

INTRODUCTION TO THINGS MESSIANIC

**An Introduction for Newcomers
to the Messianic Movement**

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MESSIANIC APOLOGETICS
messianicapologetics.net

Introduction to Things Messianic

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Cover Image: JMWScout via Istockphoto

ISBN 979-8316753604 (paperback)

ASIN B00685T1FG (eBook)

Published by Messianic Apologetics, a division of Outreach Israel Ministries

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McKinney, Texas 75070

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outreachisrael.net / outreachisrael.blog

messianicapologetics.net / messianicapologetics.blog

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Abbreviations and Special Terms

The following is a list of abbreviations for reference works and special terms which are used in publications by Outreach Israel Ministries and Messianic Apologetics. Please familiarize yourself with them as the text may reference a Bible version, i.e., RSV for the Revised Standard Version, or a source such as *TWOT* for the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, solely by its abbreviation. Detailed listings of these sources are provided in the Bibliography.

- ABD: *Anchor Bible Dictionary*
AMG: *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament, New Testament*
ANE: Ancient Near East(ern)
Apostolic Scriptures/Writings: the New Testament
Ara: Aramaic
ASV: American Standard Version (1901)
ATS: ArtScroll Tanach (1996)
b. Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*)
B.C.E.: Before Common Era or B.C.
BDAG: *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich)
BDB: *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*
C.E.: Common Era or A.D.
CGEDNT: *Concise Greek-English Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Barclay M. Newman)
CGL: *Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (2021)
CHALOT: *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Holladay)
CJB: Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CJSB: Complete Jewish Study Bible (2016)
DRA: Douay-Rheims American Edition
DSS: Dead Sea Scrolls
EDB: *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*
EJ: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
ESV: English Standard Version (2001)
Ger: German
GNT: Greek New Testament
Grk: Greek
HALOT: *Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Koehler and Baumgartner)
HCSB: Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)
Heb: Hebrew
HNV: Hebrew Names Version of the World English Bible
IDB: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
IDBSup: *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Supplement*
ISBE: *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*
IVPBBC: *IVP Bible Background Commentary (Old & New Testament)*
Jastrow: *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Bavli, Talmud Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (Marcus Jastrow)
JBK: New Jerusalem Bible-Koren (2000)
JETS: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
KJV: King James Version
Lattimore: *The New Testament by Richmond Lattimore* (1996)
LITV: *Literal Translation of the Holy Bible* by Jay P. Green (1986)
LES: *Lexham English Septuagint* (2019)
LS: *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott)
LSJM: *Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell-Scott-Jones-McKenzie)
LXE: *Septuagint with Apocrypha* by Sir L.C.L. Brenton (1851)
LXX: Septuagint
m. Mishnah
MT: Masoretic Text
NASB: New American Standard Bible (1977)
NASU: New American Standard Update (1995)
NBCR: *New Bible Commentary: Revised*
NEB: New English Bible (1970)
Nelson: *Nelson's Expository Dictionary of Old Testament Words*
NETS: New English Translation of the Septuagint (2007)
NIB: *New Interpreter's Bible*

NIDB: *New International Dictionary of the Bible*
NIV: New International Version (1984)
NJB: New Jerusalem Bible-Catholic (1985)
NJPS: Tanakh, A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1999)
NKJV: New King James Version (1982)
NRSV: New Revised Standard Version (1989)
NLT: New Living Translation (1996)
NT: New Testament
OT: Old Testament
REB: Revised English Bible (1989)
RSV: Revised Standard Version (1952)
t. Tosefta
Tanach (Tanakh): the Old Testament
Thayer: *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*

TDNT: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
TLV: Messianic Jewish Family Bible—Tree of Life Version (2014)
TNIV: Today's New International Version (2005)
TWOT: *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*
UBSHNT: United Bible Societies' 1991 Hebrew New Testament revised edition
v(s). verse(s)
Vine: *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*
Vul: Latin Vulgate
YLT: Young's Literal Translation (1862/1898)
WMB: World Messianic Bible (2020)

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Is Sunday “the Lord’s Day”?

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

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

Some uninformed Christians may accuse Messianic people of being legalistic about *Shabbat*, perhaps implying that because we do not assemble on Sunday, as they do, that we cannot be true Believers. (Many others simply do not understand what *Shabbat* is all about.) Various claims issued against us can be very serious because **we do believe** in the shed blood of the Messiah as being our sin covering, and that salvation comes by grace through faith. However, obeying God should come as fruit of a true

¹ This chapter was originally written for the author’s book *Torah In the Balance, Volume 1* (Kissimmee, FL: TNN Press, 2003).

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salvation experience. Christians who may accuse Messianic people who keep God's Sabbath as not being "saved" are on extremely dangerous ground—coming against things that He, not mortals, have established. Messianics today keep the Sabbath because Yeshua Himself did.

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

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

What day has God set-apart?

When we review the account of Creation in Genesis chs. 1-2, it is very clear what day of the week our Heavenly Father has set-apart or chosen to be unique:

"By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:2-3, NASU).²

The Hebrew verb *qadash*, translated "sanctified," appears in the Piel stem (intensive action, active voice) and means "to **proclaim a holy period**" or "to **treat someone (something) as sanctified, consecrated**" (*HALOT*).³ In other words, it is the seventh day, or *yom ha'shevi'i*, that God has indicated as being special. The Lord "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Genesis 2:3, NIV). Torah commentator J.H. Hertz states in his *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* that "The Creator endowed the Sabbath with a

² Some say that the Sabbath does not appear in Genesis 2:2-3, yet the verb form of *Shabbat*, *shavat*, does appear: *v'yishbot b'yom ha'shevi'i*.

³ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 2:1074.

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

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

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11, NASU).

This is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:12:

“Observe the sabbath day to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you” (Deuteronomy 5:12, NASU).

Furthermore, the Sabbath is one of the Father’s *moedim* or “appointed times” in Leviticus 23:

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

These commandments are quite straightforward when we understand them Biblically. Our Heavenly Father rested after His creative acts were finished, and He established *Shabbat* as a time of rest for His own to consider His wonders, experiencing a foretaste of a *greater rest* to come (cf.

⁴ J.H. Hertz, ed., *Pentateuch & Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1960), 6.

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

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Hebrews 4:9-11). It is the day that He has set-apart and made holy, so that His people might rest and rejuvenate themselves and meditate on Him. Certainly, resting from our labors for a full day is *a good thing!* As Believers who want to focus on Messiah Yeshua, spending an entire day meditating on God's Word, worshipping Him, and fellowshiping with others is not bad!

In Exodus 31:16-17, the Lord stated that keeping the Sabbath is an eternal sign between Him and His people forever:

"So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath [*v'shamru...et'ha'Shabbat*], to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant [*l'dorotam b'rit olam*]. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:16-17, NASU).

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

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

Shabbat was made by God to be a *b'rit olam*, an "eternal" or "perpetual covenant" between Him and His people. Some have tried to argue that the context of *olam*, "for ever, always," "continuous existence," "everlasting covenant," "indefinite, unending future," "everlastingness, eternity"—when we survey the array of possible applications in BDB⁷—meant that one day the Sabbath commandment would outlive itself. But the Lord very clearly said that *Shabbat* is part of His covenant, and if *Shabbat* were done away with, it means that God is not true to His covenants. ***Eternal means eternal***, and

⁶ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 761-762.

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being an ordinance existing from Creation, the Sabbath would be a very difficult observance to entirely revoke and abolish. Certainly, while the Sabbath teaches us things *beyond* just a single day of human rest in a week on Planet Earth (cf. Colossians 2:17), one cannot hope to understand greater realities beyond this dimension, without actually first participating in a weekly *Shabbat* rest in this dimension.

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

There is one argument that many Christians give that only today’s Messianics can easily answer. It is commonly said that the *Shabbat* commandment was only given to Israel and thus does not apply to “the Church,” and that at best today’s Messianic Jews might be able to continue to observe *Shabbat* as a part of Jewish culture. But non-Jewish Believers in Yeshua are a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-13) or the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16). They “are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body” (Ephesians 3:6, NASU) along with the Jewish people. Our Heavenly Father has only one chosen assembly: the community of Israel of which *all Believers* are a part. Thus, today’s Messianic Believers widely conclude *Shabbat* is something that should be seriously considered and remembered by all Believers. It is certainly something that can bless those who take a hold of it, and who honor the Lord by resting and meeting with Him.

Is the Sabbath a burden?

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

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

“The generative categories of acts of labor [prohibited on the Sabbath] are forty less one: (1) he who sews, (2) ploughs, (3) reaps, (4) binds sheaves, (5) threshes, (6) winnows, (7) selects [fit from unfit produce or crops], (8) grinds, (9) sifts, (10) kneads, (11) bakes; (12) he who shears wool, (13) washes it, (14) beats it, (15) dyes it; (16) spins, (17) weaves, (18) makes two loops, (19) weaves two threads, (20) separates two threads; (21) ties, (22) unties, (23) sews two stitches, (24) tears in order to sew two stitches; (25) he who traps a deer, (26) slaughters it, (27) flays it, (28) salts it, (29) cures its hide, (30) scrapes it, and (31) cuts it up; (32) he who writes two letters, (33) erases two letters in order to write two letters; (34) he who builds, (35) tears down; (36) he who puts out a fire, (37) kindles a fire; (38) he who hits with a hammer; (39) he who transports an object from one domain to another—lo, these are the forty generative acts of labor less one” (m.*Shabbat* 7:2).⁸

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

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

⁸ Jacob Neusner, trans., *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), pp 187-188.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. The Sabbath is to be a holy convocation:

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

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

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

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

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

5. Fire shall not be kindled on the Sabbath:

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

6. On the Sabbath, God’s people are to remember that the Ancient Israelites were once slaves in Egypt:

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

7. God’s people are not to be concerned about their own carnal pleasures:

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

8. Conducting in business is prohibited on the Sabbath:

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

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

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studying the Bible regularly or in any kind of detail, or committing oneself to a disciplined prayer life, is “legalistic.”

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

The Messiah Observed the Sabbath

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

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

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

“And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ‘THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD’ [Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6]. And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:16-21, NASU).

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

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

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

Did Yeshua break the Sabbath?

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

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

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

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

Those who conclude from these verses that Yeshua broke the Sabbath usually quote the Pharisees who said, “Why are you doing what is not

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permitted to be done on the Sabbath days?” (Luke 6:2, Amplified Bible). The Complete Jewish Bible renders this as, “Why are you violating *Shabbat*?” While Yeshua was not picking heads of grain, His Disciples were picking heads of grain, and this reflected back on Him as their Teacher and Rabbi.

It is important to first note that there is no specific commandment in the Torah that forbade picking heads of grain on the Sabbath. The Greek *exesti* correctly means, “it is allowed, it is in one’s power, is possible” (LS),⁹ not always referring to something in the Pentateuch itself. The Mishnah included two types of work on the Sabbath which were prohibited by Rabbis in Yeshua’s day, which He could have been accused of breaking: reaping and threshing (m.*Shabbat* 7:2). Those holding a rigid interpretation of the Oral Law would have immediately accused Yeshua of doing something that was not permitted on the Sabbath. However, Luke 6:2 notably recorded, “But some of the Pharisees said” (NASU).¹⁰ The text does not indicate that this was a position held by *all* of the Pharisees. Placing this passage in its appropriate historical context is imperative.¹¹

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

“Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.’ The priest answered David and said, ‘There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women’...So the priest gave him consecrated *bread*; for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread *in its place* when it was taken away” (1 Samuel 1:3-4, 6, NASU).

In the example given from the Tanach regarding David and his party, it is important to recognize how the priest provided them with food from the Bread of the Presence, which was only permitted for the priests to eat. The Torah detailed that this bread “shall be for Aaron and his sons, and

⁹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, eds., *Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon*, abridged (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 273.

The full clause in Luke 6:2 is *ti poieite ho ouk exestin tois sabbasin*, also rendered as “Why do you do what is forbidden on the Sabbath?” (*Lattimore*).

¹⁰ Grk. *tines de tôn Pharisaiôn eipan*.

¹¹ In all likelihood, the Pharisees Yeshua encountered here were of the more conservative and stringent School of Shammai.

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they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD's offerings by fire, *his* portion forever" (Leviticus 24:9, NASU). However, because they were hungry and required sustenance, the priest gave them this bread.

Eating something to provide sustenance and thus maintain one's physical life falls into a category that the Rabbis of Judaism call *Pikku'ach Nefesh* or Regard for Human Life. It is based on Leviticus 19:16: "neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbour" (1917 JPS). The *ArtScroll Chumash* commentary asserts, "If someone's life is in danger, you must try to save him."¹² In regard to the Sabbath the principle of *Pikku'ach Nefesh* has often been taken to mean that any work that is required to save a person's life takes precedence over the ritual *Shabbat* commandments of the Torah. (This is the reason why in the modern State of Israel today, doctors, police, and the military are permitted to work on *Shabbat*.)

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

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

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

In these verses, we can most certainly see application of *Pikku'ach Nefesh*. Yeshua was saving the life of a person by healing him on the Sabbath. The reaction of some of the Jews watching this was, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet" (John 5:10, NASU). These Pharisees were dismayed that the man would carry his

¹² Nosson Scherman, ed., et. al., *The ArtScroll Chumash, Stone Edition*, 5th ed. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 661.

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pallet on *Shabbat*, because they probably believed that it was in violation of Nehemiah 13:19-20:

“It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates *so that* no load would enter on the sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem” (Nehemiah 13:19-20, NASU).

These verses indicate that it was prohibited for loads to be carried on the Sabbath, but most especially loads relating to business and commerce. These loads were being carried into Jerusalem for buying and selling on *Shabbat*, which is why Jerusalem’s gates were closed. Without a doubt, many Pharisees considered this to be a “burden” or *massa*, which means “load, burden, lifting, bearing, tribute” (*BDB*),¹³ including pallets. The Septuagint translates *massa* as *bastagma*, something specifically meaning “that which is borne, a burden” (*LS*),¹⁴ but it is not used in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures.

What the healed man specifically carried was a *krabbatos*, or “a pallet, camp bed” (*Thayer*).¹⁵ UBSHNT renders *krabbatos* as *mishkav*, or simply “bed.” While sizes of beds no doubt differed, it is doubtful that this invalid’s pallet was something large and heavy. AMG offers the following description of a *krabbatos*: “A small couch used by the poor. It denotes a simple kind of bed...[which] usually consisted of a padded quilt or thin mattress to be used according to the season or the condition of the owner with or without covering.”¹⁶

With a proper understanding of *Pikku’ach Nefesh*, Yeshua did not violate the Sabbath at all by telling the healed man to pick up his pallet that was a light bed, which likely only weighed a few pounds. Yeshua did, however, no doubt “violate” the theological opinions of the group or sect of Pharisees who watched Him. David H. Stern observes in his *Jewish New*

¹³ *BDB*, 672.

¹⁴ *LS*, 148.

¹⁵ Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 358.

¹⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 883.

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Testament Commentary, “they could not see that the formerly crippled man’s ability to carry his mat attested to God’s glory.”¹⁷

The arguments from those who do not want to keep *Shabbat* will go on and on. Many people will try to present cases that seemingly prove that Messiah Yeshua—the sinless Lamb of God and who is of one accord with His Father (cf. John 10:30)—violated the Sabbath and broke His own commandments. Sadly, these arguments are often not placed within the framework of Second Temple Judaism, and often relate to Christians’ ignorance of the historical occurrence of Biblical events.¹⁸

Why do Christians assemble on Sunday?

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

If you ask many contemporary evangelical people these questions, they are most likely to tell you that it is because Yeshua was resurrected from the dead on Sunday morning, and they go to church on Sunday to remember this.¹⁹ While this was the pattern of many in the Second and Third Century Church, it was not the practice of the Jewish Apostles. The common pattern of a figure like the Apostle Paul in the Book of Acts was to always go to the local synagogue *first*, on *Shabbat*, to share the good news or gospel with those assembled (cf. Acts 17:1). However, the historical transition from *Shabbat* to Sunday Church did take place as the

¹⁷ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1995), 168.

¹⁸ D.J. Moo, “Law,” in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), pp 454-455, who does not have a particularly high view of the Mosaic Torah for God’s people today, does admit how Yeshua did not break the Sabbath:

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

¹⁹ While it is difficult to deny how the empty tomb was found on Sunday morning (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), the earthquake that signaled Yeshua’s resurrection (Matthew 28:2) occurred as the Marys approached the tomb *Opse de sabbatōn* or “late on the sabbath day” (Matthew 28:1, American Standard Version). Being delayed by the earthquake, they returned in the morning to find the tomb of Yeshua vacated.

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emerging Church distanced itself from its Jewish Roots, and the Jewish Synagogue ejected and ex-communicated many of the Messianic Believers.

Did the early Believers meet on Sunday?

Although today’s Messianic people are of the strong conviction that the New Testament is clear that the Messiah upheld the Sabbath, there are those who do tell us that His early followers did not keep *Shabbat* and instead replaced it by assembling on the first day. This is usually based on verses such as Acts 20:7, “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread” (NIV). In 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul wrote, “On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come” (NASU).

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

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

“*Motza’ei Shabbat* in Hebrew means ‘departure of the Sabbath’ and refers to Saturday night....It would be natural for Jewish believers who had rested on *Shabbat* with the rest of the Jewish community to assemble afterwards to celebrate their common faith in Yeshua the Messiah....A Saturday night meeting would continue the God-oriented spirit of *Shabbat*, rather than require the believers to shift their concern from workaday matters, as would be the case [if this were] Sunday night.”²⁰

²⁰ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 297-298.

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

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

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

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

Must it be “repeated” in the New Testament?

In spite of some of the evidence seen that Messiah Yeshua did not break *Shabbat*, there will still be those who do not keep the seventh-day Sabbath. Many may deliberately dishonor the Sabbath, claiming that because there is no specific “command” or “direction” in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) to observe it, that they should not and that they do not have to. Yet, there is no recorded instance in the Apostolic Scriptures of the Apostles *not* keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, or

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instructing the Believers—especially the Jewish Believers—*not* to keep it. In fact, the Book of Acts indicates that the Apostle Paul continued to observe the Sabbath following his coming to Messiah faith (Acts 13:14, 42, 44; 16:13; 18:4). Furthermore, we also note that Acts 15:21 states, “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (NASU), as the non-Jewish Believers were certainly going to be connected to a faith community that not only recognized the One God of Israel, but was also was remembering *Shabbat*.

The logic that “it’s not in the New Testament” could be used to deny other important Biblical practices as well. There is no explicit command in the Apostolic Scriptures that forbids sexual relations with animals, for example (Leviticus 18:23). But this is a sin which conservative evangelicals eschew. This is a specific instruction given in the Torah, and we must follow it as it is for our own good (Deuteronomy 10:13).

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

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

Many will say, though, that by the Second and Third Centuries Christians were observing Sunday and not the Sabbath. These people will use quotations from Church history to prove that it was their custom to observe Sunday, and so should we today. Yet, there is no Biblical basis for this change. Should we look to the Church Fathers of the Second and Third Centuries, as our main source of instruction and practice—or to Yeshua the Messiah and the Apostles themselves, from the First Century? Regardless of what the Church Fathers taught, we must seek our answers from the

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Scriptures and the actual writings of the Apostles first—because those who came later might have been wrong on this issue, among others.

Notably, the Apostle Paul wrote that “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work” (2 Thessalonians 2:7, NIV). Indeed, if this lawlessness or denial of God’s Torah was at work at the time when he wrote this in the mid-First Century, then is it possible that by the end of the First Century *Shabbat* was not being kept by many Believers? By the Second to Third Centuries, Church writings indeed prove that Sunday took *Shabbat*’s place, by-and-large.²¹ But simply because these Church writings say that most Christian people in the Second and Third Centuries did not keep the seventh-day Sabbath, does not make it right. Today’s Messianic Believers are widely convicted that our job is to return to the faith of the original First Century Believers in Messiah Yeshua who kept *Shabbat*. We remember the Sabbath not just as an institution from Creation, but because Yeshua and His Apostles remembered it.

Is Sunday truly a “Sabbath”?

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

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

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

²¹ For a compilation of quotes among Second-Third Century C.E. Church leaders regarding the Sabbath, consult “Sabbath,” in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 571-572; “Lord’s Day,” in *Ibid.*, pp 405-407.

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

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

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

But some will say that they observe the Sabbath. They will say that they go to church on Sunday. But Sunday is not the seventh day, and these Christians’ apparent “sabbath” is usually between *only one and two hours long*. After their church services, many Christians go out to eat or go shopping, not taking a day of complete and total rest. Their “substitute sabbath” is really no Sabbath at all, and many may be found wanting by the Lord of the Sabbath.²²

Many contemporary Christian people will say that they “rest in Christ.” After all, as Hebrews 4:9-10 says, “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His” (NASU). But is “Sabbath rest” what the text fully conveys? The Sabbath is certainly

²² Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5.

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about rest, but the Greek *sabbatismos* means “*sabbath rest, sabbath observance*” (BDAG).²³ As the Complete Jewish Bible renders Hebrews 4:9: “So there remains a *Shabbat*-keeping for God’s people.” In defense of this, Stern states in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*,

“Greek *sabbatismos*, [is] used only here in the New Testament. In the Septuagint, the related Greek word ‘*sabbatizein*’ [sic]²⁴ was coined to translate the Hebrew verb *shabat* when it means ‘to observe *Shabbat*.’ The usual translation, ‘There remains a Sabbath rest,’ minimizes the observance aspect and makes the role of God’s people entirely passive.”²⁵

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

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

Is Sunday “the Lord’s Day”?

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

The Apostle John recorded in Revelation 1:10 that “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like *the sound* of a trumpet” (NASU). Many prophecy commentators, both pre- and post-tribulational, believe that this is speaking of Sunday or the first day of the week. George Eldon Ladd, in his commentary on Revelation, stated that “It is...likely that [what] we see here [is] the emerging language referring to

²³ BDAG, 909.

²⁴ Grk. LXX: *esabbatisen*, aorist active third person singular, used Exodus 16:30; *sabbatizein*, present active infinitive, is used in 2 Maccabees 6:6.

²⁵ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 673.

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the Lord’s day as the Christians’ distinctive day of religious devotion...The emergence of Sunday observance in place of the Jewish Sabbath was a gradual historical process, and here we have the beginning of that process.”²⁶ Supposedly, when the Apostle John was shown his vision of the end-times, he was shown it on Sunday.

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

Notably, Revelation 1:10 in the Complete Jewish Bible is rendered with, “I came to be, in the Spirit, on **the Day of the Lord**; and I heard behind me a loud voice, like a trumpet.” Justifying this, Stern states in his *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, “Yochanan [John] is reporting the unique experience of having seen God’s final Judgment.”²⁷

Some say that “the Lord’s Day” of Revelation 1:10 cannot be “the Day of the Lord,” because of the unique Greek used in this passage. In the Septuagint, the “Day of the LORD” representative of *Yom ADONAI (YHWH)*, is usually represented as *hēmera (tou) Kuriou*. But what appears in Revelation 1:10 is *tē Kuriakē hēmera*, literally “the Lord’s Day.” Due to this odd Greek, it is often said that “the Lord’s Day” cannot be the Day of the LORD.²⁸

The Greek adjective *kuriakos*, translated as “Lord’s,” “**pert. to belonging to the Lord, the Lord’s**” (BDAG).²⁹ The only other place *kuriakos* is used in the Apostolic Scriptures is in 1 Corinthians 11:20: “Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper [*Kuriakon deipnon*]” (NASU).

²⁶ George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 31.

²⁷ Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 791.

²⁸ While advocating that Sunday Church is in view in Revelation 1:10, J.C. Laansma, “Lord’s Day,” in Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 682 does still acknowledge, though, “There are many ways of referring to the Day of the Lord, and Revelation 1:10 may be one more.”

²⁹ BDAG, 576.

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While I think that “the Lord’s Day” is most likely speaking of the Day of the LORD, there is a second alternative to Sunday Church that we can consider. The Book of Revelation is “A revelation [or revealing] of Yeshua the Messiah” (Revelation 1:1, NASU), and it is a time period which pertains to the Lord and to His work on behalf of His people (cf. Revelation 6:10). As Revelation speaks of the end-times, it is perhaps fitting to understand “the Lord’s Day” as a time which has special meaning for the Messiah and His followers. It could be speaking of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon God’s people and Yeshua revealing Himself to the world as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords in a manner never experienced previously before (cf. Matthew 24:21).

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

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

Christians Have Missed Out on a Blessing

The change from the Sabbath to Sunday does not have a firm foundation when one sticks to Scripture. If God’s people wish to follow Yeshua’s and the Apostles’ example, then they will seriously consider keeping the Sabbath and concentrating on Him and His completed work for an entire day. It might continue to be our sad observation, though, that many Christians will continue to miss out on the blessings of *Shabbat*, living lives where they are physically burned out and desiring rest, but not knowing where to find it.

Is Sunday “the Lord’s Day”?

Our more frequent, even **sadder observation**, comes from how many in the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement are seen to berate and harass far too many of our evangelical brothers and sisters—saying that they go to church on “SUN-day” and are not true Believers, and are in actuality worshipping the sun god rather than the Holy One of Israel. This is partially based in the thought that Sunday was the preferred day of worship in the Roman Empire and was the venerable day of the Sun. In a book I was assigned in at Asbury Theological Seminary for Church History (Summer 2005), Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist remark in their *History of the World Christian Movement*, that when Constantine made Christianity a legal religion within the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century C.E., he

“spoke of being a servant of God. Yet publicly he continued to mix Christian piety with devotion to the high solar deity, the Invincible Sun, which had become popular with the emperors of the previous century. When he declared in 321 that Sunday be set apart as a special day of worship, it is not clear whether it was the Invincible Sun or Jesus Christ whom he intended to honor.”³⁰

Many people are unaware of history, and criticizing today’s Christians of worshipping the sun god is **completely unfounded to those in ignorance**—especially as we should be worshipping and serving God *every day*. It is certainly not wrong to worship our Creator on Sunday, even though Sunday is not the Biblical Sabbath. It is not becoming of the example of Yeshua to treat Christians who go to church on Sunday and do not keep *Shabbat* as total pagans, especially since those usually criticizing surely did not consider *themselves* as pagans when they went to church on Sunday. Criticizing without fairness or mercy will cause more problems. We need to be part of the solution, demonstrating the blessings of *Shabbat* to our evangelical brothers and sisters.

I do not believe that Christians who go to church on Sunday are worshipping another God or a different Savior. Only God Himself can determine the true heart intent of Christians who are observing Sunday, and likewise that of any Hebrew Roots or Messianic person who harshly criticizes them. However, keeping the Sabbath and dedicating an entire day to God, as opposed to a few hours on Sunday, has its added blessings as it is the day that He set-apart and sanctified. It is the time when God’s people can rest from all their labors, rejuvenate themselves, fellowship

³⁰ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 162.

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with other Believers, study the Word, and look forward to the greater rest to come in the eschaton or age to come.

But just as some vehemently criticize those who do not keep the Sabbath, there are certainly those Christian people who do the same in reverse. Various Christians have definitely told today's Messianics, that by not going to church on Sunday, we are denying the resurrection of Yeshua whose empty tomb was found on this day. Do Messianic people who do not attend church on Sunday, deny the resurrection of the Messiah? Hardly. On the contrary, if anyone wants to truly want to live like Yeshua, then His followers should seriously consider honoring the Sabbath as He did—and it will be a blessing for them!

There are millions of true Believers in the Lord, who are presently not convicted that they should honor the Sabbath. Many of these people are still maturing in their walk. *But they do not speak against those who keep the seventh-day Sabbath.* I would hope that if you belong to this category, and you do not totally understand the Sabbath, that you will at least give Messianic people like us the freedom to follow Yeshua's example. At the very least, may your position be that of the late Walter Martin, who stated the following in his famed apologetic work *The Kingdom of the Cults*:

"I believe Seventh-Day Adventists, Seventh-day Baptists and Sabbatarians of other religious groups have the right to worship on the seventh day in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free. It is wrong and un-Christian to discriminate against Sabbatarians merely because they 'esteem' the Sabbath above the first day of the week, or Lord's Day. I suggest it is no more legalistic for them to observe the seventh day out of conviction than it is for the Christian Church to observe the first day. It is a matter of liberty and conscience."³¹

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

Messianic people who want to encourage positive change among all Believers, and impact evangelicals who are intrigued by the Jewish Roots

³¹ Walter R. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985), 470.

Is Sunday “the Lord’s Day”?

of their faith, must do the same to a certain degree. We cannot discriminate against those who do not keep the Sabbath—yet we can show them the blessings and the rest they have missed out on by not fully considering the life of the Messiah who kept *Shabbat*. As we follow the Sabbath-keeping of our Lord, we must also follow His example and love those who do not presently keep *Shabbat*. We need to emulate Messiah Yeshua who observed the seventh-day Sabbath, and so by emulating Him hopefully others will emulate us. May they see the blessings of *Shabbat* present in our lives, and want them as well!

We believe that when you devote an entire day to God and keep *Shabbat*, many do find that they will not want to go back to the limitations of Sunday Church. *You will be experiencing more of God, and not less!* We believe that you will find that by keeping the Sabbath with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, that the rewards of doing things the way He intended will truly be great—and that you will want to tell others about it. It will be a way to live out Yeshua’s word, “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16, NASU). And, today’s Messianic Believers, who keep the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, will certainly be in a much better place to testify to Jewish people who are inquiring of Israel’s Messiah, than those who think that Israel’s Messiah abolished it.

SUGGESTED STUDY QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 19

1. Have you ever been unfairly criticized as a Messianic person for keeping the Sabbath? If so, describe your experience.
2. What is the day that God has set-apart (Genesis 2:2-3)?
3. How is the Sabbath to be an eternal sign and covenant between God and His people?

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4. Give the scope of Biblical prohibitions regarding what one cannot do on the Sabbath. Why do you think there are people who oppose honoring it? Do you think *Shabbat* is truly a “burden”?

5. How important is it to realize that the Messiah kept *Shabbat*?

6. What are some of the misconceptions that people often have relating to the Sabbath, coming to the conclusion that Yeshua the Messiah actually violated it?

7. Why do most Christians assemble on Sunday?

8. With an understanding of what the “first of the week” is and when a day Biblically begins (Genesis 1:5b), what do you think the First Century Believers were doing by meeting on the “first of the week”?

9. Do you believe that the commandment to keep the Sabbath must be specifically “repeated” in the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) to be followed by God’s people today?

10. Do you think that Christian people today who keep Sunday are truly having “a Sabbath rest”?

11. What do you think the correct context of *tē Kuriakē hēmera* is, in Revelation 1:10?

12. Do you think Christians have missed out on a blessing by not keeping *Shabbat*? Do you believe you are being spiritually blessed by keeping *Shabbat*?