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# Our Weekly Shabbat 2003/2015

*Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee*

For our family, the experiences that we have had since 1995, upon entering into the Messianic movement, and in 2003 since the Lord called us into full time Messianic ministry—have doubtlessly directed us to actively change a number of key areas in our faith observance, which are different from our traditional Christian upbringing. As is witnessed in the volumes that we have released (as of 2015) in this *Messianic Helper* series, these include: honoring the appointed times or *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים) of Leviticus 23,<sup>1</sup> eating a Biblically kosher (כַּשֶּׁר) or kosher-style of diet,<sup>2</sup> and having a much more consciously positive view of the Torah or Law of Moses.<sup>3</sup> One of the biggest areas that has changed over the years, which we especially look forward to every week, is the remembrance of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת). The remembrance of the Sabbath is extremely vital to the people of God, being the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12), after all!

What makes the Sabbath unique, is that unlike the annual appointed times, *Shabbat* is something that takes place every week. Like many who grew up in evangelical Protestant homes, we had not thought too much about the Sabbath in our previous Christian experiences, and simply assumed that we were keeping the Sabbath—at least in spirit—by going to Church on Sunday. While Christian fellowship and worship on Sunday were edifying experiences—at least for us during the 1980s and early 1990s—once a person experiences his or her first Messianic Jewish *Shabbat* service, you begin to be stimulated in ways you never realized. Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) went to His local synagogue on *Shabbat*, He read from the Torah and Prophets, He dialogued with others about Moses' Teaching, and *He even healed people on the Sabbath! The Sabbath is important.*

It has always been our family's quest to be as Biblical as possible in today's world. We certainly honor our Protestant Christian predecessors who spearheaded the Reformation, and even with various limitations, had the intention to observe what they classified as the

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<sup>1</sup> Consult the general overview offered in *Moedim: The Appointed Times for Messianic Believers* by J.K. McKee, with more specific summaries available in the *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper*, the *Messianic Winter Holiday Helper*, and the *Messianic Spring Holiday Helper*.

<sup>2</sup> Consult the *Messianic Kosher Helper*.

<sup>3</sup> Consult *The New Testament Validates Torah* by J.K. McKee, and the *Messianic Torah Helper*.

Also to be considered can be *Torah In the Balance, Volumes I&II* by J.K. McKee, and the various volumes of *TorahScope* by Mark Huey, analyzing the weekly Torah portion or *parashah*.

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“moral law” of God’s Torah, which often included regarding Sunday as their Sabbath day of rest and refreshment in Him. In the past half century, however, with the emergence of the modern Messianic movement on the scene, and a generation of Jewish people having come to faith in Messiah Yeshua—many non-Jewish Believers are being awakened as to the significance of their Hebraic Roots and faith heritage in the Jewish Synagogue. They are joining together in mixed Messianic congregations all over the world, with their Jewish brothers and sisters, in a similar way as the Jewish, Greek, and Roman Believers joined together in assemblies and fellowships in the First Century Mediterranean. When is this most frequently taking place? **On the seventh-day of the week**, “Saturday” on our Western civil calendar, **Biblically known as the Sabbath or *Shabbat***.

We are happy to say that within our immediate family, the transition from a Sunday Christian experience to a Saturday Messianic *Shabbat* experience, has not been met with huge challenges. While our extended family has raised their proverbial eyebrows at times, these evangelical Believers hardly think there is anything morally or ethically wrong with taking off a day of rest! In this present season of Messianic growth and development, not every sincere Believer can make the commitments our family has made regarding the seventh-day Sabbath. Yet, we are aiming toward that future moment in salvation history, when the Prophet Isaiah’s expectation will be entirely realized: “‘And it will come to pass, that from one New Moon to another, and from one *Shabbat* to another, all flesh will come to bow down before Me,’ says *ADONAI*” (Isaiah 66:23, TLV).

### Our Family’s Past Sunday Sabbath Traditions

Debates over the continued validity of the seventh-day Sabbath, whether the Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week or Sunday, or even whether a new observance known as “the Lord’s Day” on Sunday supplants an abolished seventh-day Sabbath—have been going on for a very long time. Certainly, as the Lord drew our family into the Messianic movement in 1995-1996, and we transitioned away from Sunday Church to a Saturday *Shabbat*, we had many important changes to go through. These seldom involved some of the thoughts which circulate throughout the widely independent Hebrew/Hebraic Roots movement of “Sunday is the day of pagan sun worship,” as much as it was simply trying to return and recapture the original practices of Yeshua and His Disciples, and remembering the Sabbath as a time of rest, and a memorial of both God’s Creation (Genesis 2:2-3) and the Exodus of Ancient Israel (Deuteronomy 15:15).

In the past decade (2005-2015), in no small part due to John McKee’s studies at Asbury Theological Seminary (2005-2009), and the process of our family relocating from Orlando, FL back to Dallas, TX (2010-2012) and getting reestablished here in the Messianic Jewish community—we have had to consider a broader approach to the Sabbath issue. Such a broader approach involves a greater appreciation of the *Shabbat* rest that God offers His people, but also a better understanding of our own family’s theological and spiritual heritage, and the many sincere Christian people who have preceded us, having observed a “Sunday Sabbath.”

Our family heritage, on both the Jeffries (English) and McKee (Scottish) sides, is one that is both Methodist (English) and Presbyterian (Scottish), Wesleyan and Reformed—two of perhaps the greatest Protestant traditions which have affected Western civilization, after Judaism. Both of these theological traditions have historically not

believed that the Torah or Law of Moses has been abolished in its entirety, but have, albeit artificially, divided the Torah's commandments into the sub-categories of moral, civil, and ceremonial.<sup>4</sup> In the post-resurrection era, following the sacrifice of the Messiah, it is believed that the moral or ethical commandments of Moses' Teaching are those which remain valid and in force. Given the various capital penalties stated in the Torah associated with Sabbath violation, this classified the Sabbath as being a "moral law" to the Reformers—meaning that it was impressed upon all human beings via the Divine image (cf. Genesis 1:27).<sup>5</sup>

A principle of Sabbath-keeping has never, at least in past history, been opposed by those of the Reformed or Wesleyan theological traditions. However, it is believed that the Sabbath was Divinely transferred to Sunday or the first day of the week, given how, especially, Yeshua's empty tomb was discovered by Sunday morning.<sup>6</sup> As it is stated by the Westminster Confession, one of the mainstays of Reformed theology,

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

"This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations [Exodus 20:8; 16:23,25,26,29,30; 31:15; Nehemiah 13:15-19,21,22]; but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy [Isaiah 58:13; Matthew 12:1-13]" (21.7-8).<sup>7</sup>

It is also stated in the Westminster Shorter Catechism,

"The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day [Exodus 20:8, 10; 16:25-28], even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days [Nehemiah 13:15-29, 21, 22]; and spending the whole time in the publick and private

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<sup>4</sup> Among some contemporary Christian examiners, this view might be best represented by Walter C. Kaiser, "The Law as God's Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in Wayne G. Strickland, ed., *Five Views on Law and Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp 177-199.

Also consult the "Preface to the Reference Edition," in *The New Testament Validates Torah* (2012) by J.K. McKee.

<sup>5</sup> One of the most recent defenses available in favor of a "Sunday Sabbath," is provided by Joseph A. Pipa, "The Christian Sabbath," in Christopher John Donato, ed., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), pp 119-171.

<sup>6</sup> Consult the FAQ on the Messianic Apologetics website, "Sunday, Resurrection."

<sup>7</sup> [BibleWorks 9.0: Westminster Standards](#).

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exercises of God's worship [Luke 4:16; Acts 20:7; Psalm 92:1; Isaiah 66:23], except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy [Matthew 12:1-31]" (60).<sup>8</sup>

In evaluating our family's own Protestant Christian heritage, we have definitely found that the keeping of a rigid "Sabbath day" on Sunday is closely connected to those who have Puritan English roots,<sup>9</sup> those who have strongly adhered to what they consider a "Protestant work ethic,"<sup>10</sup> those whose family backgrounds have been affected by the Second Great Awakening,<sup>11</sup> and/or more generally those whose immediate ancestors simply regarded Sunday as a holy time—something which largely ceased in the mid-Twentieth Century.<sup>12</sup> Those who would widely regard themselves as being pietistic, would be those inclined toward applying the Sabbath-principle to Sunday. A downside, as must be noted, is that Sunday or the first day of the week being the "Christian Sabbath," has been historically connected to supersessionism or replacement theology.<sup>13</sup>

Because as a family, we do believe profoundly in the Torah commandment, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16),<sup>14</sup> and the inherent respect and accolades due to not just our immediate parents, grandparents, and ancestors—but also to our Protestant Christian forbearers—we have certainly wanted to see what those who have preceded us, in the past three centuries, have said about the Sabbath. Given how our family has been widely Wesleyan and Methodist in the past half-century before entering into the Messianic movement,<sup>15</sup> we have sought to find what the dominating theological tradition in our family has said about "the Sabbath." Certainly within the past three to four generations of the maternal Jeffries-Franklin-Tuck side (grandmother)—which gave rise to the ministry service of Methodist Bishop Marvin A.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Shulevitz, *The Sabbath World: Glimpses of a Different Order of Time* (New York: Random House, 2010), pp 138-140.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp 141-142, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp 167-168.

<sup>12</sup> Pipa, "The Christian Sabbath," in *Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views*, pp 132-133.

<sup>13</sup> As Pipa, in Ibid., 74, puts it, "The principle is that God uses Old Testament terminology to prophesy New Testament reality. For example, the Messiah is called David; **the church, Zion**, and the work of Christ, sacrifices" (emphasis ours).

For a further discussion, consult the relevant sections of *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?* by J.K. McKee.

<sup>14</sup> Consult "Day Five: Yom Teruah and the Ten Days of Awe" by Mark Huey, appearing in the *Messianic Fall Holiday Helper*, and "The Fifth Commandment: Honoring Our Parents," in *Torah In the Balance, Volume I* by J.K. McKee.

<sup>15</sup> The late first husband of Margaret McKee Huey, K. Kimball McKee (1951-1992), was initially raised in a local Methodist church, but later attended a larger Presbyterian church, following the death of his mother Jane Hoppenjans McKee (1919-1960), and the desire of his father G. Kenneth McKee (1903-1978), to reconnect with his Scottish and Presbyterian roots. Upon marrying Margaret in 1975, the two of them nominally attended Methodist services, until both coming to a genuine, saving faith in Jesus Christ in 1984. Margaret Jeffries, daughter of Mary Ruth Franklin (1919-), was raised in a committed Methodist home, given her mother being a preacher's daughter.

John McKee's religious experience was exclusively Methodist until 1994 (although with a certain knowledge of his McKee Presbyterian-Reformed heritage), following his father's, Kim McKee's death, in 1992, and Margaret being remarried to William Mark Huey in 1994. Following this was a brief time involved in the charismatic movement in 1994-1995. By the Fall of 1995 and certainly by Spring 1996, the entirely new, blended family (Mark, Margaret, John, Jane, Maggie), had become a part of the Messianic Jewish movement.

Franklin (1894-1972)<sup>16</sup>—as well as the Jeffries-Worthington side (grandfather), it is witnessed that once various individuals “got serious about God,” that Sunday or the first day of the week, was rigidly enforced as a day of Sabbath rest. And, if you were working on the status of Jewish-Christian relations available to you in the late Nineteenth-early Twentieth Century American South, while you would be in a position to affirm the Biblical admonition for human beings to rest on Sunday per Christian tradition—you would hardly be in a position for advocating a transfer back to the original seventh-day Sabbath.<sup>17</sup>

In our reflection back upon our Wesleyan and Methodist heritage, John Wesley himself once delivered an important sermon, entitled “**A Word to a Sabbath-Breaker.**”<sup>18</sup> While he applied this to the first day of the week or Sunday, there are many principles with which today’s Messianic people, keeping a seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* rest, can be in full agreement:

***“Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.”***

Have you forgotten who spoke these words? Or do you set Him at defiance? Do you bid Him do his worst? Have a care. You are not stronger than He. “Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth; but woe unto the man that contendeth with his Maker. He sitteth on the circle of the heavens; and the inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers before him!”

Six days shalt thou do all manner of work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God.” It is not thine, but God’s day. He claims it for his own. He always did claim it for his own, even from the beginning of the world. “In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day and hallowed it.” He hallowed it; that is, he made it holy; He reserved it for his own service. He appointed, that as long as the sun or the moon, the heavens and the earth, should endure, the children of men should spend this day in the worship of Him who “gave them life and breath and all things.”

Shall a man then rob God? And art thou the man? Consider, think what thou art doing! Is it not God who giveth thee all thou hast? Every day thou livest, is it not his gift? And wilt thou give him none? Nay, wilt thou deny him what is his own already? He will not, he cannot, quit his claim. This day is God’s. It was so from the beginning. It will be so to the end of the world. This he cannot give to another. O “render unto God the things that are God’s,” now; “today, while it is called today!”

For whose sake does God lay claim to this day? for his sake, or for thine? Doubtless, not for his own. He needeth not thee, nor any child of man. “Look unto the heavens and see, and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou

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<sup>16</sup> Marvin A. Franklin (1894-1972) served as President of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church from 1959-1960.

The information on the Bishop Marvin A. Franklin Historical Marker can be accessed online at <[georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gahistmarkers/bishopfranklinhistmarker.htm](http://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/gahistmarkers/bishopfranklinhistmarker.htm)>.

<sup>17</sup> Even though he did believe that Sunday or the first day of the week was “the Christian Sabbath,” the authors’ grandfather/great-grandfather, Marvin A. Franklin, in his service to the Methodist Church in the American South throughout the first half of the Twentieth Century, was something that involved the Christian inclusion of many Hebrew Christians, the predecessors of today’s Messianic Jews.

<sup>18</sup> John Emory, ed., *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley* (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1831), 7:352-354. Accessed via <<https://books.google.com/>>.

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sinnest, what doest thou against Him? If thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto Him? If thou art righteous, what givest thou Him? Or what receiveth He of thine hand?" For thy own sake, therefore, God thy Maker doeth this. For thy own sake he calleth thee to serve him. For thy own sake He demands a part of thy time to be restored to Him that gave thee all. Acknowledge his love. Learn, while thou art on earth, to praise the King of Heaven. Spend this day as thou hopest to spend that day which never shall have an end.

The Lord not only hallowed the Sabbath-day, but he hath also blessed it. So that you are an enemy to yourself You throw away your own blessing, if you neglect to "keep this day holy." It is a day of special grace. The King of heaven now sits upon his mercy-seat, in a more gracious manner than on other days, to bestow blessings on those who observe it. If you love your own soul, can you then forbear laying hold on so happy an opportunity? Awake, arise, let God give thee his blessing! Receive a token of his love! Cry to him that thou mayest find the riches of his grace and mercy in Christ Jesus! You do not know how few more of these days of salvation you may have. And how dreadful would it be, to be called hence in the abuse of his proffered mercy!

O what mercy hath God prepared for you, if you do not trample it under foot I "What mercy hath He prepared for them that fear Him, even before the sons of men!" A peace which the world cannot give, joy, that no man taketh from you; rest from doubt and fear and sorrow of heart; and love, the beginning of heaven. And are not these for you? Are they not all purchased for you by Him who loved you, and gave himself for you? for you, a sinner? you, a rebel against God? you, who have so long crucified him afresh? Now "look unto Him whom you have pierced" Now say, Lord, it is enough. I have fought against thee long enough. I yield, I yield. "Jesus, Master, have mercy upon me!"

On this day above all, cry aloud, and spare not, to the "God who heareth prayer." This is the day he hath set apart for the good of your soul, both in this world and that which is to come. Never more disappoint the design of his love, either by worldly business or idle diversions. Let not a little thing keep you from the house of God, either in the forenoon or afternoon. And spend as much as you can of the rest of the day, either in repeating what you have heard, or in reading the Scripture, or in private prayer, or talking of the things of God. Let his love be ever before your eyes. Let his praise be ever in your mouth. You have lived many years in folly and sin; now, live one day unto the Lord.

Do not ask anymore, "Where is the harm, if, after Church, I spend the remainder of the day in the fields, or in a public-house, or in taking a little diversion?" You know where is the harm. Your own heart tells you so plain, that you cannot but hear. It is a base misspending of your talent, and a barefaced contempt of God and his authority. You have heard of God's judgments, even upon earth, against the profaners of this day. And yet these are but as drops of that storm of "fiery indignation, which will" at last "consume his adversaries."

Glory be to God who hath now given you a sense of this. You now know, this was always designed for a day of blessing. May you never again, by your idleness or profaneness, turn that blessing into a curse! What folly, what madness would that be! And in what sorrow and anguish would it end! For yet a little while, and death will close up the day of grace and mercy. And those who despise them now, will have no more Sabbaths, or sacraments, or prayers for ever. Then how will they

wish to recover that which they now so idly cast away! But all in vain. For they will then "find no place for repentance, though they should seek it carefully with tears."

O my friend, know the privilege you enjoy. Now, "remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy." Your day of life and of grace is far spent. The night of death is at hand. Make haste to use the time you have; improve the last hours of your day. Now provide "the things which make for your peace," that you may stand before the face of God for ever.

While evangelical Wesleyan and Methodist Believers will broadly look to the works of John Wesley for inspiration and encouragement, we, both Margaret McKee Huey and John K. McKee, get to actually look *to our own first cousin once and twice removed*, the late Dr. Charles L. Allen (1913-2005),<sup>19</sup> formerly the pastor of Grace Methodist Church in Atlanta, GA and First Methodist Church in Houston, TX, for a number of interesting insights on the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12).

In his best-selling book *God's Psychiatry*, addressing the four most frequently read parts of Holy Scripture (the Twenty-Third Psalm, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Beatitudes), Dr. Allen certainly affirmed the relevance of the Sabbath for Christian Believers, in his commentary on the Fourth Commandment:

#### 4. REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT HOLY

EACH ONE OF GOD'S TEN RULES FOR LIVING IS VITAL, BUT in giving them to Moses, God said more about the fourth than any other. God needed only four words in regard to killing, but He used ninety-four words to tell us to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." In the first place, God tells us to remember. In a scientific sense, one never forgets anything. Every thought we have is registered forever on our minds, but, practically we can forget almost everything. We forget dates and names, we forget duties and even God. Some things we forget on purpose because the remembrance of them is not pleasant. Other things we forget because our minds are preoccupied with other matters. We forget to keep God's day. But God says man needs to set aside a day each week to keep it holy, and to fail to keep that day holy is to suffer.

In the first place, God gave to man the Sabbath as a reward for his labor. The man who labors deserves to rest, and to forget God's gift is to only cheat ourselves.

In his book, *East River*, Sholem Asch quotes the words of an old Jew, Moshe Wolf, in regard to the Lord's day. It is about the best statement on keeping the Sabbath I know. He said: "When a man labors not for livelihood, but to accumulate wealth, then he is a slave. Therefore it is that God granted the Sabbath. For it is by the Sabbath that we know that we are not working animals, born to eat and to labor. We are men. It is the Sabbath which is man's goal; not labor, but the rest which he earns from his labor. It was because the Jews made the Sabbath holy to

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Allen was the first cousin of my maternal grandmother, Mary Ruth Franklin Jeffries (1919-), who herself is the daughter of the late Bishop Marvin A. Franklin (1894-1972), who served as President of the Council of Bishops of the Methodist Church from 1959-1960.

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God that they were redeemed from slavery in Egypt. It was by the Sabbath that they proclaimed that they were not slaves, but free men."

Second, God gave us Sunday because every man needs to be re-created. Just as a battery can run down and needs to be recharged, so can a person. Gerald Kennedy tells of two parties who started across the plains in the pioneer days, going west to California. One was led by a religious man and one was led by an irreligious man. One group stopped all of each Lord's day for worship and rest. The other party was so anxious to reach the gold of California that it would not take time to stop. The men drove every day. The amazing thing is that the party which observed the Sabbath arrived first. We have now well established the fact that in our own nation that one can do more work in six days, even in five, than in seven. A run-down person is an unproductive person.

Also, we need to re-create our souls. A group of American explorers went to Africa. They employed some native guides. The first day they rushed, as they did also on the second, third, and every day. On the seventh day they noticed the guides sitting under a tree. "Come on," they shouted. One of the guides replied, "We no go today. We rest today to let our souls catch up with our bodies." For that purpose, God says, "Remember the Sabbath."

We have not spent so much time arguing about what we should not do on Sunday that we sometimes forget what we should do. God gave us the day, not as a time of prohibitions but rather to give us opportunity for the finest and most important things of life. An old miner once explained to a visitor, "I let my mules spend one day a week outside the mines to keep them from going blind." And the person who does not spend time away from the daily grind of life goes blind in his soul. The philosopher Santayana tells us, "A fanatic is one who, having lost sight of his aim, redoubles his effort." And much of the feverish haste we see today is by aimless, purposeless people. God says we need a day a week to keep our aim. Or, as Carlyle put it, "the man who does not habitually worship is but a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye."

As a pastoral counselor, I have seen many people who had lost their nerve control. Life for many had become a miserable experience. But it is rare, very rare, to find an uncontrolled person who regularly worships God and keeps His day holy. We have a slang expression, "That got my goat." That phrase has an interesting beginning. Owners of sensitive, high-strung race horses used to keep a goat in the stalls with the horses. The very presence of the calm, relaxed goat helped the horses to relax. On the day before an important race owners would sometimes steal another owner's goats. Thus the horse would not run its best the next day.

Well, we get sensitive and high-strung, and thus we falter in the race of life. Man needs relaxed re-creation and spiritual inspiration. Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "I have in my heart a small, shy plant called reverence; I cultivate that on Sundays." And well it will be if we all cultivate the plant of reverence within our hearts, because, as Dostoevski reminds us, "A man who bows down to nothing can never bear the burden of himself." Many of our fears, worries, and nervous tensions would be saved if we kept this fourth rule of God.

We are in too big a hurry, and we run by far more than we catch up with. The Bible tells us to "be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Beauty doesn't shout. Loveliness is quiet. Our finest moods are not always clamorous. The familiar appeals of the Divine are always in calm tones, a still, small voice. Here is the New

Testament picture of Jesus: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). The Divine is not obtrusive. He bursts in no one's life unbidden. He is reserved and courteous. "We need a day when we can hear such a voice as His. A day when we give the Highest a hearing," as Dr. Fosdick so well said.

Just as men build telescopes to gain a clearer view of the stars, so almost since the dawn of civilization, have men built churches and set aside a day to worship, in order to gain a clearer view of God and the high purposes of life. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," said God.<sup>20</sup>

### Our Transition Toward a Seventh-Day *Shabbat* Rest

There is something quite unique and special when you first start attending a Messianic congregation, for the Saturday morning *Shabbat* service. In our case, all the way back in 1995, we attended a Messianic Jewish congregation that had its own building, and it used a multi-purpose room with chairs that could be arranged differently. There were banners on the wall depicting the twelve tribes of Israel, and other Biblical themes. On the eastern wall facing Jerusalem, on an elevated platform and stage, was an ark containing a Torah scroll. While the Hebrew music and Davidic dance are some of the most significant differences for an evangelical Christian in a Messianic *Shabbat* service—without doubt it is the Hebrew liturgy and the canting of the Hebrew Torah portion with a Torah scroll, which connect you with the ancient past. In the Fall of 1995, as the Lord was leading our family into the Messianic movement, and as we were also attending Sunday church services—the Saturday service on *Shabbat* at the Messianic Jewish congregation, and the Sunday church service at the non-denominational church, **could not be more different.**

Our initial experiences of attending services on *Shabbat*, its uniqueness, its beauty, and its connection to practices extending back to the time of Yeshua—were widely responsible in seeing us no longer attending Sunday Church, and becoming part of the Messianic congregation. Early on in 1995-1996, we did, like many from evangelical backgrounds, define our transition in terms of changing our principal day of worship from Sunday back to Saturday. To us in those early Messianic days, even with some rather strict "Sunday Sabbath" roots from the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, *Shabbat* was more about corporate worship and fellowship, than it was about rest.

Once you have been fairly acclimated to attending *Shabbat* services on Saturday, in a Messianic congregation, in a mixed assembly of Jewish Believers *and* non-Jewish Believers from many different ethnic backgrounds—then you begin to truly process and experience what Sabbath observance really means. Keeping *Shabbat* hardly means observing a kind of "Saturday church," although congregational worship and fellowship among Believers are an important part. Keeping *Shabbat* means being committed to a twenty-four hour period of rest, beginning on Friday evening and ending on Saturday evening.

Yeshua, as the LORD God made flesh, kept the commandments of His Father perfectly. To imitate our Messiah in all things, we are of the conviction that all of His followers

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<sup>20</sup> Charles L. Allen, *God's Psychiatry* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1953), pp 56-59.

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should greatly desire to emulate Him by obeying the commandments. Over the years, our family has used the following Scriptures concerning *Shabbat*, as our guide to our weekly family remembrance.

The first Scripture is the Fourth Commandment that was given to Moses at Mount Sinai. This commandment makes it very clear that we are dealing with the ***seventh day of the week***, and not the first day:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20: 8-11).

The second Scripture that we focus on makes it very clear that celebrating *Shabbat* is the ***sign forever*** that will indicate that we are indeed, His people, and that He indeed, is our God:

“So the sons of Israel shall observe the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:16-18).

The third Scripture that we focus on reminds us that *Shabbat* is to be a special day of delighting in the Lord. The true blessing that is being restored to God’s people is that we are again being fed by our Heavenly Father with ***the heritage of Jacob!*** This Scripture especially points out to us that the very Hebraic heritage we had lost—gets restored when we celebrate *Shabbat*:

“If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure, and speaking your own words, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

Even with many figures in our Christian past, surely blessed by the Lord for their intention of making Sunday a Sabbath rest to Him—there is a difference between a “Sunday Sabbath” and *Shabbat*. While two centuries ago, our Methodist and Presbyterian forbearers believed that they were doing a good thing in keeping a “Lord’s Day” rest on Sunday, they were not tuned in to the Hebraic and Jewish Roots of their faith in Israel’s Messiah, as we are in the early Twenty-First Century. They had an important role to play in the Reformation of our Messiah faith to be sure, and in our case, they were not among those who believed that the Sabbath was abolished, and that some ethereal or metaphorical form of “Sabbath rest” was all that was necessary by their belief in Christ. They made an attempt to physically rest and abstain from labor. But, they were not consciously looking for that future moment described in Romans 11:26, “and so all Israel will be saved.”

Keeping *Shabbat* in the Twenty-First Century does require that you not only reshift some of your priorities, but that you also be committed to a Biblical wholeness, that encompasses both spirit and body. Feeling forgiveness and release from the guilt of sin on

one's conscience is not a Sabbath rest; the Sabbath rest is a time intended to provide both physical and spiritual refreshment. We have discovered this in our family's observance of *Shabbat*, as we dedicate this time to the Lord, as well as to various congregational activities. You frequently have to experience the totality of what *Shabbat* can be, to truly appreciate it and make it the focal point of your week. As Samuel H. Dresner writes in his book *The Sabbath*,

"The Sabbath is not a theory to be contemplated, a concept to be debated or an idea to be toyed with. It is a day, a day filled with hours and minutes and seconds, all of which are hallowed by the wonderful pattern of living which the nobility of the human spirit has fashioned over the course of the centuries. One cannot shift the Sabbath to a different day each week. There is no 'Sabbath on Tuesday.' There is no 'essence' of the Sabbath. There is only the joy of experiencing the Sabbath day itself: the release from work, the setting aside of all money, the blessing of the children, the kindling of the lights, the study of the Torah portion, the worship in the synagogue, the time spent with the family."<sup>21</sup>

### Our Family Observance and Routine

As a family, we have certainly come a long way since our initial remembrance of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat* in our early days of being involved in the Messianic community in 1995-1996. In 2003, we were called into full time Messianic ministry with Outreach Israel, and so our observance of *Shabbat* became much more than just a personal and familial issue. We have had to do far more than just implement important disciplines for the seventh day of the week; we have had to help many Messianic people, some of whom were on a journey similar to ours, but others with their own questions and inquiries, to make *Shabbat* a holy and blessed time.

Every one of us has our own personal and family routines. What we do in the morning regarding prayer, Bible study, our personal grooming, our breakfast, and even our coffee (Margaret Huey does not drink coffee, but John McKee drinks his coffee black), is all different. For many of us, our weekly observance of the Sabbath is going to be focused around a home activity on Friday evening or *Erev Shabbat*, and then some kind of Saturday activity on the day of *Shabbat*. There is not going to be uniformity among Messianic Believers, but there will be unity in that we are committing ourselves to a special and sacred time of rest.

We have a unique advantage of serving in Messianic ministry in two places, both in Central Florida (2003-2012) and in North Texas (2013-present), with *Shabbat* being observed similarly but different. In both places, we have tried to make sure that all of our work activities in our home offices have been relatively completed by around 5:00 PM, although this has usually involved some kind of shopping for the weekend on Friday afternoon.

When living in Orlando, we would frequently not have a formal *Erev Shabbat* meal, as our congregation did have Friday evening services which we would frequently attend, followed by a fellowship meal time afterward. Now living in Dallas, we will usually have an *Erev Shabbat* meal, but sometimes it might not be too formal.

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<sup>21</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, *The Sabbath* (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1970), 21.

## Messianic Sabbath Helper

When previously living in Orlando, our old congregation held an afternoon service on *Shabbat*, starting around 4:30 PM, leading into *Havdallah*, and then with a fellowship meal time. We usually slept in on Saturday, every family member was on his or her own for lunch, and then we would go to services. Saturday during our time living in Florida was a day of rest.

Now that we are living in Dallas, our present Messianic Jewish congregation holds a morning *Shabbat* service, starting at 10:30 AM. Mark and Margaret Huey are leaders of the new members class, which is offered seasonally in the Fall and in the Spring, and presently starts between 9:00-9:30 AM before the service. When this is not taking place, as many of you can attest, we like arriving at the building or shul before 10:30, usually even before 10:15, so we can get our preferred seats! The *Shabbat* service is over around 1:00 PM, and afterward there is a time of *oneg* and a fellowship lunch. Depending on what other activities are going on, we have been known to leave as late as 3:00 PM. On the way home, we will often drive by the post office, which has both our personal and ministry mail, but open most of it when *Shabbat* is over. The rest of the afternoon is a downtime for everyone, and actually extends into the evening.

Of course, during our time observing *Shabbat*, there have been various exceptions to the theme of "rest." We have forgotten to fill up our gas tanks on Friday afternoon, and had to buy gas if we wanted to go to congregational services. We have had to drive through tolls. Certainly, we have had to stay home because of being sick, and have had to go to the drug store to purchase medication. We have had to remove tree limbs that were a danger during storms, and we have had to shovel through ice and snow. We have had to wash clothes that could be permanently stained. We have had to clean up spills in the kitchen, and we have had to vacuum broken dishes and glassware. We have had to drive longer distances than to our congregation. We have had to attend weddings and funerals on *Shabbat* of non-Messianic family members and friends. We have had to attend graduations, birthday parties, and baby showers on *Shabbat* of non-Messianic family members and friends. **We do not, though, go shopping for the sake of shopping.**

We have been blessed in our time in the Messianic movement, to have a local congregation or fellowship we can attend, we can be welcomed by, and within which we can participate on *Shabbat*. Like all Messianic people, there are those days, once in a while, when we need to just stay at home all day on *Shabbat*, because pressure really has been that high, and we need to rest. But for the most part, the centerpiece of our Saturday has been attending a worship service on *Shabbat*.

One of the most frequently asked questions that we have been directed over the years, often comes from those who do not have a Messianic congregation to attend in their area. Sometimes they might find out about a Hebraic Roots Bible study or home group that has a fellowship gathering on *Shabbat*, which can be a useful option, but sometimes does not have all of the components of a much larger and more established assembly. Sometimes people have negative experiences in a Torah study home group, and so their Messianic Sabbath observance is a widely home affair with their family, and attendance at a church on Sunday morning might continue, if only for fellowship. Other times, people who live far away but not too far away from a Messianic congregation, will attend bimonthly or monthly. And then, there are situations that exist where a viable Messianic congregation in terms of size and establishment is available, but there can be

social cliques present, which are not too welcoming of newcomers. **Every situation is unique, and we trust that you will be led by the Holy Spirit to discern what is the best situation for yourself, and/or for your family, in honoring the Fourth Commandment.**

### Loving Each Other

There can be difficulties that ensue between Believers over the issue of the seventh-day Sabbath or *Shabbat*. Much of this may be between those who are convicted that the seventh-day Sabbath should be observed today, and others who are not so convinced. Yet, as Willard M. Swartley indicates in the *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, even though with the Sunday of past Christianity more in view, "Increasing numbers of Christians recognize the importance of keeping the Sabbath in today's pressured societies."<sup>22</sup> Most evangelical Christians are not going to treat Sabbath-keeping Messianic people as being amoral, dangerous cultists. The Sabbath is about rest, and will focus your attention upon the God we serve. *No mature Believer thinks physical rest is an evil to be opposed.*

If our extended family or friends question why we do not go to Sunday Church anymore, we make sure to let them know that even though we have stopped practicing non-Biblical traditions that Sunday Church often represents—we still very much believe in the Biblical practice of joining with other Believers for corporate worship and preaching (Hebrews 10:25). We do not discourage them from going to church if that is the only religious outlet they have. However, the Sabbath is on the seventh day, and it is remembered by us as a complete day of rest from our labors, as well as a time to assemble with other Believers.

So, how do we deal with our extended family and friends, who still do not understand why we are not "going to church" like they are? Our family believes that *Shabbat* is the most special day of the week! We have wonderful family time and congregational time. We, who are to walk as Messiah Yeshua walked, must reach out to others in love at this time of restoration more than ever. Yeshua told us that people would know that we are His disciples by the love that we have for one another (John 13:35). So, let us love our family and friends in such a way that they will be drawn to us, and not repelled. For, dear friends, it is through our unconditional love for them that one day they will want to know what we know about walking like the Messiah. One day they will want to know why we have sought to go back to the way the early Believers gathered on the Sabbath and rested. One day they will want to know why we love to walk as Yeshua walked. One day they will want to know why we have become thoroughly Messianic. So, let us reach out in love and show them the better way.

Let us enjoy this seventh-day *Shabbat*, and rejoice and delight in the day that the Lord tells us to set apart. And in all things, let us reflect on Yeshua our Messiah, who is the Lord of the Sabbath<sup>23</sup> for all **and Lord of us all!**

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<sup>22</sup> Willard M. Swartley, "Sabbath," in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, 695.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 2:28; Matthew 12:8; Luke 6:5.