

Is Sunday “the Lord’s Day”?

by J.K. McKee posted 28 July, 2002 www.tnnonline.net

It appears on countless church bulletins, newsletters, and is frequently referred to by many Christians, both Protestants and Catholics. It is “the Lord’s Day,” believed to be Sunday when most Christians believe that Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) was resurrected from the dead.¹ Because of Yeshua resurrecting from the dead on this day, Christians assemble in worship, some to obey the Forth Commandment: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12). Other Christians believe that the Fourth Commandment has been annulled and are of the position that they should observe Sunday, as was the pattern of the Second and Third Century Church.

We as Messianic Believers come into direct contrast with many Christians because we do not observe this “Lord’s Day,” as they call it. We keep the Biblical seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), the day of rest that God established for His people going back to the start of human history (Genesis 2:3; Exodus 20:11).

Some uninformed Christians may accuse us of being legalistic about *Shabbat*, perhaps implying that because we do not assemble on Sunday, as they do, that we cannot be true Believers. (Many others simply do not understand what *Shabbat* is all about.) Various claims issued against us can be very serious because we do believe in the shed blood of the Messiah as being our sin covering, and that salvation comes by grace through faith. However, obeying God should come as fruit of a true conversion experience. Christians who accuse Messianics who keep God’s Sabbath as not being “saved” are on extremely dangerous ground—coming against things that He, not man, has established. Messianics today keep the Sabbath because Yeshua Himself did!

It has never been my position to criticize Christians unfairly or “attack back,” as do some Messianics when Christians tell them that they are “trying to earn their salvation” or somehow committing sacrilege, often relating to *Shabbat*. However, we do have a very definite position on *why* we should keep the Biblical Sabbath, and not “the Lord’s Day” as instituted by those who came *after* our Lord. This needs to be discussed in a fair and reasonable manner, where Messianics are given a hearing.

Let us detail what the Creator God has established for humanity, and answer some of the major claims given by Christians as to why we should not keep the Biblical Sabbath. We will examine the fact that Messiah Yeshua’s atoning work does not annul the Sabbath, and why He did not break it during His ministry on Earth. We will also discuss why Sunday, or the first day, is not really “the Lord’s Day.”

What day has God set-apart?

When we review the account of Creation in Genesis chs. 1-2, it is very clear what day of the week our Heavenly Father has set-apart or chosen to be unique: “By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made” (Genesis 2:2-3).²

The Hebrew verb *qadash* (קָדַשׁ), translated “sanctified,” appears in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice) and means “to proclaim a holy period” or “to treat someone (something) as sanctified, consecrated” (*HALOT*).³ In other words, it is the seventh day, or *yom ha’shevi’i* (הַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי), that God has indicated as being special. The Lord “blessed the seventh day and made it holy” (Genesis 2:3, NIV). Torah commentator J.H. Hertz states that “The Creator endowed the Sabbath with a blessing which would be experienced by all who observed it....It is specifically marked off

¹ This article has been reproduced from the paperback edition of *Introduction to Things Messianic*, pp 143-165.

² Some say that the Sabbath does not appear in Genesis 2:2-3, yet the verb form of *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), *shavat* (שָׁבַת), does appear: *v’yishbot b’yom ha’shevi’i* (וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי).

Cf. Victor P. Hamilton, “שַׁבָּת,” in *TWOT*, 2:902-903; *HALOT*, 2:1407.

³ *HALOT*, 2:1074.

as a day consecrated to God and the life of the spirit.”⁴ John H. Walton further remarks, “The divine Sabbath of Genesis 2 is not simply an etiology of the human Sabbath...Instead, the divine Sabbath is seen as the cause of the human Sabbath.”⁵ Those who keep the Sabbath identify with God in a very unique and significant way. Yeshua spoke of how “The sabbath was made for humankind” (Mark 2:27, NRSV), indicating how it has universal affects for all people.

The commandment to observe the Sabbath was first given in Exodus 20:8-11, as a part of the Ten Commandments:

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.”

This commandment is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:12: “Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.”

Furthermore, the Sabbath is one of the Father’s *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים) or “appointed times” in Leviticus 23: “For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.” (Leviticus 23:3).

These commandments are quite simple when we understand them Biblically. Our Heavenly Father rested after His creative acts were finished, and He established *Shabbat* as a time of rest for us to consider His wonders, experiencing a foretaste of a *greater rest* to come (cf. Hebrews 4:9-11). It is the day that He has set-apart and made holy so that we might rest and rejuvenate ourselves and meditate on Him. Certainly, resting from our labors for a full day is a *good thing!* As Believers who want to focus on Messiah Yeshua, spending an entire day meditating on God’s Word, worshipping Him, and fellowshiping with others is not bad!

In Exodus 31:16-17, our Father states that keeping the Sabbath is an eternal sign between Him and His people forever: “So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath [*v’shamru...et’ha’Shabbat, וְשָׁמְרוּ...אֶת־הַשַּׁבָּת*], to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant [*l’dorotam b’rit olam, לְדֹרוֹתָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם*]. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed.”

The Hebrew term used for “sign” in this passage is *ot* (אוֹת), and it means “*sign, pledge token,*” and “*signs, miracles,* as pledges or attestations of divine presence & interposition” (BDB).⁶ Those who keep *Shabbat* are distinguished and set-apart from the rest of the world, because unlike the world—which continues to conduct in business and hectic work—by keeping *Shabbat* we can identify ourselves with the God of Israel and with His practices. *It is a distinct sign manifest to others on a regular basis that we are His,* and that we have placed ourselves in His care.

Many of us who observe *Shabbat*, though, are also separated from other “Believers” from time to time, because it can be sadly observed that a few of those who follow the Lord’s commandments in this regard can be criticized and harassed. This often comes from people who have not been sufficiently taught about what the Sabbath actually is from the Scriptures.⁷

Shabbat was made by God to be a *b’rit olam* (בְּרִית עוֹלָם), an “eternal” or “perpetual covenant” between Him and His people. Some have tried to argue that the context of *olam* (עוֹלָם),

⁴ Hertz, 6.

⁵ John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 153.

⁶ BDB, 16.

⁷ Remarkings on Hebrews 4:1, Tim Hegg indicates that “The answer to the question of why...Christian theologians and teachers have neglected the theology of ‘rest’ may simply lie in the fact that the Church jettisoned Sabbath. With Sabbath no longer part of the Christian culture and practice, the emphasis shifted from ‘rest’ to ‘work’. In this scenario, biblical ‘rest’ becomes entirely allegorized as symbolic of eternity *and therefore of no current consequence*” (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [Author, n.d.], 61).

“for ever, always,” “continuous existence,” “everlasting covenant,” “indefinite, unending future,” “everlastingness, eternity”—when we survey the array of possible applications in *BDB*⁸—meant that one day the Sabbath commandment would outlive itself.⁹ But the Lord very clearly says that *Shabbat* is part of His covenant, and if *Shabbat* were done away with, it means that God is not true to His covenants. ***Eternal means eternal***, and being an ordinance existing from Creation, the Sabbath would be a very difficult observance to entirely revoke and abolish. Certainly, while the Sabbath teaches us things *beyond* just a single day of human rest in a week on Planet Earth (cf. Colossians 2:17), one cannot hope to understand greater realities beyond this dimension, without actually first participating in a weekly *Shabbat* rest.

Exodus 31:18 further says that “When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God.” The Sabbath commandment, a major sign that is to distinguish His people from the world, was written into stone with the *etzba Elohim* (אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים) or “the finger of God.” Considering that the Sabbath commandment was written with the Lord’s very “finger,” it is important that we take notice. Truly, those who would say that something written with the Heavenly Father’s finger, is now done away, are treading on dangerous ground. (No one in his right mind argues that the Sixth Commandment, the prohibition against murder, has been done away!)

There is one argument that many Christians give that only today’s Messianics can easily answer. It is commonly said that the *Shabbat* commandment was only given to Israel and thus does not apply to “the Church.” These Christians say they are not obligated to keep it, as it was something only for the Jews. But non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). They “are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body” (Ephesians 3:6) along with the Jewish people. Our Heavenly Father has only one chosen assembly: the community of Israel of which ***all Believers*** are a part. Thus, *Shabbat* should be kept by all Believers. It is certainly something that can bless those who take a hold of it, and honor the Lord by resting and meeting with Him.

Is the Sabbath a burden?

In discussing what *Shabbat* actually is, many have the false idea that the Sabbath is to be a forced time of “unwork,” burdensome and legalistic. Unfortunately, these ideas concerning *Shabbat* do not necessarily come from Scripture, but rather from concepts of modern-day Orthodox Judaism—perhaps not even the Judaism of Yeshua’s day.

Many of our Jewish brethren, while serious about keeping the Sabbath—which is good—have unfortunately made it burdensome, imposing many extra-Biblical regulations. There are, in fact, thirty-nine specific types of work prohibited by the Mishnah (m.*Shabbat* 7:2). These prohibitions were originally put in place by the Jewish Rabbis to mimic the type of work that was used by the Ancient Israelites in the construction of the Tabernacle. Many of these things clearly do classify as laborious work and should not be practiced on the Sabbath, and they can aid us when trying to discern something as “work.” However, some of these things may be contested as being classified as laborious. In time, these man-made rules expanded the meaning of *Shabbat* beyond the original intentions of God, and these thirty-nine abstentions led to many more customs and traditions being added:

The generative categories of acts of labor [prohibited on the Sabbath] are forty less one: (1) he who sews, (2) ploughs, (3) reaps, (4) binds sheaves, (5) threshes, (6) winnows, (7) selects [fit from unfit produce or crops], (8) grinds, (9) sifts, (10) kneads, (11) bakes; (12) he who shears wool, (13) washes it, (14) beats it, (15) dyes it; (16) spins, (17) weaves, (18) makes two loops, (19) weaves two threads, (20) separates two threads; (21) ties, (22)

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 761-762.

⁹ Sadly, misunderstanding the significance of the Sabbath can even extend to Messianic Jewish Bible teachers, and is not constrained to Christian pastors alone. See the comments of Arnold G. Fructenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1996), pp 594-595, 601.

unties, (23) sews two stitches, (24) tears in order to sew two stitches; (25) he who traps a deer, (26) slaughters it, (27) flays it, (28) salts it, (29) cures its hide, (30) scrapes it, and (31) cuts it up; (32) he who writes two letters, (33) erases two letters in order to write two letters; (34) he who builds, (35) tears down; (36) he who puts out a fire, (37) kindles a fire; (38) he who hits with a hammer; (39) he who transports an object from one domain to another—lo, these are the forty generative acts of labor less one (m.*Shabbat* 7:2).¹⁰

But what does Scripture *specifically* say about how we are to keep the Sabbath day? Is the Sabbath truly a “burden”? The Pentateuch first records,

“For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death” (Exodus 31:15).

“For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy *day*, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death” (Exodus 35:2).

These two verses listed above say that those who work on *Shabbat* will be condemned to death. As far as we know, when these commandments were observed, those who violated the Sabbath in ancient times were put to death.

We do know that now Messiah Yeshua has taken the death penalty for these sins away by His atoning work on the cross (Colossians 2:14), and so *we will not*, of course, demand the death of those who do not take this commandment seriously. However, as it may be observed—conceptually as “life” is communion with God and “death” is separation from Him—by failing to properly keep *Shabbat* we can be separate from the Father and unable to properly commune with Him. We do not get to participate in all the things that He has intended for us. But, if we keep *Shabbat* and rest from our labors, then we *can* meditate and commune with Him in a very full and meaningful way—certainly something none of us should have a problem with.

But is the Sabbath a “burden” as some Christians believe?

Here are a collection of specific admonitions in the Tanach as they relate to properly keeping *Shabbat*:

1. The Seventh day is the Sabbath, requiring a suspension of all labor:

“[B]ut the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you” (Exodus 20:10).

2. The Sabbath is to be a holy convocation:

“For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:3).

3. Work is to be done in the first six days of the week:

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (Exodus 20:9).

4. The Sabbath is to be a day of complete rest:

“You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; *even* during plowing time and harvest you shall rest” (Exodus 34:21).

5. Fire shall not be kindled on the Sabbath:

“You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day” (Exodus 35:3).

¹⁰ Neusner, *Mishnah*, pp 187-188.

6. On the Sabbath, we are to remember that the Ancient Israelites were once slaves in Egypt:

“You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

7. We are not to be concerned about our own carnal pleasures:

“If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, from seeking your *own* pleasure and speaking *your own* word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

8. Conducting in business is prohibited on the Sabbath:

“As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego *the crops* the seventh year and the exaction of every debt” (Nehemiah 10:31).

Many of these admonitions are not burdensome in the least, especially for those who want to obey God with an open heart. Abstaining from all labors, remembering what God has done for His people in the past, and not conducting in business for an entire day are *good things*—not to be looked down upon. The Sabbath is *a special gift* from our Heavenly Father to His people, that we might spend a day in complete rest and meditation on Him. Those who believe that keeping *Shabbat* and dedicating this day entirely unto Him is gross legalistic error, probably have selfish motivations. Such people could probably also be led to believe that studying the Bible regularly or in any kind of detail, or committing oneself to a disciplined prayer life, is “legalistic.”

Certainly the Biblical commandments listed relating to keeping the Sabbath are interpreted differently among Messianics. We trust that you will be guided by the Holy Spirit in determining a proper application for your life’s circumstances. But the general consensus should be that *Shabbat* is to be a day of abstention from work and rest in Him.

The Messiah Observed the Sabbath

Many Believers today eagerly wish to follow the example of our Messiah Yeshua. Following what our Savior did is imperative, as we live in a world that is greatly deteriorating because we have failed to follow the Bible. So if we want to follow the example of Yeshua, are we to keep the Sabbath? Consider the following scenes from the Gospels:

“They went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and *began* to teach. They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:21-22).

“When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?’” (Mark 6:2).

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.’ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in

the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:16-21).

These verses all attest to the miraculous teaching ability of the Messiah on *Shabbat*, and the declaration of His fulfillment of Biblical prophecy as He quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 from the scroll:

“And He came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and He was teaching them on the Sabbath; and they were amazed at His teaching, for His message was with authority” (Luke 4:31-32).

From these selections, it is clear that Yeshua kept the Sabbath. In fact, *Shabbat* is connected with Yeshua’s authoritative teaching ability, as on *Shabbat* those assembling in Jewish synagogues would listen to and discuss the Torah and the Prophets. If we wish to enrich our spiritual lives, should we do the same as well? These Scriptures are *greatly overlooked* by Christians at large, who often misunderstand the teachings of God’s Torah, because they may never read it on a consistent basis (cf. Acts 15:21). On *Shabbat*, Messianic Believers assemble with one another, discuss the Torah and the Prophets—and uplift and praise our Messiah Yeshua—seeing the richness of these texts in light of the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament)!

Did Yeshua break the Sabbath?

Some Christians are of the position that our Messiah Yeshua, the sinless Lamb of God and perfect sacrifice for our sin, actually broke the Sabbath. This is a serious claim because if He broke the Sabbath and if He sinned, then perhaps Yeshua could not be the Messiah and His sacrifice could not atone for our sin—which 1 John 3:4 tells us is lawlessness or disobedience to God’s Torah.

There are two specific instances to discuss that some Christians believe give reference to the Messiah breaking *Shabbat*.

The first claim usually given to prove that the Messiah “broke the Sabbath” is seen when His Disciples were plucking grain in the fields (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5):

“At that time Yeshua went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw *this*, they said to Him, ‘Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.’ But He said to them, ‘Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?’” (Matthew 12:1-4).

Those who tell us from these verses that Yeshua broke the Sabbath usually quote the Pharisees who said, “Why are you doing what is not permitted to be done on the Sabbath days?” (Luke 6:2, Amplified Bible). The Complete Jewish Bible translates this as, “Why are you violating *Shabbat*?” While Yeshua is not picking the heads of grain, His Disciples are, and this reflects back on Him as their Teacher and Rabbi.

It is important for us to first note that there is no specific commandment in the Torah that forbids picking heads of grain on the Sabbath. The Greek *exesti* (ἔξεστι) correctly means, “it is allowed, it is in one’s power, is possible” (LS),¹¹ not always referring to something in the Pentateuch itself. The Mishnah includes two types of work on the Sabbath that were prohibited by Rabbis in Yeshua’s day, which He could have been accused of breaking: reaping and threshing (m.*Shabbat* 7:2). Those holding a rigid interpretation of the Oral Law would have immediately accused Yeshua of doing something that was not permitted on the Sabbath. However, Luke 6:2 notably tells us, “But some of the Pharisees said.”¹² The text does not indicate that this was a position held by *all* of the Pharisees. Placing this passage in its appropriate historical context is imperative.¹³

¹¹ LS, 273.

The full clause in Luke 6:2 is *ti poiείτε ho ouk exestin tois sabbasin* (τί ποιείτε ὃ οὐκ ἔξεστι τοῖς σάββασι), also rendered as “Why do you do what is forbidden on the Sabbath?” (*Lattimore*).

¹² Grk. *tines de tōn Pharisaiōn eipan* (τινὲς δὲ τῶν Φαρισαίων εἶπαν).

¹³ In all likelihood, the Pharisees Yeshua encountered here were of the more conservative and stringent School of Shammai.

Secondly, in His response to these Pharisees, Yeshua gives the example of David and his men eating the consecrated bread that was only reserved for the priests to be eaten. This is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:3-4, 6:

“Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.’ The priest answered David and said, ‘There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women’...So the priest gave him consecrated *bread*; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* when it was taken away.”

In the example given from the Tanach regarding David and his men, it is important to realize that the priest provided them with food from the Bread of the Presence, which was only permitted for the priests to eat. The Torah says in Leviticus 24:9 that this bread “shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD’s offerings by fire, *his portion forever*.” However, because they were hungry and required sustenance, the priest gave them this bread.

Eating something to provide sustenance and thus maintain one’s physical life falls into a category that the Rabbis of Judaism call *Pikku’ach Nefesh* or Regard for Human Life. It is based on Leviticus 19:16: “neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour” (1917 JPS). The *ArtScroll Chumash* commentary states, “If someone’s life is in danger, you must try to save him.”⁴ In regard to the Sabbath the principle of *Pikku’ach Nefesh* has often been taken to mean that any work that is required to save a person’s life takes precedence over the ritual *Shabbat* commandments of the Torah. (This is the reason why in the modern State of Israel today, doctors, police, and the military are permitted to work on *Shabbat*.)

Yeshua’s example of David being fed by the Bread of the Presence was poignant in that the priest followed Leviticus 19:16 by providing needed sustenance to David and his party. And, His Disciples were likewise only providing for themselves the necessary food for survival. Yeshua’s Disciples plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath was well-permitted within the larger theological construct of First Century Judaism, but was probably not liked by a few extremists.

Another example often used by those who say that Yeshua broke *Shabbat* comes from John 5:6-18, where He heals a sick man on the Sabbath. Yeshua then commands him to pick up his pallet and walk:

“When Yeshua saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him, ‘Do you wish to get well?’ The sick man answered Him, ‘Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.’ Yeshua said to him, ‘Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.’ Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk. Now it was the Sabbath on that day” (John 5:6-9).

In these verses, we can most certainly see application of *Pikku’ach Nefesh*. Yeshua was saving the life of a person by healing him on the Sabbath. In response to this, we see the reaction of some of the Jews watching this: “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet” (John 5:10). These Pharisees were dismayed that the man would carry his pallet on *Shabbat*, because they believed that it was in violation of Nehemiah 13:19-20:

“It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates *so that* no load would enter on the sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem.”

These verses indicate that it was prohibited for loads to be carried on the Sabbath, but specifically loads relating to business and commerce. These loads were being carried into Jerusalem for buying and selling on *Shabbat*, which is why Jerusalem’s gates were closed. Without a doubt, many Pharisees considered this to be a “burden” or *massa* (מַסָּא), which means “load,

⁴ Nosson Scherman, ed., *ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000), 661.

burden, lifting, bearing, tribute” (BDB),¹⁵ including pallets. The Septuagint translates *massa* as *bastagma* (βάσταγμα), something specifically meaning “that which is borne, a burden” (LS),¹⁶ but it is not used in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

What the healed man specifically carried was a *krabbatos* (κράββατος), or “a pallet, camp bed” (Thayer).¹⁷ UBSHNT renders *krabbatos* as *mishkav* (מִשְׁכָּב), or simply “bed.” While sizes of beds no doubt differed, it is doubtful that this invalid’s pallet was something large and heavy. AMG offers us the following valuable description of a *krabbatos*: “A small couch used by the poor. It denotes a simple kind of bed...[which] usually consisted of a padded quilt or thin mattress to be used according to the season or the condition of the owner with or without covering.”¹⁸

With a proper understanding of *Pikku’ach Nefesh*, Yeshua did not violate the Sabbath at all by telling the healed man to pick up his pallet that was a light bed which likely only weighed a few pounds. Yeshua did, however, no doubt “violate” the theological opinions of the group or sect of Pharisees who watched Him. Stern observes in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, “they could not see that the formerly crippled man’s ability to carry his mat attested to God’s glory.”¹⁹

The arguments from those who do not want to keep *Shabbat* will go on and on. Many people will try to present cases that seemingly prove that Messiah Yeshua—the sinless Lamb of God and who is of one accord with His Father (cf. John 10:30)—violated the Sabbath and broke His own commandments. Sadly, these arguments are often not placed within the framework of First Century Judaism, and often relate to Christians’ ignorance of the historical occurrence of Biblical events.²⁰

Why do Christians assemble on Sunday?

Even though it is obvious that Messiah Yeshua kept the Sabbath and did not “violate” it, why do Christians by-and-large today assemble on Sunday? Why do they not keep the seventh-day Sabbath?

If you ask them these questions, most Christians will tell you that it is because Yeshua was resurrected from the dead on Sunday morning, and they go to church on Sunday to remember this.²¹ While this was the pattern of many in the Second and Third Century Church, it was not the practice of the Jewish Apostles. The common pattern of the Apostle Paul in Acts was to always go to the local synagogue *first*, on *Shabbat*, to share the gospel with those assembled (cf. Acts 17:1). However, the historical transition from *Shabbat* to Sunday Church did take place as the emerging Church distanced itself from its Hebraic Roots and spiritual heritage in Judaism, and the Jewish Synagogue ejected and ex-communicated many of the Messianic Believers.

Did the early Believers meet on Sunday?

Although today’s Messianics believe that the New Testament is clear that the Messiah upheld the Sabbath, there are those who tell us that His early followers did not keep *Shabbat* and

¹⁵ BDB, 672.

¹⁶ LS, 148.

¹⁷ Thayer, 358.

¹⁸ Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 883.

¹⁹ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 168.

²⁰ D.J. Moo, who does not have a particularly high view of the Mosaic Torah for Believers today, does admit how Yeshua did not break the Sabbath:

“Certainly Jesus and his disciples violated the scribal Sabbath regulations...these activities [were not] a clear violation of the Mosaic Sabbath rules...The most that can be said is that his initiative in healing on the Sabbath, rooted in theological conviction—‘it was necessary’ for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath (Lk 13:16)—stretches the Sabbath commandment. But we have no evidence of his disciples violating, the written Sabbath commandment” (“Law,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 454-455).

²¹ While it is difficult to deny how the empty tomb was found on Sunday morning (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), the earthquake that signaled Yeshua’s resurrection (Matthew 28:2) occurred as the Marys approached the tomb *Opse de sabbatōn* (Ὁψὲ δὲ σαββάτων) or “late on the sabbath day” (Matthew 28:1, American Standard Version). Being delayed by the earthquake, they returned in the morning to find the tomb of Yeshua vacated.

instead replaced it by assembling on the first day. This is usually based on verses such as Acts 20:7, which tell us, “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread” (NIV). In 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul writes, “On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.”

When examining these two verses, it may seem to some that the early Believers did gather on the first day of the week or Sunday. There is certainly nothing morally reprehensible about this. But even if they did assemble on Sunday, there is no indication that they *did not* likewise observe *Shabbat*. The Corinthian congregation, for example, held its meetings right next to the Corinthian synagogue (Acts 18:7-8). Sunday could have been easily set aside for the business matters of the local assembly, as opposed to being the principal day of assembling for worship, prayer, and teaching.

When placed in its correct historical and cultural context, the idea that the Believers assembling on “the first of the week” here, being what would later become the Christian Sunday, is not a complete picture. Acts 20:7, depicting the scene in Troas, is actually translated in the Complete Jewish Bible as, “On *Motza’ei Shabbat*, when we were gathered to break bread, Sha’ul addressed them. Since he was going to leave the next day, he kept talking until midnight.”

Stern comments that “*Motza’ei Shabbat* [מוצאי שבת] in Hebrew means ‘departure of the Sabbath’ and refers to Saturday night....It would be natural for Jewish believers who had rested on *Shabbat* with the rest of the Jewish community to assemble afterwards to celebrate their common faith in Yeshua the Messiah....A Saturday night meeting would continue the God-oriented spirit of *Shabbat*, rather than require the believers to shift their concern from workaday matters, as would be the case [if this were] Sunday night.”²²

The new day Biblically begins in the evening (Genesis 1:5), so the first day of the week actually begins on Saturday night. If this were speaking of Sunday night, as many believe, then technically Acts 20:7 should have read that they were meeting “on the second day of the week” as Paul, “intended to leave the next day, [but] kept on talking until midnight” (NIV). Interestingly enough, the New English Bible renders Acts 20:7 with, “On the Saturday night,” recognizing the common Jewish practice.²³

But what about 1 Corinthians 16:2: “On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that contributions need not be made when I come” (RSV)? The CJB translates this with *Motza’ei Shabbat* as well: “Every week, on *Motza’ei Shabbat*, each of you should set some money aside, according to his resources, and save it up; so that when I come I won’t have to do fundraising.”

1 Corinthians 16:2 has little, if nothing, to do with “Sunday church” as is commonly observed today. At the very least, what it speaks of is people tithing their financial resources to the local assembly. Because engaging in commerce is prohibited on *Shabbat*, doing this when the Sabbath was over was appropriate for the First Century Messianic community, as then related business could be conducted, along with any other discussion of finances.

I would concede that if this is speaking of monetary collection for the local assembly, some of it may have occurred on a Sunday day, independent of a Saturday evening gathering. But, this does not negate the importance of *Shabbat*, nor does it annul it as some believe. For Acts 2:46 tells us that the early Believers were meeting together *kath hēmeran* (καθ’ ἡμέραν) or “Every day” (NIV). There is nothing wrong, Biblically, with meeting with other Believers on Sunday; **Sunday is just not the Sabbath.**

²² Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 297-298.

²³ Commentators are not fully agreed as to whether the Jewish or Roman reckoning for time is fully used by Luke in Acts.

See I. Howard Marshall, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), pp 325-326; Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 530; J.C. Laansma, “Lord’s Day,” in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 681.

Must it be “repeated” in the New Testament?

In spite of the evidence seen that Messiah Yeshua did not break *Shabbat*, there will still be those who do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Many may deliberately dishonor the Sabbath, claiming that because there is no specific “command” in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) to “do it,” that they should not. Yet, there is no recorded instance in Apostolic Scriptures of the Apostles *not* keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, or instructing the Believers *not* to keep it. In fact, the Book of Acts indicates that the Apostle Paul continued to observe the Sabbath following his conversion (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 18:4). Furthermore, we also note that Acts 15:21 states, “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath,” as the non-Jewish Believers were expected to go to Synagogue and hear the Torah and the Prophets, the only Scriptures available at the time.²⁴

The logic that “it’s not in the New Testament” could be used to deny other important Biblical practices as well. There is no specific command in the Apostolic Scriptures that tells us to use capital punishment. But many evangelical Christians rightly believe that murderers, rapists, and terrorists should (or at least, can) be executed. For that same matter, there is no explicit command in the Apostolic Scriptures that forbids sexual relations with animals. But this too is a sin. These specific instructions are given in the Torah, and we must follow them as they are for our own good (Deuteronomy 10:13).

What this ultimately comes down to is how much we want to follow the example of Yeshua. He kept the Sabbath and did not break it. He did not disobey His Father, and being one with the Father the *Shabbat* commandments are His commandments. Yeshua tells us, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). John likewise says, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments” (1 John 5:2). Love for God should motivate us to meet with Him on *Shabbat*!

Many have said that Yeshua is only speaking of His commandments here, and would say that He is not telling us to observe God’s commandments. But those who say that Yeshua’s commandments are not God’s commandments are (whether they have thought about it or not) actually telling us that Yeshua is not God—and thus not a Divine Savior. Obviously, we cannot accept this. If we want to follow the Messiah’s example then we will endeavor to obey the Torah and keep *Shabbat* as He did.

Many will say, though, that by the Second and Third Centuries Christians were observing Sunday and not the Sabbath. These people will use quotations from Church history to prove that it was their custom to observe Sunday, and so should we. Yet, there is no Biblical basis for this change. As George Eldon Ladd astutely comments, “Let it be at once emphasized that we [should not turn] to the church fathers to find authority...The one authority is the Word of God, and we are not confined in the straight-jacket of tradition.”²⁵ While these comments were delivered in regard to the pre- versus post-tribulation rapture controversy, Ladd is correct. Regardless of what the Church Fathers taught, we must seek our answers from the Scriptures and the actual writings of the Apostles first—because those who came later might have been wrong on this issue.

Notably, the Apostle Paul wrote that “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thessalonians 2:7, NIV). Indeed, if this lawlessness or denial of God’s Torah was at work at the time that he wrote this in the mid-First Century, then is it possible that by the end of the First Century *Shabbat* was not being kept by many Believers? By the Second to Third Centuries, Church writings indeed prove that Sunday took *Shabbat*’s place, by-and-large.²⁶ But simply because these Church writings say that most Believers in the Second and Third Centuries did not

²⁴ For a further discussion, consult the author’s publication *Acts 15 for the Practical Messianic* (forthcoming 2009).

Also consult the author’s article “Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?”

²⁵ George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 19.

²⁶ For a compilation of quotes among Second-Third Century C.E. Church leaders regarding the Sabbath, consult “Sabbath,” in Bercot, pp 571-572; “Lord’s Day,” in *Ibid.*, pp 405-407.

keep the seventh-day Sabbath, does not make it right. Our job is to return to the faith of the original Believers in Messiah Yeshua who kept *Shabbat*. We remember the Sabbath not just as an institution from Creation, but because Yeshua and His Apostles remembered it.

Is Sunday truly a “Sabbath”?

Others believe that the New Testament “changed” the Sabbath to Sunday. Many of these Christians honestly strive to observe a “Sunday Sabbath” and dedicate the entire day to God as *Shabbat* is supposed to be. Much of Reformation and post-Reformation history is marked by the examples of those who faithfully kept a Sunday Sabbath. However, due to the fast pace of our Western culture *today* in the Twenty-First Century, most who try to observe a “Sunday Sabbath” are not able to dedicate a day completely unto the Lord as did their forebearers—more than anything else because this is not encouraged in the contemporary Christians Church.

I would ask you to consider some of the reasons why God wanted His people to rest:

“Then Moses assembled all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and said to them, ‘These are the things that the LORD has commanded *you* to do: For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy *day*, a sabbath of complete rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death’ (Exodus 35:1-2).

The Israelites who were constructing the Tabernacle, as well as working in their daily tasks in the camp during the wilderness trek, were working long and hard hours under difficult conditions. The Lord told them to take a day of complete and total rest—what the Hebrew calls a *qodesh Shabbat shabbaton l’ADONAI* (קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּת שַׁבְּתוֹן לַיהוָה), or a holy Sabbath day of rest to the Lord.

While we can understand why this command was given to the Ancient Israelites back then, because they were working under hard circumstances, some do not believe that God would ask us today to take the seventh day and consecrate it entirely unto Him. After all, are there not things to do on Saturday? Saturday is the day when all the stores are open late and you can get the best deals at the mall. New movies have opened at the theater. All the good ball games are on and you can sit in front of the television and tune into the world. Yet, when we really do think about the fast pace and demands of modern life, remembering the Sabbath probably has more relevance *now* than it did for the ancients!

Contrary to what many may think, God indeed has the right to tell us today in the Twenty-First Century that we should consecrate a day entirely unto Him. He wants to commune with His people, and by resting in Him we not only rejuvenate our bodies—but we also rejuvenate our spirits by delving deeper and deeper into His Word—and removing ourselves from outside influences. While none of us can keep the Sabbath command perfectly, we do have the blood covering of Yeshua, and if we follow His example we should strive to honor the Sabbath to the best of our ability. He gave it all up for us by coming down to Earth from the right hand of the Father. What is one day out of our week totally devoted to Him?

But some will say that they observe the Sabbath. They will say that they go to church on Sunday. But Sunday is not the seventh day, and these Christians’ Sabbath is usually between *only one and two hours long*. After their church services, many Christians go out to eat or go shopping, not taking a day of complete and total rest. Their “substitute Sabbath” is really no Sabbath at all, and many may be found wanting by the Lord of the Sabbath.²⁷

Others will say that they “rest in Christ.” After all, as Hebrews 4:9-10 says, “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.” But is “Sabbath rest” what the text fully conveys? The Sabbath is certainly about rest, but the Greek *sabbatismos* (σαββατισμός) means “*sabbath rest, sabbath observance*” (BDAG).²⁸ As the Complete Jewish Bible renders Hebrews 4:9: “So there remains a *Shabbat-keeping* for God’s people.” In defense of this translation, Stern

²⁷ Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5.

²⁸ BDAG, 909.

states, “Greek *sabbatismos*, [is] used only here in the New Testament. In the Septuagint, the related Greek word ‘*sabbatizein*’ [sic]²⁹ was coined to translate the Hebrew verb *shabat* [שָׁבַט] when it means ‘to observe *Shabbat*.’ The usual translation, ‘There remains a Sabbath rest,’ minimizes the observance aspect and makes the role of God’s people entirely passive.”³⁰

As Believers, it is important that we understand that we have an *active faith*—not a passive faith where we can “spiritually rest” in the Messiah, but not keep the Sabbath or any kind of physical rest. While we must remember and focus on Yeshua on *Shabbat*, we cannot dispense with it and say that we are keeping it “in Christ,” as do many who really do not keep it, or perhaps make any effort to keep it. Remembering the Sabbath *physically* enables us to understand the greater spiritual realities that *Shabbat* typifies.

Dedicating one day out of our week entirely to our Heavenly Father is not difficult, and while you may get some criticism for it from others—the rewards are well worth it! Pleasing God is much better than pleasing others.

Is Sunday “the Lord’s Day”?

Now that we have discussed the Biblical importance of *Shabbat*, and some of the reasons why we as Believers in Messiah Yeshua should keep it, we are now in an appropriate position to discuss that “the Lord’s Day” is not Sunday.

The Apostle John says in Revelation 1:10 that “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet.” Many prophecy commentators, both pre- and post-tribulational, believe that this is speaking of Sunday. Ladd states that “It is...likely that [what] we see here [is] the emerging language referring to the Lord’s day as the Christians’ distinctive day of religious devotion... The emergence of Sunday observance in place of the Jewish Sabbath was a gradual historical process, and here we have the beginning of that process.”³¹ Supposedly, when the Apostle John was shown his vision of the end-times, he was shown it on Sunday.

Many Messianics believe that “the Lord’s Day” mentioned in Revelation 1:10 is not Sunday, but rather the Day of the LORD, the end-time period of God’s judgment on the world and His vindication of the righteous. This would make much more sense in relation to the subject matter of Yeshua’s revelation to the Apostle John, because if the Lord’s Day is Sunday, it may just be a minor detail that is relatively unimportant given the wider scope and message of the book he writes.³² But if it is in reference to the Day of the LORD, then it is very important that we pay attention.

Notably, Revelation 1:10 in the Complete Jewish Bible is translated with, “I came to be, in the Spirit, on **the Day of the Lord**; and I heard behind me a loud voice, like a trumpet.” Justifying this translation, Stern comments, “Yochanan [John] is reporting the unique experience of having seen God’s final Judgment.”³³

Some say that “the Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10 cannot be “the Day of the Lord,” because of the unique Greek used in this passage. In the Septuagint, the “Day of the LORD” representative of *Yom ADONAI* (יְהוָה יוֹם), is usually represented as *hēmera (tou) Kuriou* (ἡμέρα [τοῦ] κυρίου). But what appears in Revelation 1:10 is *tē Kuriakē hēmera* (τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρα), literally “the Lord’s Day.” Due to this odd Greek, it is often said that “the Lord’s Day” cannot be the Day of the LORD.³⁴

²⁹ Grk. LXX: *esabbatisen* (ἐσαββάτισεν), aorist active third person singular, used Exodus 16:30; *sabbatizein* (σαββατίζειν), present active infinitive, is used in 2 Maccabees 6:6.

³⁰ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 673.

³¹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 31.

³² Consult the author’s article “The Message of Revelation.”

³³ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 791.

³⁴ While advocating that Sunday Church is in view in Revelation 1:10, J.C. Laansma does still acknowledge, though, “There are many ways of referring to the Day of the Lord, and Revelation 1:10 may be one more” (“Lord’s Day,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, 682). He at least recognizes this as a possibility, not far fetched given the themes of Revelation.

The Greek adjective *kuriakos* (κυριακός), translated as “Lord’s,” “pert. to belonging to the Lord, the Lord’s” (BDAG).³⁵ The only other place *kuriakos* is used in the Apostolic Scriptures is in 1 Corinthians 11:20: “Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper [*Kuriakon deipnon*, κυριακὸν δεῖπνον].” Stern states that it “speaks of ‘a meal of the Lord,’ that is, pertaining to the Lord... a meal eaten in a manner worthy of Yeshua or of God.”³⁶

While I believe that “the Lord’s Day” is most likely speaking of the Day of the LORD, there is a second alternative to Sunday Church that we can consider. The Book of Revelation is “A revelation [or revealing] of Yeshua the Messiah” (Revelation 1:1), and it is a time period that pertains to the Lord and to His work on behalf of His people (cf. Revelation 6:10). As Revelation speaks of the end-times, it is perhaps fitting to understand “the Lord’s Day” as a time that has special meaning for the Messiah and His followers. It could be speaking of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon God’s people and Yeshua revealing Himself to the world as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a manner not ever experienced before (cf. Matthew 24:21).

“The Lord’s Day” may be speaking of a future period of time that in addition to “the Day of the LORD,” concerns Believers being involved in the Lord’s service in a way that they have never experienced before. The Tribulation saints are notably those “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Yeshua” (Revelation 12:17). Is it possible that if “the Lord’s Day” is a time during the Tribulation where He is revealed to His people like never before—and that this kind of revealing is contingent on them obeying His commandments in the Torah—that *Shabbat*, being a distinguishing sign, is somehow involved? The Millennium that will follow is to some degree typified as being a kind of Sabbath rest.

So is Sunday “the Lord’s Day?” In the sense that God is the Master of Creation and all things are His—including time and *all* the days of the week—yes. But in the sense that Sunday is now “the Sabbath” or a “special day” formed in New Testament times, *no*. The reference to “the Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10 is either speaking of the end-time Day of the LORD, or a time unlike any other where Messiah Yeshua is revealed to His followers and the world.

Christians Have Missed Out on a Blessing

The change from the Sabbath to Sunday does not have a firm foundation when one sticks to Scripture. If we wish to follow our Lord’s example, then we will keep the Sabbath and concentrate on Him and His work for us for an entire day. As it has been our sad observation, many Christians will continue to miss out on the blessings of *Shabbat*, living lives where they are physically burned out and desiring rest, but not knowing where to find it. But it has been our **sadder observation** that some Messianics will berate these Christians, saying that they go to church on “SUN-day” and are not true Believers, and are in actuality worshipping the sun god rather than the Holy One of Israel. This is because Sunday was the preferred day of worship in the Roman Empire and was the venerable day of the Sun.

Irvin and Sunquist remark in *History of the World Christian Movement* that when Constantine made Christianity a legal religion within the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century C.E., he “spoke of being a servant of God. Yet publicly he continued to mix Christian piety with devotion to the high solar deity, the Invincible Sun, which had become popular with the emperors of the previous century. When he declared in 321 that Sunday be set apart as a special day of worship, it is not clear whether it was the Invincible Sun or Jesus Christ whom he intended to honor.”³⁷

Many people are unaware of history, and criticizing Christians of worshipping the sun god is **completely unfounded to those in ignorance**—especially as we should be worshipping and serving God *every day* and it is certainly not wrong to worship Him on Sunday, even though it is not the Biblical Sabbath. It is not becoming of the example of Yeshua to treat Christians who go

³⁵ BDAG, 576.

³⁶ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 791.

³⁷ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 162.

to church on Sunday and do not keep *Shabbat* as total pagans, especially since those usually criticizing surely did not consider *themselves* as pagans when they went to church on Sunday. Criticizing without fairness or mercy will cause more problems. We need to be part of the solution, demonstrating the blessings of *Shabbat* to our Christian brethren.

I do not believe that Christians who go to church on Sunday are worshipping another God or a different Savior. Only God Himself can determine the true heart intent of Christians who are observing Sunday, and likewise that of any Messianics who harshly criticize them. However, keeping the Sabbath and dedicating an entire day to God, as opposed to a few hours on Sunday, has its added blessings as it is the day that He set-apart and sanctified for us. It is the time where we can rest from all our labors, rejuvenate ourselves, fellowship with other Believers, study the Word, and look forward to the greater rest to come in the eschaton.

But just as some Messianics vehemently criticize those who do not keep the Sabbath, there are certainly those Christians who do the same in reverse. Many of these will say that by not going to church on Sunday, we are denying the resurrection of Yeshua whose empty tomb was found on this day. This *is not the case*, at least for our ministry.³⁸ On the contrary, if we truly want to *live* like Yeshua, then we will honor the Sabbath as He did—and it will be a blessing for us.

We do recognize that there are true Believers who are presently not convicted that they should honor the Sabbath. Many of these people know the Lord, but are still maturing in their walk. *But they do not speak against those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath.* We hope that if you belong to this category, and you do not totally understand the Sabbath, that you will at least give Messianics like us the freedom to follow Yeshua’s example. At the very least, may your position be that of the late Walter Martin:

“I believe Seventh-Day Adventists, Seventh-day Baptists and Sabbatharians of other religious groups have the right to worship on the seventh day in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free. It is wrong and un-Christian to discriminate against Sabbatharians merely because they ‘esteem’ the Sabbath above the first day of the week, or Lord’s Day. I suggest it is no more legalistic for them to observe the seventh day out of conviction than it is for the Christian Church to observe the first day. It is a matter of liberty and conscience.”³⁹

Martin, while believing that “the Lord’s Day” should be observed instead of *Shabbat*, was fair and loving to those who kept the seventh-day Sabbath, recognizing it as a Biblical ordinance that *should not be spoken against*. He believed it was wrong to criticize and berate those who observed *Shabbat*, although he himself did not. He certainly did not consider those who honored the seventh-day Sabbath to be “unsaved.” He did not consider it a salvation issue, but rather one of personal choice.

Messianics who want to encourage positive change among all Believers, and impact Christians intrigued by the Hebraic Roots of their faith, must do the same to a certain degree. We cannot discriminate against those who do not keep the Sabbath, but we must show them the blessings and rest they have missed out on by not fully living the life of the Messiah who kept *Shabbat*. As we follow the Sabbath-keeping of our Lord, we must also follow His example and love those who do not presently keep *Shabbat*. We must emulate Messiah Yeshua who observed the seventh-day Sabbath, and by emulating Him hopefully others will emulate us. May they see the blessings of *Shabbat* present in our lives, and want them as well!

We believe that when you devote an entire day to God and keep *Shabbat*, you will find that you will not want to go back to the limitations of Sunday church. *You will be experiencing more of God, and not less!* We believe that you will find that by keeping the Sabbath with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, that the rewards of doing things the way He intended will truly be great—and you will want to tell others about it. It will be a way to live out Yeshua’s word, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).⁴⁰

³⁸ Consult the FAQ on the TNN website “Resurrection, Commemorating.”

³⁹ Martin, 470.

⁴⁰ For more information on the significance of *Shabbat*, consult *The Messianic Sabbath Helper* by TNN Press.

J.K. McKee (B.A., University of Oklahoma; M.A., Asbury Theological Seminary) is the editor of TNN Online (www.tnnonline.net) and is a Messianic apologist. He is author of several books, including: *The New Testament Validates Torah*, *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?*. He has also written many articles on the Two Houses of Israel and Biblical theology, and is presently focusing on Messianic commentaries on various books of the Bible.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.

revised 29 September, 2005

edited for spelling/grammar; minor theological fine tuning
12 February, 2007

edited edition from paperback *Introduction to Things Messianic*
posted 31 August, 2009