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Being Realistic About Shabbat ²⁰¹⁵

J.K. McKee

That the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is to be a holy time, sanctified unto the Lord, is clear enough from the Torah: "Observe the day of *Shabbat*, to set it apart as holy, as *ADONAI* your God ordered you to do" (Deuteronomy 5:12, CJB). It is also stated how "the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work" (Deuteronomy 5:14). Frequently in much of today's Messianic movement, what is witnessed is that the seventh-day Sabbath is simply a time for Believers to attend services at their local Messianic congregation, and for various other congregational activities. While congregational activities such as corporate worship, teaching, and fellowship do provide a legitimate way for people to consciously honor *Shabbat*—many questions do arise regarding work, permissible and non-permissible activities, and most especially what to do when "life happens." Tension can arise between people inside and outside of one's local assembly, with some thinking that one type of *Shabbat* observance is too lenient and liberal, and others thinking that another type of *Shabbat* observance is too rigid and inflexible. Surely, as we evaluate Biblical instruction, some traditional interpretations, and weigh some of the realities of Twenty-First Century living—the possibility does exist for us to come to a realistic orientation of making the Sabbath a holy and blessed time.

The Sabbath is something that takes place every seven days, and when in conscious view of the people of God, is something that will naturally be distinguished from the other six working days. In fact, the Hebrew *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), in the plural *shabbaton* (שַׁבְּתוֹן), can actually mean "weeks (i.e. from one sabbath to next)" (*CHALOT*).¹ For the observant Jew, it is the Sabbath occurring every seven days, that becomes the focal point of his or her week. While he or she may have a job to go to, home responsibilities to see taken care of, and other religious activities to be involved with—the pinnacle of the week involves the arrival of *Shabbat*, and the different preparations and duties to see *Shabbat* made into a special time. Such a special time will not just involve an abstention from normal labors, but also gathering for *Shabbat* dinner with family and friends, attending synagogue services, physically resting, and most especially focusing oneself onto God and His Word. While it can be very difficult—given the complexity that many face with modern living—keeping *Shabbat* and benefitting from the refreshment that it offers, needs to be preceded in the working week with important physical and spiritual disciplines. In his book *Shabbos: The Sabbath—Its Essence and Significance*, Shimon Finkelman indicates,

"If one prepares himself spiritually in the days leading up to Shabbos, then he will reap the reward of heightened spirituality that he will experience on Shabbos; but if one enters Shabbos in a frenzy, preoccupied with his daily affairs until the last minute, is it any wonder if he senses little uplift on this most coveted of days?"²

¹ *CHALOT*, 360.

² Shimon Finkelman, *Shabbos: The Sabbath—Its Essence and Significance* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1990), 86.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

***Shabbat* is hardly a time for people to show up late to a Saturday morning service, and then leave early.** *Shabbat* is to be much more, with far more than just passive effort expelled. However, given Yeshua's famed word, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, NLT), it is hardly appropriate for the Sabbath to be viewed as a time of forced "unwork"—because what it is instead, is a God-ordained time of cessation.

To be sure, given the different Torah and Tanach prohibitions present for *Shabbat*—including, but not limited to: field labor (Exodus 34:21), traveling outside of one's area (Exodus 16:29-30), kindling a fire (Exodus 35:3), carrying a load (Jeremiah 17:22), and treading a winepress and loading animals (Nehemiah 13:15-18)—there are many derived applications to be considered for Twentieth and Twenty-First Century living. Beyond this, given some of the traditional applications of prohibited work in the Jewish theological tradition—most especially including the thirty-nine prohibitions based on the work employed to construct the Tabernacle (m.*Shabbat* 7:1)—more can be considered. Too much of our Messianic faith community, though, does not go into discussing prohibitions on work or commerce—because all too frequently people will start issuing excuses as to why they cannot expel that much effort to alter many of their activities.

Rather than unaddressed and unmentionable tensions continuing unabated, we need to have some honest conversation about keeping *Shabbat* as Messianic people. The seventh-day Sabbath was taken very seriously by ancient Jews, many of whom died to keep it during times of persecution—but who also recognized that there would inevitably be life issues arise that would require God's people to be flexible. Some interesting, and even esoteric views, of what takes place on the Sabbath, did arise in some branches of Judaism. At the same time, making sure that there were clearly defined categories of labor and work, has also occurred, from which we can take some guidance, and do need to be informed of.

Ancient people seeking to follow the God of Israel had to sort and reason through some of the same issues that today's Messianic people do, as they desired to make *Shabbat* a holy and sanctified day. Hopefully, in your quest to keep the Sabbath, our realistic examination of some of the key components of what ancient Jews have wrestled with, and what present Messianics can be uncertain about—can provide you with a sense of relief. Our Heavenly Father's intention is to welcome us into *Shabbat*, but we also have to make sure that we have made the preparations, and are expelling the effort, to enter into what it offers (cf. Isaiah 58:13-14).

Commandments to Which People Give Up Their Lives

Within the Torah, it is witnessed that violation of *Shabbat* did merit capital punishment: "Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people" (Exodus 31:14; cf. 35:2). While "Whoever does any work on the day of *Shabbat* must be put to death" (Exodus 31:15, CJB) highlights how important God considers the Sabbath to be for His people, it is hardly as though every minor infraction of the Sabbath merited execution. There were not never-ending lines of Ancient Israelites being executed for violating the Sabbath. It is fairly obvious that within Ancient Israel, and certainly witnessed later in Judaism, that procedures would have to be observed by the authorities in order to convict one accused of Sabbath violation, with facts and testimonies to be evaluated. A resource like *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* by J.H. Hertz generally states,

"This extreme penalty was only to be inflicted if the culprit desecrated the Sabbath in the presence of two witnesses who had previously warned him of the punishment that awaited him."³

³ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 356.

The *ArtScroll Chumash* also notes how a court needed to sentence a Sabbath violator, but also expresses the view of how those being ignorant of *Shabbat* and violating it unintentionally, were punished by God:

"*Shall be put to death...shall be cut off.* These are two different, mutually exclusive penalties. One who violates the Sabbath despite a warning from witnesses that he is committing a capital offense is liable to the death penalty imposed by the court. But one who does so intentionally, without being warned or witnessed, is punished by God with *kareis* [or, *karat*, כרת], i.e., his soul is cut off from the nation (*Rashi*)."⁴

Why the Jewish community today, even in Israel, does not execute Sabbath violators concerns factors of civil governance. In the case of high crimes in the Second Temple period, the authority to execute criminals was solely in the hands of the Romans, indicated by how the Jewish religious leaders needed Roman approval to see Yeshua executed for blasphemy (cf. John 18:31). In the case of the First Century Body of Messiah, given Yeshua's sacrifice for human sin and the capital penalties in the Torah for which no available animal sacrifice was present, Colossians 2:14 can assert, "having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Yeshua's sacrifice has nullified the capital penalties of Sabbath violation, among other high crimes in the Law of Moses.⁵ But, the major reason why the Jewish State of Israel today does not execute Sabbath violators, widely surrounds how the Zionist vision was not one of a principally religious state, but instead a secular one. In this case, capital punishment would widely only be used for crimes such as murder (cf. Genesis 9:6).

Jewish history includes significant examples of how many Jews died in order that they might keep the Sabbath. In the Talmud, it is asserted, "R. Simeon b. Eleazar says, 'Any religious duty for which the Israelites gave up their lives unto death in the time of the government decrees, for instance, idolatry and circumcision, is still strongly confirmed in their possession'" (b.*Shabbat* 130a).⁶ Perhaps the most pronounced example of Jews dying and being slaughtered, because they kept *Shabbat*, is witnessed during the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E.:

"Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there, they, their sons, their wives, and their cattle, because evils pressed heavily upon them. And it was reported to the king's officers, and to the troops in Jerusalem the city of David, that men who had rejected the king's command had gone down to the hiding places in the wilderness. Many pursued them, and overtook them; they encamped opposite them and prepared for battle against them on the sabbath day. And they said to them, 'Enough of this! Come out and do what the king commands, and you will live.' But they said, 'We will not come out, nor will we do what the king commands and so profane the sabbath day.' Then the enemy hastened to attack them. But they did not answer them or hurl a stone at them or block up their hiding places, for they said, 'Let us all die in our innocence; heaven and earth testify for us that you are killing us unjustly.' So they attacked them on the sabbath, and they died, with their wives and children and cattle, to the number of a thousand persons" (1 Maccabees 2:29-38).

It is recognized that these people died for the cause of righteousness, but also discussions needed to take place among religious Jews whether it was valid to defend oneself on *Shabbat*. The questions asked by the Maccabean warriors, upon learning about this tragedy, were certainly valid:

"And each said to his neighbor: 'If we all do as our brethren have done and refuse to fight with the Gentiles for our lives and for our ordinances, they will quickly destroy us from the earth.' So

⁴ Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 491.

⁵ For a further discussion, consult the entry for Colossians 2:14 in *The New Testament Validates Torah*, as well as the commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.

⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

they made this decision that day: 'Let us fight against every man who comes to attack us on the sabbath day; let us not all die as our brethren died in their hiding places'" (1 Maccabees 2:40-41).⁷

The Jewish tradition, because of threats toward one's life, has made exceptions for "work" on *Shabbat* (discussed further).

The Maccabean crisis raised the importance of how enemies of Israel would take advantage of the seventh-day Sabbath being a time of rest for the people. But it is not the only example witnessed in Jewish history of *Shabbat* observance being made illegal for the Jewish community, or anti-Semitic acts being committed against Jews in association with their Sabbath-keeping. Samuel H. Dresner details a variety of examples from the Middle Ages, the Holocaust, but also early Twentieth Century America, for how the Sabbath has been observed with various levels of threatening, from his book *The Sabbath*:

"During the Middle Ages the secret Jews of Spain, called the Marranos, living in fear of their lives, tried to keep the Sabbath day holy. Knowing this, the leaders of the Inquisition directed their agents to ascend to the roof of the tallest building in the winter on Sabbath days and scan the city to see if any chimney failed to emit smoke, the sign, perhaps, of a cryptic Jew; or to suddenly break into a suspected Jewish home on Friday night to learn if a festive meal were in progress or Sabbath candles had been lit, even in the cellar, as was the practice among the Marranos. Despite centuries of persecution, traces of Sabbath observance have persisted among them until our day.

"Turning to modern times, the writer Anzia Yezierska gives another example, recording a vivid memory of the New York's East Side at the turn of the century.

"As I neared the house we lived in, I paused terror stricken. On the sidewalk stood a jumbled pile of ragged house-furnishings that looked familiar—chairs, dishes, kitchen pans. Amidst bundles of bedding and broken furniture stood my mother. Oblivious of the curious crowd, she lit the Sabbath candles and prayed over them. In a flash I understood it all. Because of the loss of my wages while I was in the hospital, we had been evicted for our unpaid rent. It was Sabbath eve. My father was in the synagogue praying and my mother, defiant of disgrace, had gone on with the ceremony of the Sabbath. All the romance of our race was in the light of those Sabbath candles. Homeless, abandoned by God and man, yet in the very desolation of the streets my mother's faith burned—a challenge to all America {excerpt from *The Golden Land*}."

"Finally, an example from the Holocaust This is a story that was...[recorded]...by a victim of the concentration camps who survived and who now lives in Israel.

"In 1943 he, his brothers and his mother were imprisoned in the ghetto of Kovno. One of the things which kept them alive was the Sabbath, which they clung to with all their strength. Each week when the Sabbath came and the lights were kindled, the songs sung and the prayers recited, new life entered the souls of the Jews. The Nazis understood the power of the Sabbath among the Jews and set out to destroy it in a typically clever way. They gave the Jews their week's supply of food on Sunday, figuring that they would surely devour the small portion of bread in the first few days of the week so they would have nothing to eat by the time the Sabbath came. But the Nazis did not reckon on the power and the piety of the Jewish woman... {proceeds to quote from *Franz Rosenzweig*}."⁸

Saving a Life and Defending Oneself

The Torah prescribes how "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" (Exodus 35:2a), "a holy sabbath of solemn rest" (RSV), "a day of complete rest" (ATS), "a Sabbath of total rest" (Keter Crown Bible), *qodesh Shabbat shabbaton* (שַׁבְּתַתְּ שַׁבְּתוֹן). Given the importance of the Sabbath, *shabbaton* (שַׁבְּתוֹן) meaning "sabbath observance, sabbatism" (*BDB*),⁹ for Ancient Israel and most especially Second Temple Judaism, it is hardly a surprise that various enemies have taken advantage of the Sabbath as a time to attack. Examples of the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Seleucid-Greeks, and the Romans, attacking on *Shabbat*, is witnessed throughout the ancient historical record. This specifically gave

⁷ For further consideration, consult the article "The Impact of the Maccabees on First Century Judaism" by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*, and "The Forgotten Past" by J.K. McKee, in the December 2014 issue of Outreach Israel News.

⁸ Samuel H. Dresner, *The Sabbath* (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1970), pp 66-68.

⁹ *BDB*, 992.

rise to discussions as to whether the need to defend oneself on *Shabbat* would be in violation of the intentions of the Fourth Commandment.

ABD goes into some detail describing how the Assyrians and the Babylonians took advantage of the Southern Kingdom's observance of the seventh day, as an ideal time to attack, because the people would widely be conditioned to a state of some form of rest:

"Sennacherib's letter written on his Judean campaign in 701 B.C. refers to his capture of Lachish on Hezekiah's 'seventh time' (*ina 7-su*, lit. 'in his 7th time'...)...[It has been] suggested that Hezekiah's 'seventh time' refers to the sabbath, the day when its defenders rested and the Assyrians captured Lachish. If this suggestion is correct, this cuneiform text from Sennacherib 'becomes the earliest extrabiblical reference to the Sabbath' {quoting W.H. Shea, "Sennacherib's Description of Lachish and of Its Conquest"}...It corresponds to such passages as Amos 8:4; Hos 2:11-Eng 13; and Isa 1:13 where the weekly sabbath is also depicted as a day of rest.

"The publication of the Chronicles of the Babylonian Kings by Wiseman in 1956 provided the date for the capture of Jerusalem 'on the second day of the month of Adar'...i.e., March 16, 597. The day was a sabbath...Also the day for the first assault against Jerusalem on January 15, 588, is again a sabbath, based on the synchronism of the biblical date (2 Kgs 25:1; Jer 52:5; Ezek 24:1-2) with the Babylonian records. Again the fall of Jerusalem on the 9th day of the 4th month of Zedekiah's 11th year (Jer 52:5-8) is calculated to fall on a sabbath...Based on these calculations, it appears that the military strategy of the Assyrians and Neo-Babylonians utilized the seventh-day sabbath rest of the Israelites to accomplish their military-political goals.

"This strategy was again used later by the Seleucids at the beginning of the Maccabean period when Jews were attacked on the sabbath but refused to resist on this day (Josephus *Ant* 12.6.2; 1 Macc 2:33-38)."¹⁰

The issue of defending oneself on the Sabbath became particularly critical during the Maccabean crisis of the Second Century B.C.E. Many Jews refused to defend themselves on *Shabbat* (1 Maccabees 2:32-38), believing it to be in violation of the Torah commandment to rest. Also witnessed is the post-Biblical prohibition, "...and any man who slaughters or kills anything..." (*Jubilees* 50:12).¹¹ As the historian Josephus would record of those who refused to go out and fight the Seleucids, "And they refused to defend themselves on that day, because they were not willing to break in upon the honour they owed the Sabbath, even in such distresses; for our Law requires that we rest upon that day" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 12.274).¹² The sad reality is that while wanting to remain faithful to observing *Shabbat*, these Jews were slaughtered.

While the Jews who chose to die rather than defend themselves did a noble deed, the Maccabean fighters led by Mattathias recognized, "If we all do as our brothers did and do not fight against the nations for our lives and for our statutes, now quickly they will annihilate us from the land" (1 Maccabees 2:40, NETS). The Maccabees led by Judah did defend themselves when attacked on *Shabbat*. Josephus recorded, "And this rule continues among us to this day, that if there be a necessity, we may fight on Sabbath days" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 12.277).¹³ *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* records how as a result of the Maccabean period, religious rulings were issued permitting defense of oneself:

"At the time of the Maccabean Revolt, Sabbath observance was so strict that Jewish warriors preferred to be killed rather than offer resistance on that day. In response, a ruling was promulgated saying that the preservation of life overrides the observance of the Sabbath, and the warriors were allowed to fight in their own defense (1 *Mc.* 2.40-41)."¹⁴

It is notably seen that when the Roman Pompey sieged Jerusalem in the First Century B.C.E., that while many Jews would defend themselves on *Shabbat*, that it was nonetheless considered unacceptable to destroy siege works:

"[A]nd had it not been our practice, from the days of our forefathers, to rest on the seventh day, this bank could never have been completed, by reason of the opposition the Jews would have

¹⁰ Gerald F. Hasel, "Sabbath," in *ABD*, 5:853.

¹¹ Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2, 142.

¹² *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 325.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Chaim Pearl, "Sabbath," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, 595.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

made; for though our law gives us permission then to defend ourselves against those who begin to fight with us and assault us, yet does it not permit us to meddle with our enemies while they do anything else. Which thing when the Romans understood, on those days which we call Sabbaths they shot nothing at the Jews, nor came to any pitched battle with them; but raised up their earthen banks, and brought their engines into such forwardness, that they might be used on the next day" (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.63-64).¹⁵

The significance of the Jewish fighters defending themselves against the Seleucid invaders, on the Sabbath, is something that notes a major shift in approach toward Sabbath *halachah*. The influence of the Maccabean crisis, and how defending oneself might mean the suspension of Biblical commands, has been seen throughout Jewish history since. In her book *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time*, Judith Shulevitz comments from a broadly progressive, American Jewish perspective, on how the Maccabees defending themselves has had a resonating impact on Jewish observance of *Shabbat*, and other Torah instructions:

"Any American with a multicultural upbringing will recognize the outlines of the story, told every year at Hanukkah. In 167 B.C.E., Antiochus IV, a Syrian-born but Greek-educated king whose empire included Judea, decided to force the Jews to become more like the Greeks. This king called himself Antiochus Epiphanes (Antiochus the Manifest, meaning that he represented a divine emanation), but he was known to the people as Antiochus Epimanes (Antiochus the Mad). He was the first to introduce religious persecution to the region. Previous rulers had treated their subjects as sources of tax revenue; they had used force to exact their tributes, but they had not required conversion. Antiochus IV, however, had lived in Rome, and had seen Rome impose the Roman civic religion on its citizens. He had watched the Roman senators quash the local Dionysian bacchanalian cults, with their drunkenness and their fertility rites, and persecute the Epicurean philosophers, who preached a hedonistic doctrine that filled the young with subversive ideas. Antiochus regarded Judaism as an unholy combination of both cult and philosophy. Like members of a cult, Jews met at night, took loyalty oaths (the Shema, which pledged allegiance to one God), and initiated new members through circumcision; like philosophers, they taught repugnant ideas out of books.

"And so, the two books of Maccabees recount, Antiochus decided to 'Hellenize' the Jews. He looted the Temple and garrisoned soldiers in Jerusalem. He put an idolatrous statue in the Temple...erected his own altars, and ordered the Jews to start sacrificing pigs on them. He forbade them to circumcise their sons or keep the Sabbath...Women who had their babies circumcised in secret were killed, and the babies were hung from their necks. Their husbands were killed as well, and so were the men who performed the circumcision. Anyone who refused to eat non-kosher food was killed.

"Many of Jerusalem's urbane, partially Hellenized Jews did as Antiochus ordered, but the Jews of the countryside did not. Instead, they rebelled. Their leader was a priest named Mattathias, in a village called Modein. First Mattathias ran a spear through a Jew who agreed to sacrifice a pig on one of Antiochus's altars, then he said, 'Whoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the covenant, let him follow me' [1 Maccabees 2:27]. Mattathias had many sons, and they followed him into the desert. One of them was named Judah Maccabeus, and the rebels became known as the Maccabees. They took to the mountains and, improbably, drove the king and his soldiers out of the land.

"Before that moment, however, retold every Hanukkah, came another that is decidedly not celebrated today. A large band of soldiers came down from Jerusalem to where a group of Jews identified only as the Pious Ones had shut themselves up in caves...When the Sabbath came, the soldiers lined up in front of the caves in a battle formation and shouted, 'Come forth, and do according to the commandment of the king, and ye shall live!' [1 Maccabees 2:33] The[se Jews] shouted back, 'We will not come forth, neither will we do the king's commandment, to profane the Sabbath day!' [1 Maccabees 2:34]

"When the soldiers advanced, the Jews made no effort to block the entrances to the caves. Instead, they said to one another, 'Let us all die in our innocence: heaven and earth shall testify for us, that ye put us to death wrongfully [1 Maccabees 2:37].' The tale ends like this: 'So they rose up against them in battle on the Sabbath, and they slew them, with their wives and children, and their cattle, to the number of a thousand people' [1 Maccabees 2:38].

"When Mattathias learned of the massacre, he quickly changed the laws of the Sabbath to permit self-defense, a rule that stands today, even in the strictest of Jewish circles. The rule is called *pikuach nefesh*, or 'saving a life.' The Sabbath laws *must* be flouted if keeping them puts a life or the well-being of the community in danger—a principle that, for instance, allowed Senator Joseph Lieberman, a Sabbath-observant Orthodox Jew, to run for president of the United States. As he pointed out, he would have no qualms about violating Sabbath restrictions to respond to an attack or anything else that threatened the nation.

¹⁵ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 369.

Being Realistic About Shabbat

“The story of the Maccabees and *pikuach nefesh* is sometimes told to show that the Jews understood full well that, as Christ put it, ‘the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’ The truth, however, is that the Maccabees’ reform was controversial at the time....”¹⁶

The major Rabbinic discussion on whether or not it was permissible to transgress Sabbath command in order to defend oneself, is seen in the Talmud, where it was concluded that the Sabbath was given to people, not people being given over to the Sabbath:

“R. Yosé b. R. Judah says, “Only you shall keep my Sabbaths” (Exo. 31:13) — might one suppose that this is under all circumstances? Scripture says, “...only...,” meaning, there can be exceptions.’ R. Jonathan b. Joseph says, “For it is holy to you” — it is given into your hands, you are not committed into its hands” (b. *Yoma* 85b).¹⁷

Because of the importance of Jewish *halachah*—even among the most strictly Orthodox down to this day—deciding that it was acceptable for people to defend themselves on *Shabbat* has resulted in an entire array of what would be acceptable suspensions of Torah commandments, for the preservation of one’s life, being witnessed in the Rabbinic tradition. The specific principle that has emerged in mainstream Jewish thought is designated by the term *pikkuach nefesh* (פיקוח נפש).¹⁸ As is summarized in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*,

[This is the] Hebrew term for denoting the paramount obligation to ignore most religious laws when someone’s life is in danger. ‘You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor’ (Lev. 19:16) is one traditional source for this rule; another, citing Leviticus 18:5, is the rabbinic view that God’s commandments are intended for man to ‘live by them’ and not die through their observance (*Yoma* 85b). The *pikku’ah nefesh* law takes account of numerous emergency situations, especially those calling for ‘work’ normally prohibited on the Sabbath and Jewish festivals, since ‘consideration for human life’ takes precedence over the Sabbath laws (*Yoma* 85a; *Shab.* 132a). In practice, holy day regulations are set aside when a sick person needs medical attention or anyone’s health may be imperiled. Expectant mothers or those falling ill should be driven to a hospital; the use of a telephone is permitted; the duty to fast on the DAY OF ATONEMENT is waived; doctors and nurses must attend to their patients; and even forbidden food may be consumed if it will save a life. The law of *pikku’ah nefesh* does not apply, however, in cases involving three cardinal prohibitions—idolatry, murder, and sexual crimes. Here, a Jew must accept martyrdom rather than transgress these commandments (*Sanh.* 74a-b).¹⁹

Some of the major Rabbinic discussion on what would be permissible to violate ritual *Shabbat* adherence, in order to save a person’s life, surround what it would take to rescue someone who had a building fall on himself (m. *Yoma* 8:6).²⁰ The Talmudic discussion on this extrapolates a number of key examples of what it would mean to help save a person’s life on the Sabbath, providing some useful guidelines which have been consulted in the Jewish theological tradition ever since:

“And any matter of doubt as to danger to life overrides the prohibitions of the Sabbath.’ *Why is it necessary to go on and say further, And any matter of doubt as to danger to life overrides the prohibitions of the Sabbath?* Said R. Judah said Rab, ‘Not only of a doubt concerning danger to human life on this Sabbath did they speak, but even of a doubt concerning danger to human life on some other Sabbath later on.’ *What would be an illustration? If the physicians made an estimate that the person would face a crisis of eight days, the first of which coincides with the Sabbath, what might you have supposed? Hold up until the night, so that on the man’s account two successive Sabbaths should not have to be desecrated? So we are informed that that is not the case. So too it has been taught on Tannaite authority: They heat water for a sick*

¹⁶ Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp 77-79.

¹⁷ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

¹⁸ The Hebrew term *pikuach* (פיקוח) is Talmudic in origin, originally relating to “removing debris...a person from under debris is, in gen. saving an endangered life” (*Jastrow*, 1169).

¹⁹ “Pikku’ah Nefesh,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Judaism*, 606.

²⁰ “Further did R. Mattiah b. Harash say, ‘Who who has a pain in his throat—they drop medicine into his mouth on the Sabbath, because it is a matter of doubt as to danger to life. And any matter of doubt as to danger to life overrides the prohibitions of the Sabbath.’ He upon whom a building fell down—it is a matter of doubt whether or not he is there, it is a matter of doubt whether [if he is there], he is alive or dead, it is a matter of doubt whether [if he is there and alive] he is a gentile or an Israelite—they clear away the ruin from above him. [If] they found him alive, they remove the [remaining] ruins from above him. But if they found him dead, they leave him be [until after the Sabbath]” (m. *Yoma* 8:6; Neusner, *Mishnah*, 278).

Messianic Sabbath Helper

person on the Sabbath, whether to give it to him to drink or to heal him with it. And they do not say, 'Wait on him, perhaps he'll live [without it].' But a matter of doubt concerning him overrides [the prohibitions of] the Sabbath. And the doubt need not be about this Sabbath, but it may be about another Sabbath [T. Shab. 15:16A-D], because any matter of doubt as to danger to life overrides the prohibitions of the Sabbath. And not only of a doubt concerning danger to human life on this Sabbath did they speak, but even of a doubt concerning danger to human life on some other Sabbath later on. And they do not say, Let the matters be done by gentiles or children, but they should be done by adult Israelites. And they do not say, 'Let these matters be done by the testimony of women, by Samaritans.' But they join the opinion of Israelites with them [to decide to save a life by violating the Sabbath] [T. Shab. 15:15F-H].

"Our rabbis have taught on Tannaite authority: They remove debris for one whose life is in doubt on the Sabbath. And the one who is prompt in the matter, lo, this one is to be praised. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court. How so? [If] one saw a child fall into the ocean and cannot climb up, or [if] his ship is sinking in the sea, and he cannot climb up, he spreads a net and pulls him out of there. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court [T. Shab. 15:11]. And that is the case even though he catches fish in the net. If he saw a child fall into a well, he breaks loose a segment of the wall around the wall and pulls him up. And the one who is prompt in the matter, lo, this one is to be praised. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court. And that is the case, even though he turns out to make stairs. If he saw that a door was closing on a child, he may break it down so as to get the child out. And the one who is prompt in the matter, lo, this one is to be praised. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court. And that is the case, even though he thereby is deliberately making chips of wood. People put out or isolate a fire on the Sabbath And the one who is prompt in the matter, lo, this one is to be praised. And it is not necessary to get permission from a court. And that is so, even though he thereby puts out the fire. And these several cases had to be articulated. For had we heard the case concerning the sea, we might have supposed that it is permitted to rescue the child with a net, since in the interim the child might be swept away in the water, but that does not apply to the case of the child's falling into a pit, since once there, it stays there, so one might have supposed that he might not save the child without permission of the court. So it was necessary to specify that case as well. And if we had been informed only of the case of the pit, one might have supposed that in that case there is no need to get the court's permission since the child is frightened, but in the case of the door's closing on it, one might sit outside and keep the child occupied by making a noise with nuts. It was therefore necessary to specify that case in so many words. With reference to the statement, people put out or isolate a fire on the Sabbath: why specify both 'put out' and 'isolate'? Even if it was to the benefit of some other court [one may do so].

"Said R. Joseph said R. Judah said Samuel, 'In matters having to do with danger to life, they are not guided by the condition of the majority.' How am I to imagine the case that is contemplated here? If I should say that there are nine Israelites and one Samaritan among them, then a majority is made up of Israelites. If it is half and half, then a matter of doubt is resolved in a lenient fashion [and there is no issue but that life is to be saved]. So it must refer to a case in which there are nine Samaritans and a single Israelite. But that too is self-evident! For you have a stationary mass, and wherever we have a stationary mass, it is regarded as a situation in which one half comprises one classification, the other half the other. No, the ruling still is necessary to cover a case in which someone has gone off to another courtyard [where he became buried in debris]. What might you have supposed? Whoever has gone off has gone off from the majority, and in this case that would then be made up of outsiders. So we are informed: In matters having to do with danger to life, they are not guided by the condition of the majority" (b.Yoma 84b).²¹

In affording the Rabbinic tradition a consultative authority,²² today's Messianic Believers should recognize a widescale Jewish acknowledgement that it is proper for a concern to save another's life, to override Sabbath ritual. For example, if one were praying on *Shabbat*, and his neighbor's house catches on fire—then by all means should the neighbors be saved and the house on fire should be put out! *People should not be left alone to burn to death.* The kinds of examples listed above provide a framework for legitimate applications of the principle of *pikkuach nefesh* to be realized.

In modern Israel, where the Torah and the Rabbinic tradition are recognized as playing an important part in the country's civil law, businesses and public transportation may cease operation on *Shabbat*, for much of the population. Yet, the police, fire department, hospitals, and military are all working. They are working because they provide security, lest any outside enemy take advantage

²¹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

²² The issue of considering the Pharisees as having a consultative authority for matters of Torah halachah, is discussed in the exegesis paper on Matthew 23:2-3, "Who Sits in the Seat of Moses?" by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

of a population that is largely at rest. *They are not considered in violation of Shabbat for performing this kind of work.*

And if this is true of people in modern Israel, it is also true of Jews in these same sorts of professions in the Diaspora—and of anyone who has to work on the Sabbath in order to provide safety and security for others.

Eclectic and Esoteric Views of *Shabbat*

While ancient Jewish literature is certainly filled with discussions on how those keeping *Shabbat* are to make it a holy and significant time, one will also be prone to encounter what can be considered eclectic and esoteric views. Genesis 2:2, for example, says, “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.” Here, the verb *shavat* (שָׁבַת), appearing in the Qal stem (simple action, active voice), would involve “*desist from labour, rest*” (BDB).²³ We know that when God’s acts of creating the universe were completed, that He ceased from this work, and that from this rest the need for human beings to rest derives its significance. To what degree God might “keep *Shabbat*,” however, is one that readers should not speculate about—as Divine rest far eclipses whatever human rest can ever or may ever involve. This did not, however, stop some in the Second Temple period from speculating. *Jubilees* 2:18, 30 draws the conclusion that God and His angels keep the Sabbath, and they in fact kept the Sabbath long before any human beings did:

“And he told us—all of the angels of the presence and all of the angels of the sanctification, these two great kinds—that we might keep the sabbath with him in heaven and on earth...On this day we kept the sabbath in heaven before it was made known to any human to keep the sabbath thereon upon the earth.”²⁴

The view that God and His angels kept the Sabbath, seems eclectic. A more esoteric perspective is witnessed in the multiple “The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice” appearing in the Dead Sea Scrolls (4QShirShabb).²⁵ This is a liturgy describing a Heavenly priesthood of angels serving God in the sanctuary on *Shabbat*. While it is clear enough that there are angels surrounding God in Heaven, the comparison and contrast of human to angelic worship—as though it were something for people to focus their attention upon during their *Shabbat* prayers and worship—is esoteric. The following excerpt states,

“...wonderfully to praise Your glory among the wise divine beings, extolling Your kingdom among the utterly h[oly]. They are honored in all the camps of the godlike beings and feared by those who direct human affairs, won[drous] beyond other divine beings and humans alike. They tell of His royal splendour as they truly know it, and exalt [His glory in all] the heavens of His rule. [They sing] wonderful psalms according to [their insight] throughout the highest heaven, and declare [the surpassing] glory of the King of the godlike beings in the stations of their habitation. [...] How shall we be reckoned among them? As what our priesthood in their habitations? [How shall our holi]ness [compare with their utter] holiness? [What] is the praise of our mortal tongue alongside their div[ine] knowledge? [...]”²⁶

When God’s people worship Him on Earth today, they do join in company with the angels and the saints in Heaven (Hebrews 12:22-23). It is also true that those of the Colossian assembly were warned about “delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels” (Colossians 2:18), which has been explained as either those in error directly worshipping angels *or* trying to pierce the extra-

²³ BDB, 991.

²⁴ Wintermute, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol 2, pp 58, 59.

²⁵ Wise, Abegg, and Cook, 365-377; Geza Vermes, trans., *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), pp 321-330.

²⁶ Wise, Abegg, and Cook, pp 367-368.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

dimensional barrier into Heaven to *really join in* to the Heavenly worship.²⁷ These are activities which are **off limits**.

It would also go too far so as to suggest that the existence of the universe depends on Israel and the Jewish people keeping the Sabbath, as expressed by Finkelman in his book *Shabbos*,²⁸ widely reflecting an Orthodox Jewish approach. While intending to highlight the importance of the weekly *Shabbat*, the Talmudic statements implying that those who keep *Shabbat* have their idolatry forgiven of them, also goes unacceptably off the map:

"Said R. Hiyya bar Abba said R. Yohanan, 'Whoever keeps the Sabbath in accord with its rule, even if he worships an idol like the generation of Enosh, do they forgive: "Blessed is Enosh who does this...who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it" (Isa. 56:2) — read the letters that yield "profaning it" as though they bore vowels to yield 'being forgiven'" (b.*Shabbat* 118b).²⁹

While the importance of *Shabbat* is rightfully lauded throughout the broad selections of ancient Jewish literature—and more often than not discussions will involve what people should and should not do on the Sabbath—caution does need to be exhibited with views going beyond edification of one's fellow and community by observing its rest.

Similarities and Differences in Sabbath *Halachah*

While significant traditions such as lighting *Shabbat* candles, having an *Erev Shabbat* dinner, attending *Shabbat* services at synagogue, or *Havdallah* are present within Judaism—and also the Messianic community—a huge amount of attention regarding traditional Sabbath observance surrounds stipulations of prohibiting work or labor, and then from this permitted and prohibited activities. Certain types of work are prohibited in Tanach Scripture, notably agricultural labor (Exodus 34:21) and commercial trade (Nehemiah 13:15-22). Some of the first major lists of activities where Jewish (sectarian) authorities determined permitted and prohibited activities for the Sabbath are found in the Pseudepigrapha (*Jubilees* 2:29-30; 50:6-13) and Dead Sea Scrolls (CD 10.14-11.18). The major thirty-nine Rabbinic prohibitions are derived from the activities of Exodus 35 in constructing the Tabernacle (m.*Shabbat* 7:1-2), the applications of which have been widely expanded. While the Rabbinic tradition includes many legitimate and worthwhile points to consider, it has also been considered to be burdensome as well. The *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* observes,

"Scripture provides only a limited description of Sabbath observance, for instance, forbidding agricultural labor even at the time of plowing or the harvest (Exod. 34:21), prohibiting trade on that day (Amos 8:5), and forbidding even discussion of one's business (Isa. 58:13). Within rabbinic Judaism, through analogy and extension of biblical prohibitions, the list of prohibited activities, as well as the description of expected or required behaviors, grew increasingly detailed. The result was a system that, in the rabbis' own description, hung like a mountain from a strand of hair, containing an inordinate number of rules, based on a small biblical foundation (M. Ḥagigah 1:8)."³⁰The Qumran community was a place where observance of the Sabbath was enforced very strictly. It was permitted for one to only walk 1,000 cubits (CD 10.21) or around 500 yards, it was prohibited to wear perfume (CD 11.9-10), prohibited to lift a stone or dust (CD 11.10-11), prohibited to aid an animal in giving birth (CD 11.13) or to help an animal out that had fallen into a pit (CD 11.13-15).

Admittedly, though, the more common Sabbath *halachah* of the Pharisees was not as restrictive as that at Qumran. Still, one has to recognize the wide number of life areas that Jewish religious law from the broad Second Temple period would try to regulate. Some would prohibit sexual intercourse between husband and wife on the Sabbath (*Jubilees* 50:8), whereas others were

²⁷ Consult the relevant sections of the commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic*.

²⁸ Finkelman, pp 2, 5, 55.

²⁹ *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

³⁰ "Sabbath," in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 539.

seemingly more permissible about it (b.*Bava Qama* 82a; b.*Ketuvot* 62b). A Sabbath day's journey was more customarily 2,000 cubits, around 1,000 yards (m.*Eruvim* 4:3; 5:7; b.*Eruvim* 51a), than the Essenes' 1,000 cubits. While the Qumran community actually thought "Any living human who falls into a body of water or a cistern shall not be helped out with ladder rope, or other instrument" (CD 11.16-17),³¹ it stands to reason that many Jews would have not left someone in a well on the Sabbath day.

Broadly speaking for the Second Temple era, *EDB* describes how two major sets of Rabbinic tradition emerged. "In the intertestamental period, two rabbinic traditions developed concerning the sabbath. One maintained a strict sabbath observance, with an emphasis on the rules of the sabbath, while the other emphasized the concept of internal, spiritual rest" (*EDB*).³² The Essenes or the Qumran community are regarded as being strict in most *halachah* (CD 13.1-27). To be fair to the Essenes, though, the historian Josephus would detail how the justice they would administer was not unfair, as proper procedures were observed. Describing the importance of their Sabbath observance, he recorded,

"But in the judgments they exercise they are most accurate and just, nor do they pass sentence by the votes of a court that is fewer than a hundred. And as to what is once determined by that number, it is unalterable. What they most of all honour, after God himself, is the name of their legislator [Moses]; whom, if anyone blaspheme, he is punished capitally. They also think it a good thing to obey their elders, and the majority. Accordingly, if ten of them are sitting together, no one of them will speak while the other nine are against it. They also avoid spitting in the midst of them, or on the right side. Moreover, they are stricter than any other of the Jews in resting from their labours on the seventh day; for they not only get their food ready the day before, that they may not be obliged to kindle a fire on that day, but they will not move any vessel out of its place, nor go to stool thereon. Nay, on other days they dig a small pit, a foot deep, with a paddle (which kind of hatchet is given to them when they are first admitted among them;) and covering themselves around with their garment, that they may not affront the divine rays of light, they ease themselves into that pit, after which they put the earth that was dug out again into the pit; and even this they do only in the more lonely places, which they choose out for this purpose; and although this easement of the body be natural, yet it is a rule with them to wash themselves after it, as if it were a defilement to them" (*Wars of the Jews* 2.145-149).³³

The Mishnah presents how in matters of Sabbath application, the Pharisaical school of Hillel, in which a figure like Paul had been trained (Acts 22:3), was much more permissible than the school of Shammai:

"The House of Shammai say, 'They do not [on Friday afternoon] soak ink, dyestuffs, or vetches, unless there is sufficient time for them to be [fully] soaked while it is still day.' And the House of Hillel permit. The House of Shammai say, 'They do not put bundles of [wet] flax into the oven, unless there is time for them to steam off while it is still day. And [they do not put] wool into the cauldron, unless there is sufficient time for it to absorb the color [while it is still day]. And the House of Hillel permit. The House of Shammai say, 'They do not spread out nets for wild beasts, fowl, or fish, unless there is sufficient time for them to be caught while it is still day.' And the House of Hillel permit" (m.*Shabbat* 1:5-6ff).³⁴

The importance of recognizing how there were differences of perspective, disagreements, and even some tensions between sects of Second Temple Judaism—such as the *halachah* of the Essenes versus the Pharisees, or sects of the Pharisees like the Shammaites versus the Hillelites—is key for recognizing the debates that would emerge in the Gospels between Yeshua of Nazareth, and various Jewish leaders. All four Gospels record various encounters between the Messiah, and various Jewish religious leaders, on *Shabbat*—and will also present some points of contention between Yeshua and His contemporaries. While some Christians have used these points of contention as a means to conclude that the Messiah abolished the seventh-day Sabbath, other Christians have seen Yeshua's discussions about Sabbath application to be well within the Jewish, and even the Pharisaic,

³¹ Wise, Abegg, and Cook, 69.

³² Ann Coble, "Sabbath," in *EDB*, 1146.

³³ *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, pp 606-607.

³⁴ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 180.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

norms of His time. Perhaps in some occasions Yeshua took the more permissive options of the day for Sabbath observance, and took them a few steps further. Yet, it is becoming more and more clear to examiners, how one would be hard pressed to say that Yeshua bore an intention to expressly violate the Torah Sabbath commandments. The summary offered by *IDBSup*, draws the main conclusion that it was the authority that Yeshua stated He had, which was the main point of contention over His Sabbath observance:

"The NT records many disputes between Jesus and the Pharisees over proper sabbath-keeping...On sabbaths Jesus' disciples plucked ears of grain without being in mortal danger, and Jesus continually healed people who were not mortally ill. These acts violated Pharisaic norms. In the Synoptic and Johannine traditions Jesus often called attention to the exceptions to sabbath-keeping which the Pharisees themselves allowed. For example, the sabbath could be 'broken' by priests making sabbath or Passover offerings (cf. Matt. 12:5), people in mortal danger (such as David—Mark 2:25-26), people aiding others in mortal danger (cf. Mark 3:4), people aiding animals (cf. Matt. 12:11; Luke 13:15; 14:5), and people circumcising a child on the eighth day (cf. John 7:22). The Pharisees also believed that God did not cease work on the sabbath. He continued to give life and to judge the dead (cf. John 5:17). Having noted such exceptions Jesus often went on to apply a traditional form of rabbinic logic: If you allow work in such lesser matters, how much more ought you to allow my work in these greater matters (Matt. 12:5-6, 11-12; Luke 13:15-16; John 7:22-23). Jesus apparently saw his healings as fulfillments of the redemptive purpose of the law. Despite the traditional form of the argument, Jesus' evaluation of the 'lesser' and the 'greater' seemed to be based on an altogether untraditional assertion of personal authority, which provoked the Pharisees' anger."³⁵

The direction to observe the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* is the Fourth of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12). Variance over how to interpret and apply the Biblical instructions on how to best observe the Sabbath, and even how to interpret and apply some traditional stipulations as witnessed in Second Temple Judaism, have been witnessed throughout Jewish history.

Lighting a Fire

One of the most poignant of the Torah *Shabbat* prohibitions, which has understandably seen some important discussions, and variance throughout Judaism, is Exodus 35:3: "You shall not kindle a fire in any of your dwellings on the sabbath day." The verb *ba'ar* (בָּעַר) appears in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice), and mainly means either "kindle" or "burn" (*BDB*),³⁶ with a possible application involving "maintain a fire" (*CHALOT*).³⁷ The clause *lo-teva'aru eish* (לֹא-תִבְעֲרוּ אֵשׁ) is often rendered as "you shall kindle no fire" (RSV), "Do not light a fire" (NIV), or even "You are not to let fire burn" (Fox).³⁸ While various Jewish religious authorities have taken this direction as being a universal prohibition on not just combustible fire, but also a widescale moratorium on using most electrical devices today, a more targeted application is witnessed in the thoughts of Robert Alter. He makes the following observations in his *Five Books of Moses* translation³⁹:

"This prohibition is a new specification. The lighting of fires might be well associated with the 'tasks' involved in constructing the Tabernacle because fire would have been required for all the metalwork, and in one Ugaritic text, fire is burned six days in order to erect a sanctuary for Baal. But the kindling of fire—as against merely making use of fire that has been set accidentally—is clearly a primary labor of civilization, as the Prometheus myth suggests, a kind of inauguration of technology, and so it is understandable that a special prohibition on it on the sabbath should be spelled out."⁴⁰

³⁵ B.E. Shafer, "Sabbath," in Keith Crim, ed., *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 760.

³⁶ *BDB*, 128.

³⁷ *CHALOT*, 44.

³⁸ Everett Fox, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 463.

³⁹ Alter has rendered Exodus 35:3 along relatively customary lines: "You shall not kindle a fire in all your dwelling places on the sabbath day."

⁴⁰ Robert Alter, trans., *The Five Books of Moses* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 2004), 514.

With these thoughts, lighting or igniting a fire is to be taken more in the direction of fire to be used for some kind of industrial purpose, as it is indeed preceded by a repetition of how work is to be prohibited on *Shabbat* (Exodus 35:2).

The Ancient Israelites in a much more temperate Near East may not have had that many options to them to light a fire on *Shabbat*. Of course, some questions about lighting a fire must have been raised by Jews living in Central or Eastern Europe during a frosty winter. But, it is in the modern West with its electrical conveniences, and the automobile in particular, where the most amount of questions and debates reside. Debates have specifically emerged among Orthodox Jews, and Conservative and Reform Jews, the two latter groups being far more accommodating as to what it means to “light a fire.” While this will involve wondering whether the usage of electrical devices such as light switches, coffee makers, and refrigerators on *Shabbat* violates Exodus 35:2—it most especially involves the issue of whether or not it is permitted for Jews to drive their cars to synagogue services on *Shabbat*. *EJ* offers the basic summary:

“Modern inventions have produced a host of new questions regarding Sabbath observance. Orthodox Judaism forbids travel by automobile on the Sabbath, Reform Judaism permits it. Conservative Judaism has differing views on this question, but generally permits travel by automobile on the Sabbath solely for the purpose of attending synagogue. The basic legal question regarding the switching on of electric lights is whether the noncombustive type of burning produced by electricity falls under the prohibition of making a fire or any of the other [traditional] prohibitions...Orthodox Jews refrain from the use of electrical appliances on the Sabbath, with the exception of the refrigerator, which may be open and closed on the grounds that any electrical current produced in the process is incidental and without express intention. It has, however, become the practice for observant Jews to use electrical appliances on the Sabbath which are operated by time switches set before the Sabbath. In Israel, on religious kibbutzim, the same procedure is used to milk the cows on the Sabbath. Israel also has local bylaws forbidding certain activities on the Sabbath. There is, however, no comprehensive law covering the whole country. Thus, whereas the public transport does not operate on the Sabbath in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv, it does in Haifa. Except for specifically non-Jewish sections of the country, the Sabbath is the official day of rest on which all business and stores must close.”⁴¹

In his book *Kosher Living: It's More Than Just the Food*, Conservative Rabbi Ron Isaacs answers the question, “Is it kosher to use electricity on Shabbat?”:

“Many traditional Jews consider electricity to be a form of fire, and Jewish law prohibits making a fire on the Sabbath. Those who do not use electricity do not turn on a radio or television or use any electrical appliances on the Sabbath. Some authorities who doubt whether electricity can truly be labeled fire explain the ban on electricity as a protective measure, to safeguard against other violation that might stem from permitting the use of electrical appliances. More liberal Jews generally will use electricity on the Sabbath.”⁴²

Much of how Exodus 35:3 is approached may concern the differences in lighting a fire for ancient people, and how technology has changed lighting a fire, even in the form of striking a match. The *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* by Ronald L. Eisenberg addresses how one of the main reasons why driving on *Shabbat*, to synagogue, became permissible in Conservative Judaism, is how the Jewish community in America became spread out to more suburban areas:

“The Rabbis interpreted the verse prohibiting the gathering of manna on the seventh day (Exod. 16:29) as forbidding one from journeying on the Sabbath. Unlike the Karaites, who took the verse ‘Let no person go out of his place on the seventh day’ literally and did not allow anyone to leave home on the Sabbath, the Rabbis did not restrict movement within one’s home town. However, they prohibited Jews from walking more than 2,000 cubits (approximately 1/2 mile) beyond the town boundaries on the Sabbath, ‘because traveling interrupts the rest of both man and beast’ [Hertz, 277]...

⁴¹ Louis Jacobs, “Sabbath: Laws and Customs of the Sabbath,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. MS Windows 9x. Brooklyn: Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd, 1997.

Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp 44-46 for some of the main features of Sabbath keeping in modern Israel, in particular in Jerusalem, as well as some of the controversy that it has stirred.

⁴² Ron Isaacs, *Kosher Living: It's More Than Just the Food* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 193.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

"Orthodox rabbis forbid driving an automobile on the Sabbath, based on the fact that it involves turning on the ignition, which in turn ignites sparks—an act that violates the Torah law against making a fire on the Sabbath (Exod. 35:3). Conservative rabbis generally permit Jews to drive on the Sabbath, but only to synagogue. This ruling was made in response to the migration of Jews to the suburbs, where most no longer live within walking distance of a synagogue. Continuing to forbid driving on the Sabbath would have forced many congregants to remain at home or to pursue nonreligious activities. Fearing an erosion of Jewish identity if synagogue attendance dropped precipitously, these rabbis permitted driving as the lesser of two evils. Orthodox rabbis denounced this decision, arguing that Conservative rabbis should instead encourage their congregants to live within walking distance of their synagogues.

"In Israel, public transport does not operate on the Sabbath in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but it does run in Haifa. Except for specifically non-Jewish sections of the country, the Sabbath is the official day of rest in which all businesses and stores must close."⁴³

What is most interesting about Conservative Judaism's allowance for *Shabbat* driving to synagogue⁴⁴—presumably with many people living within fifteen to twenty minutes—is how many people in today's Messianic movement tend to live much further distances from their local congregation. Many people across the Messianic movement know of those who drive an hour or more to attend *Shabbat* services, perhaps from a rural area. While these people may wish to live closer to their congregation's meeting place, or the congregation itself may wish to relocate closer to where many of its people live—economic considerations likely do not permit it.

Beyond the modern Jewish debates of igniting a fire to drive a car, the *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* makes a point to note the principle of *pikkuach nefesh*, and specifically how it involves feeding the ill, and hence would also likely involve cooking food, as well as making sure that there is a fire for warmth:

"The concept of *pikuach nefesh* is so highly regarded that if a seriously ill person needs food on the Sabbath, the *halakhah* requires that one should slaughter animals and prepare them according to the dietary laws, rather than feed the individual ritually forbidden food. It is even permitted to give patients forbidden food if physicians consider it necessary for their recovery. For three days after giving birth, a woman is considered in a weakened and vulnerable condition. If one of these days falls on a Sabbath, it is an obligation to do everything possible to alleviate her pain and ease her discomfort, including lighting a fire to keep her warm...."⁴⁵

The Exodus 35:3 prohibition on lighting a fire was not given to Ancient Israel, so people could think they could not light a fire in order stay warm during freezing weather. The Exodus 35:3 prohibition, as will be agreed upon by all, was intended to stop fires being lit that would involve or facilitate labor. Today, with our modern conveniences, one can set his or her thermostat to automatically regulate temperatures for both hot and cold, which can limit annoyances for many. The majority of religious Jews do drive on the Sabbath, to their local synagogues, so fellowship among their community is not broken—and in this regard, at least—turning on a car should be thought of as being in a different category than the original Exodus 35:3 instruction. If Conservative Judaism had not made this allowance, than the result could have been an abandonment of *Shabbat* observance altogether, a bigger problem to be sure.

Prohibited Activities for a Modern *Shabbat*

In today's broad Jewish tradition, among Orthodox, Conservative, and even Reform Jews—activities which are believed to be prohibited for the Sabbath, are derived from both Tanach Scripture and ancient tradition, although obviously in different degrees. It can be widely agreed that commerce is prohibited, given how the gates of Jerusalem were shut from merchants on *Shabbat* (Nehemiah 13:15-22). A cessation of work did not apply to guard duty in the royal court (2 Kings

⁴³ Eisenberg, pp 134-135.

⁴⁴ Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1979), pp 85-86.

⁴⁵ Eisenberg, pp 135-136.

11:4-12), which by implication would mean that various jobs involved in defense or law enforcement would need to function to some degree on the Sabbath. It also would surely allow for a security detail being present at a synagogue's service, especially with potential acts of anti-Semitism always needing to be spotted. The Shunamite woman would have normally traveled to consult the prophet on the New Moon or Sabbath (2 Kings 4:23), an indication that some form of travel, for religious purposes, would be permitted on *Shabbat*. So, the Conservative Jewish allowance for driving to synagogue on *Shabbat* does have some ancillary Biblical support.

Yeshua the Messiah issued the stern admonition to the lawyers of His day, "Woe to you *Torah* experts too! You load people down with burdens they can hardly bear, and you won't lift a finger to help them!" (Luke 11:46, CJB). The numbers of Rabbinic regulations witnessed in post-Second Temple Jewish literature can certainly seem a bit overbearing for Sabbath observance. Yet, there are useful guidelines to be considered, especially as it concerns the widespread imperative of how whatever can be done before the Sabbath may not be done on the Sabbath. Another principle concerns "Whoever on the Sabbath performs a forbidden act of labor and [the result of] his act of labor endures is liable" (m.*Shabbat* 12:1).⁴⁶ *Shabbat* is not supposed to be like the six other days of the week; *Shabbat* is a day of rest and refreshment in God the Creator, and is not a normal day. There are activities that can be conducted at another time, which can wait for *Shabbat* to be concluded.

Jewish scholars, examiners, and thinkers have certainly had to sort through Biblical and extra-Biblical injunctions given for the Sabbath.⁴⁷ While there are many examples to be considered, in view of the Tanach prohibition of carrying items on *Shabbat* (cf. Nehemiah 13:15-18)—which various Jews of antiquity took beyond the prohibition of lifting heavy loads⁴⁸—are various Rabbinic injunctions as to what it means to carry an item on *Shabbat*, and the boundaries in which an item may or may not be carried. The extra-Biblical term *eruv* (עֵרוּב), technically meaning "interweaving, mixture, conjunction," became associated with "a symbolical act by which the legal fiction of community or continuity is established," especially as it regarded "Sabbath limits" (*Jastrow*).⁴⁹ The point of establishing an *eruv*, is that carrying an object from one location to another location was prohibited, and so a big common area between homes and families being set up for the Sabbath would circumvent this. The *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* summarizes,

"On the Sabbath, it is forbidden to carry an object (even a house key or handkerchief) outside a private domain, though carrying is permitted inside a private residence or a synagogue. An ingenious way to get around this restriction is to change an object that is usually carried into something that can be worn, such as converting a house key into a tie clip. The prohibition against carrying is especially difficult for mothers of infants or young children. Forbidden to carry a child outside the house, they are effectively confined to their homes on the Sabbath.

"To overcome these restrictions, under certain circumstances the Rabbis permitted the establishment of an *eruv*. Literally meaning 'blending' or 'intermingling,' an *eruv* converts a large public area into a 'private domain' where carrying is permitted on the Sabbath. For example, it is forbidden to carry an object from one house to another. However, if all the tenants living around a large courtyard contribute food and place it at a central point before the Sabbath, the entire area is symbolically transformed from a series of individual private homes into one common group dwelling that belongs to the entire community. Today, a common way of making an *eruv* is to extend a wire or nylon cord around the perimeter of a community, by connecting it to telephone or utility poles. In this way, the entire area becomes a single domain, in which it is permitted to carry and push baby carriages. In Israel, *eruvim* have been constructed in all cities. In the United States, they have been established in cities that have a substantial Orthodox Jewish population."⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Neusner, *Mishnah*, 194.

⁴⁷ Cf. the lengthy summation provided by Eisenberg, pp 130-133.

⁴⁸ The term employed in Nehemiah 13:19 is *massah* (מַסָּה), widely involves "burden (of ass, mule...)" or "burden = hardship" (*CHALOT*, 217).

⁴⁹ *Jastrow*, 1075.

⁵⁰ Eisenberg, pp 133-134.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

A strict adherence to the sorts of Sabbath regulations, Biblical and extra-Biblical, summarized above, would be seen in Orthodox Judaism. A consultative approach, recognizing the value that these various traditions had for many Jews of the past, but also evaluating their relevance for the present, is seen in Conservative and Reform Judaism. There are contemporary Conservative Jewish⁵¹ and Reform Jewish discussions on what is permissible for *Shabbat*, with figures from the Conservative⁵² and Reform⁵³ movements both providing modern-day “lists” of what may be constituted as work. While Orthodox traditionalists might be prone to consider Conservative and Reform Jews to be more liberal and permissive than they, it is not as though the latter have totally dismissed both Biblical and extra-Biblical stipulations. In the Reform Jewish publication *Gates of Shabbat*, Mark Dov Shapiro addresses the question, “Why does the Reform approach to Shabbat work and rest differ from that of traditional Judaism?”:

“Reform Jews depart from the traditional definitions of work and rest because we believe that they do not represent the final word on Jewish practice. We maintain that the talmudic sages and their successors only developed definitions of work and rest in response to the specific historic needs of the Jews they knew. The sages themselves even acknowledged that much of their Shabbat legislation was only loosely related to the Torah [referencing m.*Chagigah* 1:8]. Nevertheless, they continued refining their ideas of Shabbat because the biblical Shabbat had to be clarified and elucidated if it was to be followed in their post-biblical world.

“The same holds true for us today. We are ‘commanded,’ as it were, to continue what Jews have done for centuries. We must develop definitions of work and rest that resonate with the needs of contemporary Jews.

“*One caveat needs to be stated. In creating a contemporary approach to Shabbat, Reform Jews do not function in a vacuum. Although we may depart from ancient practices, we live with a sense of responsibility to the continuum of Jewish experience.*

“Therefore, we try to balance our creativity in practice with the desire to conserve and adapt what speaks to us from the past. We are free to be novel, but proud as well to maintain as much as possible our connections with the best of the Jewish past.”⁵⁴

Although there is much that today’s Messianic movement would disagree with Reform Judaism about—ranging from its dismissal of the kosher dietary laws,⁵⁵ to its non-adherence to the doctrine of the resurrection,⁵⁶ to its acceptance of homosexuality—the Reform logic of taking ancient traditions associated with *Shabbat*, and adapting them for more modern times, is **precisely how the Sabbath is observed among many Messianic people**. Today’s Messianic people should not feel ashamed if more Center to Leftist branches of Judaism do, in fact, see the intention of the Sabbath instructions as not being hyper-restrictive or set in concrete. While it is important to be aware of the many Orthodox Jewish procedures and applications surrounding *Shabbat*, with most of us noting what they are, recognizing some degree of usefulness for those who observe them, wanting to be sensitive around those who observe them—we **do not feel bound to Sabbath restrictions that go far beyond the intention of Biblical commandments**.

In stark contrast to what is offered in some of the previously quoted summaries, most Messianic people are not going to turn off their smartphones or iPhones on *Shabbat*. They might turn off their phones for their *Shabbat* service on Saturday morning, but there might indeed be legitimate reasons for communicating with fellow Believers using technological devices later on. Most Messianic congregations, in stark contrast to Orthodox Jews who would not even turn on a coffee maker, or add cold milk to coffee or tea—do not consider turning on an electric coffee maker to be work, or adding milk to coffee to be baking or boiling. Most Messianic people surely do not consider lathering up with soap, as they shower before going to their congregation—and most

⁵¹ Cf. Isaacs, pp 189-197.

⁵² Dresner, pp 80-81.

⁵³ Shulevitz, pp 95-99; Mark Dov Shapiro, *Gates of Shabbat: A Guide for Observing Shabbat* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1996), pp 49-59 provides a summary of what may be considered “rest.”

⁵⁴ Shapiro, 57.

⁵⁵ Consult the relevant sections of the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁵⁶ Reform Judaism tends to advocate that the idea of a bodily resurrection was imported into Judaism via Zoroastrian influences in the Persian era.

assuredly washing their hands—to be a form of “labor.” Many Messianic congregations have an *oneg* or refreshment-lunch afterward, which does often require some kind of reheating in an oven.

Making the Effort to Not Work on *Shabbat*

When today’s Messianic people seek to be **realistic** about keeping the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*, while we might recognize the final sacrifice of Yeshua providing atonement for human sin, and astutely recognize that keeping or not keeping the Sabbath is hardly a salvation issue—efforts still need to be taken in order to make the seventh day a holy and blessed time for the people of God. Capital penalties for Sabbath violation might have been absorbed by the Messiah (Colossians 2:14), but loss—both physical and spiritual—is still incurred by people who do not expel the necessary disciplines to make *Shabbat* a time of rest and refreshment. Even many evangelical Christians, albeit with Sunday as the time designated for their day of rest, are recognizing the vast wisdom with a Sabbath-principle—as modern people need to put the ways of the world aside for a day. All too frequently, though, there are people who make excuses for working on the Sabbath, when they have every means at their disposal to legitimately take a rest, and even fellowship with others Believers.

It might be something of a conundrum to say this: **but people need to work in order to set the time aside to rest.** That is, the six days allotted for human beings to work need to be employed as the time for arranging all of the things, that will permit the Sabbath to then be the day set aside for God. This has actually been a huge challenge for many Jewish people in modern America. While we should all be pragmatic enough to recognize that there are times when “life happens,” and there are those moments of unavoidable work that will erupt on *Shabbat*—usually in the form of unplanned emergencies—modern people can and will *give in* to the temptation to work on the Sabbath, when reasonable effort can be expelled to postpone things to the business week. Dresner, as a Conservative Jew, addresses the common Jewish dilemma in America, in how many Jews once persecuted and discriminated against in Europe for their Sabbath observance, came to an America that provided religious freedom and opportunity. Alas, though, because of such opportunities to work and build businesses and embrace free enterprise—*Shabbat* has often been a casualty, with too many American Jews dismissing the Sabbath via the guise of their economic interests:

“Because the Sabbath had the power to preserve the Jew in time of peril, bringing renewal every seven days, the enemies of Israel throughout the ages—in Egypt, Rome, Germany, Russia—have attempted to halt its observance in order to crush the spirit of the people. But everywhere and always the Jewish spirit has triumphed. Everywhere, that is, but America. For America is different! This may very well be the first time in Jewish history when the total Sabbath day, for which Jews willingly made every manner of sacrifice in whatever clime or country they have lived, has been accepted as expendable. See the paradox—what our forefathers were willing to die for when it was forbidden (or at the very least made exceedingly difficult), we dismiss now that we are free to keep it. Only in America, the ‘goldene medinah,’ was the immigrant Jew too hard put economically to observe the Sabbath.

“If it is true that the Sabbath is the single most important institution of Jewish life and law, if it does indeed contain within itself all of Judaism in miniature, and if it is a fact that without the Sabbath our tradition cannot endure, then how has it been permitted to fall into virtual obsolescence in America? Our continued coexistence with a Sabbath-less Jewry may blur our understanding of how radically new is the situation which confronts us in the American Jewish community. There is little awareness left of the total Sabbath in many congregations. I do not mean an informed keeping of each and every Sabbath law, but at the very least an understanding that Sabbath observance, in the sense of withdrawal from weekday concerns and attachment to the spiritual, as a significant and central goal for American Jews. Few are the congregations, for example, where Sabbath observance or even regular attendance on Sabbath morning is expected of men and women who hold office in that congregation.

“It is claimed that modern times present implacable obstacles before Sabbath observance. Is this really so? Of course, there are problems today that did not exist in the insulated ghetto of yesterday. But how can one explain the fact that in some communities today the synagogues are very well attended on Sabbath morning and Jews keep the Sabbath, while in other communities the reverse is the case. A study of such communities will disclose that those who keep the Sabbath do not hold jobs different in kind from those who do not. The reason must be sought elsewhere.

Messianic Sabbath Helper

"We have made a tragic blunder by excusing Sabbath violation in the name of financial need, a shibboleth that has paralyzed our attempts to apply the Sabbath commandment to the American Jew. An unpleasant fact must be faced: there is simply no correlation—as some believed there was—between greater leisure or financial well-being and Sabbath observance! The reverse is often the case. Though we are no longer poverty-stricken immigrants and leisure time is heavy on our hands, it has made little difference. If Jews wanted to keep the Sabbath, many, if not most, could.

"The Jewish professional determines his own hours and could shift his Wednesday afternoon off to Saturday. The Jewish manufacturer and those associated with manufacturing usually work a five-day week. The Jewish retailer is in a more difficult position. Yet those who close their stores on Sabbath and holidays (and perhaps remain open on Sunday) find the reward well worth the sacrifice. There are others who are dependent upon their employers' terms. Most employees, however, will be surprised at the acceptance with which their Sabbath requests are met. Employers know that a man sincere in his religion usually makes a good worker. Further, special Jewish vocational and employment agencies are available, and fair employment laws forbidding discrimination against Sabbath observers have done much to ease the situation in recent years.

"We are not helpless victims of economic laws. That would be Marxism. Jews have traditionally subjugated the law of man to the law of God which is in truth is the law of man.

"Shall we give up the Sabbath? Shall we do without it for a little more comfort, a little greater affluence?"⁵⁷

While there are surely situations that one will encounter in the course of life, which may require working on the Sabbath from time to time—that unexpected schedule at work, an economic crunch which hits the family requiring a little more work, or an unforeseen emergency—reasonable sacrifices can be made by many people in order for them to keep *Shabbat*. **Too much really does surround how serious people are about keeping *Shabbat*.** Conservative Jews and Reform Jews have been noted to dismiss the Sabbath, at least in part, or entirely, by placing their economic and business interests at a higher level than making *Shabbat* rest a priority. Orthodox Jews in America, however, have often been able to find ways around some of the challenges. Finkelman observes in his book *Shabbos*, how many Orthodox Jews, at least, took the post-Holocaust and post-World War II period in the West, as a time to turn things around and rebuild lost Torah institutions:

"...It may well be that, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, God deemed it necessary to shower success and prosperity upon the Jews of the free world, in order to enable them to turn their energies to the creation of a renaissance of Torah life. Are we so much better than our grandparents who failed to withstand the test of assimilation in the West, during years when Sabbath observance meant the weekly loss of a job and the prospect of coming home to crying children and a wife who had nothing to cook for supper?

"Thanks to the relative prosperity of the post-War period and the inspirational leadership of great leaders to whom comfort was meaningless, large numbers of Jews channeled their human and material resources into the task of rebuilding Torah life and institutions throughout the world. So it is that there are outstanding Torah institutions and new armies of Torah adherents in places where, in earlier years, huge Jewish populations had permitted Judaism to decline and whose forbearers were convinced that their Jewish roots were doomed to wither."⁵⁸

There are many, in the Jewish community for certain, who in their wanting to keep *Shabbat* or the festivals, do run into issues with their employers. In his book *Kosher Living*, Isaacs notes the question, "Is it kosher for a person who observes the Sabbath to ask for time off on Jewish holidays without being penalized?" Given some of the economic realities of our time, if refusing to work on *Shabbat* in a particular job, some might be negatively evaluated, or they might even be terminated. Usually, though, as Isaacs describes, employers will have to recognize the various religious needs of people taking off time for the Sabbath and holidays:

"It is certainly kosher if one is observant to let his or her employer know at the outset that he or she is an observant Jew and will need to observe a number of Jewish holidays during the year. However, it is not a kosher expectation to think that the employer will acquiesce to giving him or her all these days off with pay or with no obligation to make up the missed work.

"Many observant Jews who choose not to work on the Jewish holidays will often come in to work on a Sunday, work at home, or work late into the night to be sure to finish all that is part of his or her responsibility.

⁵⁷ Dresner, pp 72-74.

⁵⁸ Finkelman, 6.

This is the fair and kosher thing to do, for when an employer hires a worker, the employer should reasonably expect that the employee will do the job agreed as in the contract.”⁵⁹

Saturday is the major day that an employer will need to work with in terms of employees not being able to show up for work. The Jewish community is not the only religious community that observes the seventh-day Sabbath, as various denominations like the Seventh-Day Adventist Church also do keep the Sabbath, and have often been able to help secure special legal dispensations for Sabbatarians. Still, the primary responsibility in making sure that *Shabbat* is set aside as a day of rest and refreshment, as well as fellowship with brethren, is up to individuals and families. You have to consciously place a value on what *Shabbat* is, and make sure that you get the most out of it. Too many have the economic freedom of not having to do any work on Saturday, and they could indeed make the Sabbath a holy time, **but they instead (willfully) forfeit its blessings.**

Messianic Believers Keeping *Shabbat*

The only way that any of us would possibly know who fellow Messianic brothers and sisters are, is by meeting them in person at a Messianic congregation, most probably on Saturday morning. This is true whether these people are Jewish Believers, some of whom were raised in a synagogue setting, and later came to faith in Yeshua—or whether they are non-Jewish Believers, led by the Lord to embrace their Hebraic Roots and live a Torah obedient life like the Messiah. Many have a home *Shabbat* dinner with the traditions of candle lighting, *kiddush*, and *challah*—and will frequently open it up to people in their congregations, and/or various other guests. Many, attending worship services on *Shabbat*, may attend congregational classes held a little earlier, or held in the afternoon. Many congregations have a time of fellowship afterward, including refreshments or even a meal. For many Messianic Believers, with their local congregation as the focal point of *Shabbat*, a good part of their day is spent on things of the Lord, with little temptation to break the Sabbath. This is especially true for those assemblies which hold *Havdallah*, and may even have a *chavurah* gathering for Saturday evening (at least on some kind of a semi-regular basis).⁶⁰

Of course, Messianic congregations do vary across the spectrum. Some hold their worship services on *Erev Shabbat* or Friday evening, leaving various individuals and families to develop different routines for the full day following on Saturday. Others will hold services on Saturday morning, but will not set aside a time for fellowship afterward on Saturday afternoon. Other congregations may hold their main services in the afternoon on Saturday, closing it with *Havdallah*.

Even with variance to be expected among Messianic people, one will easily encounter men and women, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, who are quite keen on making *Shabbat* a sanctified time unto the Lord. While congregational service times may vary, and personal and family routines and customs may differ—many are sincere about not working, they want to experience a period of rest and refreshment, and they recognize how fellowshiping on the Sabbath is something quite Biblical. There are those who vary in their Sabbath commitments, among today’s Messianic people. Very, very few would be found to keep *Shabbat* at the same level of observance as the Orthodox Synagogue, because most Messianic people will be found driving cars to *Shabbat* services. The bulk of Messianic people desiring to honor *Shabbat*, however, will be found to hold to a level of observance consistent somewhere between the Conservative and Reform movements. And, for many—**who need *Shabbat* to be a more conscious reality**—important cues can be taken from how many non-observant Jews, usually Reform, use *Shabbat* as a time to focus on their heritage, and incrementally and steadily begin to evaluate their relationship with God. As Ruth Perelson describes in *Invitation to Shabbat*,

⁵⁹ Isaacs, pp 82-83.

⁶⁰ The term *chavurah* (חַבְרָה) mainly means “friend, neighbor, fellow-being” (Jastrow, 422).

Messianic Sabbath Helper

"Shabbat is a point on which Jews should focus their attention. The observance of Shabbat has been consistently stressed—although in different forms at different times—with a variety of options for observance and celebration. In our freedom to determine what our own Shabbat observance will be, we are not free to ignore Shabbat, for 'How can the Sabbath protect us if we don't protect the Sabbath?'

"We can begin by learning about Shabbat and raising our consciousness of it. We can yet move on to increments of observance, a little at a time, as we become more knowledgeable and comfortable with them. From consciousness-raising, we can move on to such positive acts as lighting candles, having a festive meal, attending synagogue, planning Shabbat events that we feel—as individuals or as families—are in keeping with Shabbat, and making *Havdalah*.

"In other words, when I say Shabbat, I refer to its totality as a concept, and I ask you to consider it in that way for yourselves. Some of what we do on Shabbat we do as individuals; some we undertake as part of a family, congregation, or other group. All our Shabbat observances are, of course, highly personal. This is a legitimate and historic Jewish approach, although many Jews do not think about Shabbat in terms of all of these dimensions.

"If you have come this far with me, let me ask you some questions that I ask myself: Are we prepared to talk about Shabbat making demands on us? Are we as individuals prepared to educate ourselves so that we can make informed choices about the observance of Shabbat? Our answers to these questions may lead to changes in the way we live our lives, in the manner in which our synagogues function, and, indeed, in how we define being a Jew."⁶¹

Of course, various Jewish people, trying to rediscover their heritage, will inevitably find out that not all of their questions of human existence are answered, and so in begging God to reveal Himself, **may discover that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel!** Non-Jewish Believers, however, knowing that Yeshua is the Savior, tend to want to be more like Him, and today are being drawn toward the Sabbath. In so doing, many of the patterns of incrementally investigating the significance of *Shabbat*, steadily employing various traditions and customs, and implementing disciplines so that the Sabbath can be a time of rest and refreshment—can be approached in a manner similar to Jews rediscovering their heritage.

Individuals and families, in their quest to honor the Sabbath—obviously outside of congregational activities—will have to wrestle, or at least reason, with Biblical directions and traditional approaches, about what it means to make *Shabbat* a holy time. **This is where many of us need to give one another a wide berth**, not only for recognizing those areas where exceptions for work and life situations present themselves, but also for being responsible for our own Sabbath observance *first*, before intruding into the lives of others. The most that any rabbi or spiritual leader can often do, is provide a list of personal observances, offering suggestions to others. Isaacs answers the question "What kosher activities can I do on Shabbat afternoon?" with a list of activities that he likely does, as a Conservative rabbi:

"Taking a walk, napping, playing a board game, reading for pleasure, and studying Torah are all appropriate activities for the afternoon of the Sabbath. In the summer months beginning with the Sabbath after Passover, the custom is to read and study *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers), a Talmudic tractate that teaches one how to be a better person."⁶²

Indeed, many people will return home from congregational services mid-afternoon, and take a nap. They will then be awake as the Sabbath closes, avoiding any major opportunity to violate *Shabbat* via unnecessary work. Others return home, and rest in other ways.

The biggest, and most preventable temptation that exists in many Messianic congregations, which can violate the *Shabbat* restriction of engaging in unnecessary commerce, is how many, when their *Shabbat* morning service is over, will go out to eat at a restaurant for lunch. While Messianic Jewish Believers, particularly in North America, are not immune from this—this is actually more of an import to the Messianic movement from non-Jewish Believers who went out to lunch, after Sunday church services. Some of the reasons for going out to lunch after *Shabbat* morning services, might be to fellowship with fellow Messianic Believers, who are not seen during the normal week and may have to travel some distance to a congregation. Yet, many Messianic congregations can

⁶¹ Ruth Perelson, *An Invitation to Shabbat: A Beginner's Guide to Weekly Celebration* (New York: UAHC Press, 1997), 54.

⁶² Isaacs, 192.

and do offer refreshments or a lunch after morning services, not only to prevent unnecessary commerce, like going to a restaurant for lunch, but to encourage community interaction. Of course, various people in a congregation or fellowship might still leave when the service is over, and go to lunch with a number of their congregants. Mechanisms can and should be in place to discourage this.⁶³

Being Realistic About *Shabbat*

The weekly Sabbath or *Shabbat* presents a great opportunity to those who make the effort to welcome it, abstain from their labors, and enter into the rest of God. The Sabbath especially tends to be an anticipated feature of Messianic Believers who live in the United States, because unlike any other Western country, the U.S. has no mandated vacations, quite contrary to Europe.⁶⁴ Many people do not get to take extensive holidays, **and so a weekly respite on *Shabbat* should be something embraced!** This will require all of us to expel efforts throughout the working week to make sure that *Shabbat* is set aside, requiring each of us to pre-plan many things.

The vast majority of Messianic people are not going to keep *Shabbat* as those in Orthodox Judaism. Some might consider their level of Sabbath observance to be “Conservadox,” more like Conservative Judaism but leaning toward Orthodox. In on the ground circumstances, the bulk of those striving to make *Shabbat* a holy time, are going to end up with a style that is actually “Reformative,” more like Reform Judaism but leaning Conservative. **What this notably does not include are people who treat *Shabbat* as a kind of “Saturday church,”** as though it is exclusively about attending a worship service with fellow Believers, and the requirement to rest does not extend into one’s home and toward one’s person.

While uniformity regarding Messianic Sabbath observance should be no more expected than the uniformity which is lacking among different branches of the Jewish Synagogue, more effort does need to be employed by each of us in reasoning through activities which are permitted and prohibited, as well as classifying those legitimate “emergency” situations which require commercial transactions and labor. **Different levels of Sabbath observance will be present among individuals who compose congregations and fellowships.** While each individual is ultimately responsible before the Lord, an environment that encourages obedience, and leads via a Sabbath rest tempered with the love and mercy of the Messiah, is what needs to be facilitated. People who are keeping the Sabbath properly, and are being refreshed in Him, should be demonstrating His salvation in a way so that others will want to join in!

Interestingly enough, what may very well emerge among those serious about *Shabbat*, is that the conduct of many Messianic people might not be too different than that of many pietistic Christian people who kept the “Sunday Sabbath” of yesteryear. These people would have recognized the day of rest as a time to focus on God, one’s fellow Believers, and would have avoided those activities of pure pleasure, when human beings—and not human beings *and* their Creator—would have been the focus.

⁶³ Issues pertaining to the kosher keeping of Messianic people, and eating out at restaurants, is worthy of examination for sure. Consult the FAQ, “Public Restaurants, Kosher,” and for a wider discussion, the *Messianic Kosher Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁶⁴ Shulevitz, pp 207-208.