

THE STORY OF THE CHANGE OF THE SABBATH

Vance Ferrell

There have been seven days in the week from time immemorial . We can read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and we will only find Seventh-day Sabbath worship. There is nothing about first-day worship in the entire book. Where then did it come from?

In order to discover the origin and growth of worship on the first day of the week, we must look outside the Bible-into the pagan world of Christ's time. In fact, to locate the origin of "Sunday," we must look to the same source. For first-day sacredness, and the very name "Sun day " come from the same place.

The Planetary Week

The various days of the week were in ancient times called the first day, the second day, etc., for these were their Biblical names. But about the time of Christ they were given new names. The non-Christians began calling them the Day of the Sun, the Day of the Moon, etc., in honor of different heavenly bodies. This was known as the "planetary week. "

Each day was ruled over by a different god, but the most important of all gods was given the rule of the first day of the week, with the idea in mind that the first is always more important than that which follows it. The most important of all gods was given the rule over the first of the seven days. It was his day, the day of the Sun, and all the worship of the week centered on his day.

Now, although these names for the days of the week were new, the Sun god wasn't, for his worship came from a devotion to that most powerful of natural objects. It was one of the most ancient forms of worship and is represented by solar-disc images found on nearly every continent of our world.

"Sun worship was the earliest idolatry."-Fausset. Bible Dictionary, page 666. The Arabians appear to have worshipped it directly without using any statue or symbol (Job 31:26-27). Abraham was called out of all this when he went to the promised land. Ra was the Sun god in Egypt, and On (Heliopolis) was the city of Sun worship (see the Hebrew of Jeremiah 43:13). Entering Canaan under Joshua, the Hebrews again met Sun worship. Baal of the Phoenicians, Molech or Milcom of the Ammonites, and Hadad of the Syrians, and later the Persian Mithras or Mithra. Shemesh was an especially important Sun god in the middle east, and, later, in Egypt Aton was the god of the Sun Disc. The temple at Baalbek was dedicated to Sun worship.

By associating with Sun worshipers, the Israelites frequently practiced it themselves (Lev 26:30, Isa 17:8). King Manasseh practiced direct Sun worship (2 Kg 21:3,5). Josiah destroyed the chariots that were dedicated to the Sun, and also removed the horses consecrated to Sun worship processions (2 Kg 23:5,1112). Sun altars and incense were burned on the housetops for the sun (Zeph 1:5) and Ezekiel beheld the "greatest abomination": direct Sun worship at the entryway, to the temple of the true God. This was done by facing eastward to the rising sun. (Ezek 8:16-17)

All this time there was no particular day that was used for this heathen worship. But then, about the time of Christ, or a little before, the various days of the week were dedicated to specific pagan gods-dies Solis-the day of the Sun, dies Lunae-the day of the Moon, and so on.

The sacred day of the Jews and Christians was the memorial of Creation the true Sabbath—the Seventh day—the only Sabbath given in the Bible. The sacred day of paganism was the memorial of the Sun-god—the first day of the week. His day was called, "the Venerable Day of the Sun."

Mithraism

As we have seen in other tracts in this series, Sundaykeeping never occurred in the Old or New Testament, nor was it commanded. In the time of Christ and the Apostles, the official religion of the Roman government did not have a sacred day, but gradually Sundaykeeping began to become common among the non-Christian people of the empire.

The planetary week, each day named after a different planet in the sky, played a very important part in the worship of the sun. By the time of Christ, Sun worship was most powerfully represented in Mithraism. Now, Mithra (or Mithras) was originally an ancient god of Iran, and had been worshipped as the god of strength and war by the descendants of the Persians. But by the first century A.D., he had been transformed, oddly enough, into the leading Sun god, and the foremost pagan god of any kind, of the western civilized world. The Romans often called him, by a new name, Sol. Inuictus, "the Invincible Sun." During the early centuries of the Christian Era, Mithra was the greatest pagan rival of Christianity.

And this was not without a carefully developed plan, for Satan had arranged that this religion would closely approximate in several ways the only true religion in the world—Christianity. It had such features as a dying, rising Saviour, special religious suppers, a special holy day out of the weekly seven—the Sun Day, initial baptism of its converts (in the blood of a slaughtered bull), and other similarities. It counterfeited the religion of the true God more cleverly than any other religion up to that time in history.

Gradually, large numbers of non-Christians began observing Sunday as a holy day in honor of Mithra. He was especially liked by the Roman soldiers, for his worship included athletic feats of skill and "warlike manliness."

When Augustus Caesar became emperor, just before the birth of Christ, Mithraism was already spreading westward from Asia into Europe, and into the Roman Empire.

Since the Roman generals, in times of crisis, frequently took over the emperorship, this also favored the growth of sun worship. (Two centuries later, the Roman generals Constantius Chlorus and his son Constantine were devoted to the Sun god. This would prove very significant, as we shall see later on.)

But, in the first century, and the first part of the second, many of the non-Christians in the empire were also keeping the Seventh day. They were attracted to the Seventh-day Sabbath, because of Jewish, as well as Christian, influence. Josephus, a historian who lived in the first century, remarks on how widespread throughout the empire was the keeping of the Seventh-day Sabbath at that time.

Anti-Semitic Reaction

But then two important events occurred that shattered all this. In A.D. 70, nearly forty years after the death of Christ, and then again in A.D. 135, serious Jewish revolts were put down with much bloodshed. As a result of this, the hatred of the Romans toward anything that savored of Judaism became intense. Hadrian, the emperor, issued an edict soon after, strictly prohibiting the observance of the Seventh-day Sabbath. But

imperial decrees tended to be short-lived, and Christians generally disregarded it. However in Rome itself, the capitol of the empire, things were different.

Anicetus, the local bishop, or religious leader, of the Christian church in the city of Rome (men today would call him the "pope"), urged his followers as well as neighboring churches to keep the first day instead of the Seventh.

At the risk of his life, the aged Polycarp, who had been a close friend of the Apostle John before his death about 100 A.D., traveled to Rome about the year 155, and strongly protested this action on the part of Anicetus. The Roman bishop refused to yield to Scripture in this matter, but otherwise the meeting was courteous. Polycarp returned to Smyrna and was martyred the next year.

Second Century Mithraism

By the middle of the second century, Mithraic Sun worship was very popular among the Romans. The emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161 A.D.) erected a temple to Mithra at Ostia, a seaport town a few miles below Rome. Pius' name is also written at the base of the famous temple of the Sun at Baalbek (Heliopolis) in Syria. Justin Martyr, a leading Christian writer at the time, wrote an open letter to Pius, in which he referred several times to the increasing influence of Mithraism in the Christian Church. By this time, Mithraism was becoming popular among the Christians at the Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Egypt.

Gradually, the worship of the Invincible Sun became even more popular and widespread among the Roman Empire. Emperor Aurelian (270-275 A.D.), whose mother was a priestess of the Sun, made this solar cult the official religion of the empire. His biographer, Flavius Vopiscus, says that the priests of the Temple of the Sun at Rome were called pontiffs. They were priests of their dying-rising Saviour, Mithra, and vicegerents in religious matters next to him.

By this time, the middle of the second century, worldly Christians apparently, from the records in Alexandria and Rome more than anywhere else, in order to be better accepted by their pagan neighbors, began keeping Sunday, and in order to excuse their practice, since it was not Scriptural, they called it "the Lord's Day" even though it was obvious to all that Revelation 1:10 said nothing about Sunday.

Then the ball bounced back. Picking up this idea from the worldly Christians, the followers of Mithra began calling their Sun day, the day of Mithra, "the Day of the Lord," and their god, Mithra, "Lord." This led to Emperor Pius' official declaration that the deity—Mithra—was to be called Sol Dominus Imperii Romani ("The Sun, the Lord of the Roman Empire"). This title and the name Sol Invicto appeared together on his coinage.

Most of the "new things" that entered the church in the early centuries originated in Alexandria (Egypt) or Rome (Italy); and from those two locations they gradually spread to many of the western churches, and thence to some of the eastern ones. Until the fourth century and some time beyond, the eastern churches, being farther from Rome, tended to remain closer to the teachings of the Apostles.

Sun worship continued to be the official religion of the empire until Constantine I defeated Licinius in 323, after which it was replaced by Romanized Christianity.

Sunday and Christianity (50-300 A.D.)

It may seem surprising that any Christians before the time of Constantine would keep Sunday instead of the Biblical Sabbath—the Seventh-day Sabbath commanded by

God Himself. But a clearer understanding of what was happening within the Christian church itself will explain this. Christ was crucified in 31 A.D. Most of his disciples were gone by 65 A.D. John, the last of the Apostles, died just before 100 A.D.

By the year 200, pagan compromises and practices were beginning to come into the church in a decided way. Of course, the safety of God's people then, is our only safety now: The Word of God, nothing less, nothing more, nothing else. But friendship with the world was a pleasant thing and brought many rewards. By 250, tides of worldliness were sweeping into the early church in an amazing flood. Occasionally persecutions would arise which would purify the church, but then as soon as peace returned, the world returned with it. This tendency to compromise and worldly ideas was especially noticeable in the urban areas of Egypt and the western part of the Empire.

Here are some of the non-Scriptural changes that were coming into, the Church at this time, primarily through the influence of Alexandria or Rome:

The December 25 Birth

Cumont, Olcott and others clearly show that December 25 was the yearly date of the annual birth of Mithra the Sun god-the leading heathen deity of the Empire. On this date, his followers celebrated the fact that the visible orb of the sun was again rising higher in the sky, following the winter solstice (December 21st, when it is the lowest). His birthdate was made an official holiday in the Empire by Aurelian about 273 A.D.

The Roman church being more liberal than most, the Christians there began celebrating this date as the birthdate of Christ not too long after this.

The December 25 celebration came into the Christian Church from the local church at Rome, which received it directly from paganism.

"December 25 was a great pagan festival, that of Sol Invictus, which celebrated the victory of light over darkness and the lengthening of the sun's rays at the winter solstice. The assimilation of

Christ to the Sun god, as Sun of Righteousness, was widespread in the fourth century and was furthered by Constantine's legislation on Sunday, which is not unrelated to the fact that the Sun god was the titular divinity of his [Constantine's] family. Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church, third edition, page 155.

This mid-winter pagan holiday was eventually declared to be the solemn anniversary of the birth of Christ-the mass of Christ.

Tonsure and Holy Water

Because pagan priests cut a circular bald spot on top of their heads in honor of the solar disc, Christian leaders of Alexandria and Rome soon copied this hairstyle, the tonsure. [read Lev 21:5, and Deut 14:11 It is still used by certain monastic orders to this day. Along about this time, so-called "holy water" began to be used for baptism, which itself soon degenerated into a mere sprinkling instead of immersion. [Ac 8:35-38; Rom 6:3-5]

The Queen of Heaven

Much of the basis of later Roman Catholic liturgy originated at this time, with the direct copying by the Alexandrian and Roman churches of the Egyptian worship of Isis, the Egyptian Queen of Heaven. [Jer 7:18; 44:17-19,25] Here is how the Egyptian Mother goddess and her Child were worshipped:

The Sacrificial Ritual

"The daily ritual of Isis, which seems to have been as regular and complicated as that of the Catholic Church, produced an immense effect on the Roman mind. Every day there were two solemn offices, at which white-robed, tonsured priests, with acolytes and assistants of every degree, officiated. The morning litany and sacrifice was an impressive service. The crowd of worshippers thronged the space before the chapel at the early dawn. The priest ascending by a hidden stairs, drew apart the veil of the sanctuary, and offered the holy image to their adoration. He then made the round of the altars, reciting the litany [mystic words in an unknown tongue], and sprinkling the holy water from the secret spring."-Samuel, Dill, "Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius." page 577-578. London, Macmillan, 1904. [2 Tim 2:15-16, Ex 20:3-5]

The Mother and Child

The "Queen of Heaven, the Mother of God" concept came directly into the Christian church from the Mother and Child Cult in Egypt-the worship of Isis and Horus-When this new idea came into the Christian church through the local church at Rome in the fourth century, it really shook up the church. It came as a result of the urging of Egyptian church leaders who declared Mary to be "the Mother of God." This caused a split in the church and the banishing of Nestorius, a Christian who tried to oppose it. Images--statues--of Isis nursing Horus at her side had already been accepted by pagans all over the empire, for she was the avowed patron goddess of sailors from Italy.

But then in the fifth century a very significant thing happened: The names "Isis and Horus" totally disappeared, and in their place appeared the worship of "the Virgin Mary and her Child. " [Mark 3:31-35, Luke 11:27-28, Matt 10:37]

It is interesting to note that the very same thing happened to Mithra. Just as soon as the essential aspects of Mithraism had been brought officially into the church, Mithra the greatest pagan god of his time-disappeared within a century! Satan no longer needed it for his purposes for he had already brought both him and his day into the Church. And actually Mithraites no longer needed it either. Christianity, in its new form, now supplied its place very well.

Soon the church was reaching out to still other lands for ideas to make its rituals and teachings more varied and imposing.

Hermits and beads and candles

From India, came ascetics, monastic hermits, and rosary beads. The burning of candles came from the worship of Mithra, the Sun god [the light in the candle flame was considered a small "sun"]. All these things entered as the Christian church, led by the Theological School at Alexandria and the Bishop of Rome opened its doors to heathenism. And, of course, with these new practices, and from the same sources, Sunday observance came into the church.

Easter-the Resurrection of Spring

In the time of the apostles there was no Easter service such as we have today. The early church kept the day of the Biblical passover (Pascha), but not Easter, which was but another invention of paganism. Now Easter also came in the spring of the year, but it was a pagan fertility festival in honor of Ishtar, also known as Attis and was accompanied by licentious practices. Emperor Claudius, made it an official holiday during his reign.

The issue here is the fact that Christians began keeping a pagan holiday sacred to an ancient and well-known goddess, and a licentious one at that. Cumont tells us: "Attis awoke from his sleep of death, and the joy created by his resurrection burst out in wild merrymaking, wanton masquerades, and luxurious banquets."-Franz Cumont, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, pages 56-57, 1907 edition.

Gradually the Christian church identified with this pagan festival of the Resurrection of Spring, by keeping it in honor of the resurrection of Christ. History reveals that it was a deliberate decree of the bishop of Rome that brought Easter into the church.

About the year 154 A.D., Anticetus, bishop of the church at Rome, authorized a Sunday festival to correspond with the Attis fertility festival. This was a combining of Mithra, Attis and Christ and would better appeal to the heathen, he thought. Half-converted theologians in Alexandria spent their time digging up pagan philosophy and recommending it in writing to the Christian churches of the Empire, while half-converted church leaders in Rome used those ideas as levers to gain control over the other local churches by pretending that they had the authority to require obedience to them!

Polycarp who was a close friend of the Apostle John before his death, at the same time mentioned earlier in which he tried to win Anticetus back to the true Sabbath, also tried to dissuade him from keeping the pagan Sunday Easter festival. But he failed in his efforts and returned with a sad report to the brethren in the eastern churches.

First Sunday Coercion

Then, in 195 A.D., for the first time in history, the Roman church made major news in all the churches of Christendom, when Victor, bishop of Rome, tried to force all of the Eastern Church leaders to keep the annual celebration of Christ's resurrection on Sunday.

Of course, the bishops of the other churches protested, insisting that if done at all, the Biblical precedent for this was on the fourteenth day of the month Nisan [Ex 10,12,14, Lev 23:51.

But Victor would not consider this, and had the boldness to write letters "ex-communicating" all leaders and churches that refused to do as he said. He declared all the churches of Asia to be apostate because they would not follow his example in the matter.

Back in those days, some churches were more influential than others, but none were "over" the others. What Victor tried to do in 195 A.D. bordered on the fantastic.

This was probably the first time in history that the bishop of Rome attempted to gain control over all the other churches, and commenting on it, Dr. Bower, in his *History of the Popes*, volume 1, page 18, calls it "The first essay of papal usurpation." In simple language, we would call it, "the first attempt at papal takeover."

A careful study of the historical records reveals that gradually, with the passing of the years, the Roman bishop tended to use his new day, Sunday, as a ploy for political supremacy over the other churches. Victor's decree was the first ecclesiastical Sunday Law of any kind, in history.

The Easter Controversy continued, with the Eastern churches giving it stiff opposition until the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., at which time Sunday was declared the official day for Easter observance. Emperor Constantine immediately followed this, the same year, with civil enactments enforcing it among the churches.

Origin of Christian Sunday keeping

It was through the Gnostic Christians of, Alexandria that several serious problems entered the church:

- 1-Spiritizing away Scripture truth through the use of allegories.
- 2-The use of images and image worship in Christian worship.
- 3-The introduction of Greek philosophic speculations into the church.
- 4-The practice of Sun Worship.
- 5-The keeping of Sunday.
- 6-The introduction of Egyptian pagan rituals.
- 7-Anti-Jewish sentiment.
- 8-The founding of the first worldly seminary for the training of ministers (a school, by the way, that continued with great success for centuries).

Only the church at Rome gave full support and backing to the marvelous innovations of Alexandria, and it is a striking fact that all the Christians for the first two centuries after Christ and the Apostles, whose writings' have been authenticated beyond question, and who opposed the Sabbath and favored Sunday observance, were men who (1) were sympathetic with Gnosticism, had anti-Jewish prejudice, and (2) came from or who received their training in Alexandria or Rome.

Outstanding among these were the Gnostic Christian philosophers, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. And with them, Tertullian, who, living west of Alexandria, received his training from a pagan skeptic (instead of Gnostic) philosopher, before professing Christianity.

The only other significant and authenticated Christian writers who taught Sunday keeping before 300 A.D. were the bishops of Rome, in their decrees and writings.

Gnostic Philosophy

Now, unless you have actually read their writings you cannot imagine what kind of thinking went through the minds of these "Christian philosophy" men of Alexandria. It is nearly unbelievable—the mystical dreamy applications they put on Scripture and on everything else. And yet these are the men who began the Sundaykeeping idea in the Christian church, and then passed it on to the politically oriented, but liberal, minds of the leaders at Rome.

As an example, here are two of Clement of Alexandria's most important statements about Sundaykeeping. It should be here mentioned that Clement was head teacher at the Alexandrian theological school for several years (190-215 A.D.), and has the distinction of being the first Christian in recorded history to apply the term "Lord's day" to the first day of the week. Here are two of his most important passages on the importance of Sundaykeeping:

"And the fourth word [in the Ten Commandments] is that which intimates that the world was created by God, and that He gave us the seventh day as a rest, on account of the trouble that there is in life ... The seventh day, therefore, is proclaimed a rest—abstraction from ills preparing for the primal day, our true rest; which, in truth, is the first creation of light, in which all things are viewed and possessed ... The eighth may possibly turn out to be properly the seventh, and the seventh a day of work. For the

creation of the world was concluded in six days . . . The Pythagoreans, as I think, reckon six the perfect number ... As marriage generates from male and female, so six is generated from the odd number three, which is called the masculine number, and the even number two, which is considered feminine. For twice three is six."-Clement, Miscellanies, book 6, chapter 16.

Such is Clement's Scriptureless reasoning--on the Sabbath question. And what is his source of authority for the use of "Lord's day" to be applied to the first day of the week? As did several Sundaykeeping "Christian" philosophers of the Alexandrian school, Clement not only spiritualized away Scripture, but he also spiritualized out of Plato's Republic, extracts he could use for "new" Christian teachings! [Plato was an earlier heathen Greek writer who wrote a book called The Republic] Here is the thinking that introduced Sunday as "the Lord's day" into the Christian Church:

"And the Lord's day Plato prophetically speaks of in the tenth book of the Republic, in these words, `And when seven days have passed to each of them in the meadow, on the eighth day they are to set out and arrive in four days." -Clement, Miscellanies, book 5, chapter 14. [Col 2:6-8, 1 Tim 6:20]

Clement says he got the idea from Plato! Because of his very early statements about Sundaykeeping, Clement was considered very important later on to the leaders at Rome, so he was eventually canonized--and declared to be a saint!

So much for Clement-the man who invented the idea that the "Lord's Day" (Revelation 1:10) means Sunday. He was one of several teachers at the Alexandria theology school who wrote --and practiced--praying toward the sun during worship whenever possible. He tells us that he got the idea from the pagan Mithraites. [Ezek 8:16-17]

Offerings for the Dead

About the same time that all these other changes were coming into the church, Tertullian in the third century tells us of some others: "As often as the anniversary [Easter] comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honors." [Ps 106:28-29] Veneration of the saints and the burning of candles for the dead were not far distant.

The Sign of the Cross

Tertullian, one of the few authenticated Christian writers before 300 A.D. who advocated Sundaykeeping (active 196-220 A.D.), supplies careful instructions for keeping Sunday holy, in place of the Bible Sabbath, and then adds to it another "new idea"-the "sign of the cross ":

"At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign of the cross."

Offshoot of Worldlings

Jesus warned us against "tradition':

[Matt 15:3-9] Tradition is man-made inventions that have no warrant in Scripture. By the beginning of the third century tradition had reshaped, indeed misshaped, apostolic Christianity. Tradition could produce unity, but not of right doctrine. Christianity, had so conformed to worldly customs that Faustus, a Manichaeon living about 400 A.D.

[Manichaeans were non-Christians who held certain erroneous beliefs] was able to make against the Christian church a serious charge. Here is what he said:

"You [Christians] appease the shades of the departed with wine and food. You keep the same holidays as the Gentiles . . . In your way of living you have made no change. Plainly you are a mere schism [offshoot of worldlings]; for the only difference from the original is that you meet separately."-Quoted by Augustine, in "Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon," book 20, paragraph 4_

Two Contenders

All this time, the influence of Sunworship was rapidly increasing in the Roman Empire. Over the centuries the official religion of the empire had been emperor worship, but it had died out and two strong contenders for popular favor were taking its place. This was Mithra the Sun god, and Christ of Christianity. And, frankly, as the third century neared its close, it was difficult in some of the cities of Egypt and the West to see much difference between the two religions. Fortunately in the rural areas there were the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and who would not do so for several centuries to come, in spite of persecution from their own brethren.

But it would seem that there were those in the church that were doing their best to help the world see that Christ was but another name for Mithra. Cumont tells us that they purposely compared the two as closely as they could so that pagans would be drawn into the church.

The dazzling orb of sunlight, he tells us, was exalted as the great symbol of Christ. Christians in certain places had sun-symbols in their churches to help the pagans adjust to the new surroundings. [Deut 4:16-19] This is where originated the idea of light beams coming from the heads of Christ and Mary and the saints.

It had been the custom of the Egyptians and Persians to worship the sun in the morning, and Tacitus (a Roman historian) tells us of this practice in Emperor Vespasian's Roman army in the first century. Tertullian, living west of Alexandria, tells us that he and fellow Christians of his time regularly faced the east when they prayed to Christ their God. He mentions this in an essay in which he advocates Sundaykeeping, and rebukes other Christians because they were refraining from work on the Seventh day.

In every case that the present writer can locate, the few men advocating Sundaykeeping prior to 400 A.D.-were the very ones who were introducing pagan heresies to the brethren in the Christian Church. The primary exceptions were the Roman Bishops, who appeared to be stronger at legislating the heresies upon the churches, than at inventing them.

Along about this time, a youngster was growing up that was destined to powerfully affect the Christian world for all time to come-a boy named Constantine.

Constantine and a State Church (300-350 A.D.)

On the retirement of Emperor Diocletian in 305, it was an uphill fight among several men for the coveted title of Emperor. Fighting continued on and off from 305 till 323. But out of it Constantine emerged as the sole ruler of the vast Roman Empire. The crucial battle occurred just north of Rome in October of 312, following which by the Edict of Milan, he gave Christianity full legal equality with every other religion in the empire. More favors to the church soon followed.

Then, on March 7, 321, was issued the first national Sunday Law in history. This was the first "blue law" to be issued by a civil government. Here is the text of Constantine's Sunday Law Decree:

"Let all judges and townspeople and occupations of all trades rest on the Venerable Day of the Sun [Sunday]; nevertheless, let those who are situated in the rural districts freely and with full liberty attend to the cultivation of the fields, because it frequently happens that no other day may be so fitting for ploughing grains or trenching vineyards, lest at the time the advantage of the moment granted by the provision of heaven be lost. Given on the Nones [seventh] of March, Crispus and Constantine being consuls, each of them, for the second-time."-The Code of Justinian, Book 111, title 12, law 3.

Five additional Sundays Laws were to be issued by Constantine within a very few years to buttress this, his basic one.

When Constantine was issuing his Sunday laws, was he a consistent Christian? Hardly. He was at that very time embellishing The Temple of the Sun in Rome, and in the same year that he proclaimed his first Sunday Law, he made several decrees maintaining pagan practices. The old Roman priests in these superstitious performances decided the most important governmental questions by watching the flight of birds, by examining the entrails of chickens, or by similar superstitions. All this Constantine legalized.

The very next day after giving the Sunday Law of March 7, 321, quoted above, Constantine made another law favoring pagan soothsayers, to the intent that whenever lightning should strike the imperial palace or any other public building, the heathen priests should be consulted as to what it might mean. This they did by looking at the entrails of beasts that had been slaughtered in sacrifice to the gods.

It is to be observed that Constantine's Sunday law was just that –a Sunday law– and nothing more. For Sunday was the great day of the Sun worship cults as well as of compromising Christians. In that law, Christianity is never mentioned. The day is called "the Venerable Day of the Sun." (venambili die solis) This was the mystical name for the Day of the Sun god. Both the heathen and the Christians well knew this. It is an historical fact that when Constantine issued this first imperial Sunday edict of 321, enforcing the observance of Sunday by the people of the Roman Empire, he was still a worshiper of Sol Invictus–"the Invincible Sun," as well as being the Pontifex Maximus (supreme pagan pontiff or priest) of Roman heathen worship as the state religion.

In another of his six Sunday laws, he gave the order that all of the heathen troops of his army be marched out on the drill field each Sunday in order to recite a prayer composed by the emperor for this purpose. It was worded in such a way that it could be addressed to any god adored by mankind. The soldiers were required by this Sunday law to recite this prayer while facing the sun.

Victor Duruy, a French historian, says this:

"He [Constantine] sent to the legions, to be recited upon that day [Sunday], a form of prayer which could have been employed by a worshiper of Mithra, of Serapis, or of Apollo, quite as well as by a Christian believer. This was the official sanction of the old custom of addressing a prayer to the rising sun."-Victor Duruy, History of Rome, volume 7, page 489.

However, after the death of Licinius (324), his colleague in the imperial office, Constantine openly professed Christianity, though he intentionally postponed baptism until a few days before his death in 337, for he considered baptism as something of a supernatural power to take away sin, and he avoided doing it any sooner than necessary.

Phillip Schaff, the noted historian, commenting on the first Sunday Law Decree, clearly shows that the day to be observed was given not under the name Sabbatum [the Sabbath], or dies domini [the Lord's day], but instead, it was given under the heathen title for the day of the sun god dies Solis [the Day of the Sun]. Schaff observes that there was no reference in the law either to Christ, Christianity, or the resurrection of Christ.

But though Constantine meant the law to unite all contending religions into one giant compromising conglomerate, it was thought otherwise by the Christian church leaders of his time. To them it was considered a great victory.

Eusebius and Nicea

Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea (270-338), generally considered to be Constantine's outstanding flatterer in the church, made this remarkable statement:

"All things whatsoever it was duty to do on the [Seventh day] Sabbath, these we [the church] have transferred to the Lord's day."-Commentary on the Psalms, in Migne, Patrologia Graeca, volume 23, column 1171.

Commenting on this heaven-daring statement, one historical writer says this:

"Not a single testimony of the Scriptures was produced in proof of the new doctrine. Eusebius himself unwittingly acknowledges its falsity, and points to the real authors of the change. 'All things,' he says, 'whatever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day.' But the Sunday argument, groundless as it was, served to embolden men in trampling upon the Sabbath of the Lord. All who desired to be honored by the world accepted the popular festival." E.G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 574.

This was the beginning of something new and ominous within the Christian Church. Rome, itself, the capitol of the mammoth empire, was more licentious, dissipated, and political, than any other city. The influence of it all had reached to the local Christian church there, and a concern to meet the world's standard, as well as a fascination with power-politics had gripped it.

In 325 A.D. the Council of Nicaea met, at which time the church leaders decreed that all honor the resurrection of Christ by keeping the Easter festival-and only on a certain Sunday of each year. Immediately, following this ruling, Constantine issued an imperial order commanding all Christians everywhere to obey the decree of this council. Church and State had united, and whenever in history this has happened persecution of religious dissenters has generally followed. Trouble was ahead for the people of God.

Persecution of God's People Begins (350- 700 A. D.)

In order to placate church and government authorities, there were those who attempted to keep both days-Sabbath as well as Sunday holy-thus endeavoring to obey God as well as man, for religious persecution against nonobservance of Sunday was growing stronger.

For this reason, Sozomen, a church historian of that time, tells us that many "were assembling together on the Sabbath as well as on the first day of the week, which

custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria.'=Sozomen, Ecclesiastical History, book 7, chapter

19, in A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, second series, volume 2. (Lk 16:13, Ac 5:39, Gal 1:101

Even at this late date, Rome and Alexandria continued to be the only bulwarks of Sundaykeeping.

The keeping of both days might seem a practical solution, but it wasn't. The Seventh-day Sabbath was the divinely ordained day for the worship of the Creator. God had never changed it. The Sun day was a man-made institution of worship in honor of a pagan god. To obey both was impossible. [Matt 6:24]

This was exactly the problem the three Hebrew worthies faced at Dura (Read Daniel 5.) They were not at this time forbidden to worship the true God. They need only bow down that day with others in a semblance of worship to the false. But, of course, to do so would signify an acceptance of heathen worship.

And this they could not do. They would rather die first. They would rather die than lose something that many in our day consider to be of little value--The Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment given by the God of Heaven Himself.

Now, when in the fourth century it was discovered that some were doing this --keeping both days--this made the religious leaders unhappy and angry.

They saw that their authority would not be respected as supreme, as long as both days were kept. The Sabbath had to go. And so later in the fourth century, at the Council of Laodicea, for the first time Bible Sabbathkeeping--worshiping on the Seventh day of the week--was forbidden by an official decree of the Christian church. Not to comply meant "anathema"--excommunication. Enforced separation from church attendance and association with fellow Christians for the rest of their lives unless they recanted and submitted to the authority and teaching of the Church. But to submit meant to lose the precious truths of God's Word, and the precious Sabbath.

"Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [in the original: sabbato - shall not be idle on the Sabbath], but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day they shall especially honour, and as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out [anathema, or excommunicated] from Christ."-Council of Laodicea, Canon 29, in C.J. Nefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, volume 2, page 316.

This talk of "Judaizing" was a cover-up for the real facts in the case. Christians who kept the Seventh-day Sabbath, weren't obeying the Jews--they were obeying God! They weren't Judaizing,--they were Bible-izing!

The first recorded church legislation on this was at Laodicea: "The keeping of the Sunday rest arose from the custom of the people and the constitution of the Church. . . . Tertullian was probably the first to refer to a cessation of affairs on the Sun day; the Council of Laodicea issued the first conciliar legislation for that day; Constantine I issued the first civil legislation." Priest Vincent J. Kelly, Forbidden Sunday and Feast-Day Occupations, page 203. [Roman Catholic] (The exact date of this Council of Laodicea, which marked the first Sunday legislation by the Christian Church, is not known, but is thought to have been in 336 A.D.)

The Council of Laodicea marked the beginning of a new era. When the persecution of God's people began, the extermination of Sabbathkeeping lay at the heart of it.

Something Lost

You see, you're reading the story of people who lost something—something they loved. Rather, it was taken from them—the precious Sabbath they valued, and needed. And they had to stand in silent grief, and watch, as the years passed, and their little children grew up never having had it.

But there were others who resisted this apostasy against Bible truth. And they paid the highest price for it.

Still others just fled and tried to go into hiding in distant places, taking with them their beloved families and their Bibles, and the truths that meant so much to them.

For us today, there is help only in one line: Determine by the grace of God to live right yourself. Study the Bible. And obey it, by the grace of Christ, your Lord and Saviour,—at whatever the cost. They were willing to die back then for what the Bible said. Are you willing to suffer today for the same truths? Will you stand for the faith of your fathers?

Plead with your heavenly Father on your knees for a deeper experience. Plead for souls that don't know these precious Bible truths. Live those truths yourself. Your prayers and your daily life -are the best way you can help others live better. And to live better is to live Biblically. Take your stand for God's holy Sabbath, and don't waver, and others will follow your example.

Additional Decrees

Gradually, with the passing of time, additional decrees were passed restricting what could be done on Sunday, and forbidding religious activities on the Bible Sabbath (governmental decrees in the years 365, 386, 389, 458, 460, 554, 589, 681,768,789, and onward, and church council decrees in 343, 538, 578, 581, 690, and onward.) Each law became stricter; every penalty more severe. Satan was determined to destroy the Sabbath, for it represented part of God's will for mankind. In every case, we find human laws suppressing that which God has expressly commanded, the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath, and in its place exalting a day for which God has made no provision whatever at any time; namely, the day of the sun.

Surely here we have a mark, an evidence, of the desire of willful men to set up their own wishes against the wishes of God, and to establish their own traditions in place of the things which God has commanded. "It is the mark of a man." But in spite of all this, the holy Sabbath day of the fourth commandment, although it has for centuries been flouted, still remains the rest day of God, the day of which Christ Himself is Lord and Master.

The Sabbath in 425 A.D.

It is a striking fact that all this time the Seventh-day Sabbath continued to be kept by the majority of Christians in spite of all the inroads of paganism and compromise.

There are those who claim that most Christians had begun to keep the Sunday within two or three hundred years after the time of Christ and the Apostles. This is not true. By the middle of the fourth century, under the duress of combined church and state legislation, – many of the city Christians may have begun compromising in this direction,

but the greater majority of the Christians –the Christians outside the cities remained free for a much longer period of time from the encroachment of Sunday pressure.

The important church leader, Augustine, the bishop of the church of Hippo in North Africa, who died in the year 430, acknowledged the wide-spread keeping of the Sabbath in his day and in a letter to Jerome (the translator of the Roman Catholic Bible), he urged that Christians not be persecuted for keeping it instead of Sunday. In this letter he mentions that the Seventh-day Sabbath was observed in his day "In the greater part of the Christian world." Augustine, himself, was a Sundaykeeper.

Here is what the church historian Socrates, who died about 440 A.D., wrote nearly a hundred years after Constantine's Sunday Law Decree:

"Although almost all churches through the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this."-Ecclesiastical History, book 5, chapter 22.

People cannot "cease" to do what they have never done, and so we can know that even at Rome and Alexandria the Bible Sabbath was once kept.

But here we see that–amazingly so–400 years after the death of Christ, and 100 years after Constantine's linking of church and state by his national Sunday law–Rome and Alexandria were the ONLY places in the world where the majority of Christians kept Sunday and not the Bible Sabbath.

This is truly remarkable. In spite of decrees and punishments In spite of church leaders and governmental decrees, the true Sabbath of the Bible was being kept everywhere in Christendom a hundred years after Sunday legislation began–except in but two places–Rome and Alexandria.

We can understand why Rome had ceased to keep the Sabbath, since for two hundred years it had been emphasizing the keeping of Sunday. We can understand, too, the Alexandrian church's failure to obey God, for that church from its infancy had been the leading influence of Gnostic and speculative philosophy in the church. Throughout the entire history of the changeover from Sabbath to Sunday, Rome and Alexandria had worked together. Alexandria providing philosophical reasons for the changes. Rome providing the decrees and anathemas.

Who was the Antichrist?

But all the while there were humble folk who continued to keep the true Sabbath. Humble folk who read their Bible and followed it. But it remained for a pope of Rome to denounce as followers of anti-christ those who continued to observe the true Sabbath. Gregory I, named the Great, bishop of Rome from A.D. 590 to 604, declared Sabbath-keepers to be preachers of antichrist. Here is what he wrote:

"Gregory, bishop by the grace of God to his well-beloved sons, the Roman citizens: It has come to me that certain men of perverse spirit have disseminated among you things depraved and opposed to the holy faith, so that they forbid anything to be done on the day of the Sabbath. What shall I call them except preachers of antichrist?"-Epistles, book 13:1, in Labbe and Cossart, Sacrosancta Concilia, volume 5, column 1511.

This shift from Sabbath to Sunday became effective from the fourth through the seventh centuries, at the time when the popes were consolidating their enormous ecclesiastical power.

The Church in the Dark Ages (700-1500 A.D.)

As the centuries rolled by, Sunday observance became increasingly a symbol of the religious power of the Roman Church. Dissenters wherever they might be found were severely punished, but in spite of this, followers of the true Sabbath were to be found in distant or isolated places. For many centuries after

Bible Sabbathkeeping had been crushed out of much of the western world, it was still kept in such areas as Britain, Scotland and Ireland. A school was established on the lonely isle of Iona, and from there missionaries went to northern Europe, Switzerland and elsewhere. Eventually the churches in the British Isles were taken over by Rome, but among the Waldenses of the Italian piedmont and the Swiss Alps, one of the most persecuted and hunted people of the Dark Ages, many kept the Bible Sabbath.

Churches that held to this faith also existed for hundreds of years in Central Africa, in Ethiopia and Abyssinia, and among the Armenians and Syrians of Asia. (See Heylyn, History of the Sabbath, part 2, chap. 5, sec. 7; J.H. Merle D Aubigne, History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century, bk. 17, chap. 2; Roger de Hoveden, Annals, vol. 2, pp. 528-530, 281-282; Michael Geddes, Church History of Ethiopia, pp. 311-312, and other books on the Dark Ages.)

The pattern is a simple one: Christian groups that tended to be hidden away in distant places from Rome, and that had access to the Bible in their own language, were the ones who were likely to continue keeping the true Sabbath.

When the northern tribes invaded the empire, the larger number of them accepted the Roman version of Christianity, instead of the purer eastern faith. And so at the request of the pope, they prohibited Sunday work with severe civil decrees in their respective countries. But the medieval church never mixed Sunday with the Sabbath in their thinking. They recognized and freely admitted that it wasn't the Bible Sabbath. Christians never called Sunday "the Sabbath" until modern times.

Interestingly enough, just as is done today, in their blue laws they never forbade amusements on Sunday, except the most objectionable types.

Sunday rest proved difficult to regulate. To church and civil decrees were added superstitious tales of letters from heaven, or miraculous punishments visited upon violators of Sunday.

Gregory, a sixth-century bishop of the city of Tours, in France, wrote up a bookful of them—fire falling from the skies and killing Sabbathkeepers, iron sticking to the hand, blood spurting from the eyes, or thorns growing inside the eyeballs of Sunday violators, and so forth.

In what company has Sunday arisen! Born of tradition, introduced by gnostic philosophers, popularized by Sun worship, clothed in anti-Semitism, enforced by law, sanctified by superstition, finally upheld by the death sentence. All these means have been necessary because of a lack of divine authorization in even one smallest passage of Scripture.

Hidden Churches

But as we have seen, scattered here and there were to be found observers of the true Sabbath-especially in isolated places. Many of the eastern churches, as the centuries passed, continued to hold church services on the Sabbath, and refused to follow the Roman rule of disparaging God's holy day by using it only for a day of fasting and sorrowing, in preparation for Sundaykeeping, as was decreed by Rome.

Many of these hidden churches, such as the Celts of Scotland and the Waldensees of the Alps, were encouraged in their efforts to keep the true Sabbath by the fact that they had the Bible in their own language—a rare thing in those days. It had earlier been discovered that one of the best ways to forbid the Sabbath, was to forbid the Bible along with it.

One of their opponents said this: "They do not hear the masses of Christians [Catholics] ... they flee the image of the Crucifix as the devil, they do not celebrate the feasts [holy days] of the divine Virgin Mary and of the Apostles, ... Some indeed celebrate the Sabbath that the Jews observe!"-Translated by J.J. von Doellinger, *Beitraege zur Sektengeschichte des Mittelalters*, volume 2, number 61, page 662.

Harvestime Books Resource Library
<http://www.remnant-prophecy.com>
<http://www.Harvestimebooks.com>
<http://www.bible-sabbath.com>