

CHAPTER 1

The Pagan Planetary Week

A SURVEY reveals that in at least sixty-five languages the days of the week are named after the seven planetary gods of ancient paganism—Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn. And the practice of calling the days after those pagan deities is now most general in those lands where the profession of the Christian religion is dominant.

It would be absurd, however, to suppose that the dedication of the days of the week to the heavenly bodies is of Hebrew or Christian origin. The Holy Scriptures reveal that the ancient Jews and the early Christians designated the days by numbers, the sixth and the seventh being called also “the Preparation” and “the Sabbath” respectively. ¹ The dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other general sources of information are practically unanimous in attributing the calendar names of the days to a pagan source.

¹ Genesis 1:5,8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:2,3; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54, 56.

A Hybrid Institution

The week as it appears in our modern calendar is a hybrid institution. The numerical order of the days is that of the original Biblical week, but the nomenclature is that of the pagan planetary week of long ago. By the term “planetary week” we shall refer hereafter to the astrological week of seven days named after the hebdomad of heavenly bodies which the pagans anciently called *planets* and worshipped as gods. In this pagan week the days came in this order: (1) the day of Saturn, (2) the day of the Sun, (3) the day of the Moon, (4) the day of Mars, (5) the day of Mercury, (6) the day of Jupiter, and (7) the day of Venus. Their correspondence to the days of the Biblical week was as follows:

Biblical

1. First day
2. Second day
3. Third day
4. Fourth day
5. Fifth day
6. Sixth day
7. Seventh day

Planetary

2. Day of the Sun
3. Day of the Moon
4. Day of Mars
5. Day of Mercury
6. Day of Jupiter
7. Day of Venus
1. Day of Saturn

Then the Sunday of the pagan planetary week, which corresponded to the first day of the Biblical week, was made the official weekly rest day of the Roman Empire by Constantine I

(306-337 A. D.), the cycle of seven days was officially adopted into the Roman civil calendar. By his famous legislation of 321 A. D. the emperor confirmed and sanctioned the pagan name *dies Solis* (the day of the Sun), and made it the legal title of the day now called Sunday. When the Christian religion was adopted as the official cult of the Roman state, and its influence became dominant over that of paganism, the numerical order of the days of the Biblical week came to be adopted in the calendar. Nevertheless, the pagan nomenclature had already become so rooted by usage that it has remained in the calendar until this day, although in some languages the ecclesiastical name of “the Lord’s day” and the Biblical title of “the Sabbath” have prevailed for designating the first and the seventh days respectively. ²

² This is especially true in the Latin languages. In Spanish, for example, the days of the week are named thus: *Domingo* (from the Latin *dies Dominicus*, “Lord’s day”), *Lunes* (from *Lunae dies*, “the day of the Moon”), *Martes* (from *Martis dies*, “the day of Mars”), *Miércoles* (from *Mercurii dies*, “the day of Mercury”), *Jueves* (from *Jovis dies*, “the day of Jupiter”), *Viernes* (from *Veneris dies*, “the day of Venus”), and *Sábado* (from *Sabbatum*, “the Sabbath”).

Behind the planetary week there lies an ancient pagan philosophy—a pseudo science—which deified and adored the heavenly bodies. The Sun, the Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn were religiously observed and adored as gods by the heathen. Therefore, in order to understand aright the place and use of the planetary week in the heathenism of long ago, one must first know what was the general pagan philosophy which formed its basis. The facts presented in the following paragraphs will find ample confirmation by numerous quotations from ancient writers as the subject of this book is more fully discussed later on.

The World-Machine

In the thinking of the majority of the pagan philosophers of the ancient East the “world” (*cosmos*) embraced far more than this earth upon which we live. It included all the visible universe. The starry firmament seemed to them to be nothing more than a vast, spherical shell studded with motionless points of glittering light, which were designated as *the fixed stars*. This great celestial sphere was supposed to contain within itself the marvelous mechanism of the world-machine.

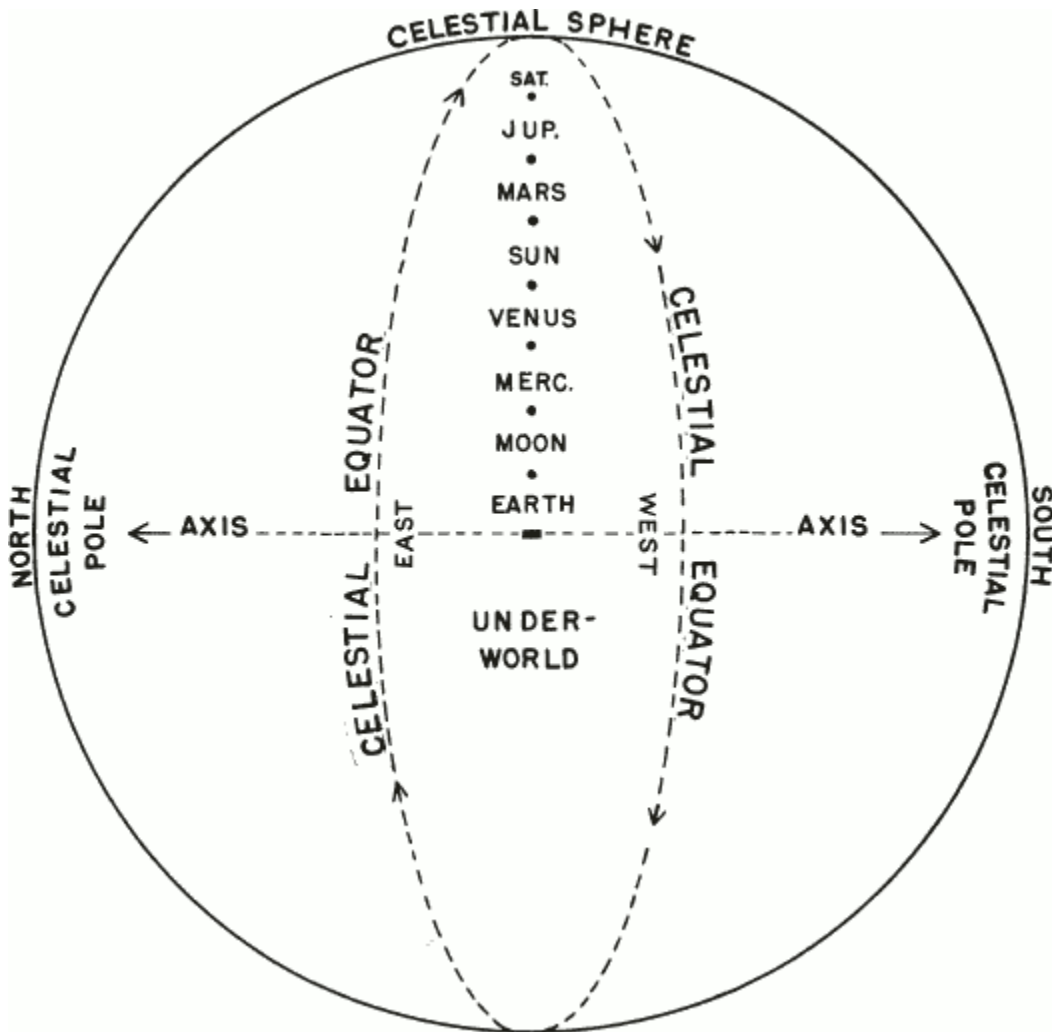
The earth was believed to be the immobile pivot around which the mighty cosmos turned like a gigantic ferris wheel. In the immensity of space between the encasing sphere of fixed stars and the motionless terrestrial center there appeared to revolve about—above and beneath—the earth seven luminous, wandering orbs. Although the relative of these celestial bodies varied at times in pagan thought, the most generally accepted order was this: Saturn (highest), Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon (lowest). Because these luminaries apparently moved to and fro with a certain degree of individual liberty, they were called *planets* (wanderers).

³ The Roman poet Lucretius (c. 99-55 B. C.) said that the Sun “is compelled to turn round his course beneath the earth by the same force which carried his orb above the earth.”—*On the Nature of Things*, book 5, lines 654, 655, in Loeb Classical Library, *Lucretius*. p. 387.

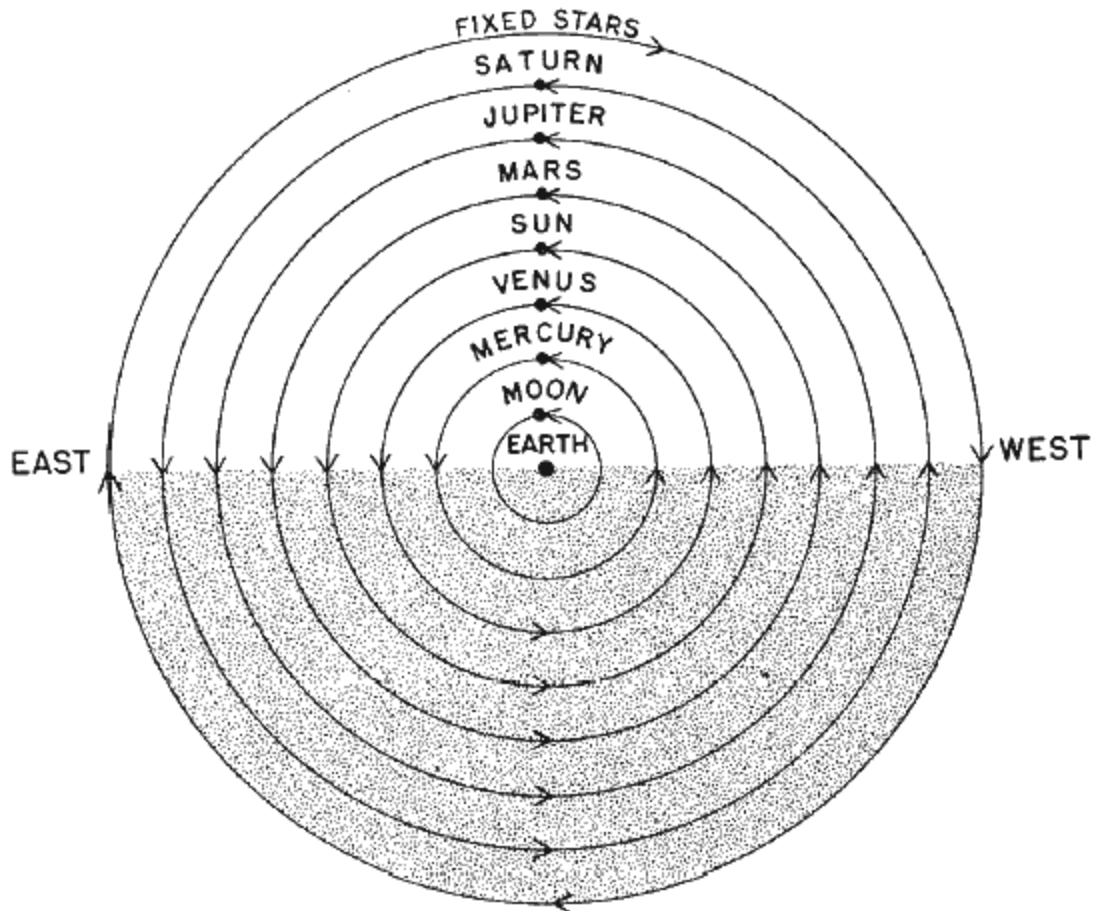
Thus the Sun and the Moon were both included in the list of the planetary bodies, and the seven of them were supposed to be the governing gods of the universe. Each of them was said to have a sphere or heaven of his own.⁴ Together they formed what was called the *hebdomad* of planetary gods and heavens. By adding to this number the heaven of the fixed stars and its divine ruler—the Demiurge (World Creator)—the *ogdoad* of gods and abodes was formed.⁵

⁴ Sometimes the orb itself was regarded as the abode of the planetary deity.

⁵ The *hebdomad* and the *ogdoad* of pagan philosophy became the subject of much study on the part of the Gnostic sects which plagued the early Christian church.



This diagram illustrates simply the ancient pagan conception of the universe. The earth was supposed to be the center of the great world-machine. The celestial sphere of fixed stars and the seven planetary bodies (Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, and Moon) appeared to revolve around the earth in a diurnal motion from east to west.



This diagram illustrates the ancient pagan conception of a geocentric universe, the view being from one of the celestial poles. While the planetary bodies appeared to revolve with the celestial sphere of fixed stars in a diurnal motion from east to west, they also seemed to have a contrary (west to east) motion of their own.

The Movements of the World-Machine

The outer sphere of the fixed stars appeared to revolve from east to west around the earth, one complete revolution of it marking off a day of time. Although the seven planetary bodies seemed to move westward in the diurnal revolution of the encasing firmament, they also appeared to have a contrary movement of their own, which carried them from west to east.

The position of the Moon, for example, was seen to shift from night to night in an easterly direction, in relation to the sidereal heaven, and a period of approximately 28 days⁶ elapsed before she returned to her original place. The Sun, too, seemed to move gradually eastward in relation to the starry expanse, and spent about 360 days returning to his original position in the sky. ⁷ These supposed movements of the heavenly bodies around the earth were called *revolutions*. While the westward movement of the fixed stars measured off the day, the eastward movements of the Sun and the Moon marked off the year and the month respectively.

⁶ The exact length of the sidereal lunar month is 27 days, 7 hours, 43 minutes, and 11.5 seconds. This must not be confused with the synodic lunar month of 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes, and 2.8 seconds.

It must be kept in mind that the ancient pagans believed that the earth was the center of the universe and that the Sun revolved around it. The year of some of the ancient calendars contained 12 months of 30 days each—a total of 360 days. This is believed to be the original basis for the division of the circle into 360 degrees—the zodiacal circle of the heaven being marked off into 360 day-spaces for the Sun. Pliny the Elder, who was a contemporary of Christ and His apostles, said that “the Sun’s course is divided into 360 parts, but in order that an observation taken of the shadows that it casts may come round to the starting point, five and a quarter days per annum are added.”—*Natural History*, book 2, chap. 6, in Loeb Classical Library, *Pliny, Natural History, Vol. I*, p. 191.

In those days the Egyptian calendar year consisted of 12 months of 30 days each. Five extra days, which were independent of the months, were added to the calendar year and celebrated as special religious holydays.

Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury also appeared to move in a direction opposite to that of the fixed stars, and the most intriguing thing about them was that sometimes some of them were in front of the Sun, and at other times they were behind him. This behavior was more pronounced in Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars than in Venus and Mercury, which stayed closer to the Sun.⁸ For this reason those five planets were supposed to be the special attendants of King Sol, about whom they were said to dance. The Moon was often regarded as the Sun’s wife—the queen of heaven.

⁸ Because the planets really revolve around the Sun, and not around the earth, their orbits take them from one side of the solar orb to the other. Ignorant of this fact, the ancient pagan philosophers supposed that the planetary bodies alternately advanced and retroceded with varying speeds as they accompanied the Sun on his journey around the earth.

The Zodiac

It was also observed that the planetary orbs, in their revolutions around the earth, varied their courses from time to time, so that their paths ascended to the north or descended to the south of the celestial equator. Nevertheless, they kept their route within certain limits in their ascending and descending, and traced a definite path through the sky. This course passed by twelve groups of fixed stars, which formed an encircling band around the firmament, passing over and beneath the earth.

The constellations forming those twelve groups of fixed stars were supposed to represent living beings, and collectively they were known as the *zodiac* (living creatures). Their Roman names were *Aries* (Ram), *Taurus* (Bull), *Gemini* (Twins), *Cancer* (Crab), *Leo* (Lion), *Virgo* (Virgin), *Libra* (Balance), *Scorpio* (Scorpion), *Sagittarius* (Archer), *Capricornus* (Goat), *Aquarius* (Water Carrier), and *Pisces* (Fish).

The twelve constellations of the zodiac were often referred to as “the houses of the Sun,” because he appeared to spend about thirty days in each one of them in his yearly revolution. Thus were marked off the twelve months of the solar year.

This is, in brief, a general outline of the fundamentals of ancient pagan astronomy, upon which the religious philosophy of astrolatry (star worship) was built. This was also the basis of the planetary week.

The Planetary Week

Upon this system of heathen astronomy was based the astrological theory of *chronocratories* (time-rulerships), which each planet was assigned dominion over an hour, a day, and even longer periods of time. Taking the planetary gods in their supposedly astronomical order—Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon—the pagan system assigned them by turn to the twenty-four hours of the day. The astrological day began at sunrise.

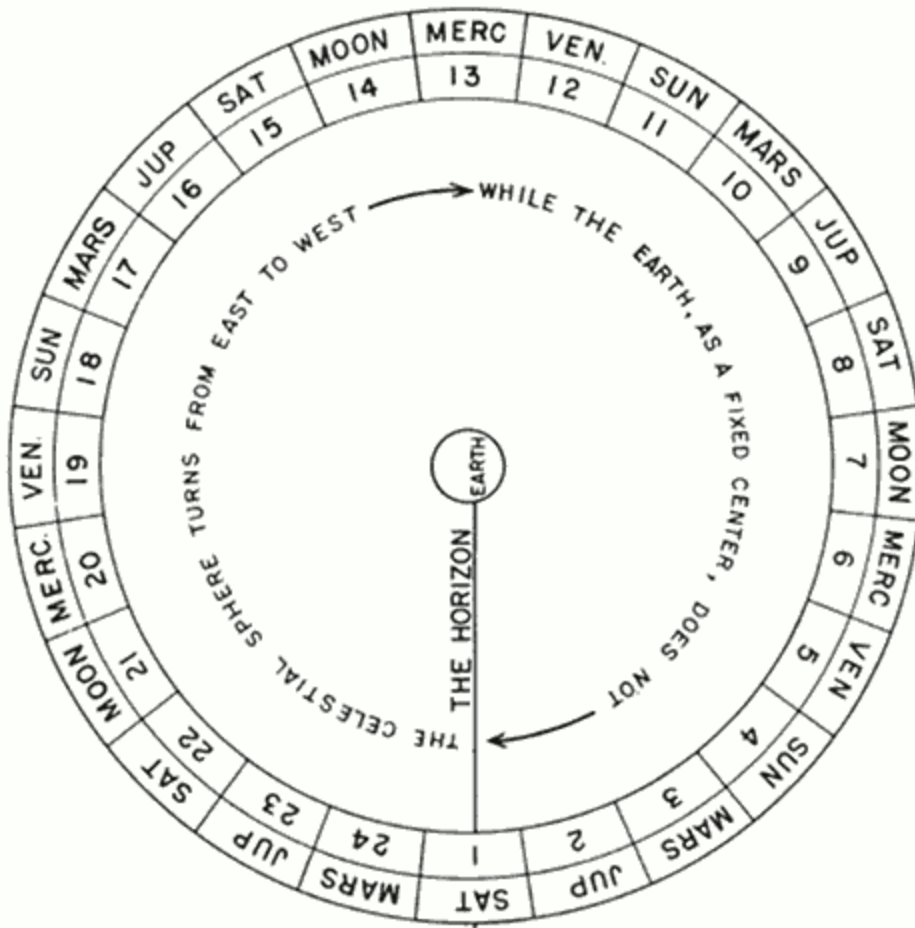
To each planet was assigned his respective hour, and the god having dominion over the first hour of the day was also lord of the day. Therefore the day was named after the planetary god having lordship over it. For example, let us begin with the planets in their supposedly astronomical order and assign the first hour of the day to Saturn, for he comes first in the hebdomad of the pagan gods. It will be the day of Saturn, because he is lord of its first hour. The distribution of the twenty-four hours of Saturn's day would be as follows: (1) Saturn, (2) Jupiter, (3) Mars, (4) Sun, (5) Venus, (6) Mercury, (7) Moon, (8) Saturn, (9) Jupiter, (10) Mars, (11) Sun, (12) Venus, (13) Mercury, (14) Moon, (15) Saturn, (16) Jupiter, (17) Mars, (18) Sun, (19) Venus, (20) Mercury, (21) Moon, (22) Saturn, (23) Jupiter, (24) Mars. The Sun, being the next planetary deity in turn, will take the lordship of the first hour of the following day, which will make it the day of the Sun. By continuing the same procedure of assigning the planets in turn to the twenty-four hours of the day of the Sun, it will be found that the first hour of the next day will belong to the Moon, which will be the day of the Moon. Thus can the system be run in an endless cycle of hours, days, weeks, and years.⁹

⁹ See Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans*, pp. 162-166; Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, in Loeb Classical Library, *Plutarch's Moralia*, Vol. 5. A 365-day year—12 months of 30 days plus five religious holydays—lends itself to this scheme. For example, the year 1945 has 365 days, beginning on Monday (January 1) and ending on Monday (December 31), so that the following year begins on Tuesday. It is the insertion of the extra day (February 29) in our calendar every four years that breaks the continuity of the planetary cycle for the years. We have a notable case in the Gnostic sect of the Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran, whose system of religion is based on the ancient Chaldean astrology. Their year is divided into 12 months of 30 days each, with five special days added to make up a total of 365. They do not follow the practice of adding an extra day every four years, for which reason their calendar now starts the year in midsummer, whereas it ought to begin in the spring. Each year of the Mandaean calendar is named for the day of the planetary week with which it begins. See E. S. Drower, *The Mandaeans of Iraq and Iran*, pp. 83-85.

This diagram illustrates Dio Cassius' explanation of the astrological week in use among the Romans, the assignment of the hours of the day to the planetary gods according to their celestial order. Because in this diagram Saturn has the lordship of the first hour—the sunrise hour—of the day, it is Saturn's day.

(EAST) SUNRISE

The Sun in his turn has the lordship of the first hour of the following day, and that is the Sun's day (Sunday). By thus continuing the assignment of the hours to the planetary gods, one finds that each deity will have his corresponding day in the planetary week.



For Making Horoscopes

The principal reason for keeping a tabulation of the hours and the days according to the plan outlined above was that the astrologers held that it was important to know what planetary god had dominion over the hour and the day when a person was born or when some other event happened, and what time would be most propitious for any undertaking.

As will be shown in the succeeding chapters of this book, astrological calendars were devised whereby the hours and the days were tabulated for ready reference.