

# SHABBAT

## A NEW COVENANT PERSPECTIVE

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There has recently arisen a movement advocating that Jewish believers in Yeshua (Jesus) are required of God to observe Saturday as the Sabbath. Some would also advocate Saturday Sabbath worship for Gentile believers.<sup>1</sup> Others, going even further, have condemned the idea that Sunday is legitimately the New Covenant Day of worship<sup>2</sup>. One Messianic Rabbi<sup>3</sup> has even stated: "You are only a pagan if you...think Sunday is a holy day."<sup>4</sup> In the opposite extreme, there are those who deny any present relevance to the fourth commandment Moses gave in the Torah.<sup>5</sup> What is true? What is Biblical? What is a new Jewish believer (or Gentile believer) in Messiah to think?

Is there a New Covenant "Sabbath"? If so, which day of the week is it? Did Gentiles change the day of worship, contrary to God's will, as a way of distancing the early Christian movement from its Jewish roots, as some charge? When did New Covenant believers begin worshiping on Sundays? Are Jewish believers *today* required to keep Shabbat according to Jewish tradition? And what about first century *Jewish* believers in Yeshua (Jesus)? Did they worship on Saturday or Sunday?

In investigating this issue we must keep a cool head. We must also be charitable to those with differing opinions and recognize this is not a simple issue or one easily agreed on. Certainly we can recognize those who differ as fellow believers, even if we believe they are wrong on an issue. Brothers can disagree, after all, and often do.

In this booklet we'll consider the Sabbath issue, particularly addressing the concerns a Jewish believer in Jesus may have. First, we'll examine the nature of the Sabbath according to the Hebrew Bible. Why was the Sabbath given? What was the purpose of the Sabbath? Could any day other than Saturday be a Sabbath? Second, we'll look at the New Covenant evidence. Finally, we'll consider the writing of the earliest theologians, those early followers of Messiah who knew the apostles themselves. This will help us know how the first century Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua<sup>6</sup> worshiped<sup>7</sup>.

## **WHAT IS A SABBATH AND WHY DID GOD GIVE SABBATHS?**

The first mention of the Sabbath principle is found in Genesis chapter 2. After God had spent six days creating the world, we are told:

"God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating he had done" (Genesis 2:3).

Note that God *blessed* the Sabbath. It is so easy to miss the significance of the word *bless*. We throw around the words bless and blessing so casually, and that's a shame because they are words with deep spiritual meaning. When God created Adam and Eve, he *blessed* them (Genesis 1:28). Blessing had to do with being in a special relationship with the Creator, a relationship in which God is oriented in unreserved benevolence toward the one being blessed. Man, however fell into the opposite state. With the Fall of man came the curse of God (Genesis 2:17-19). Man in sin is under God's curse. Moses told the people:

"You will be cursed in the city and in the country....You will be cursed when you come in and when you go out" (Deuteronomy 28:16-19).

When Noah was spared , God blessed this man and his sons (Genesis 9:1). When God promised redemption, it involved restoration of blessing. Abraham was told "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3) and Aaron was told to put God's blessing upon Israel (Numbers 6:22-27). Being under God's blessing means being in a right relationship with him and enjoying the privileges of his covenant of redemption. Messiah's redemption restores the original blessing lost through man's fall and confirms it without the possibility of forfeiture. The concepts of blessing and Sabbath are related to the concepts of redemption and covenant.

Shabbat had as part of its purpose the remembrance of the fact that God is the Creator. This is precisely what Moses told the people in the Torah the first time the Ten Commandments were given.

"Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy....**For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth**, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. **Therefore** the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:8-11).

The Sabbath remembers Creation, but the Sabbath also remembers redemption. The second time the Ten Commandments were given in the Torah we find this statement:

"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD has commanded you. **..Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that God brought you out of there** with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. **Therefore** the LORD commanded you to observe the Sabbath" (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

The Passover was God's foundational act of redemption in the Old Covenant. Notice, the meaning of the Sabbath shifted from creation to redemption. This makes sense if we realize that in fact creation and redemption are related. Redemption is redemption from the fall of man. Redemption has to do with restoration of the original blessing man was created to have in relation to his Maker. One can never understand redemption apart from creation. That is why it says:

"For as in Adam all die, so in Messiah all will be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Messiah redeemed us from the curse of the Fall. Redemption restores the blessing of the original creation and brings a New Creation.

We see from the Hebrew Bible that Sabbath is based upon both creation and redemption and is meant to remind us of what God did in creating and redeeming us. This is its purpose. This is what it celebrates. This is what the Israelites were to think about when they were told to set aside one day a week as a special day. New Covenant believers have a New Redemption. We are part of a New Creation in Messiah, the Second Adam. We now have a new rationale for the sabbath.

## MUST SHABBAT ALWAYS FALL ON SATURDAY?

What about the day of the Sabbath. Clearly the weekly Sabbath day in the Hebrew Bible was Saturday, the seventh day. But could any *other* day be a Sabbath? Yes! Leviticus 23:32 tells us that Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), falling on the tenth day of Tishri (the seventh month), was also a Sabbath. Yom Kippur could fall on any day of the week and whichever day it fell on was a Sabbath. Rosh Hashana, the Biblical Feast of Trumpets, which falls on the first of Tishri, was also a day of sacred assembly and rest, a *Sabbath*, according to Leviticus 23:24. This can also occur on any day of the week, including Sunday. Other examples could be given, but these two show that any day of the week could become a Sabbath. Indeed, there were even sabbatical years, and after seven cycles of sabbatical years a "super" sabbatical year, the Year of Jubilee, on which all debts were to be forgiven (Leviticus 25:1-17). So the concept of Sabbath goes way beyond the concept of Saturday as the day of rest. Any day of the week can become a Sabbath according to Torah, even Sunday.

## SHABBAT AND THE NEW COVENANT

Before considering specific texts, let's take what we have learned so far and consider it in the light of the redemption the Messiah has accomplished.

Messiah has become for us our Passover Lamb. He is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He told his disciples at the Passover Seder in the upper room, "do this (eat the Passover Matzah) in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Rabbi Saul, known also as the Apostle Paul, said this: "Messiah, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Clearly we have a new reason to celebrate, a reason even greater than Old Covenant believers had. A greater Exodus has come in Messiah who said "if the son sets you free you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). Yeshua is the Lamb of God and the "prophet like unto" Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15) who brought the far greater Exodus from sin and death.

Messiah also brought the beginning of a New Creation. He is the New Adam who has become the head of a New Humanity (Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:22). A true "New World Order" began with the resurrection of Yeshua who is "the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead, so that in **everything** he might have the supremacy" (Colossians 1:18). Those who are in Messiah have become part of the New Creation which has already come, for "if anyone is in Messiah, he is a New Creation (part of a new order of things); the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17. See also Galatians 6:15.) Our worship must recognize that a new order has come.

Messiah said:

"Shabbat was made for man, not man for Shabbat. so the Son of Man is Lord even of the Shabbat" (Mark 2:27-28).

That is, Shabbat was made for man's spiritual encouragement and edification. Shabbat is for man

in that it reminds us that God is our Creator and Redeemer. New Covenant believers know Yeshua himself is our Re-Creator and ultimate Redeemer. Shabbat must always point to him. We rightly devote a day to worship Messiah and cease from all labor (except that which is a matter of "mercy and necessity") as an expression of faith in the Messiah who created and redeemed us. Shabbat must fix in our minds the principle that God re-creates us, fully redeems us, and that we belong to Him, all because of the work of Messiah.

To recapitulate, in Messiah, who himself is the "Lord of the Sabbath," we have a New Creation and a New Redemption. The old Sabbath was given to remember the first creation and redemption from Egypt. In Messiah we have new reasons for the Sabbath because a new redemption and a new creation have come. They were accomplished when Messiah rose from the dead on "the first day of the week" (Matthew 28:1).

Perhaps you're saying, "Ok, so the Sabbath must now focus on the new creation and new redemption Messiah has brought us, but on what day do New Covenant believers worship? Yeshua kept Saturday, shouldn't we?" This is a good question, but we can't simply appeal to the practice of Yeshua, who came to obey the Law for us by observing it fully, by "fulfilling" it (Matthew 5:17). If we use the argument that Yeshua observed a seventh day Sabbath and therefore so should we, we would also need to argue, to be consistent, that we are likewise duty bound to all aspects of Mosaic Law, since Yeshua kept every detail of Torah. Clearly, this is a false and specious argument.

Yeshua spent the whole sabbath, after his death, in the grave. He rested completely from his redemptive labor and perfectly fulfilled the Sabbath. Yeshua kept the seventh day Sabbath in the most ultimate sense in order to fulfill the Law of Moses, just as Yeshua kept every other detail of the Law of Moses, as well. We receive him as the one who fully obeyed God for us in our place. He fulfilled the Torah on our behalf. His obedience is credited to our account through faith.

All well and good, Torah is fulfilled on our behalf through Messiah, but can we argue from this that Sunday is the New Covenant Shabbat? Consider the evidence. It was early on a Sunday morning that the Messiah rose from the grave and appeared to Miriam of Magdala. Later that same Sunday, Yeshua first appeared to the apostles:

"On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Yeshua came and stood among them and said, "Shalom Aleichem" (John 20:19).

Messiah greeted the disciples with traditional Hebrew greeting "Shalom Aleichem" (Peace be unto you) twice on that first Sunday and once again on the following Sunday<sup>8</sup>. These are the only times anywhere in the New Covenant that Yeshua is recorded as using this traditional greeting. It is interesting to note that "Shalom Aleichem" are the first words of the traditional Jewish hymn sung on Shabbat. Exactly one week later, on the following Sunday, the apostles were meeting once more. The Risen One appeared to them again in that locked room and once again gave the traditional Jewish greeting, "Shalom Aleichem". Could this threefold mention of the traditional Jewish

greeting, later connected with Shabbat in Jewish tradition, have some significance, especially since the concept of Shalom, peace, is so connected with the Shabbat? Can we say Messiah brought a lasting Sabbath peace through his victory over death? Should we say "Shabbat Shalom" on Sunday?

That great day of Shavuot, Pentecost, also came to fullness on a Sunday.

"And in the fulfilling of the Day of Shavuot (Pentecost), they were all with one mind in the same place" (Acts 2:1).

Shavuot, meaning "sevens", is so named because it comes after counting off seven sevens from the day the first sheaves of the barley harvest were brought to the Temple after Pesach. This is known as the period of "Counting the Omer"<sup>9</sup>. Messiah rose from the dead as the first fruits of the resurrection<sup>10</sup>. The mighty outpouring of God's Spirit on that great Shavuot brought the first fruits of the Messiah's harvest of the nations into God's New Covenant Temple, the Assembly of Messiah<sup>11</sup>. Is it a coincidence that this great day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Shavuot, bringing thousands of Jewish people from all the nations of the Diaspora to faith in Yeshua, fell on a Sunday exactly seven weeks after the resurrection? Does this pattern of seven sevens, from Sunday to Sunday, tell us anything at all? Here is the number of the covenant, seven, the sabbatical number itself, associated with Sunday seven times over in connection with the accomplishment of Messiah's Redemption! Do we perhaps have an indication by this that a new sabbatical pattern was being established by the New Redemption? Something to ponder.

What do we see beyond the gospels? We see a period of transition during which Jewish believers met with the rest of the Jewish community in the synagogue and Temple, to proclaim the good news of Messiah's redemption. They then met together as believers on Sunday.

Following Paul's coming to faith, he made it his practice to preach in the Jewish synagogues on the Jewish Saturday Sabbath:

"As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. 'This Yeshua I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah', he said" (Acts 17:2-3).

"Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4).

Paul was clearly in the habit of going to the Jewish synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath in order to evangelize his own Jewish people. Paul was welcomed as a respected rabbi and given the honor, as a visiting dignitary, of speaking to the synagogue members. What an opening for evangelism! May we all be granted such opportunities!

Can we conclude from this that believers are to worship on the seventh day Sabbath? No. Paul was

proclaiming Messiah to the whole Jewish community wherever he went. Certainly, one is *permitted* to observe the Jewish Sabbath if one has the opportunity to do so, in order to witness to the Jewish community. That is, one can follow Paul's method in evangelizing the Jewish people if given similar opportunities. I certainly would preach every Saturday in every synagogue which would invite me to do so!

It can also be argued from Acts 21:20-25 that the early Jewish believers in Yeshua kept Jewish tradition, at least in Jerusalem, in order to not place any stumbling block in front of the Jewish people which would hinder their coming to faith in Yeshua as Messiah. This is the principal Paul expressed:

"To the Jews I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I am myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Messiah's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:20-23).

Paul followed the practices of an observant Pharisee in order to win Jews. He also lived like a Gentile in order to win Gentiles. Peter, we are told, also lived like a Gentile among the Gentiles. This was a practical matter of missions strategy, but when it came to binding people with the ceremonial laws Paul rebuked Peter for hypocritically following certain men who insisted upon Gentile circumcision:

"You are a Jew, *yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew*. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" (Galatians 2:14).

The ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law are clearly no longer binding. Peter, it says lived "like a Gentile" until the circumcision group arrived. Paul made it clear the ceremonial laws were no longer binding. This is the whole point of the book of Hebrews. No longer are we to sacrifice animals for sin. These Levitical practices pointed forward to Messiah. Certain Mosaic practices are, beyond question, obsolete:

"By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one **OBSOLETE**; and what is **OBSOLETE** and aging will soon disappear" (Hebrews 8:13).

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

The ceremonial aspects of the Law of Moses are obsolete and have been abolished. Does this have anything to do with the Jewish Sabbath?

The book of Hebrews has this to say about the Old Covenant Sabbath:

"For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: 'And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.' And again in the passage above he says, 'They shall never enter my rest.' It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.' For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience" (Hebrews 4:4-11).

The Sabbath is a symbol and a type of the rest we have from our own works. Messiah restores the blessing of God to us through his sacrifice for our sins. We have come to something new in Messiah, a different spiritual order. Consider the following:

"For in Messiah all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Messiah, who is the head over every power and authority. **In him you were also circumcised**, in the putting off of the sinful nature, **not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Messiah**, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Messiah. He forgave us all our sins, **HAVING CANCELED THE WRITTEN CODE, WITH ITS REGULATIONS**, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Therefore **do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day**. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Messiah. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. Since you died with Messiah to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 'Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!?' These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Since, then, you have been raised with Messiah, set your hearts on things above, where Messiah is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Messiah in God. When Messiah, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 2:9-3:4).

Clearly, in Messiah, we are no longer bound by the ceremonial Levitical Law, whose rituals and stipulations were shadows and types of the greater spiritual realities in Messiah. Things have changed. If we say they haven't then we must refrain from lighting our ovens on Sabbath and put to death anyone who works on it according to Exodus 35:1-3. The Sabbath had ceremonial aspects, and those ceremonial aspects are fulfilled and abolished in Messiah<sup>12</sup>.

We are no longer bound by the ceremonial aspects of Shabbat, but do we throw out the fourth commandment altogether? Certainly not! We are redeemed from sin "that the righteous requirements of the Law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:4). The Biblical Sabbath principle of a weekly day of worship and rest from our worldly occupations is carried over into the life of the New Covenant Community, the Messianic Assembly.

The Sunday Lord's Day focuses on Messiah's final accomplishment of redemption and on the new creation he began. The early believers began to meet on Sunday, the Lord's Day, the first day of the week upon which Yeshua rose from the dead. We find this in Acts:

"**On the FIRST DAY of the week** we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight<sup>13</sup>" (Acts 20:7).

On the *first* day of the week believers were meeting together, breaking bread together,<sup>14</sup> and listening to the Apostolic teaching together. Rabbi Saul (Paul) instructed believers as follows:

"Now about the collection for God's people: do what I told the Galatian churches to do. **On the FIRST DAY OF EVERY WEEK** each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made" (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Here we have the people of God taking up a collection for the work of the gospel in other places on the *first* day of *every* week.

John, the apostle closest to Yeshua, was given the final New Covenant revelation on the "Lord's Day", which became the popular name for the first day of the week. He wrote:

"On the **LORD'S DAY** I was in the Spirit..." (Revelation 1:10).

Messiah chose to give John the great revelation of things "soon to come" (Revelation 1:1-3) on the same day he rose from the dead. Coincidence? Messiah declared to John:

"I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" (Revelation 1:18).

On Sunday, known as the "Lord's Day,"<sup>15</sup> the same day of the week he rose from the dead, Yeshua declared himself the "Living One" risen from the dead. Is this a coincidence, too?

So, based on scripture, a good case can be made for worshiping God on the day Messiah rose, the first day of the week, Sunday.<sup>16</sup> The rationale for the fourth (Sabbath) commandment, remembering creation and redemption, are carried over into the New Covenant Lord's Day, which now remembers the *new* creation and *ultimate* redemption centered in the work of Messiah who rose on a Sunday.

### **BASED ON HISTORY, WHEN DID FIRST CENTURY JEWISH AND GENTILE BELIEVERS WORSHIP?**

We've examined the Biblical evidence and theological arguments for Sunday as the New Covenant day of worship. What of historical evidence?

The earliest records we have, outside of the Scriptures themselves, confirm that first century Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua worshiped on the first day of the week, Sunday, the Lord's Day. True, Jewish believers continued, as long as they were permitted, to also join in the synagogue worship in order to witness to their own people. Eventually Jewish believers were excluded from synagogue worship and persecuted, as Yeshua had predicted in Mark 13:<sup>17</sup>.

What historical evidence do we have? Ignatius of Antioch was a direct disciple of the Apostles. He died only fifteen years after the Apostle John himself<sup>18</sup>. In regard to the first century Jewish believers in Yeshua he wrote to the Magnesians:

**"those who walked in ancient practices have obtained unto newness of hope, no longer observing Sabbaths, but living according to the Lord's Day."**

Justin Martyr, writing about 140 A.D., said that the early believers worshiped on the "eighth day", the day Yeshua rose from the dead, also known as "Sunday"<sup>19</sup>. This was only a generation after the Apostle John lived.

Irenaeus, who was taught by Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John, said that the Sabbath was kept by New Covenant believers on the Lord's Day, the day Messiah arose<sup>20</sup>.

Here is an even more striking fact. One of the early groups of Jewish followers of Jesus as Messiah were the Ebionites. Some of the Ebionites were less than orthodox about the deity of the Messiah. All of the Ebionites believed Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah should follow the Ceremonial

**Law. But what is amazing about this sect is that they observed not only the Saturday Sabbath, but they *also* celebrated Sunday as the Lord's Day, because it was the day Jesus arose!**<sup>21</sup> So even the most "Torah Observant" Messianic Jewish" sect celebrated a Sunday Lord's Day!

More evidence could be given from early church history. The Epistle of Barnabas and the Didache, both dated 70 AD mention worship on Sunday. These examples show that those who had either been in the company of the Apostles, or of the disciples of the Apostles, wrote that the first century Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua as Messiah worshiped on Sunday, the Lord's Day. This is significant data.

## **SABBATH AND COVENANT**

God has made a "New Covenant with the house of Judah and with the house of Israel" (Jeremiah 31:31-34). We are told:

"...the ministry Yeshua has received is as superior to theirs [that of the Levitical priesthood] as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises" (Hebrews 8:6).

Messiah has provided a superior sacrifice to pay for our sins, a permanent and ultimate sacrifice which will eternally cleanse all who turn from sin and receive him as savior. By his death and resurrection he has brought us out of sin and death.

The Old Covenant had rites, ceremonies, and special days connected with it which reminded God's people of the covenantal salvation God had provided. Circumcision, the rite of initiation, externally brought the Old Testament Israelite into the promises of Abraham. Passover, the central Old Covenant rite of continuation, commemorated the redemption from Egypt and the Passover Lamb.

In Messiah we are circumcised through our baptism into him (Colossians 2:11-12). At the Last Supper Messiah said the Passover Seder was from then on to be celebrated in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19). These two rites, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, are the New Covenant rites of initiation and continuation in the covenant. They are both centered in Yeshua.

Likewise, the Sabbath was the covenantal day of rest and worship which reminded the Old Covenant believer of his relationship to God because of the redemption from Egypt. The number seven was connected with both the Sabbath and the Covenant<sup>22</sup>. The New Covenant redemption was won when Messiah rose from the dead early that first Sunday morning. As we saw above, after seven subsequent Sundays the covenant was proclaimed and the Holy Spirit poured out (Acts chapter 2). How appropriate that New Covenant believers should celebrate on Sundays the resurrection of the Messiah who accomplished our covenantal salvation! Our day of worship must focus on the redemptive work of Yeshua, as does the New Covenant.

## CONCLUSION: SO NU?

Can you agree that a cogent case has been made that the Lord's Day, Sunday, is the New Covenant day of worship? A strong case can be made when we consider the purpose of the Sabbath, the resurrection of Messiah on Sunday, the New Covenant pattern of worship, and evidence from the early believing community.

Certainly we can worship the Lord every day of the week, and this in no way *excludes* Saturday, but Sunday is the day Yeshua rose from the dead. Another point to consider: the weekly Mosaic Sabbath was *not* primarily a day spent in *communal* worship. Most Israelites observed Shabbat at home. **Synagogue worship on the Sabbath was never mentioned in the Law of Moses because there was no such thing as the synagogue until after the exile to Babylon.** The New Covenant Sabbath, Sunday, is the meeting of the local community, something different from the Sabbath we find in the Torah. Hebrews tells us "Let us not give up meeting *together*" (Hebrews 10:25). The Lord's Day means meeting *together* with Messiah's followers on the day he arose. We meet to remember his work in redemption through hearing the word preached and through celebrating the Lord's Seder. Of the Seder Yeshua said: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). Certainly, we not only are to eat of the bread and wine in remembrance of Messiah's redemption, but we are also to assemble ourselves together in remembrance of his redemption.

The Holy Spirit lead the first Messianic believers to worship on Sunday. Something similar had occurred in the past with Purim. God moved his people to establish Purim as a special day to remember his deliverance in the time of Esther:

"...the Jews *took it upon themselves* to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days (Purim) every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. These days *should be* remembered and observed in every generation by every family and in every province and in every city" (Esther 9:27-28).

God instituted the Feast of Esther, Purim, by moving his people to establish the feast. Likewise, God inspired his people, the early Messianic believers, to celebrate the day upon which Messiah rose again, Sunday, as a special sabbath. A greater deliverance has come through Yeshua's resurrection. If Purim was established to remember a deliverance, wasn't it appropriate to establish a special day to remember Messiah's far greater deliverance? This is indeed what happened.

There is no excuse to call those who worship the Risen Messiah of Israel on Sunday, the Lord's Day, pagans following "Gentile" practices. Believers who love the Lord and his word can disagree without villainizing each other. If this booklet has persuaded you, well and good. If not, at least it is hoped that you see that those who believe in a Sunday Sabbath have good reasons, and, before the Lord, believe they are doing what is proper. Keep praying and studying. Seek the unity of all true believers in Messiah, a unity rooted in truth (John 17:17-21).

Something new has come. Messiah has created a New Community which breaks down the middle

wall of partition which had separated Jews and Gentiles.

"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. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Ephesians 2:14-16).

Let us worship the Risen Messiah Yeshua, King of Israel, *together* as one new people. Jewish and Gentile believers *together* are a people resurrected from our spiritual death through the one who rose from the grave in victory that first Sunday morning after Passover. Seven Sundays later the Holy Spirit was poured out to bring newness of life.

Sunday has been the day of worship for New Covenant believers, both Jewish and Gentile, since the times of the Apostles. We do well to do likewise. Let us put as of first importance the celebration of the New Creation and New Redemption Messiah has won in his resurrection from the dead on Sunday, the Lord's Day. Let us focus on Messiah's New Creation and Final Redemption rather than on the first creation and the older redemptive event, which the old Saturday sabbath remembered. A new day has dawned!

Shabbat Shalom B'Yeshua HaMashiach!

The promise of Sabbath peace is realized through faith in Messiah Jesus, our Redeemer and Lord.

## Endnotes:

1. See Celebrating the Sabbath the Messianic Jewish Way, by Richard and Michelle Berkowitz, Lederer Publications, Baltimore, MD, © 1991. While Berkowitz tries to make it clear that he doesn't believe Saturday Sabbath observance in any way merits salvation, he clearly says Jewish believers *should* keep Saturday Sabbath and Gentile believers would also do well to follow suit based on Exodus 20:10. In addition, he advances the position that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday because of Gentile anti-semitism. Also see Richard C. Nichol's paper "Resolved: Jewish Believers Are Obligated to Observe Shabbat", presented to the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism. (Please note: The LCJE does not take a position on this issue. Papers presented reflect a wide variety of views.)
2. Incidentally, the well known Jewish scholar, Theodor H. Gaster, says that the central song of the Jewish Sabbath liturgy, Lecha Dodi, comes from the kabbalists of Safed and "plays on one of the most prominent features of Arab weddings, namely, the procession of the bridegroom from the local mosque to his own home, where the bride awaits him." See Festivals of the Jewish Year, Morrow Quill Paperbacks, New York, 1978, page 283. There are aspects of traditional Judaism which are pagan in origin (Gaster gives many more examples) just as there are aspects of traditional Christianity which come from paganism, such as Christmas. Neither set of religious traditions, Christian or Jewish, is pristine pure and free from pagan influence!
3. A Messianic Rabbi is the pastor of a Messianic Jewish synagogue, a congregation of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus. These men rarely have the equivalent training of a traditional Jewish rabbi.
4. Quoted from a Messianic Rabbi who posted this message on America Online, a national computer bulletin board. He also said: "Christianity carries the baggage of paganism. Believing in Yeshua as Messiah does not make one a Christian unless that one cares to identify with all the trash in Christianity, which we Messianic Jews resist!" and "My congregation has no connection with right-wing Christian organizations and repudiates their paganish (sic) ways. We will not even accept to be called Christians."
5. These teachings, though opposite, both come from different forms of what is known as "dispensationalism". Basic to this thinking is a radical distinction between Israel and the New Covenant Assembly. Older dispensationalism threw out as irrelevant, for the present time, all Biblical law prior to the New Testament (some say all teaching prior to the book of Acts!), but maintained the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus during this age. The newer form of dispensationalism, sometimes found within Messianic Judaism, sees relevance to the Old Testament Laws, but has a tendency to fail to fully recognize the unity of all believers in Jesus and how the Torah is fulfilled in Messiah.
6. From here on we will use Yeshua, the name Jesus was known by during his life on earth in Israel. This is often how Jewish believers refer to Jesus today.

7. We will not, in this booklet, attempt to codify exactly how one is to keep the sabbath as a New Covenant believer. There are differing views. Our purpose here is simply to establish which day is the legitimate day for New Covenant communal worship. The basic idea is to set apart a day of worship and rest from secular labor, other than that which must be done out of mercy and necessity, such as medical care, police work, etc. For more discussion see Systematic Theology, by Charles Hodge, Volume 3, pp. 336-340, James Clarke & Co. Ltd., London, 1960 edition.

8. See John 20:19, 21, & 26. Luke 24:36 gives another account of that first Sunday.

9. The Omer is a measure of grain.

10. See 1 Corinthians 15:20 and Leviticus 23:9-22. Messiah corresponds to that first barley sheaf brought to the Temple at the beginning of the Omer period. At the end of the Omer period, on Shavuot (Pentecost), two loaves of bread were brought to the Temple to dedicate the rest of the harvest to God. God's harvest of souls, symbolized by those two loaves, began with the thousands who came to faith on that great day of the fulfilling of Shavuot (Pentecost) recorded in Acts chapter 2.

11. 1 Peter 2:5, Ephesians 2:21-22, Revelation 3:12.

12. Again, I'll refer the reader to Hodge: "...specific details contained in the books of Moses, designed to point out the way in which the duty they enjoined was then to be performed, are no longer in force. The fifth commandment still binds children to obey their parents; but the Jewish law giving fathers the power of life and death over their children, is no longer in force. The seventh commandment forbids adultery, but the ordeal enjoined for the trial of a woman suspected of that crime, is a thing of the past. The same principle applies to the interpretation of the fourth commandment." (Systematic Theology, Volume 3 page 337).

13. Some understand this meeting as having taken place on a Sunday and carried over through Sunday night. It can also be argued that this was perhaps a meeting after sundown on Saturday, which would be considered by traditional Jewish reckoning to be the beginning of Sunday, the first day of the week. Possibly Jewish believers in Jesus started their Sunday worship on Saturday nights, as a transition from Saturday Sabbath to Lord's Day observance. Either way this is interpreted, Jewish believers were meeting on a Sunday!

14. The breaking of bread could be a reference to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

15. The use of the term "Lord's Day" to refer to Sunday is well attested in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, who lived during the generation after the Apostles. See Francis Nigel Lee, The Covenantal Sabbath, pp. 241-244.

16. The "first" day was also called, early on, the "eighth" day. The eighth day was the day of circumcision. Some have seen significance in this.

17. Eventually Jewish believers in Jesus, many have argued, were excluded from the synagogue by the addition of the "birkat haminin", a curse upon "heretics", added to the Shemona Esreh, the eighteen benedictions of the Amidah prayer, a central prayer in Judaism. This curse on the "minim", translated "heretics" or "slanderers", most agree, was specifically directed towards Jewish believers in Jesus, who could hardly be expected to curse themselves, and thus excluded them. See The Jewish People and Jesus Christ, By Jakob Jocz, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids MI, 1979, pp. 175-181.

18. Though anyone can go to the writings of the Apostolic Fathers himself and find these things, I have found the doctoral thesis of Francis Nigel Lee, published as The Covenantal Sabbath, very helpful. It was published by the Lord's Day Observance Society, 55 Fleet St., London, in 1966. See pages 229-248. Another good resource is a booklet called The Day Changed and the Sabbath Preserved, published by The Committee on Christian Education of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 7401 Old York Rd., Philadelphia, PA.

19. Dialogue with Trypho (perhaps this was Rabbi Tarphon) and also Apology 1:67.

20. He wrote this about 180 A.D.

21. See Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1974, page 113.

22. The feast of unleavened bread was celebrated for seven days (Exodus 12:15) as was Sukkot (Leviticus 3:34). Rosh Hashana, the Biblical Feast of Trumpets, was on the first day of the seventh month. Levitical rites of cleansing and atonement usually involved a seven-fold sprinkling.