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How Did We Lose the Sabbath? 2015

J.K. McKee

When many of us think about some of the most significant theological debates of the past three or five decades, we are probably immediately drawn into thinking about conservatives and liberals sparring over the reliability of the Holy Scriptures, creationists and evolutionists fighting about the origins of humankind, Scripturalists and cultists warring over the Divinity of Yeshua, and most recently the controversy that has been rising up over homosexuality and gay marriage.¹ How many of us are consciously aware that there has been a debate ensuing among evangelical Christians, and various others, for over three decades surrounding **the Sabbath**? Books written in favor of continuance of the seventh-day Sabbath have been written, along with cross-examinations and refutations.²

Certainly, the controversy of the seventh-day Sabbath, and the widespread Christian observance of Sunday Church, might seem a bit mundane to various people. At the same time, if the widespread practice of Sunday Church is in error to some degree—than even with many other evangelical Christian doctrines widely correct—a significant opportunity for physical rest and spiritual refreshment for God’s people has been too often lost, or even outright forfeited. Further to be realized is how a dismissal of the seventh-day Sabbath, by many in the emerging Christian Church of the Second and Third Centuries, would be shown to be the result of an unwarranted anti-Semitism and purposeful distance from the Jewish Synagogue and Hebraic origins of Messiah faith.

It is frequently heard from people throughout much of today’s Messianic movement, and most especially the more independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, that the Sabbath was changed by the Emperor Constantine, so that he could continue some form of sun/solar worship via the guise of Christianity and syncretism. There is little doubting

¹ For a review of all of these issues, at least in part, consult *Confronting Critical Issues: An Analysis of Subjects that Affects the Growth and Stability of the Emerging Messianic Movement* by J.K. McKee.

² Two books that have widely framed the debate are Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977), defending the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath from a Seventh-Day Adventist perspective, and D.A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999 [1982 actual publication]), cross-examining Bacchiocchi and defending Sunday as “the Lord’s Day” from a broadly evangelical viewpoint.

A more recent analysis from a Seventh-Day Adventist standpoint is Sigve K. Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009). More general is Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011).

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the fact that the Emperor Constantine, in the Fourth Century, did enact various laws by which the first day of the week was legislated as an important time for a newly legal Christian religion. However, when one delves more into the debate over the continued validity of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), you quickly have to evaluate not just various religious-political motivations of the period of Constantine and soon thereafter—you have to also deal with theological motivations of the late First and early Second Centuries, and various passages of the Apostolic Scriptures or New Testament (i.e., Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).³ To just say that “Constantine changed it” would be an overly-simplistic view. In fact, the 2011 volume *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, reflects that there are, and have been, multiple perspectives present on the Sabbath issue throughout a wide scope of Christian history, including:

1. the continuity of the seventh-day Sabbath
2. Sunday as the new Christian Sabbath
3. the seventh-day Sabbath as a temporary prescription for Ancient Israel
4. Sabbath representative of a spiritual rest in the Messiah for Believers

The latter two views listed would argue for a total abolition of the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12), whereas the first two views would strongly agree with the concept of a Sabbath-principle, although they disagree on the day of the week to observe it. That the issue of the seventh-day Sabbath, and its continuance for God’s people, has been a debate present in various degrees, does not go unnoticed by various theological resources. A general Bible dictionary like *EDB* closes its entry on the Sabbath with the following observations,

“The Scriptures have left some questions concerning the sabbath unanswered. Not only are some particulars of sabbath regulations unclear, but the fundamental question of whether or not the sabbath was completely fulfilled by Christ’s first coming has plagued Christianity and is still a debated topic. The choice of the day also presents a point of disagreement, with some groups continuing to adhere to the Jewish practice of a Saturday sabbath.”⁴

Today’s Messianic movement—even with its diversity, and with a wide degree of applications over *Shabbat* observance—widely does believe that the seventh-day Sabbath remains an instruction to be observed in perpetuity. It is widely recognized that some changes were instituted by Christians of the Second Century for sure, with many abandoning the seventh-day Sabbath, for some kind of activity on Sunday. It is also widely recognized that the Emperor Constantine, and later Church councils, made observance of Sunday as a religious day, a legal requirement, with the seventh-day Sabbath as something to be dismissed. Some gaps do have to be filled, though, in terms of specific Christian voices deriding the seventh-day Sabbath.

One will get various admissions of anti-Semitism, and certainly anti-Sabbatarianism, on the part of many Second-Fourth Century Church leaders, by today’s contemporary

³ Much of the debate, that has been witnessed over the validity of the seventh-day Sabbath, has actually more to do about the validity of the Torah or Law of Moses for Messiah followers, than the Sabbath issue itself. This has been thoroughly addressed in *The New Testament Validates Torah* by J.K. McKee, as well as throughout the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

⁴ Ann Coble, “Sabbath,” in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1146.

Christian theologians and historians. Today's Messianic community has to fairly sort through some of this history, recognizing the loss of the seventh-day Sabbath as a great error which needs to be corrected for sure—but corrected with a proper scope of the facts, tempered by a recognition of how, in the words of Skip MacCarty,

"The Sabbath has helped God seem more real to us and nurtured our relationship with Him....[we should] not take the position that all Christians who presently worship on a different day do not love Jesus or have the assurance of salvation."⁵

Indeed, today's Messianic movement is being strategically placed to be a representation of what is coming in the Messianic era, when worldwide Sabbath observance is going to be unambiguously universal for all humanity, enforced from Zion by the Messiah Himself (Isaiah 66:23). As we examine some of the mistakes made in past history, we have to also recognize that we cannot do anything to change the past—but we can do everything to accelerate the future. We are a unique and special faith community, taking the strengths of Judaism and Christianity, and moving forward with them. A dismissal of the seventh-day Sabbath on the part of many throughout Christian history, is being rectified in our day by the Messianic community for sure—as we are consciously recapturing the faith practices of the early Believers in Israel's Messiah.

Sabbath Among the First Century Believers

When reviewing a broad spectrum of theological resources today, there is frequent uniformity of recognition in how Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) and His Disciples all observed the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*. There is disagreement as to how much or how little Yeshua observed various traditional and customary applications of "work" imposed by the Pharisaical leaders, but few would say that Yeshua's presumed violations of the Sabbath were outright acts of disobedience of Mosaic commandments. Some might say that Yeshua's violation of some of the strict interpretations of Sabbath instruction was with the intention that the Sabbath be abrogated subsequent to His resurrection. More will be prone to say that Yeshua followed a more liberal interpretation of the permissive applications of Sabbath instructions, whereby people could be healed of their infirmities, and care could indeed be expelled, to facilitate human wholeness. Willard M. Swartley offers the following summary from the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*:

"Jesus and his disciples observed the Sabbath (Mark 1:21; Luke 4:16; 23:56b), although Jesus tangled with the Pharisees over Sabbath laws...Jesus healed on the Sabbath, allowing physical exertion on that day: taking up one's mat and walking (John 5:2-12), plucking grain (Mark 2:23-28), and washing in a pool (John 9:1-12). Jesus' Sabbath actions spiraled into mortal conflict with the religious leaders.

"Jesus explains his Sabbath practices as life-affirming: 'The sabbath was made for humankind; and not humankind for the sabbath,' and therefore 'the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath' (Mark 2:27-28). In speech and action Jesus fulfills the Sabbath, bringing rest to the weary (Matt. 11:28-29) with human liberation."⁶

⁵ Skip MacCarty, "The Seventh-Day Sabbath," in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, 9.

⁶ Willard M. Swartley, "Sabbath," in Joel B. Green, ed. et. al., *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 695.

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The narrative of Luke 4:16 details, "as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath," indicating how "As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place" (The Message). Yeshua the Messiah not only kept the seventh-day Sabbath, but going to synagogue on the Sabbath was something that He was accustomed to doing.

Following the Messiah's ascension into Heaven, the record of the Book of Acts indicates that for certain, as the good news spread into the Mediterranean basin, figures like the Apostle Paul would go to Diaspora Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath, and use the Sabbath as an opportunity to testify to his fellow Jews, as well as Greek and Roman God-fearers. Most of the assemblies, to which Paul would write letters, got their start because of some kind of gospel declaration by Paul at a Diaspora synagogue on *Shabbat*. In the case of Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), the Sabbath fellowship that met outside the city was seemingly transformed into a community of Messiah followers. In the case of Corinth (Acts 18:1-18), though, the Messiah followers were ejected from the synagogue, yet they met at a home right next to the synagogue. From the narrative of the Book of Acts, aside from a departure fellowship gathering for Paul at Troas "on the first of the week"⁷ (Acts 20:7, PME), there is no quantitative abandonment of the Sabbath.

The Jewish Believers for certain continued to observe *Shabbat*, often in connection with the local Jewish community. The non-Jewish Believers, being participants in Tanach prophecy as anticipated by James the Just (Acts 15:15), when following the Apostolic decree (Acts 15:19-21, 29), would find themselves cut off from their old, pagan spheres of religious and social influence—and find their new sphere of religious and social influence to be one where Moses' Teaching was being taught every Sabbath (Acts 15:21). *ABD* further addresses how within the Book of Acts,

"Aside from two casual references to the sabbath (Acts 1:12; 15:21), the sabbath is mentioned in connection with the establishment of churches in Pisidian Antioch (13:13-52), Philippi (16:11-15), Thessalonica (17:1-9), and Corinth (18:1-4). The Western text includes Ephesus (18:19). Paul, as Jesus before him, went to the synagogue on sabbath 'as his custom was' (Acts 17:2; cf. 24:14; 28:17). There is silence on the subject of sabbath abolition at the Jerusalem Conference (15:1-29). There is also no evidence for the abrogation of the sabbath after the Jerusalem Council in the apostolic age or by apostolic authority in the early church...Early Jewish and non-Jewish Christians continued to worship on the seventh day as far as the evidence of the book of Acts is concerned.

"The single reference to 'the first day of the week' in Acts 20:7-12, when Christian believers broke bread in a farewell meeting at the imminent departure of Paul is debated in its meaning. Some scholars suggest that Roman reckoning is used so that 'the first day of the week' means Sunday night...and other scholars suggest that Jewish reckoning is used and in that case it means Saturday night...This passage hardly supports Sunday-keeping on the part of the apostolic church, since this was an occasional farewell meeting lasting till after midnight (v 7) and the breaking of bread is hardly the Lord's Supper."⁸

⁷ Grk. *En de tē mia tōn sabbatōn* (Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων); debates as to "on the first of the week" really represent are seen in the NEB/REB extrapolation "On the Saturday night" (also Phillips New Testament with, "On the Saturday"); the CJB having "On *Motza'ei-Shabbat*"; The Message has in contrast, "We met on Sunday to worship."

⁸ Gerhard F. Hasel, "Sabbath," in *ABD*, 5:855.

Judaism was a legal and protected religion in the Roman Empire, and the Messiah followers by virtue of association with the Jewish Synagogue, were a legally protected Jewish sect. Observance of the weekly Sabbath was a significant hallmark of Jewish practice (Josephus *Life* 279; t.*Shabbat* 1:13), known to the Romans for sure (Suetonius *Tiberius* 32.2; Tacitus *Histories* 5.4). While First Century Jewish Believers in Yeshua, aside from some degree of ostracism that they may have experienced for their Messiah faith, would have continued to observe *Shabbat* as they had widely known it—the issue of Sabbath observance for the non-Jewish Greek and Roman Believers is a little more complicated.

Many of the first non-Jewish Believers to recognize Israel's Messiah were taken from among the God-fearers, who are often regarded as Greeks and Romans who had recognized Israel's God, and had taken on various levels of Torah observance, notably including the seventh-day Sabbath and appointed times. They often, for various reasons, stopped short of being circumcised as full-fledged proselytes, such as Cornelius being a Roman centurion (Acts 10:2) and circumcision possibly being an issue of treason. Non-Jewish Believers who were God-fearers, with many integrated within the Jewish community already, would have continued to observe the Sabbath. Non-Jewish Believers who had been idolaters, upon recognizing Israel's Messiah, are not witnessed in the Apostolic Scriptures to have had the Sabbath mandated upon them, which leads interpreters to various conclusions.

Many Christian readers of the Pauline letters think that the Apostle abrogated or abolished the seventh-day Sabbath for all Believers, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, per some traditional interpretations of: Romans 14:5-6; Galatians 4:9-10; and Colossians 2:16-17.⁹ Some, such as this writer, are not convinced that these passages abolish the seventh-day Sabbath, and have some more particularized circumstances to be considered for their original audiences, such as the Romans 14 "days" actually being optional days of fasting, and the Galatian and Colossian situations involving an influence of paganism upon Biblical practice. Still, even if these passages are not interpreted as relating to an abrogation of *Shabbat*, what were the non-Jewish Believers to do? If they recognized Israel's God and Messiah, they would be attached to a Jewish community that rested on the seventh-day. The salvation of the non-Jewish Believers was a part of the fulfillment of Tanach prophecy, which would involve the eventual, full emergence of the Messianic Age when Sabbath observance is to be worldwide (Isaiah 66:23).

One perspective, as argued by Craig S. Keener in his commentary on Romans, is that "Paul was simply pragmatic: unless they belonged to the ethnic enclave of Israel, Gentile slaves and workers normally could not observe the Sabbath fully, and Paul did not require this ideal of those who could not observe it."¹⁰ More poignantly, it should be thought that while Sabbath observance in the Torah was an egalitarian statute, for "in it you shall not

⁹ Consult the article "Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?", appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* by J.K. McKee.

Lengthy analyses of Romans 14; Galatians 4:9-11; and Colossians 2:16-23 are available in the **Sabbath and Rest in the Apostolic Scriptures** section of this publication.

¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *New Covenant Commentary Series: Romans* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), pp 164-165.

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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), rather than imposing this on people in a manner akin to ordering the non-Jews to observe the Torah for salvation (Acts 15:1, 5)—James the Just recognized how the expectations of Tanach prophecy involving the nations were to occur naturally (cf. Acts 15:15). The interjection that many of the non-Jewish Believers—who undoubtedly came from the lower and slave classes (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26)—would have found it readily difficult to observe the Sabbath, given their widespread social and economic status, cannot be ignored. For many, choosing to identify with Israel’s God—rather than the gods of one’s employer, patron, or owner—would have proven difficult enough.

Those who were rich and wealthy, although few in number, could take off a Sabbath. But, to what degree would those who were poor or slaves be able to do so? If they all of a sudden started taking the seventh-day off, how many would find themselves homeless and destitute, beaten, or starved? Many were able to keep the Sabbath, and then others kept it as much as their circumstances permitted them.

Avoiding “things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication” (Acts 15:29) was the only prescription to the new, non-Jewish Believers to be regarded as a “burden” (Acts 15:28). Rather than forcing people to do things, the Apostolic intention was much more focused on the work of the Holy Spirit in following God’s Torah (cf. Romans 8:4)—which is true of both non-Jewish *and* Jewish Believers alike. Israel’s Messiah took the penalties of Sabbath observance upon Himself at the tree (cf. Colossians 2:14); the promised universal Sabbath would arrive as the future world to come steadily made an influence on the present evil world. When given the choice of forcing or obligating people to do things, or letting God’s plan naturally take shape at the direction and guidance of His Spirit—the latter is the only optimal choice.

Dismissal of the Seventh-Day Sabbath in Emerging Christianity

Rhetoric that is commonly witnessed throughout the independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement, but has also been popularized through many, but not all, members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, has been the supposition that the Roman Emperor Constantine changed the Sabbath to Sunday, in the Fourth Century C.E., as a means for him to continue with his solar/sun worship. For many Protestant Christians, the issue of Christian activities on Sunday does not so much concern the activities of Constantine in the Fourth Century C.E., as much as it concerns the activities of Christians in the late First and early Second Centuries C.E., with the emergence of commemorating “the Lord’s Day” on the first day of the week or Sunday. In the *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, reflecting a highly conservative Presbyterian perspective, it is asserted,

“We frequently hear the Seventh Day Adventist charge that Constantine changed the day for sabbath observance from Saturday to Sunday. This is untrue. The early church very clearly observed the first day of the week as its day for public worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). Just why Christians should have met on the first day of the week has never

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been satisfactorily answered by upholders of the seventh-day sabbath. Their practice is a mystery to us unless we recognize that it had apostolic sanction.”¹¹

The view of many, based on some traditional approaches to various New Testament passages indicating some kind of assemblage on the first day, is that a transition toward Sunday or “the Lord’s Day” is one that occurred organically in the First Century *ekklēsia*, and then by the Second Century was the major practice of the emerging Christian Church, as witnessed in the works of Second to Third Century Christian leaders. This is the view reflected in a variety of easily accessible Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias. *NIDB* draws the conclusion,

“The early Christians, most of whom were Jews, kept the seventh day as a Sabbath, but since the resurrection of their Lord was the most blessed day in their lives, they began very early to meet for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 2:1) and designated it as the Lord’s Day. Paul directed the Corinthian Christians to bring their weekly offering to the charities of the church on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16:1-2). As the split between Jews and Christians widened, the Christians came gradually to meet for worship only on the Lord’s Day and gave up the observance of the seventh day.”¹²

Noting traditional approaches to passages such as Colossians 2:16; Romans 14:5; Galatians 4:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; and Revelation 1:10, *ISBE* more cautiously directs how replacement of the seventh-day Sabbath with Sunday or “Lord’s Day” assemblages were not definite until the Second Century C.E.:

“Even the combined testimony of these texts...does not demonstrate conclusively that sabbath observance had been widely replaced by observance of the Lord’s Day by the end of the 1st century...They also suggest the probability that Sunday observance has its roots in the NT, although conclusive evidence for widespread Sunday observance is not found until the 2nd century.”¹³

Today’s Messianic community will and does have some alternative approaches to “first of the week” (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2) likely being informal gatherings of Believers as *Shabbat* was closing on Saturday evening, and *τῆς κυριακῆς ἡμέρας* associated more with “the Day of the Lord” (Revelation 1:10, CJB/TLV)¹⁴ per the end-time themes of the Book of Revelation. Still, it is an historical fact that by the Second Century, Sunday assemblages designated as “the Lord’s Day” were occurring in the emerging Christian Church. Some see the roots of this as being authorized by the Apostles. Others would see the roots of this as being a misinterpretation of the writings of the Apostles, with the “first of the week” being approached from a reckoning of Roman time and not a reckoning of Jewish time. Along with this would be a misevaluation of the time when Yeshua was actually resurrected from the dead, with *Opse de sabbatōn* (Ὁψὲ δὲ

¹¹ “Sabbath,” in Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 392.

¹² Steven Barabas, “Sabbath,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 877.

¹³ J.C. McCann, “Sabbath,” in Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:252

Lengthy analyses of Colossians 2:16-23; Romans 14; Galatians 4:9-11; Acts 20:7-12; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; and Revelation 1:10 are available in the **Sabbath and Rest in the Apostolic Scriptures** section of this publication.

¹⁴ “the day of the Everpresent Lord” (The Messianic Writings).

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σαββάτων) in Matthew 28:1 being better understood as “Now late on the sabbath day” (American Standard Version), the twilight of Saturday, with the empty tomb of the Messiah subsequently found on Sunday morning.¹⁵ Most of all, when consulting some early Christian writings about Sunday as “the Lord’s Day” having apparently superseded the seventh-day Sabbath, Messianic people cannot dismiss how a tenor of either covert or overt anti-Semitism is blatantly present.

It is to be recognized how a major factor of transition, from a seventh-day Sabbath to a first day “Lord’s Day” assemblage, took place by the Second Century C.E. so that the emerging Christian Church could establish an identity independent of the Jewish Synagogue. **This was the first stage of loss for the seventh-day Sabbath.** The *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* describes, “Their desire for self-identification, the tradition of Jesus’ Sunday morning resurrection, and the increasingly gentile church’s disinterest in the Jewish Sabbath ritual led Christians eventually to designate Sunday as their day of worship.”¹⁶ *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* concurs that this took place “to commemorate the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection and to distinguish its practices from that of the synagogue.”¹⁷ While it is historically undeniable that various pockets of Christians were keeping Sunday as “the Lord’s Day” by the early Second Century—whether such a change was, in fact, legitimate by the second, and certainly third generation, Apostolic successors should and has been challenged. In the estimation of MacCarty,

“This is not to deny that Jesus’ resurrection was a cataclysmic event in the history of salvation and that some form of at least annual celebration in remembrance of it would be natural for Christ’s followers, even though Jesus did not institute it...But to establish weekly worship on the first day of the week, even for such worthy motives as celebrating the resurrection, to the abandonment of observing the seventh-day Sabbath commanded in Exod 20:8-11, is...unscriptural both in doctrine and practice.”¹⁸

Even though MacCarty is a Seventh-Day Adventist, his conclusions would tend to be welcomed by Messianic people. In his *Jewish New Testament Commentary* remarks on Revelation 1:10, supportive of *tē Kuriakē hēmera* being “the Day of the Lord,” David H. Stern asserts, “Ignatius, who claimed to be a disciple of the emissary Yochanan [John], wrote letters only two decades or so after Revelation was written, in which he uses ‘*kuriakē*’ to mean Sunday—as does modern Greek. This only shows how quickly the Jewish roots of the New Testament were forgotten or ignored.”¹⁹

Early Christian literature from the late First to Second Centuries is fairly deduced to be broad and diverse, but is also a proverbial “mixed bag,” if you will. The early Christian writings give ample attestation to how many of these Believers were under intense persecution from the Roman authorities, and were facing the pressure of dangerous

¹⁵ For a further examination, consult the FAQ, “Resurrection, Sunday” (reproduced in this publication’s section on “FAQs on the Sabbath”).

¹⁶ “Sabbath,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 538.

¹⁷ Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, NRSV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 615.

¹⁸ MacCarty, “The Seventh-Day Sabbath,” in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, 44.

¹⁹ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 791.

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heresies such as Gnosticism. What is also witnessed, however, is a wide degree of misunderstanding, if not outright rejection, of much of Judaism and Torah practice. Far from various Christian leaders of the late First, and certainly into the Second Century, *changing* the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday—the seventh-day Sabbath was *dismissed*, the concept of rest was *widely allegorized or spiritualized* to be a condition that Believers in Christ experience, and a new “*Lord’s Day*” of Sunday was believed to be ideal for corporate worship.²⁰

A selection of quotations from early Christian materials from the late First to late Second Century will frequently, but not always, include various negative remarks about Judaism and the Jewish people:

“On the Lord’s own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure” (*Didache* 14:1; late First-early Second Century C.E.).²¹

“If, then, those who had lived according to ancient practices came to the newness of hope, no longer keeping the sabbath but living in accordance with the Lord’s day, on which our life also arose through him and his death (which some deny), the mystery through which we came to believe, and because of which we patiently endure, in order that we may be found to be disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher...It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, in which every tongue believed and was brought together to God” (*Ignatius To the Magnesians* 9:1; 10:3; early Second Century C.E.).²²

“Finally, he says to them: ‘I cannot stand your new moons and sabbaths’ [Isaiah 1:13]. You see what he means: it is not the present sabbaths that are acceptable to me, but the one that I have made; on that sabbath, after I have set everything at rest, I will create the beginning of an eighth day, which is the beginning of another world. This is why we spend the eighth day in celebration, the day on which Jesus both arose from the dead and, after appearing again, ascended into heaven” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 15:8-9; late First-early Second Century C.E.).²³

“The new law requires you to keep perpetual sabbath, and you, because you are idle for one day, suppose you are pious...The Lord our God does not take pleasure in such observances...let him repent; then he has kept the sweet and true sabbaths of God” (*Justin Martyr Dialogue with Trypho* 12; mid-Second Century C.E.).²⁴

“‘There are such people, Trypho,’ I answered; ‘and these do not venture to have any intercourse with or to extend hospitality to such persons; but I do not agree with them. But if some, through weak-mindedness, wish to observe such institutions as were given

²⁰ Cf. “Sabbath,” in David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp 571-572.

²¹ Michael W. Holmes, ed. and trans., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 365.

²² *Ibid.*, 209.

²³ *Ibid.*, 429.

²⁴ *BibleWorks 9.0: Schaff, Early Church Fathers*. MS Windows 7 Release. Norfolk: BibleWorks, LLC, 2011. DVD-ROM.

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by Moses, from which they expect some virtue, but which we believe were appointed by reason of the hardness of the people's hearts, along with their hope in this Christ, and [wish to perform] the eternal and natural acts of righteousness and piety, yet choose to live with the Christians and the faithful, as I said before, not inducing them either to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or to observe any other such ceremonies, then I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such, and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren" (Justin Martyr *Dialogue with Trypho* 47; mid-Second Century C.E.).²⁵

"...But the Sabbaths taught that we should continue day by day in God's service..." (Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.16.1; late Second Century C.E.).²⁶

"...we neither accord with the Jews in their peculiarities in regard to food, nor in their sacred days, nor even in their well-known bodily sign, nor in the possession of a common name, which surely behoved to be the case if we did homage to the same God as they..." (Tertullian *Apology* 21; late Second Century C.E.).²⁷

"...in so far as the abolition of carnal circumcision and of the old law is demonstrated as having been consummated at its specific times, so also the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary" (Tertullian *An Answer to the Jews* 4; late Second Century C.E.).²⁸

"The Holy Spirit upbraids the Jews with their holy-days. 'Your Sabbaths, and new moons, and ceremonies,' says He, 'My soul hateth' [Isaiah 1:13-14]. By us, to whom Sabbaths are strange, and the new moons and festivals formerly beloved by God, the Saturnalia and New-year's and Midwinter's festivals and Matronalia are frequented—presents come and go—New-year's gifts—games join their noise—banquets join their din! Oh better fidelity of the nations to their own sect, which claims no solemnity of the Christians for itself! Not the Lord's day, not Pentecost, even if they had known them, would they have shared with us; for they would fear lest they should seem to be Christians. *We* are not apprehensive lest we seem to be *heathens*! If any indulgence is to be granted to the flesh, you have it" (Tertullian *On Idolatry*; late Second Century C.E.).²⁹

Some of the statements which are witnessed to deride the seventh-day Sabbath are also made in conjunction with dismissals of the appointed times or *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים), circumcision,³⁰ and may have even included a misapplication of Isaiah 1:13.³¹ Other statements, such as those of Justin Martyr, while dismissing the seventh-day Sabbath, do recognize that those Jewish Believers who kept the seventh-day Sabbath were not to be treated as pariahs, but were to be accepted as genuine, albeit weak, brethren. Tertullian is particularly bad, as his dismissal of the Sabbath and appointed times permitted concurrence with heathenism.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Consult the article "Is Circumcision for Everyone?" by J.K. McKee, appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume II*.

³¹ Isaiah 1:13 is examined in the **Sabbath and Rest in the Tanach** section of this publication.

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Could one honestly see any of the Jewish Apostles of Yeshua of Nazareth say anything like what appears above? About as close as things might seemingly get would be Paul in Philippians 3:2-9,³² but there Paul is seen comparing and contrasting his human achievements in Judaism, to what the Divine Messiah has achieved, and how faith in Yeshua brings redemption. Paul is not negative toward Judaism in Philippians 3:2-9, but in a perceived human status that can get people's attention off of what Yeshua has accomplished. Paul himself expressed that there was indeed edifying value in Judaism and Torah practice (Romans 3:1-2).

Much of the anti-Sabbath polemic witnessed in the emerging Christian Church of the Second Century, likely arose because of associations of Greek and Roman Christian Believers with either Judaism, or various pockets of Jewish Believers, who had then been largely pressured to leave and were excised because of the forces of history. This was widely consequent of the Jewish Revolt of 70 C.E. in Judea, and with it renewed anti-Semitism in the Roman Empire. The Apostles and some of their immediate successors were gone, and a new generation had emerged on the scene, which did not feel great kinship toward the Jewish people. A dismissal of the seventh-day Sabbath and its rest, superseded by Sunday "Lord's Day" gatherings, would help establish the Christians as being different from Judaism. Many Protestant Christians consider this course of history to have been God-directed.

Others, such as this writer—especially today with the emergence of Messianic Judaism on the scene—would see the Second Century as including what Paul recognized as, "For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work" (2 Thessalonians 2:7a). The roots and origins of our Messiah faith are the mixed Jewish and non-Jewish congregations of the First Century C.E., to which many of today's evangelical Christians are steadily returning. The roots and origins of our Messiah faith are not Second Century assemblies that wanted little or nothing to do with Judaism and the Jewish people; such Second Century Christians made a number of lamentable mistakes.³³

³² "Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation; for we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Messiah Yeshua and have no confidence in the flesh, though I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else thinks to have confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Torah, a Pharisee; as to zeal, persecuting the assembly; as to the righteousness which is in the Torah, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, these have I counted as loss for the sake of Messiah. But even more so, I count all things to be loss for the surpassing value of the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them but refuse in order that I may gain Messiah, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the Torah, but that which is through the faithfulness of Messiah, the righteousness which is from God on the basis of faith" (Philippians 3:2-9, PME).

³³ That the late First and early Second Centuries C.E. included negative events, by which the Body of Messiah was severed from much of its heritage in the Jewish Synagogue, with the Jewish people believed to be inferior to the Christians (among other things), does not go unnoticed by various evangelical Christian theologians.

Consult the useful summary offered in Walter C. Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), pp 221-222. Kaiser credits D. Thomas Lancaster, *Restoration: Returning the Torah of God to the Disciples of Jesus* (Littleton, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 2005), pp 13-28 on being influential to his discussion.

Sunday Mandated as Religious Day

While there was a dismissal of the seventh-day Sabbath by many leaders of the emerging Christian Church of the Second Century C.E., the Roman Emperor Constantine is witnessed as having made Sunday or the first day a mandated religious day, as a part of his presumed conversion to Christianity in the Fourth Century C.E. As is witnessed in the historical record, Constantine's conversion to Christianity did play a definite role in the consolidation of his political power as emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, neutralizing the aristocratic families of Rome who followed the old gods, and the construction of his new capital at Byzantium.

The first day or Sunday had significance for the Christians who observed Sunday as "the Lord's Day," and it also had significance for many of the pagans as well. Philip Schaff, author of the significant work *History of the Christian Church*, informs us, "He enjoined the observance, or rather forbade the public desecration of Sunday, not under the name of *Sabbatum* or *Dies Domini*, but under its old astrological and heathen title, *Dies Solis*, familiar to all his subjects, so that the law was as applicable to the worshippers of Hercules, Apollo, and Mithras, as to the Christians."³⁴ As is noted, the decree issued on 07 March, 321 C.E. legislated Sunday or the first day of the week, as a civil ordinance, requiring a cessation of business in urban areas:

"On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or for vine-planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost."³⁵

The Emperor Constantine did not change the seventh-day Sabbath to Sunday for the Christians of his time, as many of the Christians were already observing a Sunday "Lord's Day" which was, albeit errantly, believed to have superseded the Sabbath. The Emperor Constantine did declare Sunday a civil day for religious observance, which had the advantage of being a day employed by both the Christians and the pagans.

There has certainly been a great deal of ink spilled on the mandate of the first day of the week as a religious day by the decree of Constantine, some of which has embellished the issue of Sunday far beyond what is reasonable *and* what is provable. During my studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2005-2009), two of the major textbooks I was assigned for Church History I (Summer 2005), certainly provided a reasoned approach to what Constantine's adoption of Christianity meant to the Fourth Century bifurcated Roman Empire, the civil decree involving Sunday, and the merging of political and ecclesiastical power structures (*The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1³⁶; *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol 1³⁷). Information, on the Emperor Constantine and his syncretism, is not difficult to find, and will often be encountered by those being trained as contemporary pastors and teachers in modern Protestantism.

³⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity*, Vol III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910/1995), 380.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, fn#1.

³⁶ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1984), pp 121-123.

³⁷ Dale T. Irvin and Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Vol. 1 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), pp 161-164.

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To Constantine's credit, in making Christianity a tolerated and legal religion in the Fourth Century C.E., it did mean that persecution and unwarranted killing of Christians became illegal, which was surely a good thing. Constantine also did try to make some amends for the injustices suffered by the Christians of his era, at the hands of the state. Yet, it can hardly be said that Constantine's "conversion" to Christianity meant that he was a born again Believer, as many evangelicals would see him—as many are agreed that he was naïve, at best, in matters of faith. Constantine's demeanor in legalizing Christianity was to recognize that the Christian god, among others, gave him military victories. Constantine did believe in the compatibility of serving the Christian god, as well as the Unconquerable Sun worshiped by his father.

It is fair to deduce that the Emperor Constantine had an agenda when professing himself to be a "Christian." While what is seen in later history, started with Constantine, how imperial and ecclesiastical power structures merged—something later negatively epitomized in the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages—Constantine did not change the Sabbath to Sunday. Instead, as the *Dictionary of Theological Terms* concludes, "He enforced the observance of the first day of the week, a very different thing from *commencing* it."³⁸ The first day of the week, or Sunday, bore some significance for the pagans, as well as the Christians who had widely already jettisoned *Shabbat*. Constantine, in our modern terms, rubber stamped a *common day of religious activity* for both the pagans and Christians in his realm.

More problematic is that the religious councils, which began meeting subsequent to Christianity being legalized, did in fact declare it illegal for Christians to associate with members of the Jewish community, for both the Passover and the seventh-day Sabbath. **This is what constitutes the second stage of loss for the Sabbath.**

The Council of Antioch (341 C.E.) decreed that anyone caught celebrating the Lord's resurrection ("Easter") at the same time as the Jewish Passover would be excommunicated from the Church, and be considered to be causing destruction to his soul:

But if any one of those who preside in the Church, whether he be bishop, presbyter, or deacon, shall presume, after this decree, to exercise his own private judgment to the subversion of the people and to the disturbance of the churches, by observing Easter [at the same time] with the Jews, the holy Synod decrees that he shall thenceforth be an alien from the Church, as one who not only heaps sins upon himself, but who is also the cause of destruction and subversion to many; and it deposes not only such persons themselves from their ministry, but those also who after their deposition shall presume to communicate with them (Canon 1).³⁹

The Council of Laodicea (363 C.E.) decreed that Christians should not rest on the Sabbath, but instead observe "the Lord's Day":

Here the Fathers order that no one of the faithful shall stop work on the Sabbath as do the Jews, but that they should honor the Lord's Day; on account of the Lord's

³⁸ "Sabbath," in *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 393.

³⁹ *The Post-Nicene Fathers*, P. Schaff, ed.; [Libronix Digital Library System 1.0d: Church History Collection](#). MS Windows XP. Garland, TX: Galaxie Software. 2002.

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resurrection, and that on that day they should abstain from manual labor and go to church. But thus abstaining from work on Sunday they do not lay down as a necessity, but they add, 'if they can.' For if through need or any other necessity any one worked on the Lord's day this was not reckoned against him (Canon 29).⁴⁰

Such a dismissal of the seventh-day Sabbath, by the leaders of Fourth Century Christendom, is hardly a positive development, as it surely involved further merging and consolidation of imperial authority and spiritual control, here undoubtedly tempered by some anti-Semitism as well. In *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, Kaiser notes the problems caused by these councils:

"When Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity and made it a legal religion in the empire, he had the divorce between Judaism and Christianity final with the Council of Nicea (AD 325). His estimate of the Torah was 'let us have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish rabble' [Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3:18-19]. The Council of Antioch (AD 341) followed suit by forbidding Christians from celebrating Passover with the Jews, and the Council of Laodicea (AD 363) forbade Christians from celebrating the seventh-day Sabbath. But it is clear that all the way up to the fourth century of the Christian era some believers were still keeping parts of the Torah."⁴¹

Sabbath in the Reformation and Post-Reformation

It should hardly be surprising that with the merger of imperial and ecclesiastical power via the reign of Constantine, extending all the way into European Christianity via the Roman Catholic Church, that issues pertaining to the first day of the week and what role, if any, the seventh-day Sabbath might have for Christians, **did not become pronounced again until the Protestant Reformation**. With the Reformation, and Christians in Europe being able to access the Bible in their native languages, did issues surrounding Sabbatarianism get revisited. A fairly broad approach to the issue of Sabbatarianism, that arose in European Protestantism, and later Great Britain and its colonies, is noted by J. Parton Payne in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*:

"Luther rejected sabbath-keeping...but the Puritans established England's comprehensive sabbath law of 1677. The Scottish and colonial 'blue-laws' are today being increasingly relaxed or eliminated."⁴²

For many Protestant Christians, Sunday was the Christian Sabbath, and such a transfer was believed to have been authorized by the Apostles. There were, though, various early Reformers which did not support Sabbath keeping of any kind, and instead allegorized or spiritualized it like many of the Second Century figures who dismissed *Shabbat*. There were various Christians in Silesia and Moravia, during the early days of the Reformation in the 1520s, observing the seventh-day Sabbath, and were fiercely

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible*, pp 222-223.

⁴² J. Barton Payne, "Sabbatarianism," in Everett F. Harrison, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960), 464.

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opposed by Martin Luther. Some of the Sabbatarians of the mid-to-late Sixteenth Century were Unitarians, being unsure, at best, on the Divine nature of the Messiah.⁴³

By the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, particularly in Britain—influenced by a conflux of Reformed theology, Puritanism, and even the later Wesleyan movement—Sunday was widely set aside for the Christian day of worship and rest. Still, there were others, such as the Seventh-Day Baptists, but most notably the Seventh-Day Adventists in the Nineteenth Century, who did help to revive the seventh-day Sabbath:

“It was not until the 4th cent. that Sunday began to take on Sabbath characteristics, when Constantine decreed that certain types of work should not be done on Sunday. This sabbatarian tendency continued over the next several centuries until the Decretals of Gregory XI (A.D. 1234) officially mandated Sunday rest. The Protestant Reformation represented a reversal, with the Reformers tending to spiritualize the sabbath commandments and to argue that any day of the week could be set aside for worship and rest. The inheritors of the Reformation tradition generally returned to a sabbatarian position, due in part to the prevalence of biblical literalism in the 17th through 19th centuries. The most literal interpreters advocated a seventh-day sabbatarianism. A return to seventh-day sabbatarianism had begun among some sixteenth-century Anabaptists, and this tradition has been carried into the present by English and American Seventh-Day Baptists and by Seventh-Day Adventism, which arose in America in the 19th century” (*ISBE*).⁴⁴

Many of us in the Messianic movement, from evangelical Protestant backgrounds, have been affected by past generations of our family keeping some form of “Sunday Sabbath.” The keeping of a rigid Sunday Sabbath, if you live in Great Britain or in one of its former colonies, is something widely inherited from Seventeenth Century Puritanism,⁴⁵ and then the spiritual movements it immediately affected. Later piety movements of the Eighteenth and into the Nineteenth Centuries tended to stress a “Sunday Sabbath,” in observance of the Fourth Commandment, as a necessity for Christian people. Sunday was the day to go to church, to not do any laborious work, to not engage in commerce, and to spend time reading the Scriptures and interacting with one’s family and fellow Christians. F.R. Harm labels this in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* to actually be “Semisabbatarianism”:

“Semisabbatarianism holds a view essentially the same as strict sabbatarianism but transfers its demands from Saturday, the seventh day, to Sunday, the first day of the week...Semisabbatarianism reached its zenith in English Puritanism, later finding its way to the New World through the early colonists. Sunday restrictions and so-called blue laws

⁴³ F.R. Harm, “Sabbatarianism,” in Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1045; Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp 128-130.

⁴⁴ McCann, “Sabbath,” in *ISBE*, 4:252.

Harm, “Sabbatarianism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1045 further states, “The Seventh-day Baptists originated in 1631, bringing sabbatarianism to England and later to Rhode Island and New York. The most notable proponent of strict sabbatarianism at the present time is the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

⁴⁵ Shulevitz, pp 138-150.

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in various states are a constant reminder of the influence of this view on the laws of our land."⁴⁶

How did many Protestants come to the conclusion that the seventh-day Sabbath was changed to the first day of Sunday, believed to be "the Lord's Day"? As is witnessed in Reformation period history, such a conclusion was not reached by consulting Roman Catholic authorities, but instead by seeing New Testament passages such as 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 and Acts 20:7, about Believers meeting on the first of the week, in conjunction with the practice of many Christians of the Second Century C.E. As is witnessed in the Westminster Confession, a huge array of doctrinal tenets and theological constructs for the Reformed tradition, some significant Tanach or Old Testament stipulations surrounding *Shabbat* are directly applied to Sunday as the "Christian Sabbath":

"As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him [Exodus 20:8,10,11; Isaiah 56:2,4,6,7]: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week [Genesis 2:2,3; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2; Acts 20:7], which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day [Revelation 1:10], and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath [Exodus 20:8,10; Matthew 5:17,18].

"This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations [Exodus 20:8; 16:23,25,26,29,30; 31:15; Nehemiah 13:15-19,21,22]; but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy [Isaiah 58:13; Matthew 12:1-13]" (21.7-8).⁴⁷

In the customary Reformed division of the Torah or Law of Moses into the presumed "moral law," "civil law," and "ceremonial law," the fact that Sabbath violation in the Pentateuch frequently brought with it capital punishment—was believed to make the Sabbath a moral law. Reading in Scripture that the Believers held some kind of meeting on the "first of the week," and not thinking through the Jewish reckoning of time, among other things, they thought it fair to deduce that the Apostles shifted the Sabbath to Sunday. Hebrews 4:9 might have even been appealed to, "So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God," with this representing a new Sunday Sabbath⁴⁸ (as opposed to a future eschatological rest, typified by the weekly seventh-day Sabbath).⁴⁹ While some of the arguments made by Protestant Christians of the past observing a "Sunday Sabbath" are disengaged from a First Century Jewish background of the Holy Scriptures, today's

⁴⁶ Harm, "Sabbatarianism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1045.

Cf. Shulevitz, pp 193-194 for a summary of how Sunday blue laws still affect parts of the United States today.

⁴⁷ [BibleWorks 9.0: Westminster Standards](#).

⁴⁸ Cf. Joseph A. Pipa, "The Christian Sabbath," in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, 165.

⁴⁹ Hebrews 4:1-10 is examined in the **Sabbath and Rest in the Apostolic Scriptures** section of this publication.

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Messianic people should be fair enough to recognize that a **Sunday Sabbath is better than no Sabbath at all**. Many Christians, of the Second and Third Centuries, and of the Reformation and post-Reformation, have thought that the Sabbath rest is to be totally allegorized and spiritualized as a condition they experience in the Messiah, and that a physical Sabbath rest is of little use.

Over the past two centuries, to be sure, questions have been raised by many Christian people about the Sabbath, and specifically about whether the seventh-day Sabbath does indeed have validity and relevance for all of God's people. MacCarty, a Seventh-Day Adventist pastor, poses the inquiry, "While the earlier Reformers had other battles to fight with the Church of Rome, once the Reformation began, it was inevitable that there would be a controversy over the identity of the true Sabbath. We believe that time is well past due."⁵⁰

Today's broad Messianic movement is obviously in a unique position, because it inherits a faith tradition directly from Judaism, with even the most liberal Jews from the Reform Synagogue keeping some sort of *Shabbat* observance on the seventh-day. Yet, today's Messianic movement, also does inherit a faith tradition from evangelical Protestantism. Leaders and people alike—and not just non-Jewish Believers in the Messianic movement but Jewish Believers who were either raised in Protestantism and then became part of a new Messianic Jewish movement, or have been trained in Protestant seminaries—have been influenced by a diverse array of evangelical theologies on the Sabbath. This includes: Baptist and Presbyterian Calvinism, Wesleyan-Arminianism and Methodism, as well as the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. All of these sectors, at one point or another, among others, have been influenced by what has been labeled as Semisabbatarianism.

In present Messianic observance of the weekly *Shabbat* on the seventh-day (Saturday), the Semisabbatarianism, of past Protestant Christians, might actually need to be consulted to some degree. While Messianic Believers do observe the Sabbath on the correct day, past generations of Believers did desire to sanctify a day as holy unto God, abstaining from their labors, and resting in Him. *And, God surely blessed them for their obedient intentions*. Much of how they did this, even though it was on Sunday, was likely much more focused and regimented than how many Messianics today keep *Shabbat*.

How do we recover the Sabbath?

Many of us, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, have been led into today's emerging Messianic movement, in these early days of our growth and development, and have received a sense from the Lord that He is preparing us to do some very vital and important work before the Messiah's return. It is being heard in increasing numbers, "*This is the end-time move of God!*" As we approach the return of Yeshua, it should not at all be surprising that the future, worldwide Sabbath observance, to be experienced during His Millennial reign (Isaiah 66:23), is more consciously breaking into the hearts and minds of His people.

Not enough in today's Messianic community are probably aware of this, but many of today's contemporary Christian people are aware of how total dismissal of the Sabbath-

⁵⁰ MacCarty, "The Seventh-Day Sabbath," in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, 46.

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principle and its concept of rest have not at all aided Believers. *If for any other reason, that Believers need to stop their activities and rest for a day, should help the stress level and health problems that beset far too many.* But more than this, a variety of key publications, mostly by evangelical Christians wanting to recapture the Sunday Sabbath of their ancestors, have been released into the marketplace of ideas.⁵¹ **That many of today's Christians want to observe a Sabbath rest is a good thing.** Some have even tried out a seventh-day Sabbath on Saturday!⁵²

A perfect storm, as some would say, is on the horizon. Today's Messianic movement needs to recognize that in this hour, the Lord can surely use renewed Christian interest in the Sabbath—to see many of our fellow brothers and sisters exposed not only to *Shabbat* as we know it, but also the appointed times, and their faith heritage in the Hebrew Tanach and in Judaism. We can indeed see a style of faith emerge that is similar to that of the early Jewish, Greek, and Roman Believers who composed some of the early assemblies out in the Mediterranean. We cannot alter what happened in the past when the Sabbath was lost, **but we can enact a future where the weekly Sabbath is recovered and appreciated.** The *willingness to change* is definitely present on the part of many of today's sincere, seeking men and women—but this must also be enjoined with a willingness on the part of today's Messianic people *to welcome.*

⁵¹ These publications include, but are not limited to:

Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Wayne Muller, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999); Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006); Mark Buchanan, *The Rest of God: Restoring Your Soul by Restoring Sabbath* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006); Dan B. Allender, *Sabbath* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009); Keri Wyatt Kent, *Rest: Living in Sabbath Simplicity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

⁵² See Lisa Gleaves, *Claim God's Sabbath Blessings! "What God's Word Says About Sabbath"* (2013) [eBook for Amazon Kindle].