APPENDIX

CONCERNING THE SABBATH
AND CIRCUMCISION IN P

Wellhausen (1905: 110, 340) gave wide circulation to the view that the sections in P dealing with the Sabbath and circumcision reflect the exilic period. He conceived the Exile as the time when Judaism was severed from the living cultic religion and began to be based upon commandments that did not depend upon the land. According to this view the Sabbath and circumcision, which are particularly stressed in P, were turned into the symbols of Judaism during the Babylonian Exile, and so they remained until today. This notion has become axiomatic in biblical scholarship, and it serves as an important point of departure in establishing P's date.¹

Just as we have raised the question concerning the account of creation in Gen 1, so shall we also inquire whether this emphasis on the Sabbath and circumcision is necessarily the result of an historical development, or characteristic of the priestly circle that gave birth to this source? We have already addressed the connection between the priesthood and the Sabbath. Certainly, the connection between the priesthood and circumcision should be even more obvious, for this is the ritual act upon which man's entry into the cultic community depends, the physical holiness of which the priests sought to preserve. The observance of this precept constituted a kind of status confessionis, and in the patriarchal stories (Gen 34:15–17; see Haran 1965: 44–45) circumcision appears as a precondition to the foreigner's joining and becoming a part of Israel (cf. Exod 12:48). It similarly appears in other ancient Israelite traditions (like Exod 4:24–26; Josh 5:2–9), and overwhelming religious significance is given to circumcision long before the Exile (cf. “uncircumcised” in 1 Sam

¹ Noth (1948: 250): “Für P steht aus allgemein bekannten Gründen die nachdeuteronomische Abfassung fest; darüber hinaus setzt das Gewicht, das für ihn die nichtkul- tischen rituellen Observanzen der Sabbatruhe und der Beschneidung haben (Gen 2, 2ff.; 17, 10ff.), doch wohl das Hervortreten dieser Ordnungen speziell unter den nach Babylonien Deportierten in der ersten Hälfte des 6. Jahrhunderts voraus. Damit ist ein terminus a quo gegeben.”
14:6; 17:36 etc., and similarly Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; 9:24–25; Ezek 44:7). Indeed, Wellhausen has not successfully established the claim that the precept of circumcision acquired a particularly great emphasis during the Babylonian Exile, nor has any evidence been presented even to support the claim. We shall similarly demonstrate further on that his claims concerning the Sabbath are unsustainable.

Wellhausen claimed that a tendency to observe the Sabbath more stringently was initiated during the period of the First Temple’s destruction and thereafter. He presented evidence for this claim from the period of the Return (Isa 56:2; Neh 13:15–22). However, this evidence merely pointed to a laxity of Sabbath observance during that period, which had long been observed, and not to any first attempts to establish this institution. On the contrary, in the pre-exilic period, the Sabbath was observed more stringently. Even those who oppressed and crushed the poor were careful to avoid selling grain or conducting business on the Sabbath (Am 8:5). The same picture is also clear in epigraphic evidence. The Hebrew letter from Yabneh-Yam (Naveh 1960; cf. Cross 1962: 42–46) mentions a farmer who ceased gathering and storing away his harvest “before the Sabbath” (לִפְּרָיָם, lines 5–6). Reference to the observance of the Sabbath is also found among the Jews of Elephantine see Porten (1969: 116–118).

Though it was necessary during the Return to fight against carrying burdens and trading on the Sabbath, many other biblical passages inform us that the Sabbath was observed in pre-exilic times both as a day of abstention from work and as a day of solemn assembly and worship (2 Kgs 4:23; Isa 1:13; Hos 2:13 etc.). Wellhausen, who could not ignore these facts, admitted the existence of the Sabbath during the pre-exilic period, but claimed that it was characterized by joy and pleasure, while the late priestly Sabbath had an ascetic character (1905: 109–110). The Sabbath in P, according to Wellhausen, is not to be understood as a day of rest and relax-

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2 It is also possible to read שָׁבָט as an infinitive, with the sense of abstention from work (Talmon 1964: 32).

3 See Neh 13:15 and similarly Jer 17:19–21. As for the late character of this prophecy, see the commentary of Rudolph (1947: 109). Isa 58:13 also apparently refers to Sabbath trading. The rendering “Geschäft” for בַּעֲלָמָה is indeed appropriate. Compare also Isa 58:13 where בַּעֲלָמָה and בַּעֲלָמָה הָדָרְכָּה, בַּעֲלָמָה הָדָרְכָּה are the equivalents of מִשְׁבָּתָה, מִשְׁבָּתָה וְמִשְׁבָּתָה, מִשְׁבָּתָה יָדָרְכָּה, and mean “carrying on business,” see Weinfeld (1982b: 278–279, n. 18).