

LDS Sabbath-to-Sunday Claims Tested

A Response to LeGrand Richards'
A Marvelous Work and A Wonder (MWW),
Chapter "The Sabbath Day,"
Section "Greek Bible Designates the First Day of the Week as a Sabbath," pp. 336-337.

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The Basic issues

According to Richards, "the first day of the week (Sunday) is called a Sabbath eight times in the original Greek Bible. Had the Bible, therefore, been correctly translated, much of the present confusion in this matter would have been eliminated. Why would the first day of the week (Sunday) be called a Sabbath in the Bible if it were not a Sabbath?" (LeGrand Richards, *MWW*, p. 336).

Unfortunately for Richards and for Latter-day Saints who wish to obey heavenly Father's commandments, his explanation is decidedly erroneous. Fortunately, we have not been left to guess about that to which he is referring; Richards presents eight texts in which he claims the first day of the week is called a Sabbath in the New Testament. These are: Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2. We shall check them all. We will go into some detail on the first text we explore, since what we learn there will be applicable in many of the others.

Let's begin with Mark 16:2.

Mark 16.2	καὶ λίαν πρῶτὴ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων
Translation:	"And very early the first (day) of the week"

Mark's statement is to the point and is not in any way a controversial passage in the Greek. The Greek adjective μιᾷ is the cardinal number "one" in feminine form. It goes with the implied word ἡμέρα, "day." The word ἡμέρα is always feminine in gender. The word for Sabbath, σαββάτων, however, is a noun that is of the neuter gender and plural number.

The undisputed rules of Greek syntax require that "The adjective agrees with the noun it qualifies in gender, number, and case."¹ The adjective μιᾷ is a different gender and a different number than σαββάτων. That is, "first" cannot be applied directly to the noun "Sabbath." It is present to modify some other word than "Sabbath."

In Koine Greek there are three ways in which the adjective is used: attributively (to attribute a quality to the noun it modifies), predicatively (to make an assertion about the noun), and substantively (the adjective is used as a noun or has included in itself the meaning of a noun). Especially helpful in determining the correct use is the position of the preceding article (in this case, τῇ). Especially helpful also in our passage above is the absence of a noun with matching gender and case. All of this makes perfect sense however when we understand that in the phrase we are discussing we simply have a

substantive use of the adjective. The meaning of τῆ μιᾶ, "the first," literally, is "the first day." "Day" (ἡμέρα) is the noun that "first" is describing. Which day? "The first day."

This is nothing strange. It happens in virtually every language. For example, in our English a telephone conversation might go something like this: "So, When are you coming down?" "We're coming on the first of September." The first what? Those on the telephone would have no trouble understanding by the context of the conversation. Surely it has reference to the first day of the month. In the same way, the meaning of "coming down" in the conversation would be implied by the location of the caller who is asking when the other is coming down.

We now move to the latter portion of the translation, τῶν σαββάτων. As already noted, what we have here is a neuter gender and plural word with its preceding article. It is also of the genitive case, that is, it will be translated "of the." The article provides the "the" in the translation, and the fact that we have a genitive gives us the "of," which is commonly how we, in English, describe a quality of something. "Whose umbrella is that?" "That is the umbrella of Mr. Davidson."

The word Sabbath (root form σάββατον) occurs 69 times in the NT (in seven NT verses it occurs twice). Sixty times it is translated "Sabbath" while nine times it is translated "week" (Richards missed Luke 18:12).

Richards' assertion is that in those eight occasions where the phrase occurs it should be translated "Sabbath" rather than "of the week." But consider the nine places where it is translated week. What we have already said holds true in all of them; namely, that context governs the translation of a word when that word has multiple meanings in its usage. Everything that we have above shared holds true for four more of the verses on Richards' list:

Luke 24.1 Translation:	τῆ δὲ μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων "Now on the first (day) of the week"
John 20.1 Translation:	Τῆ δὲ μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων "Now on the first (day) of the week"
John 20.19 Translation:	τῆ μιᾶ σαββάτων "the first (day) of the week"
Acts 20.7 Translation:	Ἐν δὲ τῆ μιᾶ τῶν σαββάτων "Now in the first (day) of the week"

Three of the above verses contain the postpositive conjunction δὲ often translated "now." This has no impact on the discussion at hand other than that its position between the article and its subject may appear strange to those who do not know Greek.

Very much like the above passages is 1 Corinthians 16:2. Here's the Greek:

1 Corinthians 16:2 κατὰ μίαν σαββάτου
Translation: "During the first (day) of the week"

Here we have the adjective *μίαν* again ("first"), in the accusative case, coupled with the implicit "day," and followed here by the singular form of the genitive neuter noun. All of this is preceded by the preposition *κατὰ* which in connection with an accusative with reference to time here is given the translation "during." (As occurs frequently in the NT, the article is not present when a preposition is.) This (anarthrous use) of the article emphasizes the quality of a day rather than particular identity. It is not the fact of it being the first day of the week as much as the quality of that day, i.e., a regular working day, that makes it the right time for church members to comply with Paul's statement. To compute and physically set aside that which was to be offered would be inappropriate for the Sabbath day.

In this text Paul commands the Corinthians *not* to take up an offering in any worship service at church on Sunday specifically because he does *not* want there to be an assembly for worship when he arrives. What the text literally says is that Church members were, on that day, to set aside whatever they were going to give towards the special contribution Paul was going to take back with him to Jerusalem. Since the first day was a work day and not a worship day, that was the day he asked them to accomplish this -- at home, not at church. The fact that this had to do with a personal and individual collection is made clear by the singular personal pronoun *ἑαυτῷ*, "by himself." What he laid aside by himself he was to "lay in store" at home. It would be well, while preparing for that collection to be taken up for the church members to week-by-week start off by setting aside that which they planned to contribute.

The next text is Mark 16:9:

Mark 16.9 Ἄναστὰς δὲ πρῶτῃ πρώτῃ σαββάτου
Translation: "Now when [Jesus] was risen early on the first (day) of the week"

"First day of the week" comes from *πρώτῃ σαββάτου*. The word *πρώτῃ* is from *πρώτος*, a nominative singular feminine adjective. It means "first," it is the root for our English word "prototype." As an adjective it is used here just like *μίαν* in the other texts is used. As an adjective it modifies a noun that has the same gender. The word for "Sabbath," *σαββάτου*, here is a neuter noun, and cannot be the word modified. The word "first" is linked with is the implied word for "day," *ἡμέρα*.

The translation of Matthew 28:1

What we have shown so far has dealt with most of LeGrand Richards' claims. We are left only to examine an assertion he makes regarding the translation of Matthew 28:1 (which we will address in a moment), to find a reason for translating *τῶν σαββάτων* as "Sabbath" instead of "week." Let us turn now to Matthew 28:1. Here is our passage:

Matthew 28:1 Ὅψε δὲ σαββάτων, τῇ ἐπιφωσκούσῃ εἰς μίαν σαββάτων
Translation: "After the Sabbath, as the light increased in the first (day) of the week"

As the reader will immediately see, there is really nothing about the latter part of the text that we have not already discussed. Here μίαν σαββάτων is preceded by a preposition, εἰς, meaning "in." For the same reasons already given, we are going to translate the latter portion of the text given just as we did all the others, "in the first day of the week."

However, included in this verse is another issue which we want to address. The first three words you see, Ὅψε δὲ σαββάτων, are translated in the KJV as "in the end of the Sabbath." There is nothing new here in the words δὲ and σαββάτων other than what we have already seen. The word that for some has become involved in confusion is Ὅψε. The best translation of this word is given by Greek scholars as "after."

LeGrand Richards' theory is that Ὅψε δὲ σαββάτων should be translated "In the end of the Sabbath," and Matthew 28:21 taken literally to read "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the Sabbath." According to Richards, "This text may be confusing because of its reference to two Sabbaths, unless one keeps in mind the fact that the Christian Sabbath (first day of the week) follows immediately the Jewish Sabbath (seventh day of the week). Hence the reference to two Sabbaths."²

We have already seen more than enough to call into question Richards' translation of μίαν σαββάτων as "Sabbath" instead of "the first day of the week." But what about the first part of this verse?

The word Ὅψε is only found three times in the Bible. The other two occurrences are Mark 11:19 and 13:35. Mark 11:15-19 has Jesus casting out the money changers during the day and then remaining and teaching in the temple until ὄψε, "even" or "evening" when He leaves. Mark 13:35 uses the word for the first of four watches mentioned, commencing with sunset. With but three uses in the Bible the exact meaning of this word is somewhat indefinite. Furthermore, a closely related form, ὄψιας (example Mark 11:11) always seems to designate the portion of the biblical day (remember the day is measured in biblical terms from evening to evening, sunset to sunset Leviticus 23:32; Mark 1:32) after sunset or in the beginning of the day (See Matthew 8:16; 14:23; Mark 1:32; 6:47; John 6:16; 20:19 for some of these).

Several top-flight Greek scholars can be named who insist that the best translation for Ὅψε in Matthew 28:1 is "after the Sabbath," among them E. J. Goodspeed and J.H. Moulton. If the ideal translation of the word in Matthew 28:1 seems indefinite in that verse itself, the problem surely is solved by the parallel gospels. In Mark 16:1-2 the two Marys and Salome bring spices to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body. When? "Very early in the morning on the first day of the week." The text in Mark is very clear. The text in Matthew harmonizes perfectly if we but allow it to. If we do not permit it to, then we create a new problem between the texts.

There is nothing in the Matthew passage to suggest a transition in time from Matthew 28:1 and a Sabbath evening, suddenly to morning in Matthew 28:2-15. Recalling that the biblical day runs from evening to evening (Leviticus 23:32; Genesis 1:1; Mark 1:32, etc.),

early Sunday morning is after the seventh day sabbath and at the dawning of the first day of the week.

The gospels all are in perfect harmony if we permit the clear time reference to the same event in Mark to bring clarity to a less definite description in Matthew. We thus conclude that the best translation for Matthew is Moulton's "After the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week." (J.H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1, p. 72).

An Additional Text

Returning to Richards' theory that the eight occasions where "Sabbath" is translated "week" in the NT should all be rendered, "Sabbath," we turn our attention to a passage he missed, adding one more significant insight. The text is Luke 18:12.

There stands the Pharisee in the temple, "praying with himself." Among the virtues he advertises to God? "I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Here lurks again the same underlying word as in the other eight occasions for "week." But it would make no sense for the Pharisee to point out that he fasted twice in the Sabbath, refusing to eat between his breakfast and afternoon meal and then again refusing to eat between an afternoon meal and an evening meal.

The originator of the theory that this has reference to two meals in one day (not Richards), also mistakenly translates the Greek $\delta\iota\varsigma$ "two" rather than "twice." The word is an adverb. It modifies a verb, not a noun as an adjective would. Remember that earlier in our discussion when we covered the Greek words for "first" we saw they were both adjectives, words that modify nouns. "Twice" modifies a verb. Therefore we realize that in Luke 18:12 it is modifying the verb given for the verb for "fast." When it reads "I fast," the modifier for that tells us how frequently the Pharisee fasts, and the word that modifies the verb is the adverb $\delta\iota\varsigma$ which gives us that information: "twice."

What About the Joseph Smith Translation?

In fact, were there mistranslations of "week" which should have read "Sabbath" in these texts, the Joseph Smith "Translation"³ of the Bible would have been an ideal opportunity to bring in these corrections. After all, in it "Joseph Smith made extensive corrections and additions to the books of Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Matthew, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, and Revelation."⁴

The current 4-in-1 (includes the Bible KJV, Book of Mormon, Doctrine & Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price, along with other helps) published by the LDS Church includes portions of the JST, some in a special section⁵ and others incorporated into the footnotes of the Bible included in the volume.⁶

Actually, *in not a single one* of the eight occasions Richards asserts should be translated differently does the JST make a change to that part of the text (in the notes provided in the 4-in-1). In John 20:1 of the JST Smith does add to the verse the phrase "and two angels sitting thereon," so we know he revisited at least this verse. But no change is present where the translation of Τῆ δὲ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων as "the first day of the week" appears.

The Embarrassing Non-LDS Source of Richards' Theory

It may be of interest to some Mormons who have not realized it to discover that the view advanced by LeGrand Richards proposing that eight NT texts should be translated differently than they have been originated at the pen-tip of Samuel Walter Gamble, a Methodist minister and a non-Mormon. Gamble, gave up his pastorate in 1897 to become a lecturer on the topic of Sabbath and Sunday. After the publication of his book, he disappears into the silence of history. Gamble's theories were decisively condemned by a variety of Sunday-keeping scholars, who, while persisting in their observance of Sunday, knew that his arguments were laughable, and urged that they receive a quick burial so that their falsity not bring upon them scholarly embarrassment.

Among refutations published, and these by non-Adventist scholars, was Wilber Fletcher Steele's, "Must Syntax Die That the Sabbath May Live?"⁷ In 1931 none other than A.T. Robertson, DD, addressed and debunked Gamble's view again in an answer to a reader published in the journal *The Expositor*.⁸

My first year Greek textbook⁹ as early as page 27 tells me that the adjective must agree with the noun in gender and number and case. This alone suffices to demonstrate that the notions presented in MWW, pp. 336-337, are incorrect. It seems clear that neither LeGrand Richards or anyone in serious leadership on the publishing committees that have approved MWW in 1950 to the present (this dated volume is still being published to the world under the LDS Church's name by Deseret Book!), knows or cares about rudimentary Greek -- or about the laughable image they perpetuate in relation to themselves and their scholarship by continuing to publish this book.

It is one thing to have teachings with which others disagree and they take exception to you because of an unavoidable difference between views. It is another to go out and by choice make the most ridiculous argument and then afterward wonder why people won't take you seriously.

Summary

In his text Richards concludes: "From the foregoing, it should be clear that the writers of the New Testament fully understood that the first day of the week (Sunday) was a Sabbath day, and that it was the day upon which the saints met to worship."¹⁰ Actually, what is clear from the foregoing is that Samuel Walter Gamble's understanding of Koine Greek was extremely small, that LeGrand Richards erred in adopting it, and that today the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should beat a hasty retreat at once from these arguments.

The message which Latter-day Saints believe God is leading them to present to the world is ill-served by the long discredited arguments of a man who simply didn't know what he was talking about. As a Seventh-day Adventist I admit that I have yet to find any sound argument for the transference of the Sabbath to Sunday. But if I ever do, I hope that it will at least be biblically defensible. The argument that the Greek Bible designates the first day of the week as a "Sabbath" is not biblically sound.

Not even close.

¹ H.E Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manuel Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 116.

² Richards, MWW, p. 336.

³ The Joseph Smith "Translation" (JST) of the Bible, so-called, a volume not held by the LDS Church on an official level as having the full authority of the other "Standard Works" recognized by them as Scripture, is more of an ammendation or "correction" of the Bible through revelation by Joseph Smith. For an examination of the validity of the JST, see my paper, "Ever-Living Intercessor," which in the course of its content examines the JST version of Hebrews chapter seven. <http://iasm.info/iasmdocs/melchizedek.html>.

⁴ "Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible," Robert J. Matthews, http://www.lightplanet.com/mormons/basic/bible/jst_eom.htm, accessed on November 15, 2002 at 8:30AM PST.

⁵ Appendix, pp. 797-813.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-1590.

⁷ *Methodist Review*, 81 (May-June, 1899), pp. 401-402.

⁸ A.T. Robertson, *The Expositor*, August, 1931.

⁹ Ray Summers, *The Essentials of New Testament Greek*.

¹⁰ Richards, MWW, p. 337.