

RESOLVED: JEWISH CHRISTIANS ARE OBLIGED
TO OBSERVE THE SABBATH

INTRODUCTION

What a thrill to witness God's hand in history! He promised never to let Israel go, that He would ultimately purify and protect her and we, as leaders of the redeemed remnant, have the privilege of seeing these things come to pass. The unexpectedly protracted period called in Scripture "the times of the Gentiles" seems to be drawing to a close and we, as subjects in the drama as well as observers of it marvel. In less than twenty short years thousands of Jewish people have trusted Jesus, dozens of Messianic Jewish congregations have been formed and, of course, who hasn't heard of the Jews for Jesus?

But we Jews are practical people--realists who have recognized that if God lived on earth, people would break his windows (his windows weren't broken but his body was, for our justification). We rejoice at the prospect of future redemption, but we yearn to understand how we are to live here and now. We want to know if we are supposed to conduct ourselves as Christians who happen to be Jews, Jews who happen to be Christians, six of one, half a dozen of the other all of the above, none of the above, one from column A, two from column B, or what. And so, we talk about the Sabbath.

Should Jewish believers in Jesus honor the Sabbath, that is the seventh day? Our suggestion is yes, for both theological and far-reaching practical reasons.

LAW AND GRACE: ONE MORE TIME

Let it be categorically stated that we Jewish believers affirm grace working through faith as the only ground ever offered man for his justification. The Sabbath issue has nothing to do our heavenly standing but very much to do with how we are to behave in a confusing world. Before discussing the Sabbath itself, however, we must seek to understand the Bible's teaching about the status of the written Law in times past and for the present.

Dispensational theologians have emphasized the discontinuity between law and grace. In his introduction to the New Scofield Bible, C. I. Scofield wrote:

"The most obvious and striking division of the word of truth is that between Law and Grace. Indeed, these contrasting principles characterize the two most important dispensations--Jewish and Christian. ...Scripture never, in any dispensation mingles these two principles. Law always has a place and work distinct and wholly diverse from that of grace. Law is God prohibiting and requiring; grace is God beseeching and bestowing." (Daniel Fuller: 1980:pp.3-4).

We are grateful to Dispensational thinkers for rediscovering the great truth of God's ongoing covenant with Israel, but such a radical disjuncture between law and grace seems to be unwarranted. Our suggestion is that all periods of human history have been characterized by measures of both.

Was the theocratic period of Moses, David and the prophets characterized by Law? Yes, The Lord gave our people principles of conduct so that we might lead successful lives in the midst of a largely corrupt dominant culture. Was it also characterized by his grace (unmerited favor)? Again the answer, yes. Is this age of the New Covenant characterized by God's grace? Yes, of course, but the New Covenant Scriptures are laden with laws--specific standards for godly living--as well! Dan Juster has noted 1,050 of these in his soon-to-be published book. (Dan Juster: 1982: pp. 278-304). The biblical picture is "both/and," not "either/or" when it comes to the operation of God's law and grace in his dealings with mankind.

Consider, for example the giving of the Ten Commandments. How do they begin? With a rule or regulation? No, but with a testimony of God's unmerited favor bestowed upon a hopeless group of motley slaves:

"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." (Exodus 20:2)

The commandments which follow, far from being a narrow, legalistic code of "do's" and "don'ts" form part of a specific covenant treaty pattern which may help us view the entire Mosaic legislation in a new, grace-oriented way.

The Middle East at the time of the Patriarchs was surprisingly sophisticated economically, socially and politically. Not unlike our own age, treaties between greater and lesser powers were common and the written documents describing these have been shown to fit stereotyped

patterns. In recent years, scholars have noticed that a particular treaty format common in the 15th century B.C. bears striking similarity to the literary form of both Exodus 20 and the whole book of Deuteronomy. This is bad news for liberal scholars who like to place the authorship of the fifth book of Moses centuries later during the reign of Josiah, but good news for us as we are now able to view the specifics of Mosaic legislation not as a legalistic system of "works-righteousness," but the Lord's graciously-given instruction manual for Israel's successful life in the land--a shield of protection for her from harmful forces both within and without. Meridith Klein explains:

"...the two tables were rather a suzerainty treaty or covenant rather than a legal code...not law but covenant ...It is a covenant of God's love to the nation." (Meredith Kline: 1963: pp. 16-17).

We are not suggesting that all Moses' legislation has the same status in our time as it did before Yeshua's atoning death and resurrection. The Book of Hebrews chapters 8-9 are clear on this point. We are suggesting, however, that a more grace-oriented view of the Old Covenant fits the biblical teaching far better than an approach which leaves Moses holding the bag of do's and don'ts of a dead legalism. His teachings were gracious, through and through, so that the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 33:31-34 contains the prescription for our problem, not Moses'.

THE NATURE OF THE NEW COVENANT

"The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel

and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people." No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

A reading of Jeremiah 31:31-34 suggests three main ideas: First, that a new covenant is necessary because of the deficiencies of our people, not necessarily of the Torah--the written code. Second, that this new covenant will be different than the previous in that its "laws" (covenant stipulations as discussed above) will be placed in the deep recesses of our beings so that we will be motivated to keep them with spontaneous joy, and third, that all Israelites--not just a faithful few--will participate in this profound operation of God's Spirit. (A related passage in Ezekiel 25 specifically mentions the role of the Spirit). The point we wish to emphasize is that this passage affirms the place of laws in the New Covenant age. God's laws viewed as standards of conduct or principles for successful living--not as a means of achieving the world to come--are part of the gracious structure of Moses' era and of our own. The passage says nothing about the abrogation of Torah--God's instruction. So, if some particular command in the Torah can be shown to have a greater significance than others--if we

can detect some yet unfulfilled prophetic quality or a dimension which brings us back to the Abrahamic covenant or even beyond to the bright days of creation itself, don't be intimidated by the messianic monsters!

THE MESSIANIC MONSTERS: "SHOULD " AND "OUGHT"

What we are trying to show in a perhaps, humorous fashion, is that believers sometimes overreact against the notion that Jewish Christians ought to observe certain commands found in the Old Testament. The phrase "Jewish believers are free to keep features of the Torah" is not a monster, but if we should merely suggest Jewish believers ought to do thus and so, the flight or fight mechanism may be aroused! Reasons for this include the kind of thinking which sees law and grace primarily as distinct ages, a generally anti-Jewish attitude characteristic of much Christian thinking or an understandable reaction to the nit-picking, pettiness and empty formality of some clerics. However, we suggest again: if it can be shown that some feature of Moses has reference beyond the doomed sacrificial system or was in some other way left in tact by the Messiah, so that it may be said that Jewish believers ought to heed Moses at that point, we should not react as if we had met a messianic monster!

Another way of picturing the above is to suggest the Old Covenant has been caught up in the new, brought up to date in light of Yeshua's first coming, and is to be reapplied by his followers in light of the changed status of things. How we reapply any given teaching requires the best biblical

scholarship, informed by the Spirit of God in an atmosphere of good will, patience and tolerance for those who configure things differently than we.

A MIDRASH: RABBI SAPERSTEIN'S NEW HOUSE

One could get a little jealous, maybe a lot jealous. Rabbi Saperstein, who is no great scholar and who has been known more than once to show up late for High Holiday services, happens to have a rich brother who built him such a house, you could die. They call it the palace of Brookline and believe you, me, they're not kidding. Such a big, beautiful place! What makes the house so wonderful--for angels, not for people I'm telling you--is not just the 12 rooms, not just the white vinyl siding, not just the ping pong room in the bottom, but the way the old house became part of the new.

You see, the rabbi's brother Barney Saperstein, the builder from Newton, besides being generous is also a wise man. The rebbetzen wanted all new. Listen, I could understand. She was tired of the old place and you know how women are. But Barney was right: did she want house beautiful like he promised, or Levitown, New York? So, she agreed and the workmen came and took down the old place but were so careful--God bless them. Any beautiful wood from the old place they saved and put linseed oil and covered with plastic in the yard. And the old foundation which mind you, was two feet thick, Barney said keep. So, to make a long story short the workmen put up the new with the old right on

the same spot and even the rebbetzen--who is usually kvetch number one--was happy. And Rabbi Saperstein was happy and I'm mostly happy and I hope you're happy, too. It's even in the Bible. When the Holy One, blessed be He says he's got a new covenant for Israel, does that mean He's going to throw out all that came before? God forbid! As it is written, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts." (Jer. 31:20).

THE ESSENCE OF PAUL'S CONCERN

A tendency to view law and grace as mutually exclusive concepts manifest in their respective ages, has been fueled by a particular understanding of a number of Paul's comments:

"For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law but under grace." (Rom. 6:14).

"To those under the law I become like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law)." (11 Cor 9:20).

"...I am not free from God's law, but am under Christ's law." (1 Cor. 9:21).

"Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory... will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?" (1 Cor. 3:7-8).

"Mark my words I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourself be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all." (Gal. 5:2).

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations." (Eph. 2:14-15).

It is beyond the scope of this brief study to examine each of these passages, but some general comments are in order. First, we suggest that these seemingly anti-law tests be viewed within their historical context as described in the Book of Acts and inferred from the epistles. That is, we find Paul at crossed swords with the Judaizers--men who taught that Gentiles must observe the specifics of Moses to be saved and counted among the community of faith.

Second, passages which teach we are not under law, but under grace seem best to be understood with reference to the great truth of Romans 4: a right standing with God is a function of trusting the finished work of Messiah, not of obeying commandments. As a system or method of receiving heaven's reward, only faith will do. But, whether Jewish believers have a covenant calling to maintain features of their biblical/national heritage is another matter all together.

Third, passages which note the superiority of Yeshua's work as over against the law should be taken at face value: his work is more glorious and gracious than anything Moses taught. However, these are comparative statements which may have little bearing on the status of Old Testament teaching for today.

Fourth, is living under the "law of Christ" Paul's expression of freedom from Moses, so that only New Testament teaching binds the consciences of Jewish believers? We think the expression has another meaning all together. Dan Juster comments:

"The 'law of Christ' does not replace Torah, but is a principle of approach to all of Scripture (emphasis mine) in the power of the atonement and the Spirit. This is the meaning of not to be under the Law as a system of righteousness. This passage is perfectly exemplified by Paul's life and practise in the Book of Acts. (Dan Juster: 1983: p. 139).

Our suggestion, then, is the "law of Christ" is equivalent to the "law of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2), the emphasis being on our heart motivation for obeying God. It is a Spirit-led motivation--not to earn his favor, but to please him because he has loved us first. Paul was under the law of Christ as he obeyed God as a faithful Jew.

Finally, it is clear from Hebrews 8-9 that the Mosaic Constitution is no longer in force as a full-blown system governing the life of Israel as it was before Yeshua's coming. The temple sacrifices are gone now that the quintessential sacrifice has been made for all men for all time. The priests are gone. A new age has dawned in which Jews and Gentiles can and should share table fellowship, joyfully expressing their love for Messiah. However, these facts hardly settle the Sabbath issue. Once we are able to get past the the radical disjuncture of law and grace, recognizing the necessity of both for all ages, the New Testament teaching about the Law takes on a new dimension. Commandment-keeping won't earn us heaven, but all Scripture--including Moses--is profitable for "teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness..." The only question is which features of Old Testament teaching

transcend the sacrificial system--which commands are bigger than Moses--which elements look before and beyond the Mosaic constitution and therefore, even today, commend themselves to Jewish believers. Our suggestion: the command to honor the Sabbath, the seventh day, is one of these..

THE SABBATH IN THE TENACH

We first encounter the Sabbath in Moses's chronicle of creation:

"Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing: so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." (Gen. 2: 1-3).

Commenting on the passage, Samuele Bacchiocchi remarks:

"In the first creation story the seventh day is closely connected with human origins. This is indicated by the fact that it follows immediately after the creation and blessing of mankind--the crown of creation (Genesis 1: 26-31). In fact, the story of man and that of the Sabbath are not only given in sequence but also receive greater coverage than all other creation events. This reflects both their interdependency and their importance." (Samuele Bacchiocchi: 1980: p.20).

One is struck by the amount of emphasis placed on the Sabbath so early in the Bible. No wonder some have referred to it as a "creation ordinance." Its origin is thousands if not millions of years before the Mosaic Covenant, perhaps suggesting a more important role than we might expect for some outdated ceremonial law.

Traveling through the centuries to the day Moses met the Lord God on Mount Sinai, we note the role of the Sabbath in the Ten D'varim--the Ten Commandments. First, the mere fact

that the day of rest is part of this pivotal portion of Scripture may indicate its great importance to the life of Israel. Based on his studies of the Covenant/Treaty pattern, Merideth Kline has suggested that the Sabbath was the seal of God's covenant with the nation of Israel (Meridith Kline: 1963: pp. 18-19). If this is correct, then the Sabbath is not some antique, buried in the ashes of the fallen temple, but remains a sign intended to be co-terminous with the Lord's love for our covenanted people. The Sabbath is a sign forever because he loves Israel forever.

Exodus 31:16-17 combines the two themes discussed so far, Sabbath as a memorial to creation and an ongoing seal of God's covenant with Israel:

"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested."

Moses' mention of the death penalty for Sabbath-breaking, kindness to donkeys, maidservants and the like can throw us off the track. Because these have so little connection with our modern situation, we might erroneously conclude that the Sabbath itself is passe. Such a conclusion seems unnecessary if we view Shabbat observance as necessarily Spirit-led and fitted to changing cultural patterns. In the Bible God's flexibility is evident. For example, He directed Moses to allow certain ceremonially-unclean people to celebrate Passover one full month late because of an unforeseen circumstance (Num. 9).

It is beyond the scope of this study to comment on all the passages relating to the Sabbath, but from the above one important point seems clear: the seventh day of rest is presented in the Tenach as having great importance. Its theological significance can be traced to the bright days of creation and to the very heart of God's everlasting relationship with Israel. It seems we would need some clear indication from the New Covenant Scriptures if the Sabbath no longer plays its central role in the life of our people, Israel.

THE SABBATH IN THE GOSPELS

The Gospels reveal two major facts regarding Yeshua's approach to the Sabbath. First, that he observed it. Second, that he, as Lord of the Sabbath, was its supreme interpreter. Also recorded are the conflicts between Yeshua and the clergy over the nature and application of the Sabbath.

Regarding the Messiah's observant lifestyle, Paul Jewett aptly comments:

"It must be further remembered that Jesus accepted the Old Testament as Scripture, as did the apostles and the primitive church. And the Old Testament placed the Sabbath in that towering ethical code, the Decalog, thus underscoring the fact that Israel was to keep the Sabbath as a perpetual covenant. 'It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he ceased from work and rested' (Exodus 31:17). ...The Sabbath above all other enactments of the law forced itself upon the notice of one's neighbors, so that the observance of the Sabbath was the touch stone of Israel's witness to the living God. There can be little doubt, then, that Jesus as a devout Jew observed the Sabbath. To feature him as the grand innovator who swept it aside in the name of

liberty, is to remake Jesus in the image of the Enlightenment." (Paul Jewett: 1971: pp. 34-35).

As we shape our understanding of Jewish believers' relationship to the Sabbath, the Messiah's regular practice should certainly loom large in our thinking. Preachers regularly point to his example for our lives in other areas. Should not his example regarding this pivotal scriptural command impact us as well?

As Lord of the Sabbath, Yeshua provided his hearers with the final, authoritative word as to its meaning summarized in Mark 2:27: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath." It seems that far from doing away with the day over which he was Lord, he merely clarified its meaning. His disregard or even contempt for the ways some of his contemporaries understood the day has been viewed by some to suggest Yeshua had a problem with the Sabbath per se. Rather, we believe his problem was with the misapplications, not with the Sabbath itself.

Finally, Matt. 24:20-21 seems to suggest Messiah expected Jewish believers (at least in Israel) would observe the Sabbath in the last days:

"Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again."

Admittedly, this interpretation is not conclusive, but considering the general flow of material in the Gospels one thing seems certain: there is little in them to suggest Jewish believers should view the Shabbat as anything less

than a command God wishes us to keep.

THE SABBATH, THE APOSTLES AND THE NAZZARENES

If we can trust James, the Lord's brother, it seems clear that Paul retained a consistent Jewish lifestyle even after becoming a follower of Yeshua, the Messiah:

"There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law." (Acts 21:23-24).

What an amazing passage! James, who history tells us was an observant Jew, deeply respected by the community in Jerusalem, tells us that Paul--the inspired author of all those "grace-oriented" passages was himself, observant. The implications of the Apostolic example for us today has been the subject of another paper. In summary, it seems that Paul and the early believing Jewish community saw themselves as having a dual identity: they were Jews living within the framework of Israel's redemptive history and they were members of the worldwide Body of Messiah. Given the exalted position of Shabbat in their Bible and the example of their Lord, it would seem unlikely they would ever even consider jettisoning the day. "Of course we Nazzarenes keep Shabbat! It is central to God's covenant with our people..." might be their way of expressing it. We learn from Acts 15 that the issue facing these early Messianic Jews, if you will, was not their own covenant calling, but the status of Gentiles as participants in the New Covenant. Dan Juster comments:

"This then is the issue of Acts: are Gentiles fully

accepted by God in Yeshua without adopting the call of the nation of Israel? It is never an issue that Jews might be called to give up their calling as part of the nation of Israel along with their practice of the Jewish-biblical-national heritage. It is assumed that they will maintain their heritage in a biblically consistent way as Jews.(Dan Juster: 1982: p. 96).

Of course the general belief, particularly in the Western church has been that the Sabbath has not been totally abrogated, but shifted to Sunday as the Lord's Day. While we have absolutely no problem with Sunday worship in of itself, it seems difficult to find a clear justification for such a monumental switch on the pages of Scripture, particularly for Jewish believers. Robert Odom comments:

"The New Testament writings say nothing about the first day of the week's being divinely blessed or set apart as holy to be observed in commemoration of Christ's resurrection. They do not speak of it as a day of sacred rest, nor do they forbid secular work on it. A professor of comparative religion and missions at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Kentucky has correctly stated this about Sunday:

'There are in the New Testament no commands, no prescriptions, no rules, no liturgies, applying to the Lord's day.

The New Testament Scriptures dealing with this subject are not numerous, they contain no explicit command, they give no regulating rules.'

"And one of America's distinguished Roman Catholic prelates and apologists has declared:

Now the Scriptures do not contain all the truths which a Christian is bound to believe, nor do they explicitly enjoin all the duties which he is obligated to practice. Not to mention other examples, is not every Christian obliged to sanctify Sunday and to abstain on that day from unnecessary servile work? Is not the observance of this law among the most prominent of our sacred duties? But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing

the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify.'" (Robert Odom: 1977: p.296).

BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE SABBATH AND THINGS TO COME

The eschatological dimensions of the Jewish feasts and festivals have long been recognized by Jewish Christian scholars so that the shofar blast on Rosh Hashanah prefigures our future resurrection, Yom Kippur looks forward to Israel's national redemption, etc. Interestingly enough, the Sabbath is presented as a weekly festival (Lev. 23:3) and may also be seen to have a yet-unfulfilled quality. For example, if we should take the passage at face value, Isa. 66:23 seems to teach some form of Sabbath observance in the eternal state:

"From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," declares the Lord."

Again, in Hebrews 4:1-11 a yet-unfulfilled Sabbath rest is suggested. In this case we look forward to the experience of Messiah's ultimate rest. When we trusted him, we entered in principle into that rest. But a day is coming when we will walk with him in the fullness of his Sabbath.

Our point is simply this: the Sabbath is presented in Scripture as having meaning far and away beyond that of teachings limited to ancient Israel's agricultural life-patterns or temple worship. Its profound spiritual meanings and colorations can have a profound impact on us and our children if our hearts can only grasp the grace of God in granting our people the Sabbath.

FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY

Has the Sabbath been switched to Sunday in honor of the Lord's resurrection? Our sense is that inferencial arguments based on his Sunday post-resurrection appearances and hints from Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, and Rev. 1:10 cannot bear the weight of a shift to Sunday Sabbath. However, there is certainly nothing wrong with believers worshipping on this or other days of the week. We suggest the issue for Jewish believers occurs along different lines: if the continued existence of the Jewish people as a distinct, recognizable group is the work of God, rooted in divine promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, then it would seem we Jewish believers should concern ourselves with the centrality of Spirit led Shabbat observance. The old adage is true: "the Jews keep the Sabbath and the Sabbath keeps the Jews." And this seal of the covenant is far more than some abstract symbol, but a living vehicle, a divinely-appointed means of ensuring there would be a Jewish people to glorify Yeshua at the end of the age and a recognizable believing Jewish remnant now to call our sick world to repentance and faith in the Son of God.

THE CHARGE AGAINST US

I'll tell you the truth. The rabbis' attacks on our understanding of Isa. 53 have little impact on me. The anti-missionaries' protestations about our evangelism techniques I easily ignore. And I say a facile "ho-hum" to their nit-picking New Testament exegesis. However, there is one charge made by our antagonists which does touch my soul and that is, "your children will not be Jewish."

The flawed frame of reference of the declared enemies of the Gospel makes them poor judges. And blessed be the Jewish believer who sees them properly--as declawed critics who, if they knew what we know about Yeshua, would be his followers, too. But, it would be the height of arrogance to assume Jewish leaders have no legitimate concerns about our movement. And when they ask, "where are the children and grand children of these so-called Messianic Jews." we want to have a ready answer. "Here they are! See my grand daughter. She loves Jesus and she lives as a Jewish believer. Here is my grandson. He is proud to be a Jew and he follows the Messiah."

If the Lord God has let Israel go, that is, if his covenant with her as a special nation among the nations has been abrogated because of her leaders' rejection of Yeshua, then this concern is little more than understandable human sentimentality. So, Italian parents want their children to grow up Italian, Chinese parents, the same and Jewish parents, too. Understandable, but no big deal. After all, this is America.

However if Israel retains her covenant calling, we Jewish believers have a great privilege and responsibility. As the redeemed minority, the center point of God's redemptive activity in our world is with us. Yeshua, through the believing remnant, fulfills Israel's role as a light to the nations. The remnant belongs to the Church to be sure, but we suggest that a biblical Jewish calling is important in the overall scheme of God's plan. It should be placed on a

higher level than a mere sentimental desire for ethnic continuity because we are talking about something far more important than a preference for bagels over baklava or klesmer music over black spirituals. We are talking about developing a biblically centered Jewish identity for ourselves and establishing structures of transmission of these values to our kids so that we can fulfill our destiny. What are the key features of this kind of Jewishness? The celebration of our feasts and festivals including the Shabbat as weekly, monthly and yearly reminders of who we are in the overall scheme of things.

GOLIATH IN JORDASH JEANS

Like the giant of old, the new Goliath is the enemy of Israel. But he looks different. He's got designer jeans on, Pony track shoes, cool shades and instead of a spear the thickness of a weaver's beam, he's got a Gucci briefcase! And inside it are copies of Omni, Psychology Today and New Age Magazines. And most surprising, he is smiling broadly, his right hand extended in a gesture of warm friendship. The power of this new Golaith is the power of the dominant secular culture. And he's far more dangerous to Israel--and all believers--than David's ancient foe.

The dominant godless culture is all pervasive and would lull all believers into a sleepy spiritual mediocrity. We thank God for the Christian electronic media which fights fire with fire to reclaim biblical values for the United States. But even here there is a challenge for Jewish Christians: so little on the airwaves reminds us of our

special calling. How shall we and our children be reminded?
Answer: the weekly rhythm of Shabbat along with festival observance. The Son of David will have to kill the new Goliath when he returns as king, but we don't have to listen to his lies now. We know who we are. We know from whence we've come and we know where we're going. Herein lies our strength to stand with Yeshua for the salvation of the world as the recognizably Jewish remnant.

DO IT FOR THE CHILDREN

Spirit-led Shabbat observance provides a weekly point of reference, a sacred stopover which adds color and meaning to our lives. And the kids love it. A special day for worship services, a nature walk, a family nap time, a festive meal, relaxing with an otherwise busy Daddy and then on Saturday night--most exciting of all--lighting the big havdalah candle followed by our special song:

Shabbat is over, night is here.
Soon off to bed, we'll have no fear.
Yeshua loves us, so we say:
Shabbat shalom, good-bye today.

The little ones (and big ones) watch, taste the wine, sing, squint in the bright candle light and they remember. Each week they remember who they are: believers in Yeshua along with boys and girls from all over the world and Jews who have a special job from their heavenly Father.

So, let the rabbis kvetch. We will walk tall, knowing that we are making a sincere effort to pass on the right kind of Jewishness to our children. And in the fullness of time our God will usher in the period of everlasting joy described

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in Isa. 66 when the whole world will rest on the Shabbat--and
we Jewish believers will have gotten into the habit long
before!

APPENDIX 1

THE UNITY OF THE BODY AND THE SABBATH

High on our spiritual agenda must be our commitment to unity of Jew and Gentile in the Body of Messiah. This unity must be consistently expressed and Jewish believers who honor the Shabbat as their day to worship are in an excellent position to demonstrate to the watching world that the middle wall of partition has truly been broken down. An example from the life of Congregation Ruach Israel:

About a year ago we began feeling the need for larger quarters for our Friday evening services. About that same time I was introduced to a pastor of a new church in the area which, itself, was in need of a new home. Art and I hit it off immediately and together with the other leaders of our congregations, began seeking the Lord about the possibility of a joint venture. To make a long story short, a magnificent piece of land came on the market in a prime location. We signed a purchase and sales agreement and began drawing up plans for our new building in Needham, MA. What has emerged in our thinking will be something unique: a worship center in a Jewish neighborhood, jointly owned by a believing Jewish and believing Gentile congregation with rental office space for an evangelical organization, start up room for new congregations in the area, a function hall, and the Shekinah prayer room, which will be open 24 hours a day. The decisive factor in favor of this arrangement is the fact that Ruach Israel holds its worship services on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, while the Good Shepherd

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Christian Fellowship meets on Sundays. So in this case, our Sabbath observance will facilitate the unity of believers.

APPENDIX 2

TWO PROBLEM PASSAGES

Two passages from Paul's writings have been interpreted by many to indicate he had a casual or even a negative attitude toward the Sabbath. Another look at these may suggest another picture:

Romans 14:5-6

Is this passage an expression of Paul's laissez faire attitude toward the Sabbath: "Keep it if you like, don't if you care not to?" We suggest that the biblical Sabbath enjoined on believing Israel is not the subject of the passage.

First, we notice that Romans 14 concerns believers' attitudes toward certain foods as well: "He who is weak eats vegetables only" (Rom. 14:2). The issue was vegetarianism, not kashrut. Similarly, the regarding of special days seems to have its locus outside the seventh day Sabbath. The issue may have been Sabbath observance for Gentiles, in which case Paul's argument could be expressed as follows:

"You Jewish believers rightly regard the Sabbath as your special day. Great! I'm with you. And you believers who formally followed Zeus can't see the logic of such a practice. You are right to feel free of concern for the day. But both of you, don't look down your noses at each other because you see things differently. Look, we all belong to God and will all stand before Messiah, the righteous judge. So stop the divisive talk and get on with building for the Kingdom of God."

Going further, it would seem impossible to interpret the passage in such a way as to put Shabbat observance in the

same category with one's taste for salads instead of burgers!
In Acts 21 we learn of a false rumor circulating among
observant Messianic Jews. James is the speaker:

"You see brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children of live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.

Was the substance of this rumor that Paul told Diaspora Jews they should not keep the Torah because Messiah had fulfilled it, or that they could observe it if they wanted to, but if not, that was okay too.

Either understanding of Paul's teaching would have awakened their legitimate concern--and we say legitimate concern because James, the Elders and Paul seemed to treat it as such. They went to some lengths to prove to these faithful Jewish believers that Paul's lifestyle was that of an observant Jew. So then, could Paul write in Romans 14, "take it or leave it, boys. To each his own regarding the Sabbath" (not some picky Old Testament law, but a central feature of biblical religion) and then give a living object lesson of his commitment to those very principles of Jewish commitment? We think not, unless he was backslidden or a hypocrite. But those who would judge him as such are without the least support from the biblical writers themselves and

may reflect an attempt to make the Scripture fit a preconceived theological model instead of allowing the Apostle's consistent lifestyle to sufficiently inform our theology. Our conclusion is that Romans 14 leaves the Sabbath very much intact for Jewish believers.

Col. 2:16-23

Again as in Romans 14, the thrust of the passage seems to have little to do with the Sabbath as God's graciously-given covenant sign to Israel. First, the "bad guys" Paul describes in the passage seem to be some kind of Jewish proto-Gnostics involved in occult practices. These were apparently selling some kind of perverted understanding of a "Sabbath" to the Colossians. So, the Apostle exhorted them not to judge one another's spirituality on the basis of their observance of this kind of Sabbath or festival or new moon.

A related point: the whole description of these false teachings suggests they were perversions of sound, biblical truth. Asceticism instead of proper self-denial, worship of angels instead of worship of God alone, self-induced visions instead of true revelation, observance of the commandments of men instead of those of God--all these at the expense of properly exalting the Messiah. So, it seems likely that the Sabbath day spoken of is not the kind of day we have commended to Jewish believers.

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WHY THE UNION REQUIRES SABBATH SERVICES

The Union of Messianic Congregations is a community of New Covenant congregations oriented to the Jewish people in outreach and to the Jewish roots of the New Testament in lifestyle. We are concerned to maintain a significant Jewish lifestyle as part of our calling and witness. It is in this light that we encourage our congregations to celebrate the feasts, be involved in Jewish concerns and maintain links with Jewish family and friends. Why however, do we require a Sabbath service?

First of all we do not require Sabbath observance as a test of salvation, or as a signification of the legitimacy of a group as a New Covenant congregation.

Secondly, it should be noted that associations of congregations make all kinds of requirements for association beyond biblically clear requirements including: 1) worship on Sunday; 2) Pre-tribulation eschatology; 3) various systems of congregational government; 4) creedal statements which included debated positions on a) speaking in tongues, not speaking in tongues b) predestination; c) eternal security; 5) and much more. One wonders in this regard why a Jewish requirement for Messianic Jewish congregations is of such concern. Is it a Gentile bias influencing even those in Jewish outreach?

The reason for Sabbath as a requirement is sensible. It is not that this alone proves adequate Jewish identity. However, it is a significant first step. Why? This is because the Sabbath is singled out above all other feasts and observances as unique.

1. It is a reflection of creation, hence having origins and meaning before and beyond the Mosaic covenant.
2. It is a reflection of the age to come both in the general millennial rest and in the world wide Sabbath to exist at that time (Is. 66)
3. It is a unique covenant sign of Israel's place as a chosen people of God. This is demonstrated in that it celebrates the Exodus. Secondly it is in the center of the Ten Commandments as a covenant sign between God and Israel (see Meredith Kline The Structure of Biblical Authority). It is thus distinct from the other nine commands as a Jewish sign and witness.
4. It is a key humanitarian gift of God to Israel. Much more can be gleaned from the passages concerning the Sabbath.

With this as a background, we have taken the stand that a time of worship sometime during the Sabbath is a key to reestablish a proper connection to Jewish life cycle. Jewish seriousness is either absent or wrongheaded if Sabbath consciousness is disregarded. It is like a statement that one is serious about American patriotism while disregarding every major observance of American holidays. We are desirous of our Union being one of Jewish seriousness in our congregations. This seriousness recognises that God has a covenant with Israel and that the Sabbath is a key sign of that covenant. The U.M.J.C. could have required much more, but we only required a minimal doctrinal statement and a Sabbath Service, Friday or Saturday.