

Breaking Bread on the First Day

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Note: This was originally a commentary on a Protestant Bible Lesson which used *Acts 20:7* to support the practice of keeping Sunday as a Sabbath.

Acts 20

⁷ And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them.

THIS is counted, in the lesson, the “golden text;” but it is not only in this lesson that it is counted so, it is deemed of the “utmost importance” by all who keep Sunday, because of its being the only recorded instance in the New Testament of a meeting on that day.

Now let us carefully and fairly examine the whole narrative and see what example there is in it in favor of Sunday keeping. And mark, if it be an example in one point, it is an example in every point. When was this meeting held?

⁷ Upon the first day of the week...

Who were they that composed the meeting?

⁷ ...the disciples came together,...[and] Paul preached unto them.

For what did they come together?

⁷ ...came together to break bread.

It is plain, then, that Paul and the disciples at Troas came together to break bread, on the first day of the week. Now there is another important question: What part of the first day of the week was it when they came together?

⁷ Upon the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread...

⁸ There were many lights in the upper chamber where they were gathered together.

⁷ And...Paul...continued his speech until midnight.

This meeting therefore was in the night of the first day of the week. Now, according to the Bible, when does the day begin?

Leviticus 23

²⁷ On the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement.

³² It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest; . . . in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall you celebrate your sabbath.

Deuteronomy 16

⁶ At even at the going down of the sun.

So, then, the tenth day of the month was from sundown on the ninth day till sundown on the tenth day. In other words sunset marks the beginning of a new day. This is strictly according to the order of God at the creation.

Genesis 1

² And the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

So far all was darkness.

³ And God said, Let there be light; and there was light.

2 Corinthians 4

⁶ [God] commanded the light to shine out of darkness.

Thus darkness being upon the earth and light following, darkness is naturally the first part of the day.

Genesis 1

⁵ And the evening [darkness] and the morning, [light] were the first day.

This is confirmed in the New Testament. In *Mark* 1:21-28 we read of the Saviour teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And in verses 29-31, that forthwith when they come out of the synagogue they went into Simon's house and healed Peter's wife's mother of the fever; then in verse 32 it is written,

Mark 1

³² And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.

They would not carry the diseased to him on the Sabbath, but just as soon as it was past, at the setting of the sun, they brought them all, “and all the city was gathered together at the door.” Dr. Clarke says:

The sick were not brought out to our Lord till after sunset, because then the Sabbath was ended.

And as the Sabbath ended, so the first day of the week began, at the setting of the sun. These are Bible facts, and accordingly if a meeting is held in the night on the first day of the week, it must be held between sunset on Sabbath (Saturday) and sunrise on Sunday. Therefore this meeting at Troas was on what we now call Saturday night. It was impossible for it to be on any other night, and still be on the first day of the week.

With this agree many eminent commentators. Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of Paul* says:

It was the evening which succeeded the Jewish Sabbath. On the Sunday morning the vessel was about to sail. The Christians of Troas were gathered together...The place was an upper room...The night was dark. Many lamps were burning in the room where the congregation was assembled.

Professor Hackett says:

The apostle then waited for the expiration of the Jewish Sabbath, and held his last religious service with the brethren at Troas...on Saturday evening, and consequently resumed his journey on Sunday morning.

Kitto says:

In fact, the Jewish civil day began, as it still does, not with the morning, but with the evening; thus the Sabbath commences with the sunset of Friday, and ends with the sunset on Saturday.

Under this arrangement the night seems to have been regarded...as belonging to and ushering in the day that follows.

He quotes from Tacitus *nox decree diem videtur*, i.e., night appears to lead the day.

Indications of this primeval order exist among many nations, and even we have “sevensnight” and “fortnight” to signify seven days and fourteen days.

Prynne says of this meeting:

For my own part I clearly conceive that it was upon Saturday night,...and not the coming Sunday night. Because St. Luke records that it was upon the first day of the week when this meeting was, therefore it must needs be on the Saturday evening, not on our Sunday evening, since the Sunday evening in St. Luke's and the Scripture account was not part of the first, but of the second day, the day ever beginning and ending at evening.

So, then, it is a fact that this meeting at Troas was upon what is now called Saturday night. Paul preached till midnight, then Eutychus fell out of the window; Paul went down and restored him to life, came up again, and then they broke the bread. Mark, the bread was not broken till after midnight. And when he had broken the bread, and eaten, and talked till break of day, then he started “afoot” for Assos, twenty miles away, on Sunday morning.

But his eight companions on the voyage had already gone.

Acts 20

¹³ We went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos.

In fact, they were not at the meeting at all. Now let us read the narrative again, and to more easily get this point, we will italicize the distinguishing words. Begin with the fifth verse:

⁵ These *seven* going before tarried for us at Troas.

⁶ And we [*Paul and Luke*] sailed away from Philippi...and came unto them to Troas,...where we [*all*] abode seven days.

⁷ And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together...Paul preached unto them...

⁸ And there were many lights...where they were gathered together...

¹² And they brought the young man alive.

Notice, he says *we* abode at Troas seven days. He does not say that on the first day of the week *we* came together, but, “*the disciples* came together.” He does not say, Paul preached unto *us*, but, “Paul preached unto *them*.” He does not say, There were many lights where *we* were gathered together, but, where *they* were gathered together. He does not say *we* brought the young man alive, but, “*they* brought the young man alive.”

But where were the *we*? What were *we* doing all this time? Ah! he tells us.

Acts 20

¹³ We went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos.

It is a fact, therefore, that Paul's eight traveling companions were not at this meeting at all, but, instead, were aboard the ship sailing to Assos. And this was by the direction of Paul himself.

¹³ And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.

¹⁴ And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene.

Again, the record says they were at Troas on the “first day of the week.” The same record (verse 15) says that “the next day” they sailed from Mitylene “and come over against [or abreast of] Chios.”

And this is proof positive that they went from Troas to Mitylene on the first day of the week, which makes fifty miles that Paul traveled, and seventy miles that his companions, by his appointment, traveled on the first day of the week, commonly called Sunday, and sometimes called the “Christian Sabbath.”

Once more:

1. The “first day of the week” they went from Troas to Mitylene, about seventy miles;
2. “the next day” they went from Mitylene to Chios, about seventy miles;
3. “the next day” they went from Chios to Samos and Trogylium, about seventy miles; and
4. “the next day” to Miletus, about thirty miles, and from there Paul sent for the Ephesian elders (verses 13-17).

All of which shows that they traveled just as far on the first day of the week as they did on any other day of which the record speaks. And that proves that Sapat, and Aristarchus, and Secundus, and Gaius, and Tychichus, and Trophimus, and Timothy, and LUKE, and PAUL considered the first day of the week as no more sacred than “the next day,” or “the next day,” or “the next day.”

Now if this be the account of how the first day of the week should be observed, then how much Sabbath observance is there about it?

Just none at all.

And if this be, as is claimed, the example of the observance of the first day of the week by the apostles and primitive Christians, then how many of them observed it as any more sacred than the other days of the week?

Not one.