

**A Review of Ranko Stefanovic's
"The Lord's Day' of Revelation 1:10 in the Current Debate"
Andrews University Seminary Studies 49.2 (2011): 261-284**

Rodney Nelson

Introduction

The enigmatic phrase "The Lord's Day" of Revelation 1:10 continue to challenge investigators of its origin. The fact it appears nowhere else in the canon of the New Testament presents the greatest challenge to interpreting the reference of the passage.

Dr. Ranko Stefanovic has offered an update on the discussion of this passage in "The Lord's Day' of Revelation 1:10 in the Current Debate" (Andrews University Seminary Studies 49.2: 261-284). Dr. Stefanovic has provided an updated recap and assessment of the scholarly investigations of the passage over the past fifty or so years. For that service all should be grateful. The purpose of this study is to assess Dr. Stefanovic's application of "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10 to the eschatological "day of the Lord."

The Difficulties

Dr. Stefanovic has identified some difficulties involved in interpreting "The Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10 (261).

- (1) "The exact phrase in Greek occurs nowhere else in the NT, LXX, or in early Christian writings (coinciding with the time of the writing of Revelation). . . Christian sources contemporaneous with Revelation are not particularly helpful."
- (2) "There is no occurrence of the adjective (*kuriakos*) in the LXX."
- (3) "The context does not give any indication, or even a hint, regarding which day of the week the text is referring to."

Analysis of Difficulties

The exact Greek phrase does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament (Bauckham 222; Specht 125-126; Osborne 83; Bratcher and Hatton 28; Stott 411). There is no linguistic correlation or usage of the adjective *kuriakos* in the Septuagint (Bauckham 222; Beale 203; Stott 411). The earliest non-canonical Christian writings contemporaneous with Revelation (*Didache* 14:1, Ignatius' *Magnesians* 9:1), do not clearly confirm the phrase's meaning in Revelation 1:10 (Bauckham 228-229; Bullinger 12-14).

The absence of *kyriake hemera* elsewhere in the New Testament may create a difficulty for interpreting the phrase, but its uniqueness may indicate a possible solution. This is bolstered by the lack of a corollary usage and reference in the Septuagint. In other words, the absence of any prior usage of the phrase in both the Septuagint and New Testament indicates the reference is to something new and without historical precedent. The sole usage of *kyriake hemera* in Revelation 1:10 indicate a new reference to a particular day.

Further support for this is provided by the phrase for “the day of the Lord” in the Septuagint, *h` hemera tou kuriou*. Those who support the reference in Revelation 1:10 as another or variant way of saying “the day of the Lord” face the difficulty of explaining completely why John would use a different formulation. As pointed out by Bauckham,

In this case, the term is not simply interchangeable with (*h` hemera tou kuriou*), since by long established usage the latter referred to the eschatological Day of the Lord. Thus if early Christians wished to call the first day of the week after their (*kyrios*), they could not use the term (*h` hemera tou kuriou*) without ambiguity and confusion. (225)

Beale adds, “However, *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 the ‘Day of the Lord’ view” (203). Finally, Rordorf makes the point, “Despite the similarity of the designations *kyriake hemera* and *h` hemera tou kuriou*, however, their difference is in this instance more important than their similarity” (208). Also, “If this were not the case, why did not Rev. 1:10 use for the ‘last day’ the name customary in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, namely, the ‘day of the Lord’?” (Rordorf 208; see Aune 1:84; Mounce 56, fn. 10).

Another consideration of the expressions uniqueness is its association with Roman imperial matters during and prior to the time of Revelation 1:10 (Bauckham 222; Aune 1:83). Therefore, while it was formerly believed that *kyriake* was a term coined for Christian usage, it had a secular usage preceding Christian adoption of it for its association with Christ. “Thus it is not difficult to see how the word was adopted by early Christians to mean ‘belonging to the Lord’ Jesus Christ as a part of a resistance against emperor worship” (Stefanovic 262).

Importantly, *kyriake* being a term “not in common secular usage except with reference to the emperor” (Bauckham 222), would seem to indicate that a narrow imperial secular usage rolled over to a distinctly Christian term associated with the Lordship of Jesus Christ connected to a particular day (*kyriake hemera*). In other words, *kyriake hemera* became a “technical term” for a particular day rather than another way of referring to an already existing usage (“the day of the Lord”) (Osborne 84; Mounce 55).

Literal or Figurative

Dr. Stefanovic argues that a figurative meaning of “the Lord’s Day” as the eschatological Day of the Lord should not be dismissed easily (277). He points out the following contextual considerations.

- (1) “The text does not state that John was on Patmos on the Lord’s day when he received the vision, but rather that *while* he was on Patmos he came to be *in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*” (277).

- (2) “With regard to the usage of the expression (*evn pneumatic*), John is consistent throughout the book; the other three subsequent occurrences of *in the Spirit* (4:2; 17:3; 21:10) refer to a symbolic rather than a literal time/place” (277).
- (3) Therefore, “If, in Rev. 1:10, a specific, literal time is intended, it would be inconsistent with the rest of the book” (278).
- (4) “The major flaw in the eschatological-day-of-the-Lord argument is that John does not use the common OT phrases (“day of the Lord”). . . in 1:10, but rather (“the Lord’s Day”)” (278). Evidence used to question this assertion is:
 - a. “One might argue that John could have taken the familiar OT terms and rephrased them” (278).
 - b. Citing Richard Bauckham’s study of the language used relative to *kuriakos*, it is argued that “This suggests that John’s use of the adjective *kyriake* (‘the Lord’s day’), rather than the noun *kurios* in the genitive case (‘the day of the Lord’), does not make a substantive change in meaning” (278).
 - c. “The basic difference between the two phrases in both cases is simply a matter of emphasis. When the emphasis is placed on the word ‘Lord,’ then the noun in the genitive case (*kurios*) is used; however, when the emphasis is placed on the word ‘day,’ then the adjective (*kyriake*) with a qualifying noun is used” (278-279).
 - d. The conclusion is that John possibly used “the Lord’s Day” instead of “the day of the Lord” to emphasize to the reader “that he was transported in vision into the context of the *parousia* and the events leading toward it” (279).
 - e. Therefore, it is argued that it is “plausible that, in Rev. 1:10, the phrase (*kyriake hemera*) is used as one of several designations for the day of the *parousia*” (279).

Assessment of Arguments

Following is an assessment of each point.

- (1) “The text does not state that John was on Patmos on the Lord’s day when he received the vision, but rather that *while* he was on Patmos he came to be *in the Spirit on the Lord’s day*” (277).

Revelation 1:10 literally reads “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day.” The time of being in Spirit for John was on the Lord’s day, not that he saw the time (the Lord’s day) while in Spirit. The text clearly puts the time of the vision as separate from the vision itself. The text states the day of the vision, not a vision of the day. The in Spirit experience occurred on the Lord’s day, not that the Lord’s day was the spiritual experience. This is the reason all English translations say “On the Lord’s day I was in the Spirit.” If the “Lord’s day” reference is symbolic, then why did John not say “While in Spirit I saw the Lord’s day” or “I was in Spirit *at* the Lord’s day.”

It is suggested that attention to the expression “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” is focused on “I was in the Spirit” and not upon “on the Lord’s day.” Attention is drawn to the state of being in the Spirit, while the reference to the Lord’s day is declarative of the time of

the vision, not the content of the vision. The content of the vision actually begins in v. 12, "And when I turned I saw. . ." Prior to this, John had entered the state of being "in the Spirit" (v. 10), but the content of the experience (vision) began in v. 12. In vs. 10-11, John received instructions of what he was to do with the contents of his vision (write down and send to the seven churches).

"We find John first recording in vision Christ's message of blessing and reproof to the seven churches of Asia Minor" (Ringer 4).

The location of the vision (Patmos) has nothing to do with the vision itself. It merely sets the stage of where the vision occurred. To state "but rather that *while* he was on Patmos he came to be *in the Spirit on the Lord's day*" does not make the "Lord's day" expression symbolic. The context surrounding Revelation 1:10 sets the stage *where* the vision occurred (Patmos, v. 9), *why* John was there (the "word of God and the testimony of Jesus", v. 9), *who* was on Patmos (John, v. 9), *when* he received the vision (the Lord's day, v. 10), the *instructions* prior to the vision (to write down what he saw, v. 11), the *recipients* of the scroll (the seven churches, v. 11), and *what* John saw (vs. 12-18). John prefaced the vision with literal details staging the vision itself, though the vision was symbolic. The vision began in v. 12 when John turned around to "see the voice that was speaking" and he "saw seven golden lamp-stands" and "someone 'like a son of man'" (v. 13a).

The vision John had should help to identify and confirm whether the "Lord's day" in v. 10 refers to the "day of the Lord." It is very clear that what John saw in the vision was not the "Lord's day" or the events occurring on the "Lord's day", but *heard* a voice instructing him to write down what he was to see in the vision (vs. 10b-11). "The voice like a trumpet instructs John to commit to writing what he is about to see" (Mounce 56; see Beale 203). The vision that begins in v. 12 actually does not end until the end of chapter 3 of Revelation (Osborne 85). "It is only with the 'after these things' of 4:1 that this inaugural vision is ended. This brings a strong literary unity to 1:12-3:22 and highlights the extent to which the Christological vision of 1:12-20 prepares for the letters themselves" (Osborne 85).

What did John see? He saw the resurrected and glorified Christ (vs. 12-18) instructing John to "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later" (v. 19). The vision in vs. 12-18 pictures Christ as judge and the one who holds the "keys of death and Hades." However, the picture is of Christ as judge, not of Christ exercising judgment as on the "day of the Lord." The thrust of 1:12-19 is "to establish the deity of Christ" (Osborne 94). The confirmation of Christ's deity is his bodily resurrection (vs. 17-18).

God's sovereignty is "extended to Christ" and emphasized His eternality (Osborne 95). "What was said of God in Isaiah and Rev. 1:8 is now applied to Christ because of his death and resurrection, which has placed him in his exalted office. He possesses the same transcendent attribute as God" (Beale 213). "Mainly, Christ through his death and resurrection has defeated the powers of evil (the twin forces of 'Death and Hades') and gained control over them. . . In the NT, 'key' in an eschatological text always has the idea of power or authority over a thing. . . Thus here he has overcome and gained mastery over the cosmic forces" (Osborne 96; see Beale 214-215).

It is suggested that there is a connection between when John saw the vision and the contents of the vision. The content of the vision after 1:10 closes with the resurrected Christ (1:18). The connection is the resurrection of Christ as testimony and verification of His supremacy and eternity as judge, priest, and God, and the time John saw the vision – the Lord’s Day. John did not see the day of the resurrection in 1:10, but on that day saw a vision of the resurrected Lord of all creation who is God and which the day of the resurrection confirmed – the Lord’s Day. Is it not interesting that John saw the resurrected Christ in a vision on the Lord’s Day?

The focus of John is to establish the “credentials” of Christ as God, not describe the work of Christ at the “day of the Lord.” The importance of the Lord’s Day reference in 1:10 is because on that day Christ defeated death and sin which is described in the vision received on that day. “There is nothing in the context of Revelation 1:10-11 to suggest that John first saw the final Day of Judgment” (Ringer 4).

(2) “With regard to the usage of the expression (*evn pneumatic*), John is consistent throughout the book; the other three subsequent occurrences of *in the Spirit* (4:2; 17:3; 21:10) refer to a symbolic rather than a literal time/place” (277).

The point with regard to usage of the expression “in the Spirit” in other passages of Revelation as indicating “a symbolic rather than a literal time/place” is overstated and off-course. What is consistent with John’s usage is that the expression “in the Spirit” describes the condition he enters that enables him to see the vision. What he sees is symbolic, yet the “in the Spirit” experience is literal. The other expressions have nothing to do with the timing of the vision or the literal time or place of the vision. All this is to say the experience of being “in the Spirit” may be connected to the time they occurred (“on the Lord’s Day”, 1:10), yet the visions are not of the day itself. Beale states with respect to 4:2,

Being ushered into the spiritual, timeless dimension of God’s heavenly council means that the time of the events that John sees in vision may be difficult to determine precisely. Some of the symbols may be descriptive symbolism in that they portray what has taken place up to the present. Or they may contain determinative symbolism predicting what will come to pass. We have observed how all the visions from 6:1 to 22:5 flow out of the vision in chs. 4-5. . . Therefore they all probably have a mixture of past, present, and future elements. (Beale 319)

There is no indication from the other passages where “in the Spirit” appears that they occurred at another time than the first vision John received starting in 1:10. It is possible, but not determinative, to think the “in the Spirit” experiences in Revelation 1:10, 4:2, 17:3, and 21:10, all occurred on the Lord’s Day, because the contents of all the visions was not about the “day of the Lord.” “There is no indication of time, and it is impossible to know if there was a period between the visions” (Osborne 223).

The expression “in the Spirit” “points to a Holy Spirit-sent visionary experience in which God reveals his mysteries” (Osborne 225). The visions were literal experiences occurring at a literal place, yet were symbolic in content. To use the symbolic nature of the

visions to make the time of the vision symbolic is an assumption and overstated. Therefore, to state that “If, in Rev. 1:10, a specific, literal time is intended, it would be inconsistent with the rest of the book” is off-course. There is no inconsistency in reading “the Lord’s Day” of 1:10 as referring to a literal day unless one assumes that because the visions are symbolic in content automatically means the time of the vision is as well. The “in the Spirit” experience is a literal experience and the visions are symbolic. Likewise, the day(s) the visions were received is literal as well.

Dr. Stefanovic ignores the fact the Revelation is not only a series of visions with figurative and symbolic significance, but these visions are set in a narrative that sets the stage for the visions. Therefore, there is no inconsistency in the relationship between the literal setting and narrative of the visions.

(3) “The major flaw in the eschatological-day-of-the-Lord argument is that John does not use the common OT phrases (“the day of the Lord”). . . in 1:10, but rather (“the Lord’s Day”)” (278).

Dr. Stefanovic argues “that John could have taken the familiar OT terms and rephrased them” (278). This seems unlikely as Revelation would be the only place that he uses *kyriake hemera* as the “day of the Lord.” Why would John use a new phrase to describe the Parousia in a way not done to that point? The burden of proof lies with those seeking to explain this unique phraseology as applying to the Parousia.

Dr. Stefanovic makes the argument that the language similar to *kuriakos* “suggests that John’s use of the adjective *kyriake* (‘the Lord’s day’), rather than the noun *kurios* in genitive case (‘the day of the Lord’), does not make a substantive change in meaning” (278). Citation of Richard Bauckham is used to make this case. However, in an email Dr. Bauckham asserts “we have no evidence of the adjective *kuriake* used of the eschatological day, whereas it is regularly used for the day of the week” (Bauckham, 3/20/14). The difference between the two expressions is more marked than the similarity. The suggestion that there is not a substantive difference between the two expressions is not an indisputable fact. The question persists – Why did John not use the phrase for the “day of the Lord” when the expression was known from prior usage throughout Biblical history? Why would John use another expression for a day most clearly understood by “the day of the Lord”? The impression one gets by the argumentation that attempts to make the two phrases say the same thing is there is “special pleading” occurring to make it so. A rule of thumb is simply the more argumentation needed to make two different expressions the same meaning testifies to the difference.

Dr. Stefanovic concludes that John possibly changed the expressions because he wanted “to inform the reader that he was transported in vision into the context of the *parousia* and the events leading toward it” (279). However, as pointed out by Dr. Bauckham, it makes no sense “of John’s visions to think that he was already transported to the last day at the beginning of the narrative of the book. The initial vision of Christ and the messages to the churches in chs 1-3 is not set in the future, but in the present. His later

references to 'the great day of God' (16:14) show that he thought of this day as coming at the end of the eschatological events that he foresees in chs 5-19" (Bauckham, 3/20/14). In addition, S.R. Llewelyn states,

that the verb 'was' (egenomen) used in Revelation 1:10 is also used in Revelation 4:2, 8:1, and 11:13; in each of these cases he notes "The time reference is to when the event occurred. By analogy, the reference in Revelation 1:10 must be to the time when the seer had his spiritual experience. Second, if the writer wished to indicate a future time towards which he was transferred in the vision, then one would have expected a prepositional phrase in the accusative . . . rather than one in the dative' (222).

Conclusions

Dr. Stefanovic has concluded that Revelation 1:10 carries a dual reference that uses the "Lord's Day" as referring to both the seventh day Sabbath and the eschatological day of the Lord (284). However, it is believed enough material has been presented to dispute the application of "the Lord's day" as synonymous with the "day of the Lord."

The fact John did not use the "day of the Lord" language, but rather "the Lord's Day," testifies to an important distinction between the two expressions referring to separate times. Consider the following argument,

It is certainly understandable why Christians who gathered on the first day of the week to worship would need to choose a name for that day that indicated that it was given over to remembrance of Christ's resurrection until he returned. They could not use the 'Day of the Lord' lest it be confused with the final Day of Judgment. This could account for their distinctive use of (the Lord's day) to refer to the day of Christ's resurrection. (*Kyriake*) was already in use in the first century to refer to the Imperial authority, administration, and the treasury of Caesar. In addition, Caesar was worshipped by the Romans as a god. (*Kyriake*) would seem to be an ideal word with which to ascribe true Lordship to Jesus Christ who not only created all things but who also rose from the dead on the first day of the week. (Ringer 12)

The context of Revelation's setting is vital on this point. By AD 90, Christians could choose an expression for the day of Christ's resurrection that would express it in a unique manner not previously done. It was clearly understood in the province of Asia and the seven churches addressed in Revelation 1-3. Of major importance is the fact that the expression "the Lord's day" would become the prominent expression to the day of Christ's resurrection certainly in the later second century and perhaps earlier.

The fact *kyriake hemera* ("the Lord's day) is not used prior to Revelation 1:10 points to it as a new expression for the church to refer to a specific day of the week. This is probably connected to the immediate context of the book of Revelation itself.

Sources

Aune, David. "Revelation." *Word Biblical Commentary* 52A. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Editors. Dallas, TX: Word, 1997.

Bauckham, Richard J. "The Lord's Day." *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*. D.A. Carson, Editor. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982.

Beale, G. K. "The Book of Revelation." *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.

Bratcher, Robert G. and Hatton, Howard A. *A Handbook on the Revelation to John*. UBS Handbook Series. New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1993.

Bullinger, E.W. *The Lord's Day*. Brookfield, WI: Bible Search Publications, Inc., NC. Rordorf, Willy. *Sunday*. London: SCM Press, 1968.

Llewelyn, S.R. "The Use of Sunday for Meetings of Believers in the New Testament." *Novum Testamentum* 43.3 (2001): 205-223.

Mounce, Robert H. "The Book of Revelation." *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Revised). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.

Osborne, Grant R. *Revelation*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.

Ringer, Wes. "Should Christians Worship on Saturday or Sunday? 'The Lord's Day': An Analysis of the Meaning of the Phrase in Revelation 1:10." www.godandscience.org/doctrine/lords_day.pdf.

Rordorf, Willy. *Sunday*. London: SCM Press, 1968.

Specht, Walter F. "Sunday in the New Testament." *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*. Kenneth Strand, Editor. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982.

Stefanovic, Ranko. "'The Lord's Day' of Revelation 1:10 in the Current Debate." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49.2 (2011): 261-284.

Stott, Wilfrid. "Kyriake." *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Volume 3. Colin Brown, Editor. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978.