

# 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. 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 most 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. Many uninformed Christians accuse us of being legalistic about it, perhaps implying that because we do not assemble on Sunday, as they do, that we cannot be true Believers. These claims are 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 alone. 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.

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.” 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 human men.

We will detail what the Creator God has established for mankind and answer many of the 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 “the Lord’s Day,” in addition to examining when the first day Biblically begins.

## What day has God set-apart?

When we review the story of Creation in Genesis chs. 1-2, it is very clear what day of the week our Heavenly Father has set-apart: “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).

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*).<sup>1</sup> 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 as a day consecrated to God and the life of the spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

The commandment to observe the Sabbath was first given in Exodus 20:8-11, as 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

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1074.

<sup>2</sup> J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino Press, 1960), 6.

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 on the seventh day of Creation, and because of it He has established *Shabbat* as a time of rest for us. 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, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. 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 word for “sign” is *ot* (אוֹת) and it means “*sign, pledge token,*” and “*signs, miracles,* as pledges or attestations of divine presence & interposition” (BDB).<sup>3</sup> 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 identify ourselves with the God of Israel and with His practices. Many of us who observe *Shabbat* are also separated from other “Believers,” because it must be sadly observed that some of those who follow the Lord’s Instructions in this regard can be criticized and harassed.

*Shabbat* is clearly to be a *b’rit olam* (בְּרִית עוֹלָם), an “eternal” or “perpetual covenant.” Some have tried to argue that the context of *olam* (עוֹלָם), “*for ever, always,*” “*continuous existence,*” “*everlasting covenant,*” “*indefinite, unending future,*” “*everlastingness, eternity*” (BDB),<sup>4</sup> meant that one day the Sabbath commandment would outlive itself. 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. This obviously cannot be the case. ***Eternal means eternal!***

Exodus 31:18 then 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, the 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 this 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 with are treading on dangerous ground.

There is one argument that many Christians give, that we Messianics who believe that in this hour the Lord is restoring all Israel, 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. But Believers in Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12), or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). Our Heavenly Father has only one chosen assembly: the people of Israel of which all Believers are a part. Thus I believe that *Shabbat* should be kept by all Believers.

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<sup>3</sup> Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, pp 761-762.

## 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 itself, but rather from concepts of modern-day Orthodox Judaism— perhaps not even the Judaism of Yeshua’s day.

Many of our Jewish brothers and sisters, 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. 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) 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).<sup>5</sup>

But what does Scripture specifically say about how we are to keep the Sabbath day? Is the Sabbath truly a “burden”?

“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 were put to death.

We know that Messiah Yeshua has taken the death penalty for these sins away by His atoning work on the cross, and so we will *not*, of course, stone those who do not take this commandment seriously. However, as it may be observed, conceptually “life” is communion with God and “death” is separation from Him, so by failing to properly keep *Shabbat* we can be separate from the Father and unable to properly commune with Him. But, if we keep *Shabbat* and rest from our labors, then we can meditate and commune with Him—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 Scripture as they relate to properly keeping *Shabbat*:

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

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp 187-188.

"[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).

**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. Abstaining from all labors, remembering what God has done for us, and not conducting in business for an entire day are *good things*, not to be looked down upon. The Sabbath is a 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 are wrong have selfish motivations. Such people would probably also believe that studying the Bible regularly or in depth 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 the correct interpretation, but the general consensus must 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 Scriptures:

"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 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 Scriptures, it is quite apparent that Yeshua did keep the Sabbath. In fact, *Shabbat* is connected with Yeshua’s authoritative teaching ability as on *Shabbat* those assembling in synagogues would listen to and discuss the Torah and the Prophets. It is obvious that if we wish to enrich our spiritual lives we should do the same as well—especially as these Scriptures are *greatly overlooked* by Christians at large who misunderstand the Torah because they may never read it on a consistent basis. On *Shabbat*, we should assemble with one another, discuss the Torah and the Prophets, and uplift 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 is not the Messiah and His sacrifice did not atone for our sin—which 1 John 3:4 tells us is lawlessness or disobedience to the Torah.

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

The first claim given to prove that the Messiah “broke the Sabbath” is 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).<sup>6</sup> 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 Pharisee said.” The Scripture does

<sup>6</sup> H.G. Lidell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 273.

not indicate that this was a position held by *all* of the Pharisees. Placing this Scripture in its appropriate historical context is imperative.

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.”<sup>7</sup> It is important that we note that this understanding has also been taken to mean, in regard to the Sabbath, 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 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 and 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

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<sup>7</sup> Nosson Scherman, ed., *ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 2000), 661.

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 *masa* (מַסָּה), which means “load, burden, lifting, bearing, tribute” (*BDB*),<sup>8</sup> which would include pallets. The Septuagint translates *masa* as *bastagma* (βάσταγμα), something specifically meaning “that which is borne, a burden” (*LS*),<sup>9</sup> but it is not used in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

What the healed man specifically carried was what the Greek calls a *krabbatos* (κράββατος), or “a pallet, camp bed” (*Thayer*).<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup>

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 that only weighed a few pounds. Yeshua did, however, no doubt “violate” the theological opinions of this group of Pharisees. 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.”<sup>12</sup>

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 One with the Father, violated the Sabbath and broke His own commandments. Sadly, these arguments are not placed within the framework of First Century Judaism, and often relate to Christians’ ignorance of the historical occurrence of Biblical events.

### **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 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. While this was the pattern of many in the Second and Third Century Church, it was not the practice of the Jewish Apostles. However, the historical transition from *Shabbat* to Sunday Church did take place in order to sever the emerging Church from its Hebraic Roots.

### **Did the early Believers meet on Sunday?**

Although we believe that Scripture is clear that the Messiah upheld the Sabbath, there are those who tell us that His early followers did not keep *Shabbat* and 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. But even if they did assemble on Sunday, there is no indication that they *did not* likewise observe *Shabbat*. Sunday could have been easily set aside for

<sup>8</sup> *BDB*, 672.

<sup>9</sup> *LS*, 148.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 358.

<sup>11</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 883.

<sup>12</sup> David H. Stern, *New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 168.

the business matters of the local assembly. However, 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 misguided.

Acts 20:7 is 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* 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.”<sup>3</sup>

The new day Biblically begins in the evening, so the first day of the week actually begins on Saturday night (Genesis 1:5). 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.”

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 absolutely nothing to do with “Sunday church” as is commonly believed. 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.

We do concede that if this is speaking of collection for the local assembly, some of it may have occurred on Sunday. 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).

### Must it be “repeated” in the New Testament?

In spite of the evidence given that Messiah Yeshua upheld *Shabbat* and that Biblically the first day begins on Saturday evening, there will still be those who do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Many will continue to dishonor the Biblical Sabbath, claiming that because there is no specific “command” in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) to “do it,” that they should not. However, there is no recorded instance in Apostolic Scriptures of the Apostles and early Believers *not* keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. 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.

The logic that “it’s not in the New Testament” could be used to deny other 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 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.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 297-298.

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 the 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).

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 telling us that Yeshua is not God—and thus not a Divine Savior. Obviously, we cannot accept this and believe that 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, however, 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. However, 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.”<sup>14</sup> While these comments were delivered in regard to the pre- versus post-trib 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 the Torah was at work at the time that he wrote this in the mid-First Century, then it is 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 its place, by-and-large. But simply because these Church writings say that most Believers in the Second and Third Centuries did not 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*.

### **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. However, due to the fast pace of our Western culture and/or the rise of lawlessness in our time, most who observe a “Sunday Sabbath” today do not dedicate a day completely unto the Lord. 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 Exodus, 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.

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<sup>14</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 19.

Contrary to what many believe, 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 worldly 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 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.<sup>15</sup>

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 about rest, but the Greek *sabbatismos* (σαββατισμός) means “*sabbath rest, sabbath observance*” (BDAG).<sup>16</sup>

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 states, “Greek *sabbatismos*, used only here in the New Testament. In the Septuagint, the related Greek word ‘*sabbatizein*’ was coined to translate the Hebrew verb *shabat* 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.”<sup>17</sup>

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 still not keep the Sabbath. 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.

Dedicating one day out of our week entirely to our Heavenly Father is not difficult, and while you may get criticism for it from others, the rewards are 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 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.

Revelation 1:10 tells us “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.”<sup>18</sup> Supposedly, when the Apostle John was shown the 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. 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 is a minor detail that is relatively

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5.

<sup>16</sup> Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 909.

<sup>17</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 673.

<sup>18</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 31.

unimportant given the scope of the text. 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 “day of the Lord”: “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.”<sup>19</sup>

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, “Day of the Lord,” representative of *Yom ADONAI* (יְהוָה יוֹם), is usually *hēmera Kuriou* (ἡμέρα 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, we are told by some that “the Lord’s Day” cannot be the Day of the LORD.

The Greek word *kuriakos* (κυριακός) translated as “Lord’s,” “pert. to belonging to the Lord, the Lord’s” (BDAG).<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup>

While I believe that “the Lord’s Day” is most likely speaking of the Day of the LORD, there is a second possibility 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. 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 is perhaps speaking of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon us and Yeshua revealing Himself to the world as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a manner not experienced before.

“The Lord’s Day” may be speaking of a future period of time that in addition to “the Day of the LORD” involves Believers being involved in the Lord’s service in a way that they have never experienced before. As the Tribulation saints are those “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Yeshua” (Revelation 12:17), it is very 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 revealing is contingent on us obeying God’s commandments in the Torah—the distinguishing sign of which is keeping *Shabbat*.

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 is unjustified and unsupported by 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. But as it has been our sad observation, many Christians will continue to remain in immaturity and will miss out on the blessings of *Shabbat*. It has also been our sad observation, however, that some Messianics will berate these Christians, saying that they go to church on “SUN-day” and are not 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 the official religion of the Roman Empire, he “spoke of being a servant of God. Yet publicly he continued to mix Christian piety with devotion to the high solar

<sup>19</sup> Stern, 791.

<sup>20</sup> BDAG, 576.

<sup>21</sup> Stern, 791.

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.”<sup>22</sup>

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 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 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 Messiah’s thousand-year Millennial *Shabbat* rest.

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. 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. We pray 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 Sabbatarians 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 Sabbatarians 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.”<sup>23</sup>

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, which is a Biblical ordinance that *should not be spoken against*. He believed it was wrong to criticize and berate those who celebrated *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 Believers 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 they have missed out on by not 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 presently are not where we are. 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* 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 Sunday church. We believe that you will find that by

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<sup>22</sup> Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 162.

<sup>23</sup> Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1985), 470.

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.

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