

## **Lord of the Sabbath**

Program #18

God's New Year

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Last Sabbath, I began a study of how you can determine the Appointed Times for worship during the LORD'S commanded Feasts and on His Holy Days. I began by investigating when would God say, "Happy New Year!" You can bet it would NOT be when the ball drops in Times Square in New York City on New Years Eve.

Like many of the world's holidays, we find that they are invented by men who often have no commitment to following God's commanded times for rest and worship. The holidays of men typically become times for getting drunk, gouging on food and doing every kind of party activity. The emphasis is on indulging the senses and having FUN!

However, God gave His people special days for festive memorials each year in which to celebrate before Him and thank and praise Him as our Savior and Lord. Most Christians do not even recognize the names of the LORD'S commanded holy convocations. Very few could explain when these holy convocations for worship are to be observed.

For those willing to hear the Voice of the Great Shepherd and follow Him, the holy days of God are easily found in Scripture. They are the same holy days that Jesus and His Christian disciples kept. They are described in Leviticus 23. There are three commanded Feasts of the LORD each year. There are seven days each year when we are to rest from our normal vocational work and hold holy convocations with brethren before the LORD.

But, you won't find them on your modern Gregorian Calendar that is hanging on your wall or laying on your desk top. That calendar did not even exist at the time of Jesus when He kept all of God's commanded appointments perfectly.

The Gregorian Calendar was invented by the Roman Empire and decreed official in the year 1584. It was named after Pope Gregory XIII. It usually has Church of Rome holidays shown on it such as Christmas, Easter, Palm Sunday and All Saints Day (called Halloween). Of course, these ARE NOT God's commanded holy days! They were neither EVER commanded nor EVER observed by any of the Apostles or personal disciples of Christ in any verse of the word of God. I guess it should not be a surprise to find that men invented a calendar to go along with their invented holidays, none of which were sanctified as holy by God.

Of course, calendars were used by men throughout recorded history. And, not all calendars were oriented toward religious celebrations. Some were made simply for keeping time. Keeping track of time allows one to record history chronologically and do memorials of all kinds. And, having a calendar allows one to plan for future events.

I'll bet you have a calendar with important future events marked on it. I surely do. One

day and date I pay close attention to each year is April 15. The Internal Revenue Service has put that date in my mind and on my personal calendar so that it is unforgettable! My wedding anniversary is April 16. You might expect it would also be unforgettable. Wrong. What is unforgettable is the consequences of forgetting it, even just one time!

Whether just a short time away, such as an appointment with a doctor or dentist, or a longer time away, like the year and month one is eligible for social security, calendars are important to all of us for planning our upcoming life activities. And, there are fixed, repeatable calendar dates of a historic nature such as July 4 in the United States.

Of course, on my calendar are some dates which are probably not on your calendar at all! They are for the seven holy days each year during the three commanded Feasts of the LORD; days for holy convocations by the people of God!

It is how I, or anyone else, can establish or proclaim these days that is the purpose of this segment of the Lord of the Sabbath program. I should comment that the study of historic calendars invented by men to keep time is an interesting topic by itself. We have pretty good historic information about the calendars used by ancient civilizations such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, Hebrews, Chinese, Mayans, etc. And, we have an even better historic understanding of the calendars used by the more recent Greek, Roman, Islamic and English world empires.

The creation and evolution of calendars are full of fascinating, and sometimes hilarious, episodes and paradigms as men, usually Kings, or leaders of Empires, along with their religious or scientific experts as consultants, have tried to establish a calendar that fits perfectly with the nature of life and time experienced on the earth by men.

Well, which calendar is right? Which one works best? The truth is that ONLY one calendar is correct and serves all the purposes of mankind. It is God's calendar. But, as in so many facets of life, man always thinks he can find a better way to live than what God provided. And, the calendar is one of those topics that proves that man's wisdom is foolishness to God. Naturally, when you try to use any of man's calendars to proclaim God's holy days, you run into difficulties leading to confusion and disagreements.

Without getting overly technical, allow me to explain the basic reason why the calendar's of men simply can't mesh with God's calendar. It involves reckoning a period of time we call a "year." There are two OTHER main measures of time helpful to man in life: a month and a day. Of course, there are hours, minutes and seconds for smaller time scales.

Both God and man find the concept of a YEAR useful in measuring time. The problem for man is that a year (technically a "solar" or "astronomical" year, basically the time for the earth to revolve once around the sun) does not consist of an integral number of days. A solar year actually averages 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds. In decimal form, this period of a year is 365.2422 days.

The fact that 0.2422 is pretty close to 0.25 is the reason that every four years, we add one day to the month of February in our modern Gregorian calendar. We call it a leap year. It works pretty well except for someone born on a February 29. They get a birthday party only every four years!

The idea of leap years, when an extra day is added, or intercalated, to a month, was part of the Julian Calendar used in the Roman Empire at the time of Jesus and named after Julius Caesar. Our modern Gregorian calendar results in a calendar creep forward of three days every four centuries. Since this is over four times the typical lifespan of a man, most people just ignore the error. Some future year, a world power or governing authority will decree a calendar adjustment like making February leap back to only 25 days.

Another problem with the calendars of men is that months ALSO do not contain an integral number of days. The time period we call a month was always associated with the period of the moon cycle. A new moon always triggered a new month. But, the lunar month actually averages 29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes and 3.7 seconds. In decimal form, the period of a month is 29.5306 days.

The fact that 0.5306 is pretty close to 0.5000 is the reason why many man-made lunar calendars use alternating months of 29 and 30 days respectively. Unfortunately, that kind of calendar with twelve such months in a year would have only 354 days. That is 11 days short of the actual solar year! It would not serve man's purposes of keeping time in their own lifetime. So, again, man has made some calendar corrections that work pretty well.

What we have in our Gregorian Calendar are twelve fixed months ranging from 28 to 31 days. They make for 365 days per year except every fourth year which is a leap year and contains 366 days. All this keeps the July 4 holiday in the summer over our lifetime. With these calendar gymnastics, the Gregorian calendar satisfies the civil and governmental requirements of man. This is why it is the standard for the modern world.

What our modern Gregorian calendar CAN NOT do is to satisfy the requirements of God for us observing His appointed holy days. Those who wish to keep God's commands and worship Him as He wants to be worshipped would notice immediately why Pope Gregory's calendar IS NOT God's calendar. Early in Genesis, God revealed that the sun and the MOON would mark His appointed times for worship. The Gregorian Calendar is a solar calendar. It is not dependent in any way on observing the moon and its phases to establish the twelve months from January to December.

Did you know that Eastern Orthodox Churches to this day DO NOT use this modern Gregorian Calendar to proclaim its religious holidays? Have you ever heard of Orthodox Easter or Orthodox Christmas? Do you wonder why they have different dates for their Christian holidays than those used in the Western, or Roman, Churches? That is because most of the Orthodox Churches of the world, especially those in Europe and the Middle East, still use the Julian Calendar that was in use at the time of Jesus.

It was introduced by Julius Caesar in 45 BC. I guess if it was good enough historically for Jesus, the Orthodox Church leaders did not need Pope Gregory of the Church of Rome to define a new calendar for celebrating the holy days that Jesus kept or that was applied to His birth and death.

Just as any solar calendar, which does not take into account the phases of the moon, IS NOT of God, any strictly lunar calendar is also NOT of God. Lunar calendars are the oldest and were at one time widely used around the world. The number of days in each month varied not only from month to month, but from year to year. Typically, it was the appearance of a new crescent, the first sliver of the visible moon that began a new monthly time period. While the length of a month tended to be either 29 or 30 days, the length of the next month was not known for certain. It is possible astronomically to have more than one month in a row with either 29 or 30 days. With study and practice, one can tell pretty well what day of the month it is by the size and shape of the visible moon.

Unfortunately, since the actual lunar cycle averages 29.5306 days per month, this alternating 29 and 30 day calendar loses 0.0306 days a month or 0.3672 days every twelve months. So, various means of correction have been devised for such calendars. The simplest is to add, or intercalate, one day every three years to the last short month of that year. The Muslim faith adds 11 days every 30 years. This makes their lunar crescent calendar very precise.

Of course, the main problem with even a corrected lunar calendar with 12 lunations is that it yields only a 354-day year. With this 11-plus day deficiency each year, the seasons would drift dramatically. A farmer in Iowa would not be able to pick a fixed yearly date like the tenth day of the fourth month (say April 10) to begin planting his seed for crops. It could still be snowing, or the rainy season could be over, if he tried to always plant seed on this fixed calendar date. I guess you might say the right day to plant would depend upon the weather; NOT upon the calendar. So, while a solely lunar calendar can be made to tell time accurately, it does not address God's annual appointed times properly.

As we might suspect, God was wiser than man. That is why He put the sun AND the moon in the heavens to mark His appointed times for worship. The calendar of God is what we might call a luni-solar calendar. These calendars make periodic adjustments to account for the twelve-month lunar year being 11 days shorter than a solar year. They periodically add, or intercalate, a thirteenth month into a year. The need for this kind of adjustment was recognized even in the time of the ancient Greek Empire.

Several methods of adding a month were developed. The most simple adjustment was to add a month every third year. But, this was not accurate enough. A more accurate method used by the Greeks was to add 3 months during 8 years in what is known as an octennial cycle.

The most precise adjustment was to add 7 months in a 19 year cycle. It was discovered by the Greek astronomer Meton about five centuries BC. He observed that there would

be 6,939.60 days in 19 solar years and 6,939.69 days in 235 lunar months. Thus, the dates of the phases of the moon repeated almost exactly ever 19-years. This is called the Metonic cycle and is still used in many religious, ecclesiastical calendars.

So, man has indeed developed and evolved a calendar system that uses days, months and years just like God's sacred calendar. With leap year adjustments our calendar today is consistent with the astronomical movements of the sun and the moon as observed from the earth. It is also quite accurate.

With our current scientific methods of astronomy, coupled with the use of computers, we can predict pretty well future heavenly events: not just the start and end of solar years and the phases of the moon, but even eclipses of the sun and of the moon as well as the appearance of comets and planets and the movement of the star formations in the heavens. These heavenly events fascinated and often frightened ancient people who lacked the knowledge of the universe, our galaxy and our planetary and moon system.

As a side issue, the mathematical models we have today about the movement of the sun, moon, planets and stars which allow us to land on the moon or mars and send probes to photograph Jupiter or Saturn have also been used to try to regress in time to document or explain some key Biblical events.

You almost certainly have heard of attempts to explain the star the wise men from the East followed to find where Jesus, the promised King of Israel, had been born. Investigators have also tried to determine exactly what year Jesus was crucified with such models. Some have tried to confirm the day of His death by trying to determine on what day of the week in the year of His death did Abib 14 fall? I have nothing against such attempts, but truthfully, I have not seen any such analysis that is convicting. It also seems that the experts who study such things disagree among themselves on the various astronomical assumptions and models used in one another's analysis.

However, I have found the photos taken by the Hubble space telescope of deep space to be awesome. To me they confirm the glory and majesty of God as our Creator. It is quite amusing to hear the scientists try to explain all the phenomena they see with their own eyes and continue to guess at the origin of these things with theories like the "Big Bang."

At a recent Feast of Tabernacles, one gentleman gave a presentation on man's theories of the origin of the moon. This represented the best scientific understanding available. It became obvious that man, as yet, simply cannot say with any certainty how the moon came into being or when! They have a number of different theories. They have trouble, of course, accepting what the Creator says about the creation of the moon and all things.

Despite mankind's knowledge of astronomy, and having calendars that predict future heavenly events, neither this knowledge nor the devised calendars codify time to tell us when a year begins. It is a decree of a man, usually a leader of a world empire.

Most of the world today celebrates January 1 on our Gregorian calendar as the first day of the New Year. Why? Have you ever wondered? From whom and when did that idea come? It was indeed decreed by Julius Caesar. January 1 of the year 45 BC was the official, inaugural, start of the Julian calendar. And, though other changes were made in the subsequent reform of the Julian calendar, the January 1 New Year decree has stuck for several millennia.

However, it was not always so. The Babylonian year began in what we call the spring. Similarly, the Assyrian and Chaldean calendars began a new year in the naturally occurring spring time in the milder climate regions of the earth where man was most likely to dwell. That makes some sense to me as there is a rebirth of plant life after a dormant winter, a new growing season with rainy periods when rivers swell their banks. The Babylonians also used a 12-month lunar calendar with alternating 29 and 30 day months and then did an extra month intercalation using the Metonic cycle.

Because of the Babylonian captivity of the House of Israel, some secularists argue that the calendar God supposedly gave to Moses was actually just the Babylonian calendar with some special holy days added. Of course, I believe that God gave His people a calendar that served His purpose and that was also accurate based upon observing the movement of the sun and the moon which He carefully set into their orbits. Men were able to grasp much of God's astronomy by observation and analysis and may have been able to codify what God eventually would put in place for Israel before He gave the specific appointed times for worship to Moses.

The ancient Chinese calendar was also luni-solar and used 12 lunar months with an intercalated month added periodically to agree with the solar year. Interestingly, the first month of a new year was the month when the sun entered the zodiac sign of Aquarius. This varied between January 20 and February 19 on our Gregorian calendar. Happy Chinese New Year!

Of special interest to me is, "What was the ancient Hebrew calendar like?" You would think they were the most likely to have a calendar that not only worked, but that was consistent with the way God Himself would want men to keep time.

Well, there is little evidence that the ancient Hebrews studied astronomy like many of their counterparts. They seemed content with telling time by observing the appearances of the moon and the sun in the sky. They had basically an empirical luni-solar calendar. Months contained either 30 days (a full month) or 29 days (a deficient month). Calendar issues such as intercalating a month were done somewhat arbitrarily being decreed by the religious leaders when needed based upon observation of the natural seasonal and agricultural cycles on the earth.

At the time of Jesus, the new moons and new years were decreed by the Jewish Sanhedrin, basically the supreme court of the nation of Israel. The Jewish rabbis and sages recorded the methods that were used to determine such things. They are quite interesting to study. However, it must be noted that such methods were not decreed by

God in His word. They, like most of the calendars of men, were just ways that seemed right to them at the time.

What we can be fairly certain of is that their methods produced RESULTS acceptable to Jesus. The Sanhedrin was basically controlled by the scribes and Pharisees at that time. Listen to the words of Jesus in Mat. 23: 1-3 as He commented to His disciples and the people of Israel on the decisions of the religious leaders and keepers of the law of God regarding what to observe and do:

*Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say and do not do.*

My understanding of this verse is that since these two groups of men were dedicated to the law of Moses, and read from it each Sabbath in the synagogue, what they taught was right and was to be done. In other words, their teachings of what was to be observed, including the appointed times for worship, was correct and the same as what God had personally spoken to Moses for His holy appointments. However, it was the practices and motives of the religious leaders that Jesus found lacking.

Let's be specific here. One of the objectionable practices of these law-keeping Pharisees was to be seen as prominent among men. Instead, they should have been concerned about how God saw them. And, they needed to be humble and not proud before a holy, all knowing God. If there is any doubt about Jesus' intent here applying to the Feasts of the Lord or His appointed times, consider what he says about the Pharisees in Mat. 23: 6;

*They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogue,*

Here we see a reference to the best seats in the synagogues each Sabbath day, and the best places to enjoy the Feasts of the Lord. Yes, Jesus accepted the timing for the appointed times of worship for all of Israel as given to Moses and decreed by the Sanhedrin, but He did not like the attitude of the religious leaders while proclaiming and attending the Feasts and Holy Days of the LORD.

The idea of a week as a measure of time is also unique to the Hebrew reckoning of time. The link to the seventh day Sabbath and God's rest after the creation is unmistakable. Some other early calendars seemed to define a week as one of three divisions of a 30 day month. Others seem to have used a seven-day week as a quarterly sub-division of a month based largely on the changing phases of the moon approximately every seven days.

But, it is clear to me that the week of seven days is a teaching straight from God to His people and it has no significance to the measures of time, or astronomy, which He mentions early in the book of Genesis for His annual appointed holy days of worship.

Since the appointed times were given to Moses for Israel directly by God, and apparently people knew and remembered how to determine when they were to be observed, even at the time of Jesus, the first and easiest means to determine the appointed times of God's feasts and holy days would seemingly be to buy a Jewish calendar that has them transposed on our Gregorian calendar.

Next Sabbath, I will address specifically why I no longer do that. And, I will lay out the method I now use to determine when to celebrate the Feasts of the LORD. This is one Lord of the Sabbath program you do not want to miss.

If we, who want to obey God and keep the same holy days that His Lord of the Sabbath kept, can't agree on when they are, how can we worship before the Lord together? We need to be of one mind, the mind of Jesus, the Christ, our Savior and the Lord of the Sabbath, and the soon coming King, on this matter. We must be the kind of worshippers who will worship God, our Father, in spirit and in Truth.