in *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 221-250.

²The adjective κυριακός occurs in the LXX only in 2 Macc 15:36 in association with the word φωνή. However, there is a variant reading Συριακῇ, noted by Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath (*A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament*, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], 2:800).

³Adolf Deissmann shows that the word was common in Egypt and Asia Minor, where it meant “imperial.” Almost all known usages are in connection with imperial

Although there are some rare examples of secular usage of the word in Greco-Roman sources, κυριακός was almost exclusively used with reference to imperial administration. Thus it is not difficult to see how the word was adopted by early Christians to mean “belonging to the Lord” Jesus Christ as a part of a resistance against emperor worship. In the NT, it is used by Paul in 1 Cor 11:20 as an adjective in “the Lord’s supper” (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον). However, in the late second century the word was used by the Patristic authors only with qualifying nouns that exclusively referred to Christ: e.g., λόγος, λόγια, γραφαί, ὄπλα, αἵμα, σῶμα, δεῖπνον, φωνή, ἐντολαί, and παρουσία.⁴ In the same manner, in Revelation κυριακός is an adjective (“the Lord’s”), clearly qualifying ἡμέρα as “the Lord’s day.”

In the contemporary debate, there are two major approaches used to interpret the expression κυριακὴ ἡμέρα. Most commentators, ancient and modern, believe it refers to a literal weekly day. This approach, which boasts a consensus among most scholars, interprets the expression as referring to Sunday, the first day of the week. Several alternative proposals have been suggested. They range from Easter Sunday and Emperor’s Day to the seventh-day Sabbath, the latter held generally by Seventh-day Adventists. In the second approach, scholars maintain that κυριακὴ ἡμέρα refers figuratively to the eschatological “day of the Lord.”

The purpose of this article is to review and evaluate these major proposals and to suggest a plausible meaning of the enigmatic expression κυριακὴ ἡμέρα in the Apocalypse.

Κυριακὴ ἡμέρα as Sunday

The prevailing view among ancient and modern commentators is that κυριακὴ ἡμέρα refers to Sunday, the first day of the week.⁵ The main argument presented

finance, where κυριακός qualifies nouns such as “[Lord’s] treasury” and “[Lord’s] service” (*Light from the Ancient East*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965], 357-358); also idem, *Bible Studies* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903), 217-218; see also W. H. P. Hatch, “Some Illustrations of New Testament Usage from Greek Inscriptions of Asia Minor,” *JBL* 27 (1908): 138.

⁴Cf. Deissman, *Bible Studies*, 222-224; Stott, 71.

⁵E.g., Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 3d ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 4:554-555; Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 13; Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 357; Robert H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 22-23; Stott, 70-75; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 2d ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 55-56; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 31; Bauckham, 221-250; Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation*, 2d ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 52; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 50; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*

in support of this view is that from the second century Christian writers used this term with reference to Sunday because Jesus was resurrected on this day. It is undeniable that later in history Sunday became known as “the Lord’s day.” Κυριακή ἡμέρα and the short form κυριακή became the designation for Sunday among Greek-speaking authors, while *diēs Dominica*, derived from the Vulgate text, became the name for Sunday in ecclesiastical Latin.⁶ However, all the references to Sunday as “the Lord’s day” were used nearly one century after Revelation was written. As such, they cannot be regarded as evidence for determining the meaning of κυριακή ἡμέρα as Sunday at the time of the writing of Revelation.

However, two early second-century Christian writings, *Didache* and the letter of Ignatius of Antioch to the Magnesians, are commonly regarded as the strongest evidences for an early usage of κυριακή ἡμέρα with reference to Sunday.⁷ It is necessary, therefore, to take a closer look at the two texts to find the meaning behind the adjectival term used in them.

Didache (known as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) is an early instructional manual, dated from the late first century to the late second century. Most scholars today are in favor of the earlier date. The statement of interest is found in *Codex Hierosolymitanus* (Codex C, or “H” in some editions), the only surviving complete Greek manuscript of the document, which reads as follows:

Didache: Κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου συναχθέντες κλάσατε ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσατε, . . .

Lightfoot’s translation: “On the Lord’s own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, [having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure.]”⁸

(Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 90-92; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC 52a (Waco: Word, 1997), 83-84; Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 203; Christopher C. Rowland, “The Book of Revelation,” in *NIB* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 12:566; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 51; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 43.

⁶Walter F. Specht, “Sunday in the New Testament,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 126.

⁷Bauckham, 223, lists thirteen second-century references in which κυριακή ἡμέρα or κυριακή allegedly mean “the Lord’s day.” It is important to note that only two of these references, the *Didache* and Ignatius’s *To the Magnesians*, are from the early second century, and all others come from the late second century.

⁸*Did.* 14.1, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Text and English Translations of Their Writings*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, 3d ed., ed. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 364-365 (unless otherwise noted, all further reference to the Apostolic Fathers will come from this edition). Cf. also Bart D. Ehrman, *Apostolic Fathers: English*

It should be noted here that the text reads *κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου*. The substantive “day” (*ἡμέραν* in the accusative case) does not appear in the text, but rather is supplied by the translators and is rendered, “on the Lord’s *day*.” However, there is no textual evidence that would warrant such a reading of the text, which is an obvious stretch. Nor does the context indicate that the Lord’s day is intended. Strong evidence suggests, however, that the phrase could rather mean *κατὰ κυριακὴν διδασχὴν*,⁹ *κατὰ κυριακὴν ἐντολὴν*, or *κατὰ κυριακὴν ὄδον* (“according to the Lord’s teaching, . . . command, or . . . way”).

The next alleged evidence is the letter *To the Magnesians*, attributed to Ignatius of Antioch, who died between 98 and 117.¹⁰ The letter deals with, among other things, the issue of “Judaizing,” a series of Jewish practices that continuously caused disputes in Christian communities. The author admonishes the Magnesians: “If we continue to live in accordance with Judaism, we admit that we have not received grace.”¹¹ It is in this context that Ignatius gives the following warning:

Ignatius: Εἰ οὖν οἱ ἐν παλαιοῖς πράγμασιν ἀναστραφέντες εἰς καινότητα ἐλπίδος ἦλθον, μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακὴν ζῶντες, ἐν ᾗ καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἡμῶν ἀνέτειλεν δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, ὃν τινες ἀρνοῦνται, δι’ οὗ μυστηρίου ἐλάβομεν τὸ πιστεῦειν, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὑπομένομεν, ἵνα εὐρεθῶμεν μαθηταὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ μόνου διδασκάλου ἡμῶν.

Lightfoot’s translation: “If, then, those who had lived in antiquated practices came to newness of hope, no longer keeping the Sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord’s day, on which our life also arose through him and his death [which some deny], the mystery through which we came to believe, and because of which we patiently endure, in order that we might be found to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our teacher.”¹²

The common understanding of the phrase *μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακὴν* is that Ignatius bade the Magnesians to give up the Sabbath

and Greek, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1:438.

⁹See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), 114, n. 73; Kenneth A. Strand, “The ‘Lord’s Day’ in the Second Century,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 346, 351, n. 16. On the other hand, Bauckham, 227-228, has doubts concerning the addition of *διδασχὴν*, since he believes that the *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.30.1 (fourth century), which interpreted the *Didache*, has *ἡμέρα* with *κυριακῆ*.

¹⁰*Ign. Magn.* (*Apostolic Fathers*, 202-213). Our knowledge of the circumstance within which Ignatius’s letters were written is drawn from the letter itself, as well as from Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.36; *NPNF*², 1:166-169).

¹¹*Ign. Magn.* 8.1 (*Apostolic Fathers*, 207-209): εἰ γὰρ μέχρι νῦν κατὰ ἰουδαϊσμον ζῶμεν, ὁμολογοῦμεν χάριν μὴ εἰληφέναι (see also 10.3; *Ign. Phld.* 6.1).

¹²*Ign. Magn.* 9.1 (*Apostolic Fathers*, 208-209).

and observe the Lord’s day, which was presumably Sunday.¹³ However, as in the case of the *Didache*, the Greek text does not read κυριακῆν ἡμέραν, but rather κατὰ κυριακῆν (“according to the Lord’s”) without the substantive ἡμέραν. In this case as well, the word “day” is supplied by the translators, making the phrase read: “On the Lord’s day.”

The statement under consideration comes from the commonly accepted Greek edition of the middle recension of the Ignatian letters.¹⁴ The only surviving Greek manuscript of the middle recension, Codex G (*Codex Medicus Laurentius*), considered to be the parent of other Greek manuscripts in existence today as well as the Latin translations,¹⁵ actually reads κατὰ κυριακῆν ζώην (“according with the Lord’s life”). However, the Greek text, reconstructed by modern editors and which serves as the basis for English translations, omits the substantive ζώην after κατὰ κυριακῆν. Such a reading bears an obvious impact on the common understanding of the meaning of κατὰ κυριακῆν. Since the two expressions σαββατίζω and κυριακῆν do not occur elsewhere in the Ignatian letters, the readers are left to choose which of the two words, ζώην (supported by the best manuscripts) or ἡμέραν (as a conjecture), fits the context.¹⁶

On the basis of a careful analysis of the usage of κυριακός in early Christian writings, Richard Bauckham notes a variety of meanings for the word, which “must be determined from the sense and context in any particular case.”¹⁷ Several careful studies have shown that, in this case, the manuscript and contextual evidence are both on the side of the substantive ζώην.¹⁸ After having carefully compared and critically examined the Ignatian

¹³Guy, 10, mentions the theological bias of the translator in weighting the validity of the ancient manuscripts. R. B. Lewis demonstrates how the passage has been translated differently, with scholars expressing obvious theological bias. For example: Robert and Donaldson, the editors of *ANF*: “no longer observing sabbaths but fashioning their lives after the Lord’s Day”; Lake: “no longer living for the Sabbath, but for the Lord’s day”; Kleist: “no longer observe the Sabbath, but regulate their calendar by the Lord’s Day”; Goodspeed: “no longer keeping the Sabbath but observing the Lord’s Day”; Richardson: “They ceased to keep the Sabbath and lived by the Lord’s day”; Grant: “no longer keeping the Sabbath [cf. Isa 1:13] but living in accordance with the Lord’s [day, cf. Rev 1:10] (“Ignatius and the Lord’s Day,” *AUSS* 6 [1968]: 55-56, brackets original).

¹⁴There are three basic forms of the letters, referred to as the short, middle, and long recensions. The multiplicity of forms created debates over the authenticity of the letters. Today, the seven letters of the middle recension are generally considered to be authentic (Holmes, 171-173; see Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960]; Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* [Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950], 1:74; also Ehrman, 1:209-213).

¹⁵See Quasten, 1:74; Holmes, 185; Guy, 17.

¹⁶Lewis, 51-52.

¹⁷Bauckham, 224.

¹⁸See Guy, 7-17; cf. Lewis, 48-53.

manuscripts available today, Fritz Guy concludes that the evidence favors the longer reading *κατὰ κυριακῆν ζώην*, that the evidence for *κατὰ κυριακὴν* instead of *κατὰ κυριακῆν ζώην* is very weak, and that the latter is most likely the original.¹⁹ A similar conclusion has been reached by other scholars.²⁰

The contextual evidence seems to be in favor of *ζώην* rather than *ἡμέραν*.²¹ The statements that precede and follow the passage in question help to clarify further the meaning of the enigmatic Ignatian statement:

Magn. 8.1-2 For if we continue to live in accordance with Judaism (*κατὰ Ἰουδαϊσμόν ζῶμεν*), we admit that we have not received grace. For *the most godly prophets* lived in accordance with Jesus Christ. This is why they were persecuted.²²

Magn. 9.1-2 If, then, those who had lived in ancient practices came to newness of hope, no longer sabbatizing but living in accordance with the Lord's [life] (*κατὰ κυριακῆν ζῶντες*), in which our life also arose through him and his death. . . . how shall we be able to live without him, of whom also *the prophets*, who were his disciples in the Spirit, were looking for as their teacher?²³

Magn. 10.1 Therefore, having become his disciples, let us learn to live in accordance with Christianity (*κατὰ Χριστιανισμόν ζῆν*).²⁴

¹⁹Guy, 2-17; see also Lewis, 46-59. On the basis of the evidence, Lewis, 58, concludes that the expression “the Lord’s day” is theologically biased and artificially forced into the text for the purpose of supporting an early use of the term for Sunday.

²⁰Lewis, 56-58, quotes three nineteenth-century Sunday advocates, who saw serious weakness in the Lord’s day as Sunday arguments in Ignatius’s letter. E.g., B. Powell, who declared that the passage from Ignatius “is confessedly obscure, and the text may be corrupt,” noted that “On this view the passage does not refer at all to the Lord’s day; but even on the opposite supposition it cannot be regarded as affording any positive evidence to the early use of the term “Lord’s day” (for which it is often cited), since the material word *ἡμέρα* is purely conjectural” (“Lord’s Day,” in *Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature*, ed. John Kitto [New York: Mark H. Newman, 1835], 2:270).

²¹I am indebted for this idea to Guy, 13-14, and R. A. Kraft, “Sabbath in Early Christianity,” *AUSS* 3 (1965): 28-29. Cf. Strand, “Another Look at ‘Lord’s Day,’” 179.

²²Lightfoot’s translation of 8.1-2: εἰ γὰρ μέχρι νῦν κατὰ Ἰουδαϊσμόν ζῶμεν, ὁμολογοῦμεν χάριν μὴ εἰληφέναι. οἱ γὰρ θειοτατοὶ προφῆται κατὰ Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἔζησαν. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἐδιώχθησαν.

²³My translation of 9.1-2: Εἰ οὖν οἱ ἐν παλαιοῖς πράγμασιν ἀναστραφέντες εἰς καινότητα ἐλπίδος ἦλθον, μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακῆν ζῶντες, ἐν ἧ καὶ ἡ ζώη ἡμῶν ἀντετελεῖται δι’ αὐτοῦ καὶ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ, . . . πῶς ἡμεῖς δουνησόμεθα ζῆσαι χωρὶς αὐτοῦ, οὐ καὶ οἱ προφῆται μαθηταὶ ὄντες τῷ πνεύματι, ὡς διδάσκαλον αὐτὸν προσεδόκων;

²⁴Lightfoot’s translation of 10.1: διὰ τοῦτο, μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ γενόμενοι, μάθωμεν κατὰ Χριστιανισμόν ζῆν.

This closer look at the text shows that Ignatius contrasts “two different ways of living—one apart from ‘grace’ [‘judaizing’], the other in the power of the resurrection life.”²⁵ The “according to” (κατά) construction used in these three comparative passages contrasts living “in accordance with Judaism” with living “in accordance with Jesus Christ” (8.2) and/or living “in accordance with Christianity” (10.1). This suggests that the text that comes between (9.1) should read as “living in accordance with the Lord’s life.” Thus “Sabbatizing” most likely does not mean Sabbath observance, but rather the keeping of the Sabbath in accordance with Judaism.²⁶

Furthermore, the persons whom Ignatius is referring to in 9.1—those “who had lived in ancient practices . . . no longer sabbatizing but living in accordance with the Lord’s [life]”—are actually the ancient Hebrew prophets (clearly stated in 8.2 and 9.2).

As Robert A. Kraft correctly points out, Ignatius “warns the Magnesians in Asia Minor not to live ‘in accord with Judaism’ but to follow the insight which even the divine prophets of old had received through God’s grace and to live ‘in accord with Christ Jesus,’ God’s Son and God’s Logos sent to man.”²⁷

In referring to “the most godly prophets” who “lived in accordance with Jesus Christ,” Ignatius most likely had in mind the passages from the prophets, such as Isa 1:13-17, which indicted the people’s outwardly ritualistic observance of the Sabbath, much as Jesus did with reference to the Pharisaic observance of the Sabbath according to the Synoptics (cf. Matt 12:1-13; Mark 2:23–3:5; Luke 6:1-11). Ignatius might have also been thinking of Isa 56:1-8 and 58:13-14, which urged the people to observe the Sabbath.²⁸ This is probably the best way to understand how the ancient prophets “lived in accordance with Jesus Christ.” Such an assertion is fully supported by Kraft’s reading of the Ignatian passage, which, in Kraft’s view, is most likely the original second-century reading:

If, then, those who walked in the ancient customs [i.e., the aforementioned prophets] came to have a new hope, no longer ‘sabbatizing’ but living in accord with the Lord’s life—in which life there sprang up also our life through him and through his death— . . . how shall we be able to live apart from him, of whom the prophets also were disciples, since they had received him as teacher in the spirit? Wherefore, he whom they justly awaited when he arrived, raised them from the dead. . . . Thus, we should be his disciples—we should learn to live in accord with Christianity. . . . It

²⁵Kraft, 28.

²⁶Lewis, 50-51; so also Bauckham, 229; contrary to Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1968), 210-211.

²⁷Kraft, 27; see also Guy, 1.

²⁸If Ignatius indeed had Isaiah in mind, he would have accepted the unity of the book, and thereby would have ascribed Isaiah 56 and 58 to the author of Isaiah 1.

is absurd to proclaim Jesus Christ and to 'Judaize'. For Christianity has not placed its trust in Judaism, but vice-versa.²⁹

After taking a closer look at the evidence, one might conclude that Ignatius does not appear to urge the Magnesians to refrain from observing the Sabbath and to live according to the Lord's day, presumably Sunday, but rather to live "according with the Lord's life."³⁰ At this point, Richard B. Lewis correctly observes that

it is almost certain, if we are to avoid absurdity in our treatment of Magnesians, that *sabbatizing* is equivalent to the idea of Judaizing, a practice which could be avoided even while keeping the Sabbath. This is the only feasible explanation inasmuch as it is the Sabbath-keeping Old Testament prophets who are described as 'no longer sabbatizing'. To interpret the next words of the same passage in such a way as to make the Old Testament prophets keep Sunday is, of course, equally absurd.³¹

The context thus shows that the text under consideration does not suggest a Sabbath/Sunday controversy.³² The burden of Ignatius's argument was not to discuss days of worship, but to encourage an observance of the Sabbath in a spiritual manner. Such a notion fits the historical context; Kenneth Strand correctly observes that, at least during the earlier period of Christianity,

The anti-Judaizing or anti-Sabbatizing emphasis may not have been involved with the matter of days at all, but rather with a manner of worship or way of life; namely, Christian liberty versus Jewish legalism. When this sort of polemic was first clearly applied to days (again in the early period), it was used in an effort to encourage a Sabbath observance of spiritual, rather than merely formal and legalistic, quality.³³

²⁹Translation from Kraft, 27, brackets and ellipses original.

³⁰Regarding the possibility of a cognate accusative (in which a noun in the accusative is coupled with a participle of the same etymological family, producing an idiom that often has no literal parallel in English), according to which *κατὰ κυριακὴν ζῶντες* could be translated as "living a life according to the Lord's day," Guy, 10-11 and 16, concludes that "living according to the Lord's life" is warranted by the context of the passage, the literary style, and the theological emphasis of Ignatius over the former. See also Bauckham, 228-229.

³¹Lewis, 51.

³²Contra Rordorf, 211.

³³Kenneth A. Strand, "Some Notes on the Sabbath Fast in Early Christianity," *AUSS* 3 (1965): 172. Bauckham, 229, admits that it was not Ignatius's intent to draw any real contrast between days as such, but between ways of life (e.g., between "sabbatizing," living according to Jewish legalism, and living according to the resurrection). However, he believes that the Sabbath is implied in the text as a distinguishing characteristic of Judaism.

Such an idea is expressed in the expanded version of chapter 9 of *To the Magnesians*, which is interpolated by an unknown fourth-century editor:

Let us, therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness. . . . But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them [*reference to well-known Jewish practices with respect to Sabbath*]. And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all days [of the week].³⁴

If there is any conclusion, however, to be drawn from Ignatius’s reference to “sabbatizing” (σαββατίζοντες), it is that the Christians at that time were still observing the Sabbath.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, one might conclude that there is no conclusive evidence showing that κυριακή ἡμέρα was used for the first day of the week by Christians in the early second century³⁵ or that would lead us to the conclusion that the Revelator initiated the expression in question to mean Sunday. Walter F. Specht correctly observes that the Fourth Gospel, dated later than Revelation, refers to Sunday as “the first day of the week,” something that would seem very unusual if it was already known as “the Lord’s day.”³⁶ In addition, the early anti-Jewish polemical works, including those of Barnabas (c. 100) and Justin Martyr (c. 110-165), do not use the term “Lord’s day” with reference to Sunday, but rather use “the first day of the week,” “the eighth day,” or “Sunday” instead as common second-century Christian designations for Sunday.³⁷

All of the evidence for the alleged understanding of κυριακή ἡμέρα or the short version κυριακή from the early Christian era as “Sunday” actually

³⁴Pseudo-Ignatius, *Magnesians* 9.3-4 (ANF 1:62-63; first set of brackets supplied; second set of brackets original).

³⁵Joseph Seiss stresses that “none of the Christian writings for 100 years after Christ ever call it [Sunday] ‘the Lord’s day’” (*The Apocalypse* [New York: Charles C. Cook, 1906], 1:20).

³⁶Specht, 120, 1.

³⁷*Barn.* 15.8-9 (ANF 1:146-147); Justin, *Dial.* 24, 41, 138 (ANF 1:206, 215, 268); idem, *1 Apol.* 67 (ANF 1:185-186). Here Justin refers to Sunday as τῆ τοῦ ἡλίου λεγομένη ἡμέρα, and the day after Saturday ἥτις ἐστὶν ἡλίου ἡμέρα. Strand points to the Latin version of the second-century NT apocryphal *Acts John*, which makes a statement regarding John: “And on the seventh day, it being the Lord’s day, he said to them: Now it is time for me also to partake of food” (ANF 8:561). It is particularly interesting that the text does call the seventh day, rather than Sunday, as the Lord’s day” (Strand, “Sabbath Fast,” 180).

comes from the late second century.³⁸ The first conclusive evidence of its usage in reference to Sunday comes from the latter part of the second century in the apocryphal work *The Gospel of Peter*.³⁹ The first church father who used it in the same way was Clement of Alexandria (ca. 190).⁴⁰ It could be that at some later time these authors eventually took the familiar phrase, derived from Revelation, and applied it to Sunday as the first day of the week. However, the later usage of the expression κυριακή ἡμέρα might not be admissible as evidence to support the use of this meaning in the first century.

The whole question of the rise of Sunday and the eclipse of Sabbath observance in the second century is “a complex one”⁴¹ and “remains shrouded in mystery.”⁴² What all historical sources indicate, however, is that until the fourth and fifth centuries the two days were both observed side-by-side by the Eastern segment of Christianity, although already at an early period Sunday observance was urged as the day of rest instead of Sabbath, due mainly to anti-Jewish sentiments.⁴³ The change from one day to another was slow and gradual. It was not until the fourth century—due to several factors, including theological, ecclesiological, and political—that Sunday observance finally took the place of Sabbath observance.⁴⁴ What seems very likely is, as

³⁸Contra Bauckham, 225, who argues that κυριακή ἡμέρα had been established early as the common Christian name for Sunday for the purpose of distinguishing it from ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου. Bauckham supports his claim with historical evidence. A. Strobel acknowledges that κυριακή as a term applied to Sunday represents, as it is generally acknowledged, a secondary development (“Die Passa-Erwartung als urchristliches Problem in Lc 17.20f,” ZNW 49 [1958]: 185, n. 104).

³⁹*Gos. Pet.* 9.50: “Early in the morning of the Lord’s day [ἄρθρου δὲ τῆς κυριακῆς], Mary Magdalene, a disciple of the Lord . . . came to the sepulcher” (*New Testament Apocrypha*, 2d ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991], 1:224). There is a similarity here to two other apocryphal writings from the same period: *Acts Pet.* 29-30, identifies *dies dominica* with “the day after the Sabbath” (Schneemelcher, 2:311), and *Acts Paul* 7.3 speaks of the apostle as praying “on the sabbath as [κυριακῆ] drew near” (Schneemelcher, 2:252).

⁴⁰Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 14 (ANF 2:459).

⁴¹Strand, “Sabbath Fast,” 173.

⁴²Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2009), 301; Rordorf, 301, candidly admits that “Nowhere do we find any evidence which would unambiguously establish where, when, and why the Christian observance of Sunday arose.”

⁴³Strand, “Sabbath Fast,” 173. Dugmore, 279, argues that it is a historical fact that the observance of the Sabbath as a day of Christian worship did not disappear until the late fourth or early fifth century.

⁴⁴The official acceptance of Sunday observance in place of Sabbath, which came in the fourth to fifth centuries, was due to two major factors: (1) Constantine’s law of 321, which requested the urban population to rest on “the venerable day of the

J. Massyngberde Ford candidly admits in her comment on Rev 1:10, that at the time that Revelation was written “most probably the Christian would still be keeping the Sabbath, the seventh day.”⁴⁵ Questions concerning the change from Sabbath to Sunday are, however, beyond the scope of this study.

Κυριακή ἡμέρα *as Easter Sunday*

Another interpretation is that κυριακή ἡμέρα refers to the Christian Passover or Easter Sunday, as an annual event, rather than the weekly Sunday.⁴⁶ It is argued further that it was on the day of the annual celebration of the resurrection that John was carried in the Spirit to meet the resurrected Christ. As a representative view, C. W. Dugmore suggests that the sources indicate that the earliest Christian references to the Lord’s day are to Easter as an annual commemoration of the resurrection and that its use for “the first day of every week would only have been possible after Sunday had become a regular day of worship among Christians.”⁴⁷ In this way, both the observance of Sunday and its alleged title κυριακή somehow developed from Easter Sunday.⁴⁸ Some have found support for such a possibility in the early church’s tradition, reported by Jerome in his commentary on Matthew 25, that Christ would return at midnight on Easter.⁴⁹ Jerome stated that “the apostolic

Sun,” while allowing farmers to pursue their agriculture work regardless of the day of the week (see *Codex Justinianus* 3.12.3, trans. H. S. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. [New York: Oxford University Press, 1970], 26). (2) The various Church Councils, which formally renounced the Sabbath on behalf of Sunday, include Elvira (A.D. 306), Nicea (A.D. 325), and Laodicea (A.D. 363). The latter urged Christians not to rest on Sabbath, but instead to honor Sunday as the Lord’s day and pronounced anathema on and called Judaizers all who kept observing the Sabbath.

⁴⁵J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, AB 38 (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 384.

⁴⁶E.g., Strobel, 185; Dugmore, 6:272-281; Massyngberde Ford, 384; Strand, “Another Look at ‘Lord’s Day,’” 174-181. While Strand argues for the primary application of κυριακή ἡμέρα to Easter Sunday over the weekly Sunday, he recognizes that this does not apply to Rev 1:10 due to the fact that Revelation originated in the Quartodeciman area (*ibid.*, 180); Alan Johnson, “Revelation,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 425; John P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, TPINTC (Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990), 67.

⁴⁷Dugmore, 275-279, argues that *Did.* 14:1, as interpreted by the fourth-century document *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.30, renders explicit support for the meaning of κυριακή ἡμέρα as a technical term for Easter Sunday; so also Strobel, 185. Dugmore’s view has been refuted by Bacchiocchi, 118-121.

⁴⁸See Geraty, 85-96.

⁴⁹E.g., Friedrich Bleek, *Lectures on the Apocalypse* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1875), 156; J. A. Bengel wrongly concludes that Jerome’s report shows that the early church expected Christ to return at midnight on Sunday (*Gnomon of the New Testament* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1877], 201); cf. Stott, 73.

tradition [was] continued [so] that on the day of the Passover vigil it is not permitted to dismiss the people before midnight, as they await the coming of Christ.”⁵⁰

The Easter Sunday view has been contested and refuted on the basis of different arguments.⁵¹ For instance, Wilfrid Stott argues that the Easter view does not fit the context of the vision of Christ as the High Priest in the sanctuary (Rev 1:12-20), which is, in his view, the Day of Atonement. Since the common name for Easter among early Christians was *πάσχα*, the context shows, he argues, that *κυριακή ἡμέρα* is not connected with the Passover season, but with the Day of Atonement. This argument is weakened by the fact that the scene of Christ among the lampstands reflects not the Day of Atonement, but rather the daily services related to the first apartment of the Hebrew cult as prescribed in the Mishnah.⁵² Numerous studies have demonstrated that the paschal context of Revelation 1 fits neatly into the context of the entire book of Revelation.⁵³

Bauckham refutes the Easter Sunday view on the basis of the argument that there is no conclusive evidence that Easter was ever called simply *κυριακή*⁵⁴ nor that the weekly observance of Sunday and its alleged title *κυριακή* developed from the annual religious festival of Easter Sunday. Any

⁵⁰Jerome, *Comm. Matt.* 4:25.6, in *St. Jerome: Commentary on Matthew*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 117 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 283; cf. Migne, *PL* 26:192.

⁵¹The Easter-Sunday view has been refuted by Strand, “Another Look at ‘Lord’s Day,’” 175-181; Bauckham, 230-231; Bacchiocchi, 118-123.

⁵²The scene of Christ among the seven lampstands evokes ordered priestly officiation: trimming and refilling the lamps that were still burning or removing the wick and old oil from the lamps that had gone out, supplying them with fresh oil, and relighting them (see m. *Tamid* 3:9, in *Mishna*, trans. Herbert Danby [London: Oxford University Press, 1933], 585; also Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, updated ed. [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994], 125).

⁵³See M. D. Goulder, “The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 342-367; T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 119-125; Richard M. Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” in *Symposium on Revelation—Book 1*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 121-122; Jon Paulien, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 33 (1995): 247-255; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2009), 32, 34.

⁵⁴Bauckham, 231, overlooks the fact that Irenaeus’s document *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus*, which dates to 170, refers to Easter Sunday as *κυριακή* (see *ANF*, 1:569-570).

claim that Rev 1:10 refers to Easter Sunday is, in his view, speculative and without real evidence to support it.⁵⁵

The strongest argument against the Easter Sunday view is that John was from an area that kept the old Quartodeciman reckoning of the resurrection, according to which the Christian Pascha (later Easter) was celebrated on the fourteenth of Nisan of the Jewish lunar calendar (the day of Passover). In referring to κυριακή ἡμέρα, the Revelator wrote to Christians, who, if they observed Easter, also observed the Quartodeciman reckoning.⁵⁶ According to this reckoning, Easter could fall on any day of the week. Therefore, the churches in Asia, by appealing to a tradition that claimed to go back to the apostles and particularly John the Revelator, celebrated Easter annually on the fourteenth of Nisan.⁵⁷ This was unlike the Roman church (and the rest of the churches) that celebrated Easter as resurrection day and, therefore, on Sunday.⁵⁸ Early in the second century, disputes arose involving the churches in Asia Minor of the older tradition and the Roman bishop, which were known as Quartodeciman or Paschal/Easter controversies regarding on which day to celebrate Easter.⁵⁹ The Easter Sunday custom eventually prevailed

⁵⁵Ibid., 231.

⁵⁶See *ibid.*

⁵⁷See *NPNF*², 1:241, n.1; Eusebius mentions Irenaeus’s statement that Polycarp was a disciple of John, a Quartodeciman, and unwavering in sticking to the practice he “observed with John the disciple of the Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated” (see *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.16; *NPNF*² 1.244). See also Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.1-7; *NPNF*² 1:242-244, which shows that all prominent bishops in Roman Asia were Quartodeciman.

⁵⁸In his letter to Victor, bishop of Rome, Irenaeus reports that the Roman church celebrated Easter on Sunday at the beginning of the second century (cited in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.14-17 [*NPNF*², 1:243-244]).

⁵⁹Eusebius reports the decision of the bishops of Asia, led by Polycrates, the bishop of Ephesus, to cling to the tradition of observing Easter on the fourteenth of Nisan, handed down to them by John the Revelator and other apostolic fathers. On this accession, Polycrates wrote to Bishop Victor in Rome, defending the Quartodeciman practice: “For in Asia great luminaries have gone to their rest who will rise on the day of the coming of the Lord. . . . These all kept the fourteenth day of the month as the beginning of the paschal feast, in accordance with the Gospel.” Then he reminded the bishop that “seven of my relatives were bishops and I am the eighth, and my relatives always observed the day when the people put away the leaven.” In turn, Victor reacted by trying to excommunicate the churches in Asia; however, the two sides reconciled through the intervention of Irenaeus and other bishops (*Hist. eccl.* 5.24; *NPNF*², 1:242-244). Melito, the bishop of Sardis in the mid-second century, reported a similar controversy, this time in “Laodicea concerning the time of the celebration of the Passover, which on that occasion had happened to fall at the proper season [i.e., the fourteenth of Nisan]” (*ANF* 8:758). For the discussion of the Quartodeciman controversy, see Frank E. Brightman, “The Quartodeciman Question,” *JTS* 25

over the Quartodeciman practice as a result of decrees issued by different synods, in particular by the Council of Nicea in 325, which condemned the Quartodeciman practice and imposed on the whole church the observance of Sunday as the official day of Easter.⁶⁰

All of this evidence suggests that an understanding of κυριακή ἡμέρα as Easter Sunday is not warranted by the historical evidence. Even though there are statements to confirm that the expression was indeed used to designate Easter Sunday, including in Asia Minor where Christians celebrated Easter in memory of Jesus' resurrection,⁶¹ they are, however, of a much later date (later second century). As such, they cannot be used as proof for a much earlier usage of the phrase in Revelation.⁶²

Κυριακή ἡμέρα as the Emperor's Day

Some commentators suggest that κυριακή ἡμέρα refers to the Emperor's Day.⁶³ Adolf Deissmann shows that the word κυριακός was current in the first century, denoting what belonged to the Roman emperor who claimed the title κύριος ("lord").⁶⁴ Inscriptions seem to confirm that Egypt and Asia Minor had a day known as ἡμέρα Σεβαστή ("Augustus Day," or "Emperor's Day"), dedicated in honor of the Emperor Augustus to commemorate his birthday, and was thus before the Christian era.⁶⁵ Having built on this evidence, some scholars such as R. H. Charles suggest that at least in Asia Minor the first day of each month or a certain day of each week was Σεβαστή or "Emperor's Day"; and when the issue arose concerning "Caesar or Christ," the full phrase "the Lord's day" (or just the adjective "Lord's") was used not only for the first day of the week to symbolize resurrection day, but also in protest against the emperor cult.⁶⁶

(1923/1924): 254-270; C. W. Dugmore, "A Note on the Quartodecimans," *StPatr* 4:411-421; Strobel, 185.

⁶⁰See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.23.2 (NPNF² 1:241; see also n. 1).

⁶¹Cf., "Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus," 7 (*ANF* 1:569-570).

⁶²For opposing arguments, see Bauckham, 230-231; see also Bacchiocchi, 118-123.

⁶³E.g., Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 357; James Moffatt, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 5:342; Charles, 1:23; Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, HNT 16 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926), 15; William Barclay, *The Revelation of John*, 2d ed., Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:43; George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 2d ed., New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 65.

⁶⁴See Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 357-358.

⁶⁵See further *ibid.*, 358-361.

⁶⁶Charles, 1:13; cf. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 359.

On the basis of linguistics, it is difficult to see a connection between the expressions κυριακή ἡμέρα (“Lord’s day”) and Σεβαστή (“Augustus Day”). First, the two phrases are completely different; no conclusive evidence has been discovered indicating that the phrase κυριακή ἡμέρα was ever used in reaction to the day honoring the emperor. Furthermore, although κύριος is a common title for God in the LXX, there is no evidence that the early Christians used it with reference to Christ in reaction to emperor worship.⁶⁷ If John intended the phrase to be understood in connection with the Emperor’s Day, why did he not use the Greek expression Σεβαστή, well known to the people in the Roman province of Asia, instead of using κυριακή ἡμέρα, which he initiated? It is also unlikely that the Revelator referred to the Lord’s day in Rev 1:10 as the Emperor’s Day at the time when Christians in Asia were being persecuted for refusing to worship the emperor as κύριος.⁶⁸

Κυριακή ἡμέρα as the Sabbath

Another possibility is that κυριακή ἡμέρα means the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. Such an understanding reflects the strong tradition of Seventh-day Adventists.⁶⁹ The phrase κυριακή ἡμέρα (“the Lord’s day”) is not used in the LXX or elsewhere in the NT. Yet the day is reported in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue to be ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἑβδόμη σάββατα Κυρίου τῷ Θεῷ σου (“the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Lord your God,” Exod 20:10, LXX). It is also called τὸ σάββατόν σου (“your Sabbath,” Neh 9:14). The expression τὰ σάββατά μου (“my Sabbath”) is used sixteen times in the LXX.⁷⁰ While the LXX reads ἅγια τῷ Θεῷ (“holy [day] to God”) in Isa 58:13, the Hebrew text has “the holy [day] of the Lord.” In addition, this passage in Hebrew also has “my holy day.” All three Synoptics quote Jesus as saying: “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (κύριος γάρ ἐστιν τοῦ σαββάτου ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Matt 12:8; Mark 2:27-28; Luke 6:5).

Thus it is possible that the Christians in Asia could have easily understood the expression κυριακή ἡμέρα as John receiving his vision on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. To use Paul K. Jewett’s argument, just as the title κύριος was applied to Christ in the conviction that he was the true Lord, so κυριακή ἡμέρα came to be used in the conviction that this day belonged to

⁶⁷As noted by Jewett, 58.

⁶⁸*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:736.

⁶⁹See *ibid.*, 7:735-736; Strand, “Another Look at ‘Lord’s Day,’” 180; Specht, 127; Desmond Ford, *Crisis! A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Newcastle, CA: Desmond Ford Publications, 1982), 2:250-251; C. Mervyn Maxwell, *The Message of Revelation*, God Cares (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1985), 2:82-85.

⁷⁰Exod 31:13; Lev 19:3, 30; 26:2; Deut 5:14; Isa 56:4, 6; Ezek 20:12, 13, 16, 20, 21, 24; 22:8; 23:38; 44:24.

him,⁷¹ and there is only one day in the Hebrew and Christian tradition that is designated as “the Lord’s.” This is further supported by the fact that the NT contains neither an explicit nor an implicit reference concerning a change from the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday. The seventh-day Sabbath was still honored in the NT as the divinely designated day of rest (cf. Luke 23:54-56; Heb 4:4-11). If its change was intended by either Jesus or the apostles, it would be strange that such a change was not clearly specified somewhere in the NT.

The evidence from early Christian authors points to the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath rather than Sunday in Asia Minor in the first half of the second century. One may mention, for instance, the above-cited letter of Ignatius, in which his reference to σαββατίζουτες (“sabbatize”) may mean to observe the weekly Sabbath. This shows that the Christians at that time were still observing the Sabbath. To this, one might add *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the document describing the martyrdom of Polycarp (70-c.156), which took place in the second half of the second century. Polycarp, the bishop in Smyrna and a disciple of John the Revelator, was captured on ἡ παρασκευή (“the preparation [day]” or Friday) and his martyrdom took place on σαββάτον μέγαλον (“the great Sabbath”).⁷² The use of these two expressions—“the preparation day” and “the day of the great Sabbath” (the latter occurs twice in the document)—shows that the Christians in Smyrna around the middle of the second century were still considering Friday to be ἡ παρασκευή (“the preparation day,” cf. Luke 23:54) for the Sabbath.

On the basis of biblical statements that clearly refer to the seventh-day Sabbath as the Lord’s day, as well as to statements from the ante-Nicene patristic writings that generally show Christians, particularly in Asia Minor, were still observing the seventh-day Sabbath at the time of the writing of Revelation, one might conclude that it would be highly unusual for John to have used the expression κυριακὴ ἡμέρα for any day other than Saturday. This observation is also affirmed by some who favor the Sunday or Easter Sunday interpretation of the expression κυριακὴ ἡμέρα. As noted above, Massyngberde Ford, who is in favor of the Easter view, candidly admits: “Most probably the Christians would still be keeping the Sabbath, the seventh day [when Revelation was written].”⁷³ Likewise, Scott, arguing against the Easter view, states that in Ignatius’s passage, referenced above, Christians were bidden not to “sabbatize,” namely not to keep, the weekly Sabbath.⁷⁴

⁷¹See Jewett, 58-59, who argues for Sunday as the Lord’s day.

⁷²See *Mart. Pol.* 7.1; 8.1; 21.1 (ANF 1:40, 43).

⁷³Massyngberde Ford, 384. Dugmore, 279, admits that “as matter of historical fact the Sabbath did not disappear as a day of Christian worship until the late fourth or early fifth century.”

⁷⁴Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1948), 179-180.

Scott thus tacitly admits that the Christians in Asia were still observing the seventh-day Sabbath a decade or two after the writing of Revelation.

Κυριακὴ ἡμέρα *as the Eschatological*
Day of the Lord

Another interpretation is that κυριακὴ ἡμέρα does not refer to a literal weekly day, but to the eschatological day of the Lord.⁷⁵ Accordingly, the Revelator was taken away in vision to witness the events leading toward the eschatological day of the Lord, which were unfolded before him in vision. This was considered a time when God would intervene powerfully in end-time world affairs. The phrase “the day of the Lord” (ἡμέρα κυρίου) is used uniformly in the LXX (Joel 2:11, 31; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:14; Mal 4:5), as well as in the NT (Acts 2:20; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10) with reference to the *eschaton*. Deissmann concludes that in Rev 1:10, grammar and context favor the interpretation of κυριακὴ ἡμέρα as the day of judgment, referred to in the LXX as ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου.⁷⁶

An argument against the figurative understanding of the expression is that since John the Revelator gives the specific place (“the island called Patmos”) and circumstances (“because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus”) under which he received the vision, it would be logical to conclude that the phrase “the Lord’s day” refers to the literal, specific time when John saw the vision.⁷⁷ In spite of the logic in this argument, the textual evidence emphatically suggests that a figurative understanding of the expression should not be discarded easily. The text does not state that John was on Patmos on the Lord’s day when he received the vision, but rather that *while* he was on Patmos he came to be *in the Spirit on the Lord’s day* (ἐν πνεύματι ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ). With regard to the usage of the expression ἐν πνεύματι, John is consistent throughout the book; the other three subsequent occurrences of *in the Spirit* (4:2; 17:3; 21:10) refer to a symbolic rather than a literal time/place.

⁷⁵Including J. Jacobus Wettstein, *Novum Testamentum Graecum* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1962), 2:750; William Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, Expositor’s Bible (Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1889), 13; Seiss, 1:20-21; Fenton Hort, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1908), 15; E. W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse*, 2d ed. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1935), 9-14; Deissmann allows for such a possibility (*Light from the Ancient East*, 357, n. 2); Phillip Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1931), 77-78; W. Leon Tucker, *Studies in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 51-52; Louis T. Talbot, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1937), 19; Scott, 36; Bacchiocchi, 123-131; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 42.

⁷⁶Adolf Deissmann, “Lord’s Day,” in *Encyclopedia Biblica* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 2815.

⁷⁷See *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, 7:735.

If, in Rev 1:10, a specific, literal time is intended, it would be inconsistent with the rest of the book.

The major flaw in the eschatological-day-of-the-Lord argument is that John does not use the common OT phrases *ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου* or *ἡμέρα κυρίου* in 1:10, but rather *κυριακή ἡμέρα*.⁷⁸ However, one might argue that John could have taken the familiar OT terms and rephrased them.⁷⁹ After carefully analyzing the uses of the adjective *κυριακός* in early Christian writings, Bauckham concludes that “the word *κυριακός* is simply synonymous with (τοῦ) *κυρίου* in all cases where (τοῦ) *κυρίου* is used adjectively with a noun, with the exception of instances of the objective genitive.”⁸⁰ He further demonstrates that Irenaeus and Clement “use *κυριακός* and (τοῦ) *κυρίου* interchangeably and virtually indiscriminately,” and concludes in an objective manner that “from the beginning *κυριακός* was used as a synonym for (τοῦ) *κυρίου*.”⁸¹

This suggests that John’s use of the adjective *κυριακή* (“the *Lord’s* day”), rather than the noun *κυρίου* in the genitive case (“the day *of the Lord*”), does not make a substantive change in meaning. For instance, *κυριακὸν δέϊπνον* (“the *Lord’s* supper”) in 1 Cor 11:20 is synonymous with *τράπεζα κυρίου* (“the table of the *Lord*”) in 1 Cor 10:21.⁸² The basic difference between the two phrases in both cases is simply a matter of emphasis. When the emphasis is placed on the word “*Lord*,” then the noun in the genitive case (*κυρίου*) is used; however, when the emphasis is placed on the word “*day*,” then the

⁷⁸See Bauckham, 232. His argument that *κυριακή ἡμέρα* was a title for Sunday at the time of the writing of Revelation is not warranted by the evidence.

⁷⁹Oscar Cullmann suggests that “The Christian term *ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου* or *κυριακή ἡμέρα* . . . is the Greek translation of *jom* [=yom] *Jahweh*” (*Early Christian Worship* [London: SCM Press, 1966], 92).

⁸⁰Bauckham, 224-225; contra Werner Foerster, “*kurios*, et al.,” in *TDNT* 3:1096. However, Bauckham, 225, wrongly argues that *κυριακή ἡμέρα* is “not simply interchangeable with *ἡμέρα (τοῦ) κυρίου*, since by long-established usage the latter referred to the eschatological day of the *Lord*. Thus if early Christians wished to call the first day of the week after their *κύριος*, they could not use the term with *ἡμέρα (τοῦ) κυρίου* without ambiguity and confusion. This, it would seem, is the reason why *κυριακή ἡμέρα* early established itself as the common Christian name for Sunday.” Unfortunately, Bauckham, 224, does not follow his own advice that interpretation “must be determined from the sense and context in any particular case.” Instead he supports his position with later material (see n. 36 above). In this case, the substantives that make the most sense and fit the context are *διδαχήν* or *ζωήν*, respectively.

⁸¹Bauckham, 246, nn.11-15, 225.

⁸²I am indebted to Foerster, 1096, for this information. Stott, 71, shows how Origin uses the adjective *κυριακή* in reference to the final day of resurrection and judgment.

adjective (κυριακή) with a qualifying noun is used.⁸³ This would explain why John employed the expression κυριακή ἡμέρα rather than ἡμέρα (τοῦ) κυρίου in Rev 1:10. Possibly he did it for the purpose of emphasis, wanting to inform the reader that he was transported in vision into the context of the *parousia* and the events leading toward it.

It is thus plausible that, in Rev 1:10, the phrase κυριακή ἡμέρα is used as one of several designations for the day of the *parousia*, e.g., “the day of the Lord” (ἡμέρα κυρίου, 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10); “the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ], 1 Cor 1:8; 2 Cor 1:14); “the great day” (μεγάλη ἡμέρα, Jude 6); “the great day of his wrath” (ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτῶν, Rev 6:17); “the great day of God” (ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ μεγάλη τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος, Rev 16:14).⁸⁴ In addition, Jesus calls the day of the *parousia* “his day” (ἡμέρα αὐτοῦ, Luke 17:24). The variety of expressions used in the Bible for the coming of Christ shows that the references to this climactic event in history are not limited to any one specific phrase. The expression κυριακή ἡμέρα could thus function as one of several different designations commonly used in the Bible with regard to the *parousia*.⁸⁵

The eschatological meaning of κυριακή ἡμέρα is clearly supported by the context.⁸⁶ Eschatology is clearly the framework for every vision in the Apocalypse. The day of the *parousia* is introduced in the prologue of the book, which is replete with eschatological statements that are repeated verbatim in the book’s epilogue:

δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (1:1)	δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει (22:6)
ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς (1:3)	ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν (22:10)
Ἴδου ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν (1:7)	ἰδοὺ ἔρχομαι ταχύ (22:7, 12).

The purpose of the book is “to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place” (1:1), suggesting eschatological imminence; this phrase is repeated verbatim in 22:6. Likewise, “the time is near” (1:3) is also

⁸³As correctly pointed out by Bullinger, 12.

⁸⁴Contrary to Bauckham, 225, who, although he concludes that the word κυριακός is simply synonymous with (τοῦ) κυρίου, argues that κυριακή ἡμέρα is not synonymous with (τοῦ) κυρίου because of the traditional usage of the latter with reference to the eschatological day of the Lord; see also Bacchiocchi, 127-128.

⁸⁵See Bacchiocchi, 127-128.

⁸⁶Contrary to Bauckham, 232.

repeated in 22:10. Finally, the climatic statement “Behold, he is coming with the clouds” (1:7) parallels “Behold I am coming quickly” in 22:7, 12.

This suggests that the phrase *δείξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ὃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει* in 1:1 and 22:6, together with two other parallel statements, function as an *inclusio*, suggesting that the whole content of the book is articulated through the perspective of the eschatological day of the Lord.

It is also especially significant that John’s reference to *κυριακὴ ἡμέρα* occurs after the climatic statement “Behold, he is coming with the clouds” (1:7), and is immediately followed by the reference to a trumpet-like sound, suggesting a divine *theophany*, the personal coming of the Lord in judgment (cf. Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16).⁸⁷ Thus it is not without significance that references to the *parousia* and other eschatological designations permeate the messages to the seven churches (chaps. 2–3), denoting a sense of urgency in each message. In addition, the eschatological promises given to the overcomers that conclude each message clearly anticipate their fulfillment in chapters 21–22:

Ephesus—*ἔρχομαί σοι* (I am coming to you, 2:5); “I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (2:7).

Smyrna—*δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς* (I will give you the crown of life, 2:10); “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death (2:11).

Pergamum—*ἔρχομαί σοι ταχὺ* (I am coming to you quickly, 2:16); “I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it” (2:17).

Thyatira—*ἄχρι οὗ ἂν ἦξω* (until I come, 2:25); *δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν* (I will give to each one of you according to your deeds, 2:23); “I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star” (2:26–28).

Sardis—*ἦξω ὡς κλέπτης* (I will come like a thief, 3:3); *περιπατήσουσιν μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν λευκοῖς* (they will walk with me in white, 3:4); “He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels” (3:5).

Philadelphia—*καγὼ σε τηρήσω ἐκ τῆς ὥρας τοῦ πειρασμοῦ τῆς μελλούσης ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης* (I also will keep you from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole world, 3:10); *ἔρχομαί ταχύ* (I am coming quickly, 3:11); “I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name” (3:12).

⁸⁷In the Hebrew Bible, the trumpets are regularly associated with the eschatological day of the Lord (see, e.g., Isa 27:13; Joel 2:1, 15; Zeph 1:16; Zech 9:14).

Laodicea—δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου (I will give him to sit with me on my throne, 3:21).

In light of this consideration, one may agree with William Milligan, who states: “From the beginning to the end of the book the Seer is continually in the presence of the great day, with all that is at once so majestic and terrible.”⁸⁸ Likewise Charles H. Welch insists:

The book of Revelation is taken up with something infinitely vaster than days of the *week*. It is solely concerned with the day of the Lord. To read that John became in spirit *on* the Lord’s day (meaning Sunday) tells practically nothing. To read in the solemn introduction that John became in spirit in the Day of the Lord, that day of prophetic import, is to tell us practically everything.⁸⁹

John was thus carried in the Spirit into the sphere of the eschatological day of the Lord to observe the events in history “that must soon take place” (1:1), which were leading toward the Second Coming and the time of the end. When John was carried away by the Spirit in vision to observe future events, he was already experiencing the nearness of the end time. This is why he could speak of the day of the Lord as being at hand. The nearness of the Second Coming added urgency to the message John communicated to his fellow Christians (cf. Rev 1:3; 22:7, 12, 20). He, together with the churches he was addressing, experienced the eschatological day of the Lord as a present reality.

Conclusion

On the basis of available evidence, it is problematic to interpret κυριακὴ ἡμέρα as Sunday. The support for such a view is dubious and insufficient, since it “does not rest on evidence supplied by the Scriptures but upon post-apostolic usage of the phrase, long after John’s time.”⁹⁰ No evidence exists in the patristic writings from the late first century or the early second century to show that κυριακὴ ἡμέρα was used for either the weekly Sunday or Easter Sunday (the latter due, among other things, to the Quartodeciman practice in Asia Minor until the end of the second century).⁹¹ The Emperor’s Day view does not rest on reliable evidence either.

The strongest biblical and historical evidence favors the seventh-day Sabbath. On the other hand, the eschatological character of the book as a

⁸⁸William Milligan, *Lectures on the Apocalypse*, Baird Lecture, 1885 (London: MacMillan & Co., 1892), 136.

⁸⁹Charles H. Welch, *This Prophecy: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 2d ed. (Banstead, UK: Berean Publishing Trust, 1950), 49.

⁹⁰Specht, 127. Dugmore, 274, asserts: “Is it not remarkable how little evidence there is in the New Testament and in the literature of the Sub-Apostolic age that Sunday was the most important day in the Christian Week, if in fact it was the occasion of the supreme act of Christian worship, viz. the Eucharist?”

⁹¹Strand, “The ‘Lord’s Day,’” 350.

whole also supports the eschatological ἡμέρα κυρίου (“the day of the Lord,” cf. 1:7), while the figurative meaning of the expression fits neatly into the symbolic context of the whole book. As was shown before, the whole book of Revelation was apparently written with the eschatological day of the Lord and the events leading up to it in mind. It thus appears that neither the Sabbath as the literal day of the week nor the eschatological day of the Lord may be discarded easily.

It is, therefore, quite possible to see a double meaning in John’s enigmatic expression κυριακή ἡμέρα. It is plausible that the Revelator may have wanted to inform his readers that he was taken ἐν πνεύματι (by the Spirit into vision) to witness the events from the perspective of the eschatological day of the Lord (end-time judgment) and that the vision actually took place on the literal weekly seventh-day Sabbath. The association of the two days—the eschatological day of the Lord and the Sabbath—by John would fit the eschatological connotation of the seventh-day Sabbath in the Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish tradition.⁹²

In Hebrew tradition, the Sabbath functions as the sign of deliverance (cf. Deut 5:15; Ezek 20:10-12).⁹³ The Sabbath is, at the same time, “the climax of the primordial time and the paradigm of the future time.”⁹⁴ *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* indicates that the Sabbath became the memorial of the exodus, “presenting to the picture of the redemption expected in the future the counter-piece of the release achieved in the past.”⁹⁵ It is significant that two passages referring to the Sabbath in Isaiah are associated with eschatological time (58:13-14; 66:23). The same concept is found in Jewish extrabiblical literature. For instance, in the first-century-A.D. Jewish apocalyptic work *Life of Adam and Eve*, “the seventh day is a sign of the resurrection, the rest of the coming age, and on the seventh day ‘the Lord rested from all his works.’”⁹⁶ Such an idea is expressed in Rabbinic literature, in which the Sabbath is seen

⁹²See Theodore Friedman, “The Sabbath: Anticipation of Redemption,” *Judaism* 16/4 (1967): 447; Robert M. Johnston, “The Rabbinic Sabbath,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1982), 73; Samuele Bacchiocchi, “Sabbatical Typologies of Messianic Redemption,” *JSJ* 17 (1986): 153-176; Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews*, Hermenia Commentary Series (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 131, n. 85. A few scholars argue for the eschatological concept in the weekly Sunday: André Feuillet, *The Apocalypse* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1964), 85; Cullmann, 7, 91-92; Stott, 73-74; Rowland, 566.

⁹³See Bacchiocchi, 165-166.

⁹⁴Friedman, 447.

⁹⁵Max Joseph, “Sabbath,” in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 1939-1943), 9:295-296.

⁹⁶*L. A. E.* 51:2, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 294.

as, Robert Johnston states, "an island of eternity within time, a foretaste of the world to come."⁹⁷ According to the Mishnah, Psalm 92, which was sung by the Levites in the Temple on the Sabbath, is "a psalm, a song for the time that is to come, for the day that shall be all Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting."⁹⁸ Theodore Friedman argues that many different expressions concerning the Sabbath in Talmudic literature express the idea that "the Sabbath is the anticipation, the foretaste, the paradigm of life in the world to come. The abundance of such statements is the surest evidence of how deep-rooted and widespread this notion was in the early rabbinic period."⁹⁹

As Johnston also notes, the eschatological denotation of the Sabbath is closely linked to the idea of "the cosmic week, deduced from Psalm 90:4, according to which six thousand years of earth's history would be followed by a thousand years of desolation."¹⁰⁰ He also adds that this idea is further connected with the concept of the eschatological Sabbath in Rabbinic literature.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷Johnston, 73. I am indebted to Johnston for some of the Rabbinic references listed in the section. For an excellent treatment on the subject, see Friedman, 443-452; also George Wesley Buchanan, "Sabbatical Eschatology," *Christian News from Israel* 18/3-4 (1967): 49-55.

⁹⁸M. *Tamid* 7:4 (Danby, *Mishna*, 589). Friedman, 448, also points to another statement of the Mishnah that links the Sabbath to the world to come: "A man should not go out on (the Sabbath) carrying the sword, a bow, a cudgel, a stick, or a spear . . . The sages say: 'They are naught save a reproach, for it is written, *And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*'" (*Shabbath* 6.4 [Danby, 105]). *Midrash on Genesis* contains the following statement attributed to Rabbi Hanina: "There are three incomplete experience phenomena: the incomplete experience of death is sleep; an incomplete form of prophecy is the dream; the incomplete form of the next world is the Sabbath" (*Genesis Rabbah* 17.5; 44.17; trans. H. Freedman [London: Soncino Press, 1939], 136, 372); Johnston, 73, also finds a parallel to the notion of the eschatological Sabbath in the *Midrash on the Ten Commandments*, in which lost souls are given a temporary reprieve from punishment in Gehenna on the Sabbath. At the Sabbath eve, an angel in charge of souls would shout: "Come out of Gehenna!" Thus the souls are not judged on the Sabbath. However, when the Sabbath closes, the angel cries again: "Come out and come to the house of the shadow of death and chaos."

⁹⁹Friedman, 443.

¹⁰⁰Johnston, 73; cf. b. *Sanh.* 97a, b (trans. I. Epstein [London: Soncino Press, 1936], 654).

¹⁰¹The same idea is also expressed in *Pirqe R. El.*, chap. 19, according to which God "created seven aeons, and of them all He chose the seventh aeon only; the six aeons are for the going in and going out for war and peace. The seventh aeon is entirely Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting" (trans. Gerald Friedlander [New York: Benjamin Blon, 1971], 141); see also Buchanan, 52-53.

The eschatological concept of the Sabbath also appears in the NT. According to Matthew, Jesus advised his disciples to pray to God so that their necessary flight from Jerusalem during the Roman invasion would not occur in the winter nor on the Sabbath (24:20). The context suggests that judgment upon Jerusalem typologically foreshadowed the final judgment of the *eschaton*.¹⁰² A similar concept is expressed by the author of Hebrews, wherein the seventh-day Sabbath has eschatological significance as the heavenly rest for the wandering pilgrims (4:4-10).¹⁰³

The Revelator's own situation on Patmos, as well as the situation of the churches he was addressing (cf. Revelation 2-3), made the Sabbath meaningful as a foreshadowing of the future reality of the day of the Lord. John describes his situation on the island as being "in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance" because of his faithfulness to the gospel (1:9). Thus within the climate of his own Patmos experience and the visionary experience he had on the seventh-day Sabbath, he was carried away in the Spirit into the sphere of the eschatological day of the Lord to observe the historical events "that must soon take place" (1:1); in other words, those events leading up to the Second Coming and the time of the end. It was on this "Lord's day" that, as he claimed, he had an encounter with the resurrected Lord, which for him made that Sabbath a foretaste of the eschatological rest he would enter into together with the faithful of all ages (chaps. 21-22).

When John was carried by the Spirit in vision, he was already experiencing the nearness of the end. This is why he could speak of the day of the Lord as being at hand. The nearness of the Second Coming added urgency to the message he communicated to his fellow Christians (cf. Rev 1:3; 22:7, 12, 20). Together with the churches he was addressing, the Revelator experienced the eschatological day of the Lord as a present reality. This would explain why he evidently avoided the use of the technical expression *ἡμέρα κυρίου*, which would have one-sidedly referred to the eschatological day of the Lord. Just as Paul initiated the expression *κυριακὸν δεῖπνον* ("Lord's Supper") in 1 Cor 11:20 to incorporate what was commonly known as "the breaking of the bread" and the notion of *κοινωνία* into one concept, so John the Revelator initiated the phrase *κυριακὴ ἡμέρα*, not previously used, in order to incorporate the two biblical concepts—the Sabbath and the eschatological day of the Lord—into a single idea.

¹⁰²Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC 33b (Dallas: Word, 1995), 703; Robert Mounce, *Matthew*, NIBC 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1985), 222.

¹⁰³See Attridge, 129-131.