

CHAPTER 11

“On the Lord’s Day of the Sun”

IN the New Testament the Greek word generally translated as “lord” is *kurios*. There is also an adjectival form of this word, which is *kuriakos* and means “lord’s.” Thus we have it in the phrases “Lord’s supper”¹ and “Lord’s day,”² the only instances of its use in the writings of the apostles. The Latin words corresponding to the Greek terms are *dominus* and *dominicus*.

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:20.

² Revelation 1: 10.

Fortunately, the apostolic literature does not leave us in the dark as to what day of the Biblical week was “the Lord’s day” in the primitive Christian church. Three of the Gospel writers were careful to note what the Lord Jesus Himself had said on this point. His statements were made publicly and in the hearing of both His friends and His enemies. “He said unto them, That the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.”³ “The Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.”⁴ “Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” Thus the Master’s teaching rang true to the ancient precept of the decalogue, which says that “the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.”⁵ It was not until the second century A. D. that the first day of the week was called “Lord’s Day.”

³ Luke 6:5.

⁴ Matthew 12:8

⁵ Mark 2:28.

⁶ Exodus 20:8.11; Isaiah 58:13; Luke 23:55, 56.

Sunday Called “the Lord’s Day”

After the death of the last of the apostles many of the Gentile Christians, who had been converted from heathenism, began to observe the pagan Sunday, which corresponded to the first day of the Biblical week. This practice took its rise about the middle of the second century after Christ, and the argument invented for it was that it was a fitting way to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, although no commandment from Christ or His apostles was adduced in support of the idea. These Sunday-keeping Christians, in need of a name for this new festival, hit upon the idea of calling it “the Lord’s day.” Thus we find in both the Greek and the Latin ecclesiastical literature of the latter part of the second century and the centuries following, frequent references to Sunday by this name. None of these writings cite Revelation 1:10 as Biblical authority for calling Sunday “the Lord’s day.” Indeed, no ecclesiastical writer prior to Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century alleged that either Christ or his apostles instituted the observance of the first day of the week.

The Lord of the Heathen Sunday

Because there is no New Testament precedent for the designation of Sunday as “the Lord’s day,” much has been written and said about how it got this title. Some writers have been rather bold in stating their convictions on the matter. For example, A. Paiva, a Portuguese writer on the subject of Mithraism, says:

“The first day of each week, Sunday, was consecrated to Mithra since times remote, as several authors affirm. Because the Sun was god, the Lord *par excellence*, Sunday came to be called the Lord’s day, as later was done by Christianity.”⁷

⁷ Agostinho de Almeida Paiva, *O Mitraísmo*, p. 3.

Also he compares Mithraism and Sunday-keeping Christianity thus: “The one and the other hallowed Sunday, as the Lord’s day, and the one and the other celebrated the birth of its god on the 25th of December; and it is beyond doubt that Mithraism preceded Christianity in this and in other points.”⁸

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

Arthur Weigall, a historian who is well known, says too: “As a solar festival, Sunday was the sacred day of Mithra; and it is interesting to notice that since Mithra was addressed as *Dominus* ‘Lord,’ Sunday must have been ‘the Lord’s day’ long before Christian times.”⁹

⁹ A. Weigall, *The Paganism in Our Christianity*, p. 145.

And not a few other authors take the same position as that held by Gilbert Murray, who says: “It [Mithraism] had so much acceptance that it was able to impose on the Christian world its own Sun-Day in place of the Sabbath, its Sun’s birthday, 25th December, as the birthday of Jesus.”¹⁰

¹⁰ G. Murray, “Religion and Philosophy,” in *Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, pp. 73, 74.

Thus Sunday observance, having no “Thus saith the Lord” in Holy Writ to support it, is still said to be a child of Sun worship, just as it was affirmed to be in the days of Tertullian and Origen.

“Lords Many”

Writing to the Greek Christians of Corinth, the apostle Paul said: “There be gods many, and lords many.”¹¹ And Jesus Himself pointed out that no particular good might be derived by using the name “Lord” if the professed servant of God does contrary to His expressed will. “Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name

done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.”¹²

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 8:3.

¹² Matthew 7:21-23.

Thus it is apparent that sacred labels can be put on many religious things that do not meet divine approval. God has never called Sunday “My holy day.”

Pagan Lords

It is a fact, as Paul said, that the term “lord” was used to designate many heathen deities. This has been so from times immemorial, especially of the Sun. For example, in the ancient Chaldean hymns to the Sun there abound such words as these: “Lord,” “Great Lord,” “Lord, Light of the legions of the heavens, Sun, O judge!” “the Lord of living beings,” and “Lord, illuminator of darkness.”¹³ Tablets which tell of an invasion by the Medes show that the Assyrians addressed the Sun with such phrases as: “O Sun-god, Lord great, whom will I call to thee,” and “O Sun-god, Great Lord, I have asked thee.”¹⁴

¹³ Society of Biblical Archaeology, *Records of the Past*, Vol. 11, pp. 123-128.

¹⁴ A. H. Sayce, *Babylonian Literature*, pp. 79, 80.

Nebuchadnezzar, of Biblical fame, in an inscription refers thus to the solar deity he worshiped: “O Sun, great Lord!” “the Sun my Lord,” “the Great Lord, my Lord.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Society of Biblical Archaeology, *Records of the Past*, Vol. 7, Pp. 69-72.

In the Tel-el-Amarna letters abound such phrases as these: “The King my Lord, the Sun from heaven,” “my Lord the Sun,” “the Sun-god my Lord.”¹⁶

¹⁶ “The Tel-el-Amarna Letters,” in *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, Vol. 1, pp. 263-354.

The Phoenician Baal

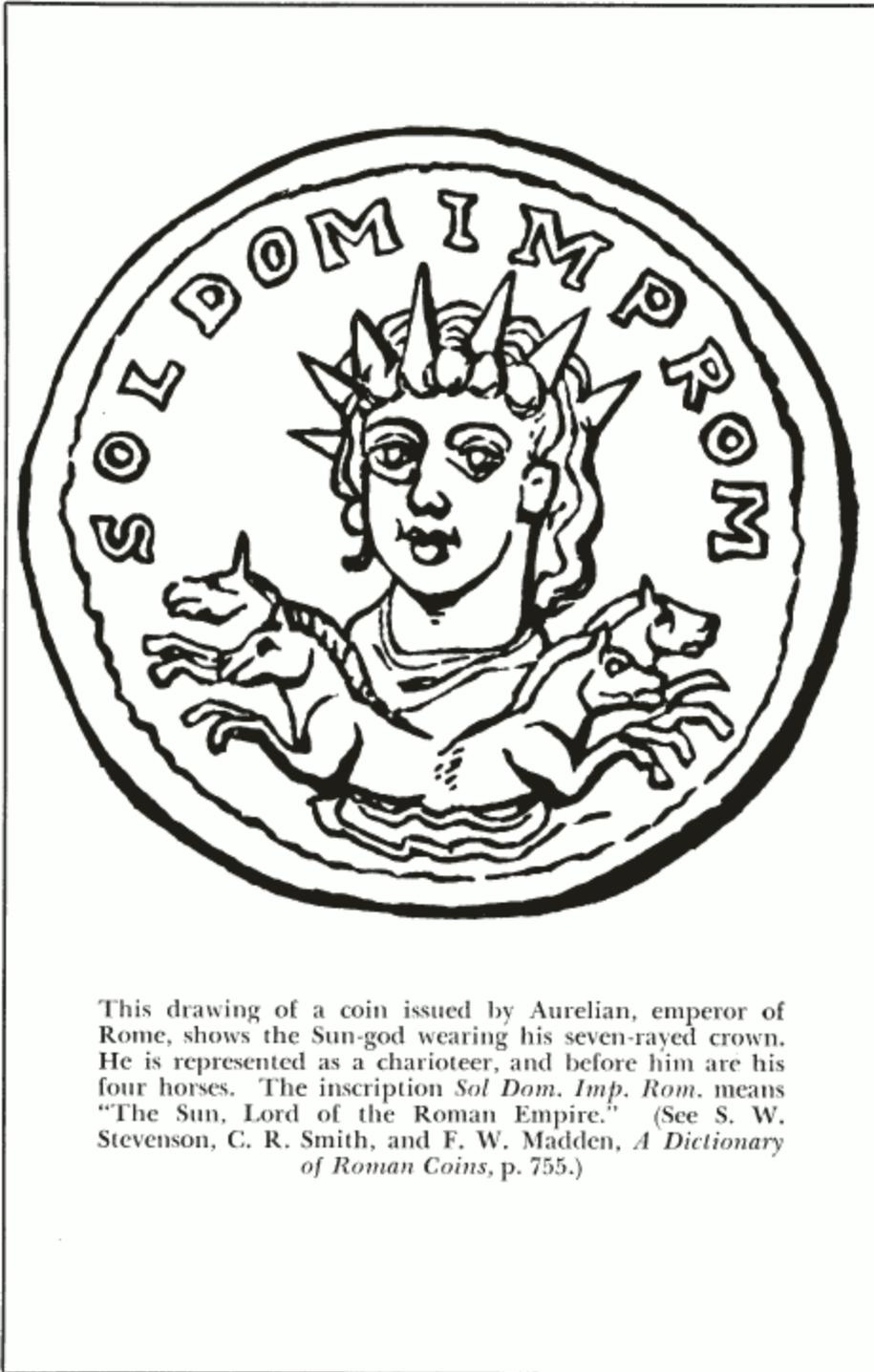
In the Bible much is said about the worship of Baal, “the Sun-god of Phoenicia.”¹⁷ This name means “lord.” In Numbers 21:28 and Isaiah 16:8 the Hebrew word *baal* is rendered “lord.” It is frequently translated as “master” and “owner” in the Old Testament.

¹⁷ E. G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan*, p. 583.

On this point a statement by A. H. Sayce, the noted Orientalist, is enlightening:

“The Semite addressed his god as Baal or Bel, ‘the Lord.’ It was the same title as that which was given to the head of the family, by the wife to the husband, and by the servant to his master. There were as many Baalim or Baals as there were groups of worshipers. Each family, each clan, and each tribe had its own Baal, and when families and clans developed into cities and states the Baalim developed along with them. The visible form of Baal was the Sun; the Sun was lord of heaven and therewith of the earth also and all that was upon it.”¹⁸

¹⁸ A. H. Sayce, *Babylonians and Assyrians*, pp. 233, 234.



The Sun as the Lord of the Roman Empire

Joseph Scaliger and others say that in the Persian tongue the name "Mithra" used to designate the Sun, really means "Lord." If this be true, the "day of Mih," once widely used in Chinese almanacs to designate Sunday, and which has been shown to have come to China from Central

Asia (most probably from Persia), means “the Lord’s day.”²⁰ The word *Mih* is the Chinese transliteration of the Persian name *Mihra* (Mithra).

²⁰ Joseph Scaliger, *De Emendatione Temporum*, book 6, p. 551.

²¹ The matter of the Mithraic Sunday in China is considered more fully in the next chapter.

Among the many Roman inscriptions related to Mithraism, the cult of the invincible Sun, this Sun-god is frequently referred to as “Lord.” Here are some examples of phrases found in them: “*Sancto Domino Invicto Mithrae*”²¹ (to the Holy Lord, the Invincible Mithra), “*Domino Invicto*”²² (to the Lord, the Invincible One), “*Domino Soli*”²³ (to the Lord, the Sun), “*Domino Soli sacrum*”²⁴ (sacred to the Lord, the Sun), and “*Domino Soli Sacro*”²⁵ (to the Lord, the sacred Sun). In an inscription made by order of the emperor Commodus (180-192 A. D.) “to Mithra, the Invincible Sun,”²⁶ this solar deity is expressly referred to as “the Lord.”²⁷

²¹ F. Cumont, *Textes et Monuments Figurés Relatifs aux Mystères de Mithra*, Vol. 2, p. 104, No. 60.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 152, No. 417; p. 167, No. 519.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 112, No. 111.

²⁴ *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 1863 ed., Vol. 5, part 2, p. 1096, No. 8970.

²⁵ Marquardo Gudio, *Inscriptiones Antiquae quum Graecae ium Latinae*, p. 23, No. 1.

²⁶ A. Gorius, *Inscriptiones Antiquae*, Vol. 1, p. 112, No. 93; J. Gruterus, *Inscriptiones Antiquae Totius Orbis Romani*, Vol. 2, p. 35, No. 1.

²⁷ See also Philippus A. Turre (R. C. bishop), *Monumenta Veteris Antii*, chap. 1, sec. “De Mithra,” pp. 166, 167.

A. Dieterich presents a Mithraic prayer, composed in Greek, in which the Sun-god is addressed thus: “Lord, hail, King of great power, far-ruling, greatest of the gods, Helios, the Lord of the heaven and the earth, god of gods.”²⁸

²⁸ A. Dieterich, *Eine Mithrasliturgie*, p. 10, line 31 (

ὁ κύριος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς)

The emperor Aurelian (270-275 A. D.) not only officially proclaimed the Invincible Sun of Romanized Mithraism as *Sol Dominus Imperii Romani* (The Sun, the Lord of the Roman Empire), but also placed the full title and the image of the Sun on his coinage. On others of his coins the title is abbreviated as *Sol Dom. Imp. Romani* and *Sol Dom. Imp. Rom.*²⁹

²⁹ H. Mattingly and E. A. Sydenham, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, Vol. 5, part 1, pp. 264-312; S. W. Stevenson, C. R. Smith, and F. W. Madden, *A Dictionary of Roman Coins*, p. 753

The emperor Julian (361-363 A. D.), who attempted to restore Sun worship to the place it had formerly occupied in the Roman Empire before Constantine abandoned it, wrote in Greek “that among the gods whom we can perceive, who revolve eternally in their most blessed path, he [the Sun] is leader and Lord.”³⁰

²⁰ Julian, “Hymn to King Helios” (

ἀπεδείκνυμεν ἀρχηγὸν καὶ κύριον) in Loeb Classical

Library, *Julian*, Vol. 1, pp. 413, 415.

“On the Lord’s Day of the Sun”

An ancient sepulchral inscription found in Catina (now Catania, at the foot of Mount Aetna, on the east coast of Sicily), although written in Greek, is clearly Roman, for it uses the Latin mode of calendar dating. It is the sepulchral epitaph of a child, and the particular part which bears on our subject says:

“He was born, O Lord of good things, on the 15th day before the Kalends of November, on the day of Saturn; he lived 10 months; (and) he died on the 10th day before the Kalends of September, on the Lord’s day of the Sun.”²¹

²¹ G. Kaibel, *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Vol. 14, *Inscriptiones Italiae et Siciliae*, p. 129, No. 525; A. Kirchhoff, *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, Vol. 4, p. 506, No. 9475.

The dates thus given are (for the birth) Saturday, October 18, and (for the death) Sunday, August 23. The year date of the inscription is not known, but the script indicates that it is of an early date. The death did not occur on a leap year, because when October 18 falls on Saturday, the following August 23 cannot fall on Sunday if the intervening February has 29 days. The phrase “Lord’s day of the Sun” appears as *hemera Heliou Kuriake*.