

# THE JUBILEES CALENDAR AND THE ORIGIN OF SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

EARLE HILGERT

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

A. Jaubert<sup>1</sup> and J. van Goudoever<sup>2</sup> have proposed that Christian Sunday observance is to be seen as rooted in an ancient Jewish sacerdotal calendar similar to or identical with that known from the *Book of Jubilees* and the Qumran literature. Jaubert, for instance, has spoken of the Christian Sunday as a "continuation" ("prolongement") of an ancient Jewish "priestly liturgy" which stood "in marked opposition to the legal calendar."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, W. Rordorf also has given attention to this problem and has concluded that "the recent investigations of the calendar, called forth by the study of the *Book of Jubilees* and related writings as well as by the discoveries of Qumran, are not able to elucidate the problem of the origin of Christian Sunday observance."<sup>4</sup> Such apparently divergeant conclusions invite a review of the evidence bearing on this problem.

<sup>1</sup> A. Jaubert, "Le calendrier des Jubilés et les jours liturgiques de la semaine," *VT*, VII (1957), 60; "Jésus et le calendrier de Qumrân," *NTS*, VII (1960-61), 27, n. 2 and p. 28: "Déjà l'origine de la Pentecôte au jour annuel fixe du dimanche montre que la communauté chrétienne primitive ne partageait pas les interprétations pharisiennes, mais que les coutumes de calendrier s'enracinaient dans le (ou un) calendrier sacerdotal ancien; il faut certainement en dire autant pour le dimanche chrétien."

<sup>2</sup> J. van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden, 1961), pp. 167-175.

<sup>3</sup> Jaubert, *VT*, VII (1957), 60.

<sup>4</sup> W. Rordorf, *Der Sonntag* (Zürich, 1962), p. 187: "Auch die neuen Kalenderforschungen, hervorgerufen durch das Studium des Jubiläenbuches und verwandter Schriften, sowie durch die Entdeckungen von Qumran, können das Problem des Ursprungs der christlichen Sonntagsfeier also nicht klären."

*The Jubilees Calendar*

In *Jubilees* 6: 32-38, an angel is portrayed as giving a calendar to Moses consisting of 364 days, or 52 weeks exactly. Its twelve months have thirty days each, with an intercalary day added at the end of each quarter, bringing each quarter out to exactly thirteen weeks. The most striking characteristic of this calendar, then, is that every year a given date falls on the same day of the week. Accordingly, each Jewish new moon and feast, stipulated in the Law in terms of a certain day of a certain month, is fixed to a specific day of the week. The angel warns against the rival lunar calendar that became normative in historic Judaism ("There will be those who will assuredly make observations of the moon"), for this calendar contained only 354 days ("comes in from year to year ten days too soon")<sup>5</sup> and so caused the feasts to fall at a different time from those in the Jubilees reckoning. Furthermore, in the lunar calendar the feasts moved from year to year through the different days of the week.<sup>6</sup> A similar calendar to that in Jubilees is also presupposed by a number of passages in *First Enoch* 72-82.

Recently attention has been drawn to the Jubilees calendar by the discovery among the Dead Sea Scrolls of several documents bearing on it. Fragments of both *Jubilees* and *First Enoch* have come to light there, showing that the people of Qumran used these books. Elsewhere also in their sectarian literature they show a keen concern for calendrical matters. Thus in the *Manual of Discipline* new recruits to the sect are warned in regard to the calendar, "not to deviate in any one thing from all the words of God in regard to their periods, and not to advance their seasons, and not to cause any of

<sup>5</sup> *Jubilees* 6: 32 in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* (Oxford, 1913), II, 23.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the normative Jewish calendar, see F. D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D. C., 1953-57), II, 100-123.

their festivals to be later.”<sup>7</sup> This seems to be a warning against following the lunar calendar of normative, Pharisaic Judaism. Most important of all, however, is a group of manuscripts from Cave IV known as *mišmārōt*, “courses.” These consist of schedules for the rotation of the service of the priestly families in the Temple (a practice familiar from Lk 1: 5, 8, 9). These schedules give the days of the week on which the Jewish festivals fell according to the Jubilees calendar and synchronize the two calendars on the basis of a three-year cycle,  $364 \times 3 = 354 \times 3 + 30$  (the intercalary month of the lunar calendar, here inserted once every three years).<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the *mišmārōt* give days of the week coinciding with dates in the Jubilees calendar means that we can fix any new moon or festival on that calendar to the exact day of the week on which it always fell. D. Barthélemy<sup>9</sup> and A. Jaubert,<sup>10</sup> by brilliant deduction, had already concluded that the New Year’s Day of this calendar fell on Wednesday, and this has now been substantiated by the *mišmārōt*.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, it is possible to give the following table for the days of the week on which the chief Jewish feasts and new moons were celebrated according to the Jubilees calendar:

New Moon, 1st month	Wed.
Passover (15/1)	Wed.
Wave-Sheaf (26/1)	Sun.
New Moon, 2nd month	Fri.
New Moon, 3rd month	Sun.

<sup>7</sup> IQS I, 13-15: ולוא לצעוד בכול אחד מכול דרכי אל בקציהם ולוא לקדם עתיהם ולוא להתאחר מכול מועדיהם cf. J. Obermann, “Calendric Elements in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *JBL*, LXXV (1956), 289, 292 f.

<sup>8</sup> J. T. Milik “Le travail d’édition des manuscrits du Désert de Juda,” *Suppl. to VT*, IV (1956), 24-26; *Ten Years of Discovery in the Wilderness of Judaea* (Naperville, Ill., 1959), pp. 41, 107 f.

<sup>9</sup> D. Barthélemy, “Notes en marge sur les manuscrits de Qumran,” *RB*, LIX (1952), 199-203.

<sup>10</sup> Jaubert, “Le calendrier des Jubilés et de la secte de Qumran,” *VT*, III (1953), 250-264; “La date de la dernière Cène,” *RHR*, CXLVI (1954), 140-173; “Le calendrier des Jubilés et les jours liturgiques de la semaine,” *VT*, VII (1957), 35-61; *La date de la Cène* (Paris, 1957), pp. 20-27.

<sup>11</sup> Jaubert, *La date de la Cène*, p. 27.

Pentecost (15/3)	Sun.
New Moon, 4th month	Wed.
New Moon, 5th month	Fri.
New Moon, 6th month	Sun.
New Moon, 7th month	Wed.
Day of Atonement (10/7)	Fri.
Feast of Tabernacles (15/7)	Wed.
New Moon, 8th month	Fri.
New Moon, 9th month	Sun.
New Moon, 10th month	Wed.
New Moon, 11th month	Fri.
New Moon, 12th month	Sun.

The striking thing about this calendar, as revealed in the table above, is that *all the major festivals fell on three days of the week: Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday*. Similarly, in the *Book of Jubilees*, where many events recorded in Genesis are given imaginary dates, Jaubert has shown that almost all of these dates fall on Wednesday, Friday, or Sunday.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, for the people of Qumran, these days were of special significance.

Before following this fact further, however, two additional points in regard to the Jubilees calendar must be made clear. (1) The period between Passover and Pentecost is reckoned differently here from traditional Pharisaic practice. The basic passage, Lev 23: 15, states, "And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete." The Pharisees, followed by traditional Judaism, understood the "morrow after the sabbath" on which the Wave-Sheaf was offered, to be 16 Nisan, the day after Passover (which was counted a "sabbath" regardless of the day of the week on which it fell). From one of the *mišmārôt*, however, we know that at Qumran "the morrow after the sabbath" was understood to be the day after a weekly, seventh-day Sabbath, i.e., Sunday, and that this Sunday on which the Wave-Sheaf was offered was 26 Nisan, the Sunday following the first Sabbath after the eight days of Passover.<sup>13</sup> This explains how, while Passover always came on Wednesday, Pentecost was always on Sunday. (2) Thus far, no scholar has proposed a universally acceptable solution to the problem of how the Jubilees calendar, which is  $1\frac{1}{4}$  days short of the actual solar year, was kept in harmony with

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-30.

<sup>13</sup> Milik, *op. cit.* pp. 108 f.; cf. Jaubert, *La date de la Cène*, pp. 20-24.

the seasons over a period of years. This problem has led to a vigorous debate, principally between A. Strobel and K. G. Kuhn, the latter denying that this calendar ever functioned for more than a short period of time.<sup>14</sup> Theoretically it is possible that its adherents could have accommodated it to the solar year of 365  $\frac{1}{4}$  days by intercalating an extra week every seven years, plus an additional week every 28 years.<sup>15</sup> While there is no proof that they did this, such a procedure would have kept the calendar in line with the seasons and would have maintained the bond between specific days of the week and dates of the calendar.

### *The Influence of the Jubilees Calendar*

The special emphasis that the Jubilees calendar appears to place on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday is particularly important for our problem. One of our earliest Christian documents, the *Didache*, provides information regarding Christian liturgical practices about the beginning of the second century. It declares (ch. 8: 1): "Let your fasts not take place at the same time as those of the hypocrites. They fast on Tuesday and Thursday; as for you, fast on Wednesday and Friday." Now the custom of fasting on Tuesday and Thursday was characteristic of the Pharisees (cf. Lk 18: 12), and it is doubtless they who are referred to here as "hypocrites" (cf. Mt 23: 13 f.). The Christian custom, on the other hand, became a fixed practice in the early church, Wednesday and Friday as fast days being known as early as the middle of the second century in both Greek and Latin as *stationes*, "stations."<sup>16</sup> The term is probably the Latin counterpart of the Hebrew *ma'amād*, which in the Mishna (cf. *Ta'anit* IV, 2) refers to the

<sup>14</sup> See pro: A. Strobel, "Der Termin des Todes Jesu," *ZNW*, LI (1960), 69-101; "Zur Funktionsfähigkeit des essenischen Kalenders," *RQ*, II (1961), 395-412; "Der 22. Tag des XI. Monats im essenischen Jahr," *RQ*, III (1962), 539-543; con: K. G. Kuhn, "Zum heutigen Stand der Qumranforschung," *ThLZ*, LXXXV (1960), cols. 649-655; "Zum essenischen Kalender," *ZNW*, LII (1961), 65-73.

<sup>15</sup> P. W. Skehan, "The date of the Last Supper," *CBQ*, XX (1958), 193. For other proposals, see Jaubert, *La date de la Cène*, pp. 142-149 and the articles by Strobel cited in n. 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Similitude* V. 1; Tertullian, *On Fasting*, II, X, XIV; Clement of Alex., *Stromata* VII. 12; Epiphanius, *Expositio Fidei* 22; *Apostolic Constitutions* VII. 23.

services of the priests in their courses in the Temple—the same subject with which the *mišmārōt* at Qumran are concerned.<sup>17</sup> If the Qumran emphasis on Wednesday and Friday was influential on Christian liturgical observance of those days for fasting, it can be no surprise that Sunday, the third of the special days of the week at Qumran, also appeared in Christianity.<sup>18</sup> There are, of course, a number of other motifs characteristic of the Qumran literature that reappear in the writings of the earliest Church Fathers.<sup>19</sup>

In evaluating the significance of this evidence for the origin of the Christian Sunday, we must bear in mind the difference between two propositions: (1) that there was some type of Sunday observance at Qumran which the early church copied, and (2) that certain attitudes regarding days of the week existed at Qumran which may have influenced early Christian thought and practice. Rordorf is doubtless correct that “the weekly ‘liturgical’ Sunday, which appears in the [Qumran] calendrical dating, was—at least as far as it has been possible to ascertain as yet—in no way characterized by a religious service; and no direct line leads from the yearly day of the Wave-Sheaf and Pentecost, which according to this calendar each fell on a Sunday, to the weekly Christian observance of Sunday.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Jaubert, *La date de la Cène*, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Didache* XIV. 1, contains also an obscure statement that has often been referred to Sunday: *κατὰ κυριακὴν δὲ κυρίου συναχθέντες κλάσατε ἄρτον καὶ εὐχαριστήσατε*. J.-P. Audet, *La Didache* (Paris, 1958), p. 72. emends this to *καθ' ἡμέραν δὲ κυρίου . . .* on the basis of a possible reading of the Georgian version and of *Apostolic Constitutions* VII. 30. 1. C. W. Dugmore, “Lord’s Day and Easter,” *Neotestamentica et Patristica in honorem sexagenarii O. Cullmann* (Leiden, 1962), pp. 276 f. refers this passage to Easter.

<sup>19</sup> On relationships between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the earliest patristic literature, see especially J.-P. Audet, “Affinités littéraires et doctrinales du ‘Manuel de Discipline,’” *RB*, LIX (1952), 219-238; J. Daniélou, *Theologie du Judéo-Christianisme* (Paris, 1958).

<sup>20</sup> Rordorf, *loc. cit.*: “Der wöchentliche ‘liturgische’ Sonntag, der in den Kalenderdatierungen erscheint, war — wenigstens soweit das bisher festgestellt werden konnte — in keiner Weise gottesdienstlich aus-

Such a conclusion, however, leaves open the possibility that the second proposition above may claim a certain validity. In view of the undeniable parallel between the priority of Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday in the Qumran calendar and the *Didache*, followed by general Christian practice thereafter, it appears probable that an attitude of favoritism toward these particular days of the week was inherited by the first-century church from sectarian Judaism. Such an attitude by itself could scarcely have given rise to the observance of Sunday as a day of worship. The immediate origins of this must be found elsewhere. *Nevertheless a psychological orientation toward Sunday derived from Qumran or related circles may well have been a contributing factor in the establishment of Sunday observance in the early church.*

Another aspect of the Jubilees calendar that could have contributed to Sunday observance is its emphasis on the keeping of yearly feasts and festivals on specific days of the week. Obviously, from the way in which these celebrations, and also the many dated events in the Book of Jubilees, follow a pattern of specific days of the week, this must have been of great importance to the observers of the Jubilees calendar. This was the identical concern voiced by the bishops of Rome and those who agreed with them during the Quartodeciman controversy: Easter was to be observed on no other day than Sunday.<sup>21</sup> Xystus I (ca. A.D. 116-125), the earliest Roman bishop known to have followed this practice<sup>22</sup> (though he probably did not originate it, as it was widely followed in the East as well), must have represented a popular point of view in emphasizing the observance of a memorial on a specific

gezeichnet; und vom jährlichen Omer- und Pfingsttage, die nach diesem Kalender je auf einen Sonntag fielen, führen keine direkten Linien zur wöchentlichen christlichen Sonntagsfeier."

<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V. 24. 1 f.

<sup>22</sup> Eusebius, *op. cit.*, V. 24, quotes a letter from Irenaeus to Victor, bishop of Rome (c. A.D. 190-198), in which the former lists five predecessors of Victor who had not followed the Quartodeciman practice. Xystus is the earliest in the list.

day of the week, rather than on a given date of the month. Although Rordorf has demonstrated the difficulty of maintaining a common origin for the Easter Sunday and the weekly Sunday,<sup>23</sup> yet the widespread insistence on the observance of festivals on specific days of the week would seem to indicate a psychological orientation that could have fostered a weekly memorial of the Resurrection on the day of its occurrence.<sup>24</sup>

### Conclusion

We cannot conclude that the origin of Sunday observance is to be found in Judaism. There is no indication of a weekly observance of Sunday there. However, in certain areas of sectarian Judaism, notably that represented in *Jubilees* and the Dead Sea Scrolls, a predilection for Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday and attitudes toward the commemoration of events on specific days of the week seem to have been such that the weekly memorial of the Resurrection on Sunday could have arisen as a psychologically natural development. In this indirect sense we can agree with Jaubert when she speaks of the Christian Sunday as being "rooted in the (or an) ancient priestly calendar."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand Rordorf seems to be clearly in the right when he maintains that the true *origin* of the Christian Sunday is to be found in Christianity and not in sectarian Judaism.

<sup>23</sup> Rordorf, "Zum Ursprung des Osterfestes am Sonntag," *ThZ*, XVIII (1962), 170, 173.

<sup>24</sup> Van Goedeoever, *op. cit.*, pp. 167 f., has emphasized the way in which the Jubilees calendar reckons the period from Passover to Pentecost so that the Wave-Sheaf offering and Pentecost always fell on Sunday (see above, p. 47). He sees here a background of the Christian Sunday. While we may have here a significant antecedent for the Sunday Easter, Rordorf (*Der Sonntag*, pp. 186 f.) has pointed out the difficulty of demonstrating how a yearly festival could have developed into a weekly one. This problem is inherent in all attempts to relate the Quartodeciman controversy *directly* to the rise of the Christian weekly Sunday observance. Yet even here we may still allow that a psychological predilection for Sunday in a paschal context could have been an encouragement for the observance of the weekly Sunday, and/or vice versa.

<sup>25</sup> See note 1 above.