

Something Different: Lunar Sabbaths

by Larry and June Acheson

Introduction

My wife, June, and I were first exposed to a belief known as “Lunar Sabbatarianism” in either 1996 or 1997. At that time we occasionally worshipped in the home of a family living in southeast Dallas, Texas. We often hung around after services, spending the afternoon chatting about anything from our various backgrounds to our interpretations of certain passages of Scripture. One Sabbath, while chatting with a gentleman whom we had known for some time, we learned that, to him, that particular day wasn’t “really” the Sabbath day. Stunned by his remark, I was immediately curious as to the source of his understanding, as well as his historical references. At the time, he offered nothing.

The following Sabbath he returned, this time bringing a photocopy from *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*. On that page, he conveniently highlighted the following sentence for me to read:

“The New Moon is still, and the Sabbath originally was, dependent upon the lunar cycle.”¹

I could definitely understand how someone might read the above commentary and then subsequently question the origin of the traditional Sabbath that has been handed down to us by Judaism, especially since the remark is found in a Jewish reference! Certainly, if the same Jews who have handed down the weekly Sabbath as we know it admit that it was originally based upon a lunar cycle, then this must simultaneously be regarded as evidence of a Jewish admission to an ancient conspiracy to change the weekly Sabbath.

However, strangely missing from that particular commentary is the evidence supporting such a conclusion. Does their evidence come from Scripture? From historical records? What is their source? None is provided. This is certainly strange, coming from what would normally be considered a trustworthy reference. Adding to the mix here is the fact that this same reference *also* states:

“The origin of the Sabbath is obscure.”²

How can the same reference on the one hand claim that the Sabbath was originally based upon the lunar cycle, and then on the other hand state that the origin of the Sabbath is “obscure”? The first thought is that, since these comments are found in separate articles in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, they came from two different authors with two different perspectives of the historical record. However, it turns out that *both articles* were authored by the same person, a man named Max Joseph. Perhaps Mr. Joseph wasn’t quite as certain of the original method of reckoning the Sabbath as lunar sabbatarians would like for us to believe.

Our lunar sabbatarian friend had nothing else to offer us in support of his position apart from some vague, isolated Scriptural references that I feel he took out of context. Since we already knew he holds to other esoteric positions, such as a belief that the Creator is both male and female, we decided that this man simply is not “all there.” Since that time, he has sent us a study that he wrote on the topic of lunar sabbatarian theology ... a study that confirmed our suspicions. In fact, the very *title* of his study reveals the confusion found within its pages. It is entitled *The Tree of Everlasting Lunar Sabbath Life*.

During the intervening years since our first encounter with a lunar sabbatarian, we have met others of the same persuasion, although it seems that no two clusters of lunar sabbatarian groups are alike. Some, for example, teach that the weekly (lunar) Sabbath must fall on the 7th, 14th, 21st, and 28th days of each month. Others teach that these Sabbaths must fall on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days. Both sides are equally adamant that their position is the only one supported by Scripture.

I would like to save the reader the time and effort of pouring through the seemingly endless claims and objections raised by lunar sabbatarians, combined with our responses to those claims, as I really believe the simple facts establish that the weekly Sabbath day as handed down to us from Judaism can be traced to the original Sabbath of creation. Perhaps, in this introduction, I can call your attention to the inherent difficulties involved with accepting the lunar sabbatarians’ doctrine. Here are a few points that I would like for you to consider:

The Commanded “Extended Sabbath” Day?

Those who observe “lunar sabbaths” must set aside an “extended Sabbath day” each and every month, at month’s end. This “extended Sabbath,” of course, skews the continuous seven-day sequence as presented in Exodus 20:8-11. In that passage, we are given the basic details pertaining to the fourth commandment, wherein we are told to work six days, but rest on the seventh one. If our Heavenly Father intended for His children to understand that this “work six days, then rest on the seventh” sequence is to be interrupted once a month, this would have been a perfect spot to have inserted such a significant detail. However, none is offered. Not only is there a glaring absence of such details in all of His Tanakh, but there are no examples of anyone ever having set aside such an “extended Sabbath” each month. Furthermore, there aren’t even any historical examples that any believers, at any time, deliberately observed either “extended Sabbaths” or “lunar sabbaths.” The only people known to have observed lunar sabbaths were the Babylonians. Indeed, lunar sabbatarians, in presenting their isolated verses that they believe support their view, maintain that one can only “see” their position if he or she has the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Thou shalt regulate My Sabbaths by the lunar cycle (?)

There is not a single verse of Scripture wherein we are told that the weekly Sabbath is governed by the lunar cycle. In their attempt to compensate for such a gaping hole, lunar sabbatarians are left to patch together isolated verses of Scripture, each of which is presented outside of the context of the passage in which it is found.

Thou shalt set aside the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of each moon as my appointed Sabbath days (?)

Not only are there no verses explaining that the weekly Sabbath is governed by the lunar cycle, but also missing from Scripture are plain instructions detailing that the weekly Sabbath must fall on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of each month (or any other dates for that matter). This would have been so simple, yet it is remarkably absent from Torah. Lunar sabbatarians, in their attempt to make up for Yahweh’s apparent “neglect” to provide this information, go to great lengths to try and help Him specify the correct dates of the month. Indeed, Yahweh “apparently” left out much vital information that would have settled this matter long ago. Why would He leave out such important information ... missing information that is only now being retrieved after nearly 2,000 years of absence? Does He play “mind games” with His children ... not “spelling things out” ... just expecting us to “figure it all out”?

The Meaning of the word “Shabbat” and its cognates in over 100 languages

The Hebrew word “Shabbat” has cognates in over 100 languages around the world, each one being a reference to the day commonly known as “Saturday.” Furthermore, the cultures in which these cognates are found recognize a continuous, uninterrupted seven-day week, independent of the lunar cycle. If it were true that any believers ever observed **lunar** sabbaths, along with the monthly interruptions to that cycle, we should expect to at least find some cultures whose weeks are based upon the lunar cycle. There are, however, none known to exist.

When was the switch made from “Lunar Sabbath” to “Saturday Sabbath” observance?

Although I have repeatedly asked lunar sabbatarians to pinpoint when the apparent switch from Lunar Sabbaths to the “Saturday Sabbath” occurred, no one has been able to produce any historical evidence of the switch, much less the time frame when such a switch occurred. Certainly the switch wasn’t made without at least a whimper of protest from pious Jews, was it? I have requested that lunar sabbatarians produce the record of a controversy that existed within Judaism prior to their apparent decision to depart from the “lunar way,” yet they have offered nothing. Instead, all I have received is a “counter-challenge” asking me to produce the record of when Judaism stopped observing the new moon as a “special sabbath.” The only problem is, the new moon was never ordained in the Torah as a “special sabbath,” the lone exception being the new moon of the seventh month.

Have the anciently-scattered Jews, now becoming reunited, been found to observe differing days as the Shabbat?

Thanks to modern technology, man is now able to travel anywhere around the globe in a relatively short amount of time. Since the airplane was only invented a little over a hundred years ago, the speed of modern-day travel hasn't been around very long. The fastest means of travel prior to the invention of the airplane was by train. Often people traveled on horseback or by a horse-drawn carriage. Others traveled by ship. Even in ancient times, these were the accepted means of travel (with the exception of the train, of course). Travel was often slow. As Israelites and Jews were scattered throughout the nations, separated by thousands of miles, it is only natural that the method of lunar sabbath reckoning would have been preserved ... even if by a single cluster of Jews. However, with the advancement of modern travel and communication, these Jews are now being reunited and to no one's surprise, all of them are in complete agreement with regard to which day is the weekly Sabbath day. In no instance have *any* of these Jews been found to observe "lunar sabbaths."

The Famous Lunar Sabbath Controversy (?)

There is no shortage of records of the various controversies that have existed within the ranks of Judaism, such as the Pentecost controversy, the calendar reform proposed and implemented by Hillel II in 358 C.E., and even the "milk and meat" controversy. These are all recorded controversies within Judaism. When asked to produce the record of the Jewish "Lunar Sabbath Controversy," however, lunar sabbatarians are left speechless.

Would Jews Rather Fight Than Switch?

According to lunar sabbatarians, Jews would rather *switch* than fight. It is a matter of record that much of Judaism would have preferred death over transgressing Yahweh's laws, including His Sabbath day. We have, for example, the record from II Maccabees chapter seven of the mother and her seven sons, who were all tortured and killed ... all because they refused to eat a little swine's flesh. We also have the record of Jews who refused to fight on Yahweh's Sabbath day, choosing death over possible transgression of the fourth commandment. Certainly, then, if a decision were made to switch from lunar sabbath observance to "Saturday Sabbath" observance, there would at least be a record somewhere of *someone* who protested the switch, right? Not only that, but since lunar sabbatarians seem to believe this was a forced change, there must be a record *somewhere* of people who were either persecuted or put to death for refusing to change, right? I have repeatedly asked lunar sabbatarians to produce those historical records, but my requests have been ignored.

The Annual Double Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (?)

Historical records are also silent regarding anyone ever noting the "annual double sabbath" that occurs at the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread *each and every year*. Certainly, if true believers observed lunar sabbaths, this was the case each and every year. Abib 21 is the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and that day is also a "high day" Sabbath. The following day, Abib 22, is always a weekly (lunar) sabbath for those who believe the weekly Sabbaths must fall on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of each month, giving lunar sabbatarians an annual "double sabbath." However, no record exists that any true believer ever recognized such an annual event. Moreover, those who believe the lunar sabbaths must fall on the 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th days of each month are faced with a similar dilemma. Since Abib 14 is, for them, a weekly (lunar) sabbath day, and since the following day is a "high day" Sabbath, anyone of their persuasion *must* observe an annual double sabbath at the *beginning* of the Feast of Unleavened Bread each and every year. However, the historical record is silent, which offers telling evidence that no believers ever understood such an annual event.

"Eight days ye must eat unleavened bread" (???)

Even more significant than the above-mentioned annual "double sabbath," though, is the fact that lunar sabbatarians who observe weekly sabbaths on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of each month absolutely *must* observe an **EIGHT-DAY** Feast of Unleavened Bread each and every year, without exception ... even though Yahweh only commands *seven* (Ex. 12:15, Lev. 23:6, Num. 28:17). Does Yahweh not know how many days unleavened bread has to be eaten? He certainly *does* command only seven days, yet these lunar sabbatarians have no recourse but to consume unleavened products for *eight days*. Here is why: We know that we are commanded to remove the leavening from our dwellings on Abib 14. Beginning on Abib 15, then, we must eat unleavened bread for seven complete days. The seventh and final day is Abib 21, which is also an annual "high

day” Sabbath. Once Abib 21 ends, we are once again allowed to bring leavened products into our homes. **However**, for lunar sabbatarians, the very next day is **also** a Sabbath ... each and every year. The question thus arises as to **how**, **when** and **where** these individuals are to obtain their leavened products. They certainly cannot purchase them, since that following day is a weekly Sabbath, a day on which no buying or selling is permitted. Their only recourse would be to go to the home of an unbeliever and request a leavened product for free! This would hardly be an act befitting of a true believer! Thus, for eight consecutive days, each and every year, these lunar sabbatarians must eat unleavened bread.

I am aware of some folks who choose to begin eating unleavened bread on Abib 14, even though there is obviously no requirement for them to do so. Certainly, we can eat unleavened products whenever we choose, so long as we **also** do so during the time frame specified by Yahweh (Abib 15-21). For those who choose to begin consuming unleavened products on Abib 14, they observe eight days of unleavened bread. Again, this is by their own choice, and is not a requirement of Yahweh. **However**, any lunar sabbatarian who begins consuming unleavened bread on Abib 14 must observe not only eight days of unleavened bread, but also **nine days** of unleavened bread! The point is, lunar sabbatarians **could** observe nine days of unleavened bread, but they **must** observe it for eight days ... even though Yahweh only specifies seven.

Of course, this is an embarrassment to lunar sabbatarians, and in their attempt to “save face,” they respond by saying, “But Larry, you would **also** have to consume unleavened bread for eight days!”

It is true that every now and then a year will arise in which those of my persuasion are left with no choice but to eat unleavened bread for eight days. In years when Abib 21 falls on the sixth day of the week, we enjoy an eighth day of unleavened bread. However, that is the **exception**, not the rule. For lunar sabbatarians who observe lunar sabbaths on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of each month, this is the **RULE**. Again, Yahweh commanded **seven days of unleavened bread**, not eight, but lunar sabbatarians have no choice but to believe that Yahweh **miscalculated** in coming up with the necessary chronological sequence. Try asking a lunar sabbatarian why Yahweh wasn’t able to come up with the **true** number of days required for consuming unleavened bread.

A Lunar Sabbatarian Disproves the Lunar Sabbath Doctrine!

It is always neat coming up with pearls of wisdom in support of your argument, so I would love to be able to say that I came up with the above understanding pertaining to the fact that lunar sabbatarians must consume unleavened bread for eight days each year. The ridiculousness of the notion that Yahweh specified seven days but intended eight spotlights a truth which in itself and **by** itself disproves the lunar sabbatarian position. However, as much as I would like to take credit for coming up with such argument-stopping insight, I cannot. I am not the one who came up with the above logic. Where, then, did I obtain it? Would you believe me if I told you it came from a lunar sabbatarian who was in the process of reconsidering his position? Sometimes truth is indeed stranger than fiction, for not only did a doubting lunar sabbatarian come up with this nugget of truth, but also his insight was not sufficient to dissuade him from observing lunar sabbaths. To this day, he is a practicing lunar sabbatarian.

The lunar sabbatarian I am referring to was on the verge of abandoning the lunar sabbath doctrine. In fact, he had already sent me a study he had authored entitled *Lunar Sabbaths: Reconsidered in Light of Scripture and History*. In that study he concluded, “I therefore must be honest with myself and change my day of worship to the day we know as Saturday.” I prefer to withhold his name, as my interest is not that of revealing the identity of this individual, but rather to reveal that it was in fact a lunar sabbatarian who came up with perhaps the clearest evidence disproving the lunar sabbath doctrine. Sadly, as I just pointed out, he has once again reconsidered his position and is at this time observing lunar sabbaths ... including observing eight days of unleavened bread each year.

Yahweh Deliberately Timed Israel’s Departure From Egypt So As to Be on the Weekly Sabbath?

Another lunar sabbatarian offers a \$10,000 reward to anyone who can demonstrate that a weekly Sabbath day fell on any day other than the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of the month. I have petitioned him on several occasions to make good on his offer, but each time he comes up with an “alternate explanation” that he somehow believes justifies his position. For example, according to Scripture, Yahweh deliberately timed the ten plagues of Egypt so as to culminate with the death angel killing Egypt’s firstborn on Abib 15. We believe the Passover lambs were killed the afternoon of the 14th, then that night the death angel slew Egypt’s firstborn children, and the lunar sabbatarian I just mentioned agrees with that scenario. On this same day, Abib 15, the children of Israel departed from Rameses (Num. 33:3) and journeyed to Succoth, a distance of **at least** ten miles. Since the 15th is always a weekly (lunar) Sabbath, the question immediately arises as to **why** Yahweh would deliberately time the ten plagues so as to cause them to culminate with a departure and journey on the weekly Sabbath. Many scholars recognize that such a journey is not normally allowed on the Sabbath ... and the lunar sabbatarian agrees. The only reasonable

explanation is that Abib 15, that year, was *not* a weekly Sabbath, thus identifying a month during which the weekly Sabbath could *not* have fallen on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days of the month.

The lunar sabbatarian, in defending his position, maintains that the departure from Egypt was a necessary “travel allowance” for that particular weekly Sabbath. In other words, it should be allowed as an “exception to the rule.” However, once again, Yahweh is in complete control of the timing of all events, and certainly this is one of the greatest events of all time! Did Yahweh deliberately time that those events so as to culminate in a departure on the weekly Sabbath? In other words, would Yahweh deliberately time one of the greatest events of all time so as to cause the Israelites to break His law? We think not.

Which Day Does Yahweh Assign as “the Passover”?

I believe another passage that easily identifies a month wherein the weekly Sabbaths could not have fallen on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th is found in the book of John. In John 12:1 we read that, six days before the Passover, the Messiah journeyed to Bethany. In the previous chapter we read that He had been staying in the city of Ephraim. The journey from Ephraim to Bethany is one of at least 14 miles through rough, hilly country ... *not* a journey that a pious believer would consider undertaking on a weekly Sabbath day. Certainly the Messiah, our Righteous Example, would not have done so.

Given the Scriptural fact that Abib 14 is the day of Passover (Lev. 23:4, Num. 28:16), combined with the fact that Abib 15 is regarded as the day *following* the Passover (Num. 33:3), we can understand that to calculate six days before the Passover we must subtract six days from Abib 14. This brings us to Abib 8, which is one of the days promoted by lunar sabbatarians as a monthly (yet weekly) sabbath. In other words, lunar sabbatarians must face the fact that the Messiah completed this lengthy journey on the weekly Sabbath ... something that they agree He would *not* have done. This, then, identifies yet *another* month during which the weekly Sabbaths could not have fallen on the 8th, 15th, 22nd and 29th days.

In his attempt to salvage his doctrine, the lunar sabbatarian counters that the Apostle John’s use of the word “Passover” in John 12:1 *cannot* be a reference to Abib 14. He contends that it can only be a reference to **Abib 15**. Thus, when he subtracts six days from Abib 15, he has the Messiah completing the journey on Abib 9 ... which for him is not a weekly (lunar) sabbath. However, once again, by *Scriptural definition*, “the Passover” can only be a reference to **Abib 14**. Only by “user definition” can anyone label “the Passover” as falling on any other day.

On an interesting side note, I asked the lunar sabbatarian how he would have interpreted John 12:1 if it were to read, “Then six days before the Passover Yeshua *rested* in Bethany.” Given such a verse, six days before Abib 14 would *still* be Abib 8, which is a weekly (lunar) sabbath day, but in this instance it would depict Him as *resting* instead of traveling. Since it would follow that Yeshua’s purpose for resting in Bethany would have been to observe the Sabbath, it would only make sense to a lunar sabbatarian that, in this instance, the reference to “the Passover” can only be to Abib 14. After ignoring my repeated attempts to answer my question (I was persistent), he finally responded, admitting that he would, in that instance, agree that “the Passover” is a reference to Abib 14. Of course, this is a classic example of allowing one’s doctrinal stand to dictate his interpretation of a text that would otherwise contradict his theology, and this is what lunar sabbatarians consistently do.

Many very intelligent people have fallen for the deception of lunar sabbatarianism. We believe this is because there is enough truth behind their teachings that others find it appealing, especially in view of the fact that we already understand Yeshua’s warning that only a *few* will make it into the Kingdom. Certainly, since only a *few* people observe lunar sabbaths, this is evidence that these are the people who have the “inside track” on the path to Yahweh’s Kingdom. A very dear friend cautioned me about the nature of deception. He wrote, “The danger of deception is that deception wouldn’t be deception if it were obvious. The real danger of deception is that it *appears* reasonable and contains a substantial amount of truth.” This, then, is a summary of our perception of lunar sabbatarian theology: a very clever deception laced with just enough truth that many sincere believers will accept it. Of course, the lunar sabbatarian is very quick to turn my friend’s quote against those of my persuasion. According to him, those who observe the “Saturday Sabbath” are the ones who have fallen for the deception. It is up to each individual, then, to carefully research this matter, weighing each argument against what is found in both Scripture and the historical record, praying for Yahweh to guide our study. I urge each of you to *not* accept Scripture only as it is interpreted by me, but to *only* accept my interpretation as it is supported by Scripture.

¹ Source: *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, Edited by Isaac Landman, The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., New York, 1941, article “Holidays,” p. 410.

² Source: *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9, Edited by Isaac Landman, The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., New York, 1943, article “Sabbath,” p. 295.