

Revelation 1:10

"The 'Lord's Day' or 'Day of the Lord'?"

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound of a trumpet*."

Revelation 1:10 is a frequently referenced passage, often provided by many Christians in favor of Sunday Church being a First Century development of the Apostolic era, as it tends to be concluded that the Apostle John was shown his visions of the end-times by Yeshua the Messiah on a Sunday. There are certainly a number of Bible versions that one will encounter which offer the paraphrases, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (*the first day of the week*)" (The Voice) or "It was Sunday and I was in the Spirit" (The Message).¹ Concurrent with traditional interpretations of Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2, George Eldon Ladd (among others) concludes, "Here we find the first evidence that the day was viewed as being particularly consecrated to the Lord, because it was the day of his resurrection. The emergence of Sunday observance in place of the Jewish sabbath was a gradual historical process, and here we have the beginning of that process."²

It is witnessed in Second Century Christian materials, for sure, how "the Lord's Day" was a first day of the week or Sunday religious observance for many Believers. Whether "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10 is actually Sunday, is something that can be legitimately challenged, or at least tempered, given the wider themes of the Book of Revelation. In the entry for "Lord's Day" in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, J.C. Laansma does, at least passively acknowledge, especially given the content of material in the Book of Revelation which will follow, how, "Might not John's reference be to the Day of the Lord?...There are many ways of referring to the Day of the Lord, and Revelation 1:10 may be one more."³ The main alternative to "the Lord's Day" being Sunday, is that the time referenced in Revelation 1:10 is to the eschatological Day of the Lord.

There are commentators on the Book of Revelation who are widely convinced that "the Lord's Day," *tē Kuriakē hēmera* (τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρα), is Sunday as the first day of the week, a time of Christian religious observance.⁴ There are other commentators, though, who while certainly favoring "the Lord's Day" being Sunday as the first day of the week for Christian religious observance, still have to recognize how *tē Kuriakē hēmera* could be a reference to the eschatological Day of the Lord:

- Robert H. Mounce: "The vision takes place 'on the Lord's day.' Some have interpreted this as a reference to 'the day of Yahweh.' That is, John is carried forward by the Spirit to the day of consummation: when Christ is

¹ Also, "It was the first day of the week and I was in the Spirit" (The Inclusive Bible).

² George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 31; also M. Eugene Boring, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 82; Christopher C. Rowland, "The Book of Revelation," in Leander E. Keck, ed., et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 12:566.

³ J.C. Laansma, "Lord's Day," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments*, 682.

⁴ Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 52; Ben Witherington III, *New Cambridge Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 80; Grant R. Osborne, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 83.

Revelation 1:10 Sabbath and Rest in the Apostolic Scriptures

unveiled and the judgment of God falls on mankind. It is more probable that that is the first mention in Christian literature of the Lord's day as a technical term for the first day of the week."⁵

- David Aune: "[T]he meaning of κυριακῆ ἡμέρα [*Kuriakē hēmera*] in Rev 1:10 is widely understood to be a new Christian designation for Sunday...A less common view is that κυριακῆ ἡμέρα in Rev 1:10 refers to the eschatological Day of the Lord, i.e., that John was transported in his vision to the eschaton...Why then did John not use the more common expression ἡμέρα (τοῦ) κυρίου [*hēmera (tou) Kuriou*], which occurs frequently in the LXX and NT?"⁶

The first main objection, to "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10 being the eschatological Day of the Lord, tends to be made on the basis of how associated terminology appears in the early Second Century to describe Sunday or the first day of the week as a time of Christian religious observance:

"On the Lord's own day [*Kata Kuriakē de Kuriou*, Κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου] gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure" (*Didache* 14:1).⁷

"If, then, those who had lived according to ancient practices came to the newness of hope, no longer keeping the sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord's day [*mēketi Sabbatizantes alla kata Kurikakēn zōntes*, μηκέτι σαββατίζοντες ἀλλὰ κατὰ κυριακὴν ζῶντες]..." (*Ignatius Epistle to the Magnesians* 9.1).⁸

The second major objection, to "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10 being the eschatological Day of the Lord, is more textual. It surrounds the usage of the adjective *kuriakos* (κυριακός), "of or for a lord or master: esp. belonging to the LORD (CHRIST)" (*LS*),⁹ which is also employed in 1 Corinthians 11:20 for "the Lord's Supper" or *Kuriakon depinon* (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον). It is frequently asked why *τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρα*, "the Lord's day" (Brown and Comfort)¹⁰ is used in Revelation 1:10, when it could have instead been *hēmera Kuriou* (ἡμέρα κυρίου; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10).¹¹ In the estimation of G.R. Beasley-Murray,

"John's vision took place **on the Lord's day**. This is not to be interpreted as implying a removal of the author to the 'day of the Lord' to witness the events of that day. The term *Lord's* in the phrase *the Lord's day* is an adjective *kuriakos*, from the noun *kurios*, lord, and it means 'belonging to the lord'. Paul uses it in the known phrase 'the Lord's

⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 76.

⁶ David Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation*, Vol 52a (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), 84.

⁷ Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 365.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁹ *LS*, 458.

¹⁰ Brown and Comfort, 852.

¹¹ Cf. Mounce, 76 fn#33.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

Supper', i.e. a supper which is for the Lord and in his honour. Such is the meaning in the phrase *the Lord's day*."¹²

Also to be recognized are the conclusions drawn by G.K. Beale, who while thinking that "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10 is Sunday, does not totally dismiss the interjection that *tē Kuriakē hēmera* could be the end-time Day of the Lord:

"Some contend that ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ [*en tē Kuriakē hēmera*] ('on the Lord's day') refers to the eschatological Day of the Lord prophesied in the OT, so that John's vision (especially chs. 4-22) is an explanation of how this latter-day expectation will be (or is being) fulfilled. This would be an attractive idea since the focus of this book's visions is end-time judgment. However, κυριακός [*kuriakos*] is never used of the 'Day of the Lord' in the LXX, NT, or early fathers. This is not a fatal objection, but it puts the burden of proof on those arguing for this 'Day of the Lord' view. The phrase is clearly and consistently used of Sunday from the second half of the second century on..."¹³

Some commentators go on to note how there were various days on the Roman calendar such as "Augustus' day," and thus this could make the first day of the week being "the Lord's Day" as a subversive ploy to the Roman system.¹⁴

Interestingly enough, one of the last theologians we would expect to see favoring "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10, being the end-time Day of the Lord, is the famed dispensationalist John F. Walvoord:

"John's revelation occurred **on the Lord's Day** while he **was in the Spirit**. Some have indicated that 'the Lord's Day' refers to the first day of the week. However, the word 'Lord's' is an adjective and this expression is never used in the Bible to refer to the first day of the week. Probably John was referring to the day of the Lord, a familiar expression in both Testaments (cf. Isa. 2:12; 13:6, 9; 34:8; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Zeph. 1:17-8, 14, 18; 2:3; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5; 1 Thes. 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). 'In the Spirit' could also be rendered 'in [my] spirit' (cf. Rev. 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). That is, he was projected forward in his inner self in a vision, not bodily, to that future day of the Lord when God will pour out His judgments on the earth."¹⁵

Here, what Walvoord appreciably does is that he limits the terminology of "the Lord's Day" (*tē Kuriakē hēmera*) to the Biblical canon.

It cannot go unnoticed how in Seventh-Day Adventist theology, "the Lord's Day" is commonly viewed as being the seventh-day Sabbath.¹⁶

While generally favoring "the Lord's Day" being Sunday, Craig S. Keener's thoughts on what it represents cannot go unnoticed. He states,

¹² G.R. Beasley-Murray, *New Century Bible Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), pp 64-65.

¹³ G.K. Beale, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 203.

¹⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 65; Mounce, 76; Witherington, *Revelation*, 80.

¹⁵ John F. Walvoord, "Revelation," in *BKCNT*, 930.

¹⁶ Skip MacCarty, "The Seventh-Day Sabbath," in Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), pp 35-39; also concluded to be the Sabbath in William J. Morford, trans., *The Power New Testament: Revealing Jewish Roots*, third edition (Lexington, SC: Shalom Ministries, 2003), 332.

Interestingly enough, Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 14 makes light of how "The seventh day is the Lord's Day..."

Revelation 1:10 Sabbath and Rest in the Apostolic Scriptures

“Because the first Christians were Jewish, they may have...avoided assembling on Friday evening or Saturday morning to avoid conflict with their synagogue services. ‘The Lord’s Day’ here may also involve a play on words: In worship, John was experiencing a foretaste of the future day of the Lord, when believers’ suffering would give way to the kingdom (1:9).”¹⁷

This presents “the Lord’s Day” being both the first day of the week as a time of religious observance, *and* as the future Day of the Lord. In his Revelation commentary in the *NIV Application* series, Keener further describes a scene that he witnessed during Bible college, of a debate between a traditional pastor and a Seventh-Day Adventist, arguing over the seventh-day Sabbath and Sunday observance. Keener draws the important conclusion,

“As early as the second century some Gentile Christians may have contrasted the ‘Lord’s Day’ with the Jewish Sabbath (Ignatius, *Magn.* 9.1). But within the New Testament itself there is no evidence that the Sabbath was ‘changed’ from Saturday to Sunday....[S]ome of those who argue that the particular day in Scripture is Saturday and was never changed insist that one should attend church on Saturday; but Scripture does not require one to hold church on one’s day of rest. The connections between ‘the Lord’s Day’ and the Sabbath on the one hand and between the Sabbath and church services on the other are postbiblical, and we should be charitable for differences of practice on this point.”¹⁸

While Keener does not think that church or congregational attendance should be insisted upon others for one’s day of rest,¹⁹ he does usefully recognize how the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament do not authorize a change of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* to the first day of the week. He also, most commendably, emphasizes that a demeanor of charity and fairness be demonstrated among born again Believers who do and do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath.

It is most commonplace for Messianic teachers to approach “the Lord’s Day” along the lines of it actually being the eschatological or end-time Day of the Lord. This is reflected in Messianic renderings of Revelation 1:10:

- “I came to be, in the Spirit, on the Day of the Lord; and I heard behind me a loud voice, like a trumpet” (CJB).
- “I was in the *Ruach* on the Day of the Lord, and I heard behind me a loud voice like that of a trumpet” (TLV).
- “In the Spirit, I was in the day of the Everpresent Lord, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a shofar” (The Messianic Writings).²⁰

In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, David H. Stern specifically draws the conclusion that *en tē Kuriakē hēmera* does mean “on the Day of the Lord,” further thinking

¹⁷ Craig S. Keener, *NIV Application Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp 83-84.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 86-87.

¹⁹ Consult the thoughts offered in Chapter 9 of this publication, “Today’s Messianic People and Shabbat: Moving Beyond ‘Saturday Church’” by J.K. McKee.

²⁰ The Sacred Name ISR Scriptures (1998/2009) actually has, “I came to be in the Spirit on the Day of יהוה, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.”

In contrast, the Delitzsch Hebrew New Testament actually has rendered the Greek *en tē Kuriakē hēmera* as *b’yom haAdon* (בְּיוֹם הָאֲדוֹן).

Messianic Sabbath Helper

that usages of this terminology by Christians in the Second Century C.E. for Sunday, indicates a quick dismissal of their Jewish Roots:

“On the Day of the Lord. If this is what Greek *en tē kuriakē ēmera* means, as I believe it does, Yochanan [John] is reporting the unique experience of having seen God’s final Judgment. If it means ‘on the Lord’s Day,’ that is, Sunday, the day on which Yeshua was resurrected (Mt 28:1, Mk 16:2, Lk 24:1)—and this is the majority understanding—then Yochanan is mentioning a relatively minor detail, the day of the week on which his visions took place.

“I think my translation is supported by context, since the whole of the book of Revelation is about the Last Judgment, which over and over in the *Tanakh* is called in Hebrew ‘*yom-YHVH*’ [יְוֹם יְהוָה] (‘the Day of *Adonai*,’ ‘the Day of the Lord’). On the other hand, Ignatius, who claimed to be a disciple of the emissary Yochanan, wrote letters only two decades or so after Revelation was written, in which he uses ‘*kuriakē*’ to mean Sunday—as does modern Greek. This only shows how quickly the Jewish roots of the New Testament were forgotten or ignored.”²¹

So, should there be any real problem with *tē Kuriakē hēmera*, literally “the Lord’s Day,” and not *hēmera Kuriou* or “day of the Lord,” appearing in Revelation 1:10? The difference is between the adjective *Kuriakē* and the noun *Kuriou*, one *describing* ownership and the other a genitive (case indicating possession) *designating* ownership. The lexicon appearing in *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* by William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, defines *kuriakos* (κυριακός) with the rather fair, “*pertaining to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord’s.*”²² The main emphasis of Revelation 1:10 is not on the day, rather it is on the Lord. As Revelation 1:1 opens what the Apostle John will be shown,

“The Revelation of Yeshua the Messiah, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John.”

Far from “the Lord’s Day” being what would develop in Christian history into Sunday Church, *tē Kuriakē hēmera* is indeed the end-time Day of the Lord, **but with the prime emphasis on the Lord and not the judgment**. Far too many people, when approaching the end-times, fail to see it from the vantage point of the Lord working on behalf of His people in salvation history—and instead focus almost exclusively on negative judgments, the rise of the beast, death and carnage, and more on the antichrist/antimesiah, and the work of Satan and the forces of darkness. Contrary to this, the Apostle John being transported to the future Day of the Lord, or “Lord’s Day” as he termed it, would be with the specific intention that readers of the Book of Revelation focus their steadfast attention upon,

“Yeshua the Messiah, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father—to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1:5-6).

²¹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 791.

²² William D. Mounce and Robert H. Mounce, eds., *The Zondervan Greek and English Interlinear New Testament (NASB/NIV)* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 2011), 1103.