

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #44

Sabbath Keeping in First Millennium

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When our Savior was born some two-thousand years ago, it was clear to every believer in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that the seventh day of the week was THE Day of the LORD, the day sanctified by our Creator at creation for rest from daily work and for the communal worship of our God.

Scripture is unequivocal that Jesus customarily kept the weekly seventh-day of the week as a holy Sabbath day and assembled at the local synagogue. He NEVER kept the first day of the week as holy unto the LORD. He NEVER taught any of His disciples that He changed the LORD's own sanctified seventh day to remember Him instead. That is absurd.

Jesus is also shown in scripture keeping the three annual pilgrim Feasts of the LORD in Jerusalem. He even became our Passover Lamb on the last day of His human ministry to mankind. He NEVER observed an Easter Sunday. He NEVER even asked His disciples to remember His resurrection

Here is the plain Truth for anyone with ears to hear. For the entire first century after the death and resurrection of Jesus, every believer in the God of Abraham, every disciple who believed that Jesus was His only begotten Son and the promised Savior of the world, was a Sabbath-keeper! There were NO exceptions. Every believer rested from work and held holy convocations ONLY on the weekly and annual Sabbath days which were appointed by the LORD.

Not one person in the family of God, not one person who was alive when Jesus spoke to the multitudes, not one person who was taught the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God by Him OR by His hand picked apostles ever kept Sunday as the new day of rest or worship for His disciples eventually known as "Christians." No, not one!

Yet today, we have essentially the entire Christian Church, a couple of billion people all around the world, keeping Sunday as THE holy day of the Lord for Christians. Just about every Christian Church leader and preacher, whether from a pulpit, podium or a radio broadcast, a television show or a computer internet site proclaims that Sunday, the first day of the week, is the holy day for worship for those who follow Christ.

How can practically the whole world be so deceived? How can they have wandered so far off the path of Christ and His Apostles? Where are the scholars who have studied both their Bible and the history of the church of God? Where is a Christian leader willing to stand up for the Truth of God and His holy Word and admit that no where in scripture is it taught to keep the first day of the week holy instead of the seventh day?

Where are the Christian historians who can reconcile the Truth from scripture that none

of the thousands of “Christians” (meaning the followers of the Christ) in the church of God who received the Holy Spirit on and after Pentecost and returned to their far flung nations of the civilized world kept Sunday as their holy day for over a hundred years after the Lord of the Sabbath ascended to heaven to be with our Father?

Can you reconcile how these seemingly wise religious leaders find dogmatic truth in Sunday worship when those who were closest to our Lord, when the church that He heads began, NEVER kept Sunday as His holy day? His disciples all clearly understood that He was Lord of the Sabbath and made it for all mankind just as He proclaimed with His own lips. From where does your understanding come? Can you give an answer based upon scripture? Or, can you only quote a priest, pastor or evangelist or some secular book?

Isn't it time that you stopped being deceived? Isn't it time for the scales to fall from your eyes and to see Jesus as Lord of the seventh-day Sabbath? Isn't it about time for you to trust in what God declared to be holy time and abandon the false teachings of men? Isn't today the time for you to hear the voice of our Great Shepherd and follow Him?

No one could be any more shocked than I was when I first studied for myself what the Bible taught about the commanded day of rest and holy convocation for the people of the God of Abraham. How could so many God-fearing, Bible-reading Christians be misled about what God clearly commanded His people to do FOREVER concerning worship before Him?

The answer seems to be that when a story is retold for thousands of years, and you hear it from your parents and your Sunday-school teachers whom you trust, it naturally becomes part of your accepted belief system and needs no further scrutiny. Anything to the contrary is simply dismissed as weird or fanatical or cultic.

There is just enough Truth mixed in with Sunday falsehood to make today's belief credible. It is not too different than many legends which have a grain of truth in them and when that seed is watered and embellished with imaginations and half-truths a myth becomes spoken about as if a true legend.

Again, no one could be more surprised, or more disgruntled, than I was when I studied what actually happened as the Sabbath of the LORD was changed to the Sunday of the Church of Rome. Believe me, this crime against God was an inside job. Religious leaders within the professing Christian Church brought in false teachings about Sunday being the holy day for the disciples of Christ, the true head of the church of God.

In previous programs, I covered the historical events affecting the church of God in the three centuries after the apostle John had died. Various Church Fathers began jostling for dominance in authority and doctrine. An intense hate for the Jews both in Jerusalem and those scattered among the nations produced a hate for all things Jewish in the governments and in the Church. One sure sign of the Jews was their seventh-day Sabbath.

All these factors gradually set the stage for a dramatic act that changed the course of the professing church of God. It occurred in the fourth century. I am speaking of the combination of the power of the leader of the greatest world-dominating power to date, the Roman Empire, with the leader of the Church of Rome.

Many Christians who have studied Church history will recognize the name of Emperor “Constantine the Great.” Many will claim that Constantine declared Christianity to be the official “religion” of the entire Roman Empire. The story goes that after seeing a vision of a cross in the sky under which to conquer, Constantine converted to Christianity.

How many of these impressions are true? Secular writings provide a different and disturbing picture. Are you willing to consider the facts? Or, will you accept such legendary accounts as given and repeated endlessly by vicars of the Church of Rome?

We have the words of the decree which Constantine issued on March 7 AD 321. I quote:

“Let all the judges and town people, and the occupation of all trades rest on the venerable day of the sun; but let those who are situated in the country, freely and at full liberty attend to the business of agriculture;”

The Emperor of Rome officially commands his citizens to rest from labor on Sunday. He specifically commands that the empire’s judges not hold court on Sunday. This is easy for him to enforce. He also commands that tradesmen in the cities also not work on Sunday. This was not so easy to enforce.

At first blush, you might conclude that Constantine is confirming that Sunday is replacing the Saturday Sabbath for Christians like himself. The reference to days that you are not to work looks like a link to the Jewish Sabbath. You would be terribly wrong. What is not well understood is that Constantine had not yet seen the vision in the sky of the cross. In fact, he did not profess Christianity until two years later in 323 AD! And, many doubt his true conversion as he even murdered his own son to maintain his power.

Now, look closely at his decree. Is there any mention of Christianity in it? Is there a reference to the Bible or of Sunday being the holy day that replaces the Saturday Sabbath? Would anyone familiar with the Bible or the Torah think that Constantine the Great was establishing a new Sabbath day which allowed sowing and reaping or husbandry? No.

The clue to what is really going on is the connection of the Emperor’s decree of rest from work to honor the “venerable day of the sun.” This is not the Son of God. It is the blazing sun in the sky! Constantine was enforcing the pagan festival of sun worship in his empire! Constantine was a heathen personally celebrating the rites performed by sun worshippers which had dominated Greek, and now the Roman culture, especially the members of the military, the powerful Roman legions of soldiers.

A hero of Constantine the Great was Hercules, the mythical being of great power and the son of the god Zeus; not Jesus, the Son of the God of Abraham. He would have appreciated the god Apollo, of manly beauty, poetry and prophecy who was closely associated with Helios, the Greek sun god; not the God of Abraham! He also followed Mithras; the Persian god of light, not Moses who was used by God to enlighten His people about His commandments; including keeping the Sabbath holy.

Historians report that the sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine. The multitudes were taught that the emperor beheld with his mortal eyes the visible majesty of their sun deity. Roman citizens witnessed that the alters of Apollo were crowned with the votive offerings of Constantine the Great.

So, if Constantine's Sunday law was really not about Christianity AT ALL, how did it become part of the church of God? To understand this development, we need to consider another leader, the bishop of the Church of Rome; Pope Sylvester. It was by his apostolic authority some three years later that Sylvester decreed the name of this already established pagan sun festival with the title of the "Lord's Day."

It is important to understand that while various segments of the Church had begun meeting on Sunday for worship to contradict any assembly on what they reckoned as the "Jewish" Sabbath, it was understood that the Sabbath of the Bible, the Sabbath of the Lord for rest, was Saturday. Some earlier Church Fathers also referred to Sunday as the Lord's day. However, most of the apostolic church kept Saturday as a day of rest, even fasting at home on it while a few used Sunday for a more festive time for group worship.

For Sylvester, Constantine's Sunday law was an opportunity to get the heathen Sunday festival observers acquainted with Christ on this newly decreed Lord's Day. It would empower the empire's universal Roman Catholic Church with the sanction of the Emperor of Rome. The stage was set for branding any who rested and worshipped on the Biblical Sabbath as a heretic. The breach widened the gap between the Western Church which kept Sunday as holy and the Eastern Church which retained the Saturday Sabbath of the apostolic church.

After the vision of Constantine of the cross of conquest, and his declared conversion to Christianity, he began to exert a controlling influence on the Church of the Roman Empire. Both politically and spiritually, the Jews and their Sabbath left Constantine determined to "have nothing in common with that most hostile rabble of the Jews."

Eusebius, a bishop of Rome, and an historian, was a special friend and the eulogist of Constantine. He lived in the sunshine of imperial favor. The writing of Eusebius would naturally give great pleasure and flatter his benefactor. Now consider the words of Eusebius as he comments on Psalm 92:

"Wherefore as they rejected it, the Word, by the new covenant, translated and transferred the feast of the Sabbath to the morning light, and gave us the symbol

of the true rest, viz., the saving Lord's day, the first [day] of the light, in which the Savior of the world, after his labors among men, obtained the victory over death, and passed the portals of heaven, having achieved a work superior to the six-days' creation."

"On this day, which is the first of light and of the true Sun, we assemble, after the interval of six days, and celebrate holy and spiritual Sabbaths, even all nations redeemed by him throughout the world, and do those things according to the spiritual law, which were decreed for the priests to do on the Sabbath."

"And all things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day, as more appropriately belonging to it, because it has a precedence and is first in rank, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath."

Do you catch it brethren? It is there for us to see with our own eyes if we will open them. Eusebius is the father of the doctrine that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday for the Christian Church.

There is no writer before Eusebius in the fourth century who even hinted that the Sabbath of the Bible was CHANGED to Sunday for Christians. And, he does so with flowing words void of a single text of scripture. Writing as though Christ, the Word, changed the day of rest and worship from Saturday to Sunday, the very words of Eusebius reveal the change was a bank shot of three men starting with the decree of pagan Emperor Constantine for the law of the Empire regarding work.

This was officially sanctioned by the authority of Pope Sylvester for the Church of Rome for the first time. And, finally it was testified to as new doctrine for all Christian believers by Bishop Eusebius some three hundred years after Christ departed the earth. Christ, of course, left not one inspired word to that effect to any disciple of His.

So astonishing was this testimony, that not one other writer of that age even seconded this motion of Eusebius. Are you going to second his motion some 1,700 years later? Or, will you search your own Bible to see if the doctrine of Eusebius is the Truth of Christ? Basically, regardless of the name above your Church door, if you view the Sabbath as being on Sunday, you are actually in the Church of Eusebius! It is a shocking realization.

Actually, despite these momentous events in the history of the church of God, after the reign of Constantine and its wounding of the Biblical Sabbath of the Lord, the holy seventh-day began to recover strength, especially in the Eastern Churches of the Empire. The fact is that most established Churches around the world continued to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy. The main Churches keeping Sunday as a new day of rest and worship were the Church of Rome and the Church of Alexandria in Egypt.

The issue of whether the Sabbath for the church of God in the Roman Empire was Saturday, the seventh-day, or Sunday, the first day was a derisive matter among the believers in Christ. The leaders of the Church of Rome had support from the Roman

Emperor and sought a universal day of rest and worship. A Council of Church Fathers was convened in 364 AD at Laodicea to settle this matter. Here is what was decreed:

the “Because Christians ought not to Judaize, and to rest in the Sabbath, but to work in that day (which many did refuse at that time to do). But, preferring in honor the Lord’s day (there being then a great controversy among Christians which of these two days should have precedence), if they desired to rest, they should do this as Christians. Wherefore if they shall be found to Judaize, let them be accursed from Christ.”

This council’s decree prohibited the keeping of the Jewish Sabbath under an anathema. It materially enhanced both the “sacredness” and the ecclesiastical authority of a Sunday festival throughout the Roman Empire. It was no longer a voluntary choice of Christians between two acceptable days for rest and worship. Indeed, the doctrine of the Church of Rome now taught that the decreed Sunday festival was the very day intended by the fourth commandment.

The winds of change continued to blow in the Church. Not only was it hoped that the celebration of Sunday in the Church would help bring the pagan sun-worshippers into Christianity, it soon was condoned that the rest from work on Sunday first decreed by Constantine only applied to a ceasing of work in the morning so that Christians could attend a Church service to be called a “mass” of remembrance.

As the fifth century rolls around, two prominent Church saints, Jerome and Augustine, both led the denigration of the seventh day Sabbath of the Jews as a day of fasting. They promoted the acceptance of work on Sunday but only after a morning worship festival.

And, St. Augustine, a favorite of Catholic theologians, proffered a forceful approach in compelling this change. It was referred to from his epistle throne in North Africa to “Compel them to come in.” It gave the papacy a deadly weapon and laid the foundation for the infamous Inquisitions. Augustine taught that the doctrines of the Church of Rome were to be enforced by the sword of the empire. His teaching, along with the actions of “Imperial Christianity,” to their shame sent millions of believers to death for no greater crime than refusing to believe in the forms of ecclesiastical worship enforced by the state.

Confusion and turmoil within the Church and Empire continued as some who had now accepted Sunday as the Sabbath, now wanted to ban both vocational work and self-pleasure on Sunday. So, we find Emperor Leo in AD 469 issuing the following decree which overrides Constantine in the allowance of husbandry work on Sunday:

“It is our will and pleasure, that the holy days dedicated to the most high God, should not be spent in sensual recreations, or otherwise profaned by suits of law, especially the Lord’s day, which we decree to be a venerable day, and therefore free it of all citations, executions, pleadings, and the like avocations. Let not the circus or theater be opened, nor combating with wild beasts be seen on it....If any will presume to offend in the premises, if he be a military man, let him lose his

commission; or if others, let his estate or goods be confiscated. We command, therefore, all, as well as husbandmen as others, to forbear work on this day of our restoration.”

If these back and forth religious decrees of emperors and ecclesiastical leaders don't set well with your spirit, don't be disheartened. Even within the Roman Catholic Church, there were pockets of believers who rejected the maddening decrees coming from Rome.

Indeed, even the Church in northern Italy, centered in Milan, strongly resisted the decrees and authority of the Church of Rome. It was not just the change of Sabbath to Sunday they resented, but other doctrines such as the celibacy of the priesthood and the ascetic continence of St. Jerome who introduced heresies into the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate, the Catholic Bible. Imperial powers insisted upon including the apocryphal books which were later decried in the Reformation of the second millennium.

During the fourth century, the Roman Empire reached its pinnacle of world power dominating the territories and peoples surrounding the entire Mediterranean Sea which included much of the civilized world. Emperor Constantine, with Rome as the capital of his Western Empire, even established a capital for his far flung Eastern Empire in the city called Byzantium which he renamed Constantinople after himself. We know it today as Istanbul in Turkey. This Byzantine Empire survived almost a thousand years after the fall of the Roman Empire!

By combining the Church with the State, the papacy of Rome and the political and military power of the Emperor, the Holy Roman Emperor became the leader of what might be called Imperial Christianity. Like the Empire with two capitals, we now find two religious authorities, the Western Church of Rome and the Church of the East of Constantinople.

The annals of history concerning the rise and fall of the Roman Empire has filled a book. We can't touch even a fraction of its history in this half hour program. Suffice it to say that tribes and nations bordering the Roman Empire, who were called barbarians, continued to challenge the Empire for control of territory, people and wealth.

You would recognize some of their names as tribes from the north which invaded Italy: the Goths, the Vandals and the Huns. In the fifth century, by 476 AD, the Goths of Germanic descent invaded Rome and drove the last Roman Emperor from his throne. The great Western Empire of Rome had fallen.

However, the fall of the Roman Empire did not end the reign of the Church of Rome as the authoritative seat of world Christianity. It actually strengthened its grip on Christianity during the next three centuries. Although by the fifth century the Church of Rome had decreed new holy days for the Christian Church, there remained pockets of Sabbath keepers who refused to bow their knee to the Popes of the Roman Empire.

The clock on the wall says I must quit in the middle of the first millennium after Christ.

Next Sabbath, I will highlight some of the most embarrassing situations created by the Sunday-keeping Church of Rome, including the Dark Ages, the Reformation and especially how the Sabbath came to America. You don't want to miss this history of how most of us Christians have gotten deceived by tradition and rejected the Lord of the Sabbath and the day He created for mankind.