Irish Biblical Apocrypha
Selected Texts in Translation

EDITED BY
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1. Here begins the Epistle of the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, concerning Sunday. His own hand wrote it in the presence of the inhabitants of heaven, and it was placed on the altar of the apostle Peter in Rome of Latium in order to have Sunday kept holy for all time. When this epistle was brought from heaven the whole earth began to tremble from east to west, and the land heaved up its stones and trees in fear of the Creator, and in joy at the visitation of the angels who came with the Epistle. Such was the rumbling that the Roman grave of the body of the apostle Peter opened at that time. While the abbot of Rome was offering Mass, he saw the Epistle on the altar.

2. It was found to contain this: "People should be prohibited from transgressing Sunday. For whatever plague or suffering appeared in the world, it came because of non-observance of Sunday. In some eastern regions there are beasts sent to men as punishment for neglect of Sunday. These are called *brucha*, with iron spikes in place of hair, and fiery eyes. They enter the vineyards, cut the tendrils of the vine, and make them fall on the ground. Then they roll about on the fruit, so that the grapes become impaled on their spikes, and they bear them away thus to their lairs".

3. "There are also other creatures such as locusts there. These have iron wings, which fasten around everything they encounter. They go in amidst the wheat, and fasten on the ears of corn until they fall to the ground. This, indeed, is to punish people for violation of the Sunday".

4. It is commanded by the heavenly Father in the Epistle to show mercy to the poor and infirm, and to pilgrims. The tears which these shed when faced with inclemency are visible on the Creator himself. It is he who avenges the wrong done to them.

5. This is the order from heaven, that Sunday be observed from eventide (vespers) on Saturday to the end of Monday morning (tierce on
Monday). Christ, son of the living God, who endured crucifixion and martyrdom on behalf of the human race, rose from the dead on Sunday. Even on that account alone, Sunday should be exalted. On that day, moreover, he will come on Doomsday, to judge the living and the dead. It is advisable for all to be in readiness for it. It is there that all will be judged justly, in accordance with the magnitude or smallness of their offence. "He who does not keep Sunday for its proper purposes, his soul will not attain heaven", says the heavenly Father. "Neither will he look on me, nor on the archangels and apostles, in the kingdom of heaven".

6 "Any horse which is ridden on Sunday becomes a horse of fire under the thighs of his rider in hell. Any ox, or servant, male or female, who is kept in wrongful subjection on Sunday, sheds tears of blood from the eyes to God, because God gave them that day as a day of freedom. For not even those in hell are tortured on that day".

7 "Unless you observe Sunday within its proper limits", says the Lord, "there will come on you great storms, many fiery lightning flashes, thunder and lightning which will burn families and peoples, heavy, stony hail-showers, and flying serpents. Heathens will come to you through my agency", said God himself. "A race of pagans will bring you from your own lands into captivity, and will sacrifice you to their own gods. There are, moreover, five huge, horrible beasts in the depths of hell seeking a way to come on earth to people to punish their neglect of Sunday, unless the mercy of God holds them back".

8 "This is the reward for those who keep Sunday holy: The windows of heaven will be opened for them, and God will grant a blessing on themselves, on their dwellings, and on their lands, so that no poverty or hunger will affect a house in which Sunday is observed. Any prayer asked of God at the burial-places of saints will be granted to those who maintain Sunday observance. They will inherit the earth here, and they will have heaven in the next life, and the Lord will make welcome their souls".

9 "If you do not keep Sunday holy", says the Lord, "I swear by my power, and by the only-begotten Son, Christ son of God, and by my holy angels, that fire will rain down on you on the feast of John, killing
everyone, men and boys, women and girls, and your souls will be in everlasting hell thereafter”.

10 “This is what I forbid”, God says: “On Sunday, let there be neither dispute, controversy, law-case nor contention, no trading nor horse-driving. There shall be no sweeping the floor of a house, no shaving, washing or bathing, no grinding in mill or quern, no cooking, churning or spinning, no conjugal intercourse, no travelling beyond boundaries, no swift running, casting shots, or riding on horse or ass, nor anything which is criminal. Anyone who does such a thing on Sunday, unless he greatly repents of it, his soul will not attain heaven”.

11 “I swear by the power of God the Father, and by the cross of Christ”, said the abbot of Rome, “that this is not a product of my imagination, nor it is a fiction or fabrication, rather, it is from God the Father that this letter was brought to the altar of Peter in Rome of Latium, to render Sunday holy. Even if there had not come from Jesus Christ himself this wondrous precept for the observance of Sunday, the day should be sacred, revered, sanctified, and honoured, since it was the day on which all these miracles happened”.

12 a “For it was on a Sunday that the first light of day ever in the world was seen.

b On a Sunday God first created heaven and earth, and, on the first Sunday, the formless primordial matter, and angelic light.

c On a Sunday God allowed Noah’s ark to come to rest on the mountain of Armenia after its escape from the torrent of the deluge.

d On a Sunday a rainbow appeared as a sign of the saving of Adam's seed after the deluge, for God had promised them that when the rainbow was to be seen his anger would not descend.

e On a Sunday the Israelites crossed the Red Sea dry-shod.

f On a Sunday God provided the heavenly food for the Israelites, the pleasant manna, when they were forty years in the desert.
It was on a Sunday that the son of God the Father was conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, not by male agency, but by the grace and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

On a Sunday he was born of the Virgin, whose virginity was not diminished either by the birth or thereafter.

On a Sunday, the child was venerated by three magi who came to him with their triad of gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

On a Sunday the Son [of God] was baptized by John the Baptist in the river Jordan.

On a Sunday Christ blessed the five loaves and two salmon, so that five thousand were fed from them, and they had twelve baskets of leftovers.

On a Sunday, the transfiguration of the divinity and humanity of the Son of God on Mount Tabor, to which these five were witnesses: Peter, John, and James, from the people of this earth, Moses, from the dead, and Elias, from the sanctified.

On a Sunday, he (Christ) rode on the ass, when palms were strewn before him.

On a Sunday Christ overcame the demon, on the fifteenth of February.

On a Sunday was the first preaching of Christ himself in the temple, on the Kalends of May.

On a Sunday Christ made wine from water in Canaan of Galilee, at the wedding of John, the beloved disciple.

On a Sunday the extraordinary vision and heavenly revelation was seen by John son of Zebedee, that is, the mystical Apocalypse.

The resurrection of the Lord was on a Sunday.

On a Sunday, Christ himself came forth from the enclosed captivity in
which he was placed by the Jews, without opening a lock or chain.

u On a Sunday he bestowed on his disciples [mastery of] the many languages on earth.

w On a Sunday the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in the form of fire.

x On a Sunday will be the general resurrection, when Christ will come to judge the living and the dead.

y On a Sunday all created things will be renewed in a better and more beautiful form than they were fashioned in their first creation, when the stars of heaven will be like the moon, the moon like the sun, and the sun like the brightness of seven suns, as was the first light of the sun, before the sin of Adam.

z On a Sunday Christ will separate the two groups, the innocent lambs, the saints and the just, being separated from the host of arrogant sinners of the world.

13 Therefore, by these precepts God commanded that the sanctity of Sunday be maintained, because the hand of God himself wrote that commandment for people, that they should not perform any business or servile work on a Sunday."
16. LETTER OF JESUS ON SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

McNamara no.52;

Portion of text of Leabhar Breac, 202b25 - 203b50, collated with other manuscript copies. For account of text tradition, see previous edition by J. G. O’Keeffe, “Cáin Domnaig”. Ériu 2 (1905), 189-214.

Inclusion of texts such as this among “Apocrypha” brings to a head the problems of defining exactly what one means by this term. This letter, originating from the heavenly Saviour Jesus Christ, rather than the Jesus of history, and this well after the New Testament period, is not included in such collections of New Testament Apocrypha as those of M. R. James or E. Hennecke-W. Schneemelcher. A review of The Apocrypha in the Irish Church (Études Celtiques 1978, 138) contains a note of Professor Henri-Irénée Marrou saying he does not quite understand why the notion of “Apocrypha” is extended to include a work such as this. It is, however, admissible in the broader understanding of the term accepted by the Association pour l’Étude de la Littérature Apocryphe Chrétienne, which among its list of apocryphal texts features: “Lettre du Christ tombée du ciel”. It is also included in F. Stegmüller’s list (Repertorium Biblicum Medii Aevi, I, Madrid, 1940, no. 148).

For more on this and Hiberno-Latin texts on Sunday observance, see McNamara, nos 52A, 52B, 52C.