

**Is the Sabbath Only for Jews or Also for Gentiles?
Jewish and Christian (Re)-Appropriations
of the Sabbath in the Genesis Creation Account**

The ambiguous language of Genesis 2:1–3, which only indicates that the Sabbath was sanctified without explicitly connecting it with Israel, at least in the book of Genesis, became a locus of exegetical interest, starting in the Second Temple period, for various Jewish authors interested in the Sabbath’s relationship and relevance for Jews living in a world full of increasing and inevitable interaction with non-Jewish space. With the appearance of the Jesus movement and its process of gradual Gentilization and Christianization during the first centuries of Late Antiquity, several patristic and even occasional rabbinic figures also turned their attention to Genesis 2:1–3, reinterpreted and (re)-appropriated,¹ sometimes in novel ways, the institution of the Sabbath as described within creation. My intention in this short presentation is to survey some of these exegetical takes on Genesis 2:1–3 from the Second Temple and Late Antique period with the hope of showing how different thinkers, whether Jewish or Christian, employed the Sabbath motif in Genesis in order to shape the boundaries they wished to see operating between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds of their time.²

¹ I use the term “reappropriate” to describe a process which certain Jews participated in because of their fear that the Jewish Sabbath was either being appropriated by non-Jews, dislocated by certain Christians, or even abandoned by certain Jews who wanted to more fully integrate themselves within their non-Jewish surroundings. Thus some Jews “reappropriated” (the Sabbath was already theirs to begin with) the Sabbath by pointing back to its primordial creation status in order to highlight their special election and exhort other Jews not to abandon its observance. Other non-Jews, often Christians, appropriated this institution either by transferring its substance and relevance to the Lord’s day, that is Sunday, or even at times observed the Jewish Sabbath without becoming Jewish—this despite rabbinic and patristic injunctions to refrain from such practice.

² In order to delimit my diachronic study, I am focusing only on a cluster of Jewish and Christian texts that are in some way exegetically tied to the Sabbath in the Genesis account, particularly Gen 2:1–3, where the Sabbath makes its first appearance within scripture. The second criterion of delimitation restricts my inquiry only to asking whether

The Book of Jubilees

While the tradition(s) behind Genesis 2:1–3 were probably originally formulated only with Israel in mind—there being no explicit indication anywhere in the Pentateuch that Sabbath keeping is incumbent upon non-Jews living outside the periphery of Israel—the explicit command to keep the Sabbath day was given only at Sinai. Certain Jews of the Second Temple and Late Antique period tried to fill this lacuna within Genesis in order to demonstrate that God had clearly intended, even *before* Sinai, for Israel *alone* to keep the Sabbath. For example, the rendition of the Sabbath during creation as found in the Book of Jubilees, provides interesting insights into this exegetical-ideological process in which its author(s?) seeks to highlight the distinctions he

such Jewish or Christian interpretations of Genesis viewed the Sabbath as a universal institution or one solely reserved for Israel. There obviously exist many other dimensions to these ancient documents, and several other texts on the Sabbath from Jewish and Christian sources have been purposefully left out of this study because of limitations in time and space. Nevertheless, I hope that the selection of texts I have brought to the forefront in this paper will demonstrate that the Sabbath in Genesis did become an arena for ideological constructions of Jewish and Christian identity during antiquity. The major work written during the twentieth century on the topic of Sabbath/Sunday observance in early Christianity was Willi Rodorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Trans. A. A. K. Graham; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967). Rodorf believed Jesus challenged the observance of the Sabbath, even abolished its practice. Since the church was essentially Jewish in Palestine, the *ekklesia* momentarily experienced a “relapse” and returned to Sabbath keeping. Paul, under divine providence, however, led the church back to the original, messianic and eschatological meaning of the Sabbath, which eventually was transferred to Sunday observance. Of course, Rodorf’s thesis is outdated, and no longer tenable, especially regarding the historical Jesus’ attitude toward Jewish praxis.

Samuele Bacchiocchi’s *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian university, 1977) combats Rodorf’s view at many points, but his historical treatment of canonical sources proves problematic as well. The work’s main value lies in its collection of a vast repertoire of patristic texts dealing with Sabbath-Sunday observance. Sigve Tonstad, *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, Mich: Andrews University Press, 2009) looks at the historical sources from a similar viewpoint. Nevertheless, he presents a much more favorable view of ancient Judaism, thanks to the influence of such exegetes as E.P. Sanders. Several of the articles compiled in D. A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1982 were apologetically written in reaction to Bacchiocchi’s work. In his *A Day of Gladness: The Sabbath Among Jews and Christians in Antiquity* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), Herold Weiss attempts to dodge these apologetics and focus on exegesis and history. The end result is a refreshing treatment of passages dealing on the Sabbath in Jewish and Christian texts, dating roughly from the second century B.C.E. to the second century C.E. Another excellent and provocative analysis of the Sabbath in early Christianity is Andrea J. Mayer-Haas, “*Geschenk aus Gottes Schatzkammer*” (*bSchab 10b*): *Jesus und der Sabbat im Spiegel der neutestamentlichen Schriften* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen Bd. 43; Münster: Aschendorff, 2003). Lutz Doering’s monumental *Schabbat: Sabbathhalacha und –praxis im antiken Judentum und Urchristentum* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), although focused on the topic of Halakot, contains several fine portions relevant to this paper.

desires to see existing between Israel and the nations. In Jub 2:19–21, in his “rewritten” account of Genesis 2:1–3, the author explicitly states that Jacob and his descendants will become the exclusive recipients and guardians of the Sabbath day:

I will now separate a people for myself from among my nations. They, too, will keep sabbath. I will sanctify the people for myself and will bless them as I sanctified the sabbath day. I will sanctify them for myself; in this way I will bless them. They will become my people and I will become their God. I have chosen the descendants of Jacob among all of those whom I have seen. I have recorded them as my first-born son and have sanctified them for myself throughout the ages of eternity. I will tell them about the sabbath days so that they may keep sabbath from all work on them'. In this way he made a sign on it by which they, too, would keep sabbath with us on the seventh day³

Any reader who is familiar with the original Genesis account will notice that Jubilees has explicitly inserted into the Genesis narrative the exclusive bestowal of the Sabbath to Israel alone. In Gen 2:1–3, the Sabbath day is blessed and sanctified, but is not explicitly handed over to Israel, who receives the command of its observance at Sinai. The Sabbath instead “hovers” in time, as it were, until the first explicit command of its observance appears later on in the narrative of the Torah. The author of Jubilees, however, was unhappy with this chronological parenthesis, and transposed the explicit command given to Israel at Sinai back into the remote primordial time of creation, perhaps in reaction to certain Jews who were either universalizing this institution or, more likely, neglecting its observance, arguing that it was of temporal significance, since it was officially instituted only at Sinai and did not go back to creation.⁴

³ In addition, the Sabbath is bestowed as a sign to two kinds of angels, “the angels of the presence” and the “angels of holiness” (2:18). On earth, Israel alone is meant to mirror this angelic Sabbath keeping. All quotations from Jubilees are taken from James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (2 vols.; CSCO 510–511; Scriptorum Aethiopicorum 87–88; Leuven: Peeters, 1989).

⁴ VanderKam claims that the author of Jubilees rewrote the Genesis creation account in order to prove that a detailed and separatist legislation existed since creation and was kept by the patriarchs. He suggested that the author of Jubilees may have made this particularistic assertion in reaction to other Jews who argued that a purer and more cosmopolitan law existed before Sinai. See James C. VanderKam, “Genesis 1 in Jubilees 2,” *DSD* 1 (1994) 300–21. Doering suggests that the stringent attitude of Jubilees toward the Sabbath may have stemmed from the author’s preoccupation with the influx of Hellenism and the threats posed by it to Israel’s identity. See Lutz Doering, “The Concept of the Sabbath in the Book of Jubilees,” in *Studies in the Book of Jubilees* (ed. Matthias Albani, Jörg Frey and Armin Lange; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 202. Werman, on the other hand, does not view the book of Jubilees as a work written against Hellenizers. See her dissertation in Hebrew, Cana Werman, *Attitude towards*

Philo, Josephus, and Aristobulus

A tendency toward universalizing the Sabbath can be found in certain Jewish works roughly contemporaneous with Jubilees.⁵ According to Philo's understanding of Gen 2:1–3, the Sabbath is “the festival, not of one city or one country, but of all the earth; a day which alone it is right to call the day of festival for all people, and the birthday of the world” (*Opif.* 89). Josephus, in his later work known as *Contra Apionem*, boasts that “the multitude of mankind” had a “great inclination” for Jewish observances such as the Sabbath day (*C. Ap.* 2.282–284).⁶ In his earlier work *Jewish Antiquities*, however, in the section devoted to Genesis 2:1–3, Josephus only concludes from this passage that “we [ἡμεῖς, i.e., Jews] celebrate a rest from our labours on that day, and call it the Sabbath” (1.33). Thus, unlike Philo, Josephus does not go as far as interpreting Genesis 2:1–3 as a universal, worldwide festival for humankind. On the other hand, he does not entirely restrict the Sabbath in covenantal terms to the Jewish people nor oppose, as the author of Jubilees probably would have, Gentile observance of this Jewish holy day.⁷

Gentiles in the Book of Jubilees and Qumran Literature Compared with Early Tanaaic Halakha and Contemporary Pseudepigrapha (in Hebrew) (Diss.; Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995), 30–34.

⁵ For a fuller discussion on Jubilees and the Sabbath, see Doering, “The Concept of the Sabbath,” 179–206.

⁶ Translation of Philo taken from C. D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993). Translation of Josephus taken from William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987). The complete passage of Josephus reads: “Nay, further, the multitude of mankind itself have had a great inclination of a long time to follow our religious observances; for there is not any city of the Greeks, nor any of the barbarians, nor any nation whatever, where our custom of resting on the seventh day has not come, and by which our fasts and lighting lamps, and many of our prohibitions as to our food, are not observed; they also endeavour to imitate our mutual concord with one another, and the charitable distribution of our goods, and our diligence in our trades, and our fortitude in undergoing the distresses we are in, on account of our laws; and, what is here matter of the greatest admiration, our law has no bait of pleasure to allure men to it, but it prevails by its own force; and, as God himself pervades all the world, so has our law passed through all the world also” (*C. Ap.* 2:282–284).

⁷ Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 70: “According to Josephus, some pagans also observed the Sabbath rest. In this he agrees with Aristobulus and Philo of Alexandria and disputes those who argued that it was impossible for a pagan to observe the Sabbath.”

The fragment of Aristobulus, which was probably written in the second century B.C.E.,⁸ and therefore contemporaneous with Jubilees, also contains a discussion on the Sabbath pericope found in Genesis 2:1–3. Aristobulus’ language is similar to Josephus’ comments in *Antiquities*, since he claims that after God created the whole world He gave “us (ἡμῶν) the seventh day as a [time of] rest” (Fragment 5:1). Presumably, the usage of the first person by Aristobulus refers solely to the Jewish people. It appears again in the same pericope where Aristobulus claims that “it has been made clear to us that [the seventh day] is legally binding” (5:4). With this language, Aristobulus hints at the giving of the Torah to Israel, which is found in Exodus. Accordingly, he is no maximalist allegorizer who has completely abandoned literal weekly Sabbath observance. Rest is for humans, not just some vague allegorized reference to God’s rest.⁹

Much depends on how one imagines the audience to whom Aristobulus’ text was addressed. If he was writing to persuade Gentiles about the special qualities of the Jewish tradition, he may have welcomed non-Jews who would have embraced his message in concrete, ritual ways, including Sabbath observance.¹⁰ Even if Aristobulus’ language is not as passionate as Philo’s regarding worldwide Sabbath festivity, he does speak of the Sabbath in cosmic terms,

⁸ Nikolaus Walter, *Der Thorausleger Aristobulos: Untersuchungen zu seinen Fragmenten und zu pseudepigraphischen Resten der jüdischen-hellenistischen Literatur* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 86; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), 127f., wants to date it toward the middle of the second century B.C.E., while Hengel and Holladay date it around 175–170 B.C.E. See Hengel, Martin. *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine During the Early Hellenistic Period* (London: SCM Press, 1974); Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 3:62–75. Doering, *Schabbat*, 307, finds neither position ultimately convincing, leaving its dating open to sometime in the second century B.C.E.

⁹ So Doering, *Schabbat*, 310: “Aristobulus versteht den Sabbat als grundsätzlich ‘Ruhe’ Es handelt sich hierbei keineswegs um eine allegorische oder symbolische Deutung, sondern um eine Aussage über die Qualität des (jeweils) siebten Tages, der im Pentateuch ‘als (etwas) Gesetzliches bezeichnet’ (F 5, 12) ist. Aristobulos stellt klar, dass die ‘Ruhe’, von der er spricht, nicht Gott betrifft, sondern die Menschen Die Ruhe am Sabbat ist damit Gabe und Aufgabe an die Menschen.”

¹⁰ Externally, the work appears like a dialogue occurring between the author and a king. But it remains unclear whether Aristobulus has primarily Jews or non-Jews in mind. So Doering, *Schabbat*, 307. He seems to be attempting not only to defend Jewish tradition against Greek criticism of the law, but also to attack some of his fellow Jewish compatriots who hold on to a very literal interpretation of the Torah. So Doering, *Schabbat*, 308; Walter, *Torausleger*, 132–34.

describing it as day of rest “because life is laborious for *all*” (παᾶσι; 5:1).¹¹ Nevertheless, he, like Philo and Josephus, falls short of demanding Gentiles to observe the Sabbath day.¹²

Gospel of Mark

Some of the Jewish documents found within the New Testament express views which fall somewhere between the two polarities expressed in the Book of Jubilees and the writings of Philo. According to the author of the Gospel of Mark, during an argument with the Pharisees concerning Sabbath praxis, Jesus is said to have declared that “The sabbath was made (ἐγένετο) for *humankind* (ἄνθρωπον), and not humankind for the sabbath” (Mk 2:27).¹³ Many scholars believe that this logion originally goes back to the historical Jesus. Moreover, the usage of terms such as “ἐγένετο” or “ἄνθρωπος” echo the creation language found in Genesis.¹⁴ However, such terminology should not mislead us into thinking that the historical Jesus, whose ministry was primarily confined to the house of Israel, had in mind all of humanity when he was speaking about the Sabbath. The usage of the term “humankind” or “any human” in connection with the

¹¹ Translation of Aristobulus taken from “Aristobulus,” translated by A. Yarbro Collins, (*OTP* 2:831–42). Walter sees Fragment 5 of Aristobulus as a speculative explanation building upon Gen. 2:1–3. See N. Walter, “Fragmente jüdisch-hellenistischer Exegeten: Aristobulos, Demetrios, Aristeas,” *JSHRZ* 3.2 (1975), 264.

¹² Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 12: “Aristobulus, a precursor of Philo, saw observance of the Sabbath on the part of Gentiles as a sign of its universal significance.” But Doering, while acknowledging the obvious universal orientation of Aristobulus, seems closer to the point, pointing out how no solicitation on the part of the author for Gentile observance of the Sabbath appears in the fragments available to us: “Eine parikulare Beschränkung der Geltung des Sabbats auf Israel ist ebensowenig angezeigt wie eine erkennbar werbende Aufforderung an Nichtjuden, den Sabbat gemäß der jüdischen νομοθεσία zu begehen” (*Schabbat*, 315).

¹³ All biblical passages are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

¹⁴ See Lutz Doering, *Schabbat*, 414–16. An English version with some modifications of Doering’s German chapter on the Sabbath laws in the Gospels is now available in English. See Lutz Doering, “Sabbath Laws in the New Testament Gospels,” in *The New Testament and Rabbinic Literature* (ed. Reimund Bieringer, et al.; vol. 136 of *Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism*, ed. Hindy Najman; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 207–54. I often cite the German version of his work in this paper as there are relevant sections available only in his German book.

Sabbath can appear even in the most exclusive works such as the Book of Jubilees without any Gentiles in mind.¹⁵

The saying emphasizes Jesus' *eschatological* message of restoration for Israel with the renewed possibility for *Jews* of properly observing the Sabbath and fully enjoying its rest which was created on account of/for humankind, that is, the Jewish man or human.¹⁶ The saying was formulated with a concern for proper Sabbath *praxis* and not as a statement on the universal nature of the Sabbath. The author of the Gospel of Mark has also placed this saying in such a setting where the discussion involves *how* to observe the Sabbath rather than *who* (Jew or non-Jew) should keep it. Nevertheless, one may wonder at the redactional level of the Gospel, especially since a Markan audience would have included Gentiles, whether the saying of Jesus may have been read in a new way, with Sabbath observance now also taking Gentiles into consideration. Speaking against this possibility is the way the author of Mark has crafted the setting within which this logion appears: there is no explicit call within the passage (or elsewhere in Mark) for non-Jews to keep the Sabbath, and the redacted context within which the saying appears involves *Jewish* characters who debate on how to observe the Sabbath.¹⁷ Nevertheless, we may wonder how the author of Mark could have credibly inserted Gentile characters into episodes that involved intra-Jewish debates on Sabbath *praxis*. The possibility, therefore, that Mark, or at least certain Gentiles, perhaps those more zealous for the practice of Jewish

¹⁵ See Doering, *Schabbat*, 418 n. 117: "Auch im Jub, das die Exklusivität der Sabbatbeobachtung Israels hervorhebt, gibt es Formulierungen wie 'Mensch' oder 'alles Fleisch,' wobei stets die Zugehörigkeit zum Volk Israel vorausgesetzt wird. Eine universalistische Interpretation des Sabbats ist für Jesus nicht erkennbar." See also Doering, *Schabbat*, 64 n. 104, commenting on Jub2:28 ("every man") and 2:30 ("any human") which appear in reference to Sabbath keeping but in a context where it is clear that its observance is relevant only for *Israelites*.

¹⁶ See Doering, *Schabbat*, 413–18.

¹⁷ See Doering, *Schabbat*, 406–407, who, in reference to such pericopes, points to the influence of the post-Easter Christian kerygma, which may have further radicalized various "Jewish Christian" communities to relativize the importance of the Sabbath in various degrees. It is not possible, however, to directly identify from the *Sitz im Leben* of such Sabbath pericopes the *Zusammenleben* of Jewish and Gentile Christians, since non-Jews do not figure in these sections. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to think that in such Sabbath pericopes, Sabbath *praxis* of *Jewish* Christians is reflected, who, in a milieu that had opened itself to Gentiles, had experienced a "break" with certain aspects of Jewish observance practiced by their opponents.

traditions, read this logion in such a way so as to observe the Sabbath with their fellow Jewish followers of Jesus, remains open. The author of the Gospel of Mark, in any case, does not go as far as explicitly forbidding Jewish (or Gentile) disciples of Jesus from observing the Sabbath nor does he pronounce anything against the Sabbath *in itself*.¹⁸ According to this understanding, the author of the Gospel of Mark does not quite reach Philo's universalistic altitudes regarding the Sabbath. His attitude seems to be somewhat closer to that of Aristobulus and Josephus although unlike Josephus, Mark does not even boast in his gospel about Gentiles voluntarily and spontaneously embracing Sabbath observance.¹⁹

Letter to the Hebrews

The author of the so-called Letter to the Hebrews also turned to Genesis 2:1–3, not to exhort his audience to keep the Sabbath on the seventh day, but in order to encourage his audience to heed to his message by remaining in a steadfast condition of faithfulness and hope. Citing Genesis 2:2 from the LXX, where it states that God rested (κατέπαυσεν) on the seventh

¹⁸ At least the final redactor of the Gospel of Mark seems to have made such an attempt with the question of dietary laws as exemplified in Mark 7:19b where the final redactor inserts into the discussion on the washing of hands the parenthetical statement: "Thus he [i.e., Jesus] declared all foods clean." No parallel Markan addition, however, is made to the statement regarding the Sabbath, and so one may assume that the author of Mark did not *object* to Jewish and perhaps even Gentile observance of the Sabbath. The author of the Gospel of Mark does not seem to explicitly oppose the observance of the Sabbath by followers of Jesus (Jew and non-Jew alike?) since he does not include any unequivocal clause indicating that Jesus has nullified Sabbath observance *all together*.

¹⁹ I am not as confident as Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 95, in his understanding of the logion of Mark 2:27: "It stresses the gift of the Sabbath to humanity. Given the general openness to the Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark, it is quite possible that the author fully intended the universalistic thrust of the saying. This would indicate that the Jewish disagreements as to whether or not a Gentile could keep the Sabbath were somewhat familiar to the Christians. Here Mark is making a strong statement in favor of the universality of the Sabbath as a gift of God. It is clearly intended against those who would restrict its benefits exclusively to the Jews." This reading is possible, provided we make a distinction between the traditional and redactional dimensions. Weiss' proposed grid (based on Raymond Brown), which is certainly welcomed for our reflection on Christianity in antiquity: "The evidence in the Synoptic Gospels does not support those who would like to classify the Sabbath controversy dialogues along Jew/Gentile, linguist, and geographical delineations. These gospels come from mixed Diaspora communities. To argue that generally Gentile Christians did not become Sabbath observers is, at best, misleading. Christian allegiance to Jewish institutions was not dependent on these coordinates. Greek-speaking, Diaspora Jews may have been more attached to the temple and the Sabbath, than Palestinian, Aramaic-speaking Jews. Gentile converts to Christianity may have been more attached to the Sabbath than some Jewish Christians" (97). I remain somewhat undecided as to whether Mark expected the Gentiles within his audience to observe the Sabbath. It may well have been viewed as optional for such members. Andrea Mayer-Haas, *Geschenk*, 148ff., however, makes a compelling case that Mark's audience did indeed observe the Sabbath, albeit apart from other synagogues.

day, the author of the epistle affirms that this very same rest is now available for certain individuals to partake of (Heb 4:4–6). Apparently, this rest was even available to the generation of Israelites who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses, but, according to the author’s understanding, that generation failed to obtain this very rest because of their disobedience. Instead this rest remains available to the audience of the author’s own time, should they heed and hold fast to the promulgated message made available since the time of Jesus. The author goes as far as calling this rest a “σαββατισμὸς” which remains accessible to the people of God (Heb 4:9).

My purpose is not to linger in trying to interpret the actual meaning of what the author intended with his unique usage of the term “rest” which he synthesized from passages in the Septuagint. My main question is whether in Hebrews chapter four we can learn anything about the author’s expectations concerning a *literal weekly* observance of the Sabbath for Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus. Much depends on the determination of the author’s background and audience. If we view the addressees as a group of Jewish followers of Jesus, it seems safe to assume that they were Torah observant. In any case, the author feels it necessary to point out throughout his epistle, that something newer, even better, has ushered in since the arrival of Jesus into the scene of earthly history. Especially regarding the cultic aspects of Torah observance, the author feels confident that the sacrificial, priestly ministry of Jesus is superior to the Temple cult. The author, however, does not go as far as to dissuade his audience from observing Jewish customs such as Sabbath keeping, food laws, and circumcision.²⁰ He simply does not touch upon

²⁰ I find little in Anderson’s assessment to disagree with: “With the one fundamental exception relating to the cult, the Torah still is valid for those to whom it was given by Moses. No break with Jewish tradition apart from priesthood, sacrifice, and temple is assumed in Hebrews. Discontinuity centers upon cult, not Torah. Of course, cult implicates Torah. But Torah is a larger category, and apart from priesthood and other cultic aspects, is left untouched by the critique of Hebrews. The new covenant does not imply a new Torah, but a ‘changed’ Torah in which earlier cultic legislation is replaced. . . . Judaism was more than the temple cult, as it demonstrated following the destruction of the temple and the cessation of its services.” Charles P. Anderson, “Who are the Heirs of the New Age in the Epistle to the Hebrews?” in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament* (ed. J. Marcus and M.L. Soards; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 273–74.

these issues in his epistle, possibly because he accepted them as legitimate practices for his Jewish audience. On the other hand, the author of Hebrews does not appropriate Genesis 2:1–3 in such a way so as to exhort Gentile followers of Jesus to observe the weekly Sabbath. This question even seems *hors sujet* to the author. His point is to show that ever since the completion of creation, God has been enjoying a perpetual Sabbath rest, a permanent reality, timeless, beyond the space and confinements of this world, which remained available to subsequent generations, and is about to become particularly accessible to the generation of the author’s own day.²¹

Epistle of Barnabas

The tendency of the author of Hebrews to subordinate the importance of the ritual commandments intrinsically tied to the Temple cult, was carried on and taken to another level by the author of the so-called Epistle of Barnabas, who interpreted Genesis 2:1–3 in such a manner so as to deter followers of Jesus, whether Jewish or Gentile, to observe the literal weekly Sabbath of the Jews. For Barnabas, God’s creative works as mentioned in Genesis, which He accomplished in six days, is nothing else than a symbol of how “the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years” (15:4).²² As for the mention in Genesis of God’s rest on the seventh day, the author of the Epistle of Barnabas interprets this as

²¹ For a convenient summary and investigation of the concept of σαββατισμὸς in the Letter to the Hebrews see Herold Weiss, “*Sabbatismos* in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *CBQ* 58.4 (1996), 674–89; now in Weiss, *A Day of Gladness*, 147–62. At the end of his article, Weiss provides an interesting comparison on the topic of the Sabbath between Philo and the Letter to the Hebrews. Weiss emphasizes that Philo was indeed anxious to point out that the actual observance of the Sabbath was important (at least for Jews). On the other hand, the Letter to the Hebrews, uses Genesis 2:1–3 to argue that his audience must remain faithful followers of the high priest Jesus. While I agree with Weiss that this is certainly what the author of the Letter of Hebrews aims at in his interpretation of Genesis 2:1–3, the epistle does not inform us about the author’s observance or opposition to an actual literal observance of the Sabbath. From my standpoint, as stated above, it seems safe to infer that the author is not opposed to such observance, and may have actually kept the Sabbath even if he believed that the ultimate perennial rest of God lied elsewhere.

²² Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.28.3: “For in as many days as this world was made, in so many thousand years shall it be concluded.” See Rabbinic texts such as *b. Sanh.* 97a which also classify world history according to similar themes and structure: “Rabbi Kattina said: “Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh] it shall be desolate”

a sign of Jesus' return when he "shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the sun, and the moon, and the stars" (15:5). Only then, according to the author's understanding, will there be true rest on the seventh day (15:5).

The author opposes any literal observance of Jewish rites such as circumcision, Kashrut or the Sabbath. Circumcision was never meant to be observed literally—the Jews misunderstood God's commandment because they were deluded by an angel (9:4). Following an allegorical Jewish tradition, well accounted for in Egypt (e.g., the Letter of Aristeas and the works of Philo), Barnabas not only "spiritualizes" the "dietary" laws forbidding Jews to eat unclean meats such as pork (10:1–12), but dismisses their literal observance (10:2). Barnabas resembles one of those Jewish "allegorizers" whom Philo accuses for having completely abandoned Torah observance because of their maximalist allegorization of the Mosaic tradition. Barnabas' conclusion that there is no need to literally observe the weekly Jewish Sabbath seems to be one of the possible logical outcomes of this Jewish allegorical tradition, indebted to certain Greek schools of thought: Barnabas is a follower of Jesus, wearing a Jewish allegorizing garb, who has integrated this allegorical tradition with his new faith in Jesus. Ironically, from our standpoint, he uses Genesis 2:1–3 to promote the weekly observance of Sunday, "the eighth day . . . the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead" (15:9).

Justin Martyr

Certain traits of Barnabas' take on Genesis of 2:1–3 were carried on by other Christian authors of the second century C.E. such as Justin Martyr who also argues against the observance of the Jewish Sabbath among Gentiles. For Justin, the fact that the Jewish scriptures in Genesis states that God "rested" on the seventh day, does not constitute evidence that humans should, *imitatio dei*, cease to work on the Jewish Sabbath. In fact, the creator did not really cease from

his work on the Sabbath, since even the elements of the universe do not remain idle on the Sabbath, so Justin argues (*Dial.* 23.3).²³ Moreover, pre-Sinaitic patriarchs such as Enoch observed neither the Sabbath nor circumcision, which were only later imposed on the Jews by Moses because of their sinful ways, making it clear that such commandments were temporary

²³ The denial that God completely ceased from working on the Sabbath appears already in the Gospel of John 5:17 where the Johannine Jesus justifies his healing activity on the Sabbath by stating: “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” Here too the Johanne passage understands Genesis 2:1–3 not as an indication that God completely rested on the Sabbath day. The Johanne saying seems to be appealing to such a belief held by Jews in antiquity. As such, Jesus, the perfect imitator of his heavenly father, is justified in performing healing activities on the Sabbath day. The whole passage in which this verse appears in John (5:1–18) need not be understood as an abrogation of the Sabbath but a temporal *suspension* of the Sabbath in cases involving *healing* chronic diseases. Thus, the verb “ἔλθεν” in John 5:18 (“he was not only breaking the sabbath”) can be understood in terms of qualified suspension rather than systematic annulment. This is how Doering, *Schabbat*, 472, initially understands this verse: “. . . eine Abrogation des Sabbats, die auch für andere Menschen verbindlich wäre, ist nicht Gegenstand dieses Stücks.” But then Doering moves on to state that Sabbath observance was no longer an issue for the audience of John. See Doering, *Schabbat*, 476. Cf. also his statement in his English article, “Sabbath Laws in the New Testament Gospels,” 246: “The ironical situation regarding John is then that Jesus’ Sabbath conduct is not portrayed as exemplary for its audience, while the audience’s disregard for the Sabbath most likely has to do with the Jesus tradition received in the Johannine circle.” It is this latter half of Doering’s argument which I find unpersuasive even if we apply it to the latest editors of the Gospel. The text primarily justifies Sabbath breaking in the case of healing chronic diseases, but hardly portrays Jesus (or his followers) as completely neglecting Sabbath observance so as to perform *any* forbidden activity (e.g., engage in work to earn one’s living) on the Sabbath. If the audience and author(s) of the Johanne Gospel did indeed keep the Sabbath, perhaps there were also Gentile followers of Jesus within their ranks who may have observed this institution, as the audience of John certainly included non-Jews, given the explanations of terms provided within the Gospel which presumably would have been superfluous for a Jewish reader. Nevertheless, the passages on the Sabbath in John (John 5:1–23; 7:23–25; 9:1–41) hardly call for a universal weekly Sabbath observance. They are included within the Gospel text perhaps to justify certain acts (e.g., healing) by Jewish followers of Jesus who differ in their Sabbath keeping from the wider Jewish “mainstream.” Gentile followers of Jesus who joined these ranks may have (voluntarily) observed the Sabbath as well, but there is certainly no call voiced by the author of John that all humans should keep the Sabbath. We have here a scenario similar to Mark albeit embedded with higher christological statements.

Jewish passages which negate the idea that God completely rested on the Sabbath can be found already in Aristobulus (5:11f) and Philo (*Leg.* 1:5–6; *Cher.* 87–90). See also later rabbinic passages such as *Gen. Rab.* 11:10; *Exod. Rab.* 30:6, and others which can be found in Doering, *Schabbat*, 470–71. Justin Martyr and other Christian authors employed this Jewish understanding of Genesis 2:1–3 in order to persuade followers of Jesus to desist from Sabbath keeping altogether. Thus the writer of the Didascalia states: “Cease therefore, beloved brethren, you who from among the People have believed, yet desire (still) to be tied with the bonds, and say that the Sabbath is prior to the first day of the week because that the Scripture has said: *In six days did God make all things; and on the seventh day he finished all his works, and he sanctified it* [Ex 20.11; Gen 2.2-3] But now all the governance of the world is carried on ever continually; and the spheres do not cease even for a moment from their course, but at God’s command (their universal and perpetual motion proceeds.) For if He would say: *Thou shalt be idle, and thy son, and thy servant, and thy maidservant, and thine ass* [cf. Ex 20.10; Dt 5.14], how does He (continue to) work, causing to generate, and making the winds to blow, and fostering and nourishing us His creatures? On the Sabbath day He causes (the winds) to blow, and (the waters) to flow, and (thus) works. But this (the Sabbath) has been set as a type for the times, even as many other things have been set for a type. The Sabbath therefore is a type of the (final) rest, signifying the seventh thousand (-years), But the Lord our Saviour, when He was come, fulfilled the types and explained the parables, and He showed those things that are life-giving, and those that cannot help He did away, and those that cannot give life He abolished” (Didascalia 26). Translation taken from R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 113–14.

and not for all generations (*Dial.* 23:1–3). Instead, Justin argues that the “New Law” demands that followers of Jesus enter into a “perpetual Sabbath,” in which, for example, perjurers, thieves, adulterers, and other such sinners mend their ways through repentance, entering in this manner into a “true and peaceful Sabbath” (*Dial.* 12:3). Justin, therefore, in his own way, carries on the legacy laid forth by Barnabas, which is already timidly hinted at in Hebrews. On the other hand, he sets himself apart from Barnabas, by explicitly tolerating the practice of ritual commandments among *Jewish* followers of Jesus, provided the latter do not impose their customs upon the ever growing Gentile majority within the Jesus movement (*Dial.* 47:1–5).

Rabbinic Tradition

Within the early rabbinic tradition, *certain* passages side with the more exclusive claims already pronounced in the Book of Jubilees.²⁴ In one passage, penned already in a Tannaitic midrash, an interesting statement, similar in certain ways to Mark 2:27, appears regarding the function of the Sabbath:

R. Eleazar answered and said: If circumcision, which attaches to one only of the two hundred and forty-eight members of the human body, suspends the Sabbath, how much more shall [the saving of] the whole body suspend the Sabbath! . . . R. Jonathan b. Joseph said: For it is holy unto you; i.e., it [*the Sabbath*] is committed to your hands, not you to its hands (*b. Yoma* 85b; cf. *Mek. Šabbeta-Ki Tissa* 1 on Ex 31:12f, Horovitz-Rabin).²⁵

As with the Gospel of Mark, the debate here also deals with Sabbath praxis, and the rabbis provide room for breaking the Sabbath under special circumstances such as circumcision or saving human life. But, unlike Mark, the rabbinic passage does not state that the Sabbath was *made*²⁶ for (“Jewish”) *humankind*, but *handed to Israel*: “[*the Sabbath*] is committed (from מסר)

²⁴ So also Doering, *Schabbat*, 64–65.

²⁵ All translations of early rabbinic literature from the Bavli and Midrashei Aggadah, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the Soncino Classics editions.

²⁶ Mayer-Haas, *Geschenk*, 167, states that despite the reference in Mark 2:27 to Gen 1, the verb ἐγένετο should not be translated here as “created,” since references to the Sabbath being created are fairly rare in Jewish literature. The verb γίγνεσθαι is occasionally used in the LXX to express creation, although ποιεῖν and κτίζειν are more common.

to your hands [i.e., to Israel], not you to its hands.” In one passage of the *Mekilta Šabbeta-Ki Tissa* 1), the rabbinic logion builds upon Ex 31:13 and 14, which explicitly states that the Sabbath is a sign between Israel and God, taking the reader back to Sinai rather than creation.²⁷ The dictum of Jesus, however, points back to (restored) creation. Yet both sayings, within their respective, original horizons, share the same presupposition that Sabbath observance is ultimately for Jewish people only.²⁸

In a later rabbinic midrash, there appears an interesting interpretation on Gen 2:1–3, which in many ways is similar to that of the Book of Jubilees. The full passages reads:

Now why did He bless it [the Sabbath]? R. Berekiah said: Because it has no mate. The first day of the week has the second, the third has the fourth, the fifth has the sixth, but the Sabbath has no partner. . . . R. Simeon b. Yohai taught: The Sabbath pleaded to the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘All have a partner, while I have no partner!’ ‘The Community of Israel is your partner,’ God answered. And when they stood before the mountain of Sinai, He said to them, ‘Remember what I said to the Sabbath, that the Community of Israel is your partner, [hence,] Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy’” (Ex 20:8).

In this midrash, the rabbis have paired each day with the subsequent one (first day is matched with the second, the third with the fourth, etc.) leaving the odd seventh day alone which awaits in eager anticipation for the arrival of its partner Israel. The biblical text itself contains a different structure, one that pairs the days in the following way: the first three days of creation parallel

In Mark 2:27, ἐγένετο expresses in general terms the emergence of humanity and the Sabbath. Neither κτίζειν nor ποιῆν are used here in reference to the Sabbath’s creation, even though Mark 2:27 is surely alluding to the Genesis creation account(s). See, however, the late *Midr. Psalms* 92 where the Sabbath is indeed created (לפי שברא יום שביעי (שלא לעשות בו מלאכה)).

²⁷ Doering, “Sabbath Laws in the New Testament Gospels,” 217 n. 46 is unsure whether the saying at is appears in the *Mekilta* (attributed there to R. Shimon) refers to the revelation of Torah on Mount Sinai, since there are other appearances within the *Mekilta* where מסר appears with the Sabbath without reference to the bestowal of the Torah at Siniai (e.g., *Mek. Shabbta, Ki Tissa* 1 on Exod 31:15, Horovitz-Rabin 343).

²⁸ Doering, *Schabbat*, 418. As in the case with the logion found in Mark 2:27, Doering points out that the rabbinic language of the dictum “the Sabbath is committed to your hands, not you to its hands” was not coined originally out of concern for Gentiles encroaching upon the sacred established relationship between Israel and Sabbath. Instead it stresses the priority of the people of Israel over the Sabbath. Nevertheless, the rabbinic language ultimately reflects the presupposition regarding the restricted, covenantal applicability of Sabbath observance which is confined to the people of Israel. Thus, in *Mek. Šabbeta* 1, commenting upon the phrase in Exodus 31:13 (“it is a sign between you and me”), the *Mekilta* adds “ולא ביני ובין אומות העולם” (“and not between me and the nations of the world”).

and complement the last three days of creation. Thus, on the first day, light is created, which is then matched by the fourth day wherein the luminaries are set in place (Gen 1:3, 14). On the second day, sky and waters are divided, while the fifth day includes the creation of aquatic and bird life (Gen 1:6, 20). The third day involves the creation of dry land and vegetation, which is paralleled by the creation of animals of the earth on the sixth day (Gen 1:9, 24). The structure culminates with the establishment of the Sabbath on the seventh day, the only entity which is not matched by any of the creatures from the other six days of creation. The structure serves to single out the Sabbath, highlighting its importance, which God is said to have blessed and sanctified (Gen 2:3).

Some rabbis, much like the author of Jubilees, seemed to have been bothered by the absence in Genesis of any explicit reference to Israel's unique standing vis-à-vis the Sabbath. This restrictive process persists in later rabbinic commentaries, appearing especially in discussions on the so-called Noahide Laws. For example, in *Exod. Rab.* 25:11, the commentary points to the biblical language of Exod 16:29 ("The Lord has given *you* the sabbath") and emphasizes that the "you" in this passage refers to Israel, not to the Gentiles. The commentary even contains a condemnation against those Gentiles who should try to keep the Sabbath, drawing its argument from a "proof-text" in Gen 8:22 where God states to Noah that "as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (**לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ**)." According to rabbinic hermeneutics, the sages tie the verb **שָׁבַת** ("cease" or "stop") in Gen 8:22 with the seventh day Sabbath (**שַׁבָּת**). Playing with the wording of Gen 8:22 (**לֹא יִשְׁבְּתוּ**),

“shall not cease”), the rabbis argue that Gentiles, like the seasonal cycles, should not cease from work on the Sabbath.²⁹

In a parallel passage in *b. San* 58b, R. Ravina (a sixth generation Babylonian Amora) maintains that a Gentile cannot even rest on Monday (אפילו שני בשבת), implying that a Gentile can *never* rest. It is intriguing that Ravina mentions the *second* day of the week (שני בשבת) rather than the first working day of the Jewish week. Is Ravina not only claiming that Gentiles must work every day (Monday symbolizing any workday), but also tacitly polemicizing against the day of rest and worship of Christians and other non-Jews (Sunday)?³⁰

The surviving evidence does not allow for definite conclusions. In any case, it is intriguing to notice that on the other side of the spectrum, Christian clergy figures repeatedly discouraged their members from attending the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath. As is well known, John Chrysostom, in his homilies, repeatedly sought to dissuade his audience from observing Jewish customs such as the Sabbath and other festivals. Chrysostom bemoans the fact that there are many in his own ranks who were “going to watch the festivals” and “join the Jews in keeping their feasts and observing their fasts” (*Adv. Jud.* 1.1.5). Chrysostom’s only wish was, in his own words, “to drive this perverse custom from the Church right now” (*Adv. Jud.* 1.1.5).³¹ Other

²⁹ In *Seder Olam Rabbah* 5, the Children of Israel at Mara (Exod 15:25) are given ten commandments, seven of which are the Noahide Laws, the three others being the Sabbath (שבת), establishing law courts (דינין), and honoring one’s parents. What is significant for our discussion is that the Sabbath is given *after* the Noahide Laws and to Israel *alone*.

³⁰ Admittedly, Ravina’s mention of Monday could be simply interpreted as a general statement indicating that Gentiles should work on any given day. But his leap in time (failing to start by the logical chronological order of a Jewish week) may indicate that he is also subtly referring to someone else’s Sabbath day of rest. It is true that had Ravina simply stated the “first day of the week” the matter would have been equally ambiguous—we would not know whether Ravina was simply stating that non-Jews should constantly labor (Sunday representing the first working weekday) or whether he would also be polemicizing against the Christian and pagan Sunday. Rashi views Ravina’s statement as meaning that Reish Lakish did not mean that an idolater was liable for only ceasing from work as a religious act (refraining from work on the Sabbath or Sunday), but that the Gentiles are prohibited from not working on any day, Monday representing the regular work day, which is not holy for anyone.

³¹ Translation taken from Paul W. Harkins, *Saint John Chrysostom: Discourse Against Judaizing Christians* (The Fathers of the Church, a new translation 68; Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1979).

rabbinic passages are even more forthright in their dissociation of the Sabbath from the Noahide Laws. In *Deut. Rab.* 1:21, admittedly a rather late work, R. Levi states that “when the children of Noah were charged [to observe certain laws], they were given seven Laws only, the observance of the Sabbath not being among them.” According to this passage, a Gentile who observes the Sabbath is even liable to death. In my opinion, *Deut. Rab.* 1:21 also reveals some rabbinic anxieties about non-Jews (possibly Gentile Christians and/or non-Christian Gentile sympathizers of Judaism) who were observing the Sabbath, since the passage goes on to relate how Moses asked before God the following question: “Master of the Universe, just because the Gentiles have not been commanded to observe the Sabbath, wilt Thou show favour to them if they do observe it?” God replied to him: “Do you really fear this? By your life, even if they fulfil all the commandments in the Torah, yet will I cause them to fall before you.””

This section of *Deut. Rab.* contains an intriguing fear placed in the mouth of Moses regarding Gentiles who observe the Sabbath: will God favor non-Jews who observe the Sabbath even though they were not commanded to do so? From the immediate literary context, it is unclear to which Gentiles, if any, the midrash may be alluding. One possibility is that the rabbis were reacting to other Jewish groups who allowed Gentiles to observe certain Jewish rites such as the Sabbath without enforcing full conversion (i.e., circumcision). The rabbis may have felt uncomfortable with this hybrid category (in their eyes) of people, neither quite Jewish nor quite Gentile, and clarified in their rabbinic academies the distinctions between rabbinic Jews and other groups (even if though they would not have been able to immediately transform their taxonomy into any social reality on the ground). These rabbinic discussions, however, could simply be theoretical—the rabbis, in their taxonomic obsession, sought to classify different

Chrysostom’s denunciation of Christian appropriation of Jewish praxis appears extensively throughout his homilies against the Jews. See, for example, *Adv. Jud.* 1.5.1–4; 1.5.8; 1.6.5, etc.

mitzvoth as either Jewish or Noahide. But the preoccupation placed in the mouth of Moses in *Deut. Rab.* may contain the ring of a real threat (for the rabbis). Given its late date, this passage may reflect a rabbinic effort, paralleled in Christian circles, to enforce a clear litmus at the level of Torah praxis between Judaism and Christianity.

Chrysostom's extreme vociferous denunciations and the sharper reservations expressed by later rabbinic traditions only point to the fact that many Christians continued to observe Jewish customs, patristic and rabbinic injunctions notwithstanding. The *Apostolic Constitutions* voice this alternative view regarding Christian observance of the Jewish Sabbath, which actually does understand Genesis 2:1–3 in a “universal” way, and which many church fathers and rabbis would have disapproved of: “Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath-day and the Lord’s day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety. *We have said that the Sabbath is on account of the creation, and the Lord’s day of the resurrection.*” (8.33.1-2).³²

In reaction to such opinions and habits, patristic and rabbinic intellectuals tried to establish clearer borders between Jews and Christians. They felt uncomfortable with the social trespassing of their imagined boundaries by the many Jews and Christians who seemed to have remained oblivious to their reifying.³³ In this case both church father and rabbi alike succinctly agreed,

³² Translation taken from the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* series. Cf. *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.36.1f: “O Lord Almighty Thou hast created the world by Christ, and hast appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day Thou hast made us rest from our works, for the meditation upon Thy laws. . . . Thou didst enjoin the observation of the Sabbath, not affording them an occasion of idleness, but an opportunity of piety, for their knowledge of Thy power, and the prohibition of evils; having limited them as within an holy circuit for the sake of doctrine, for the rejoicing upon the seventh period. On this account was there appointed one week, and seven weeks, and the seventh month, and the seventh year, and the revolution of these, the jubilee, which is the fiftieth year for remission, that men might have no occasion to pretend ignorance. On this account He permitted men every Sabbath to rest, that so no one might be willing to send one word out of his mouth in anger on the day of the Sabbath. For the Sabbath is the ceasing of the creation, the completion of the world, the inquiry after laws, and the grateful praise to God for the blessings He has bestowed upon men.” According to Marcel Simon, the Sabbath continued to be observed by certain circles even after Sunday had become a holy day. See discussion in Marcel Simon, *Verus Israël. Etude sur les relations entre chrétiens et juifs dans l’empire romain* (135–425) (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1964), 321f.

³³ Here my language and ideas are heavily indebted to Daniel Boyarin’s *Borderlines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). My only contribution here is to argue that the

each one in his own realm, that Sabbath-keeping was not for Gentiles, but only for Jews. The “proto-orthodox” Christian tradition confined the Jewish Sabbath to the realm of “Judaism,” and sought to remove its observance from the Christian sphere. Only Jews because of their alleged stubbornness were to keep this institution. Paradoxically, from our viewpoint, many patristic thinkers condemned Jews for their persistent attachment to the literal observance of Torah, yet at the same time necessitated the existence of such Jewish practice in order to contrast and distinguish it vis-à-vis the emerging orthodox Christianity which they were seeking to create. Ironically, Christian thinkers would increasingly turn back to the Genesis creation account(s) not with the intent of universalizing the weekly observance of the Jewish Sabbath but in order to transfer its keeping to the so-called eighth day, the first day after Sabbath, that is Sunday, when Jesus rose from the dead and restored, as it were, creation as in days of yonder. Thus, Justin Martyr already in the second of half the second century C.E. could state: “Sunday, indeed, is the day on which we all hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, transforming the darkness and prime matter, created the world . . .” (*1 Apol.* 67:3–7). Eusebius, in his own age, could confidently claim that all things that were once necessary to carry out on the Sabbath (πάντα δὴ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐχρῆν ἐν Σαββάτῳ τελεῖν) had now been transferred by Christians to the Lord’s day (ἐν τῇ Κυριακῇ μετατεθείκαμεν), which was more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath (τοῦ Ἰουδαϊκοῦ Σαββάτου τιμιωτέρας), since on this day of creation God created light, and also the sun of righteousness rose souls from the dead (καὶ κατ’ αὐτὴν ταῖς ἡμετέραις ψυχαῖς ὁ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἀνατέταλκεν Ἥλιος; *Comm. Ps.* 91; PG 23:1172a–b).

The rabbis, for their part, implicitly agreed with their patristic counterparts that the seventh-day Sabbath was only for Jews, but obviously for entirely different theological reasons: the Sabbath

issue of Sabbath keeping could actually be a sample of a much larger process of reification and ideological construction of religious-social borders by rabbis and church fathers alike.

was the exclusive sign between Israel and God, predestined and set apart for the Jewish people since the time of creation. Thus, both long term “winners” from each side of the Jewish-Christian spectrum eventually confined Sabbath practice to Jewish space and history. This result was possible only after the boundaries between Jews and Christians had thickened, and once a tangible, visible body of Torah observant Jewish (and Gentile?) followers of Jesus had vanished from the Christian periphery. For as long as the borders between Judaism and Christianity remained fluid, and as long as there were Jewish followers of Jesus who observed the Sabbath, there remained a real possibility for Gentiles to also adopt such Jewish customs.