

# OIM UPDATE

March 2013

This past month, *Purim* commemorated the ancient deliverance of the Jews in Persia (the Book of Esther), and now the Messianic community of faith prepares for participating in Passover *seders* and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day and the last day, of the eight-day period, are considered Sabbaths. During this time, the Omer Count of seven weeks, concluding on *Shavuot* or the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 16:3; Leviticus 23:7-16), begins. The significant Sabbath celebrations, which occur during the Counting of the Omer season, have had me dwell on the importance of the Fourth Commandment, and how it has been widely relegated to relative insignificance among many modern-day Believers, who claim to be followers of the Messiah of Israel. This month's lead article is entitled, "Do Not Pass-Over Sabbaths," and is written to encourage the faithful to understand the significance of participating in not only an annual Passover *seder*, but to also remember the weekly Sabbath and to keep it holy. Hopefully in so doing, our generation of Believers will be prepared and/or be preparing future generations, to become the end-time saints, who will have a testimony of Yeshua and obey His commandments (Revelation 12:17; 14:12).

This past month, we have completed the publication in paperback and Amazon Kindle eBook of *Sayings of the Fathers: A Messianic Perspective on Pirkei Avot*, which is a useful guideline to spend some time in spiritual reflection and contemplation, during the upcoming Omer Count to *Shavuot*. We have found that this book, along with the *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*, are making some inroads into not only independent Messianic sectors, but even Messianic Judaism itself, primarily because very few titles are available that encourage the Counting of the Omer from a Messianic viewpoint. Additionally, the recently released Confronting Issues volume by J.K. McKee, entitled, *Are Non-Jewish Believers Really a Part of Israel?*, is being used by the Lord to help bolster the faith and convictions of many who have embraced a Messianic lifestyle, especially in view of some significant, widespread challenges, by some misguided Messianic influencers.

Additionally, we are continuing to seek support for our **Theological Defense Trust** because we know that a loving, balanced, and scholarly, *written*, apologetic argument—for what God is doing in this hour via the Messianic perspective—is vitally needed to defend this global, end-time move of His Holy Spirit. Our ministry is dedicated to taking the considerable amount of time required to thoroughly research Scripture, appropriate ancient literature, and contemporary Biblically-oriented writings—in order to present to the world at large, a cogent case for the Messianic restoration of all things, as it progresses. Your intercessory prayers and financial support for our efforts are greatly needed and appreciated!

Finally, we are always available (by phone or e-mail) for individual counsel. We genuinely appreciate all of your inquiries and promptings, as they are often the source for our **Frequently Asked Questions** section of the TNN Online web-

site (tnnonline.net). We have found over the years that the questions you might have are somewhat universal in nature, and the Lord has used many of them to prompt us to write various articles and publications.

Have a blessed Passover *Shabbat* in Him,  
Mark Huey

# DO NOT PASS-OVER SABBATHS

by Mark Huey

One of the most compelling understandings revealed from a fuller appreciation of the whole counsel of God is that the Holy One of Israel sincerely wants intimate communion with His children on a regularly scheduled basis, such as the weekly Sabbaths (Exodus 20:8-11) and appointed times (Leviticus 23). However, unlike a mere human father, who truly loves his children and wants the best for them—but is limited by his humanity—our omniscient Heavenly Father even more earnestly desires His children’s personal and/or corporate time and intimate fellowship, derived from praise, worship, and prayer devoted to Him. For it is in these reverential periods of time, set-apart to exclusively approach Him, that the Almighty—if He so wishes—turns His face and countenance toward His beloved sons and daughters. It is during these moments of cherished communion, that the Lord can freely bestow His love, coupled with joy and peace, upon His own, in a very unique and profound way. One would suspect that *all true Believers* would yearn for these instances, but this is not necessarily the case for many, because of various teachings and presuppositions which have prevailed in religious systems developed over the past two millennia.

The Holy Scriptures reveal that true Believers in the Creator God are to direct their attention through Yeshua, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), repeatedly noting that He is seated at the right hand of the Father on His Heavenly throne (Psalm 110:1; Matthew 22:44; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33-34; Romans 8:34; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; et. al.). After all, He alone knows what the heart motivation is for every individual (1 John 3:20). When He sees hearts stirred toward Him and Him alone by faith, He is pleased. For it is written, “without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). Hence for millennia, in order to willfully reaffirm a desire to draw near to the Creator, many devoted followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have been faithfully reciting the *Shema* on a regular basis, as they appeal to Him. For in these confessional words, Moses exhorted the Ancient Israelites to not only “hear” the Lord God—implying obedience to Him alone—but further directed a fully committed love from all of one’s heart, soul, and might, *and* additional instructions from God on how to pass on His words to future generations:

“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! **You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.** These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house

and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

From ancient days to our time, pursuers of the God of Israel who have taken these commands literally, particularly the Jewish people, have sought to establish customary methods and systematic study programs—to maintain not only the oracles of God (Romans 3:2)—but also honor the instructions to remember the Sabbath and the appointed times or feasts of the Lord (Leviticus 23). However, modern-day Messiah followers, who may not be as fully conversant on the heart-felt, inspiring recitation of the *Shema*, or those who have been incorrectly taught that the commandments of God’s Torah do not apply or are irrelevant to them in the post-resurrection era, are at a serious disadvantage.

Despite much of contemporary Christianity’s “cherry picking” method for approaching the commandments declared in the Tanakh (Old Testament), there is an almost universal assumption that at least the moral and ethical tenants of the Ten Commandments certainly still apply. However, as Christianity has developed over the ages, in the past century there has been a precipitous falling away from following the Fourth Commandment, the instruction to remember the Sabbath day and sanctify it:

“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).

Even with various Christian traditions customarily observing what they might consider to be a “Sunday Sabbath” over the centuries—obviously not observed on the seventh day—the Twentieth Century saw a widescale abandonment of even this limited viewpoint of the Fourth Commandment.

In the Fourth Commandment, the Lord declared that His children were to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. While the balance of this instruction further explains the prohibitions against working or causing others or even livestock to labor—the emphasis is placed upon emulating the pattern of the Creator, by taking the seventh day of the week to enter into His rest. Without elaborating on all that has been concocted down through the centuries to avoid work and resting, the key element of the Fourth Commandment is to remember the Sabbath, or *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), sanctifying this time as holy. Setting apart a day of the week to remember what God has done since the Creation is, in many regards, replicating a critical attribute of the Lord God—who remembers all that He has done and promised through His written revelation. This includes remembering Noah (Genesis 8:1), and even establishing an occasional visible rainbow as a reminder that He would never again judge the world with a Flood (Genesis 9:14-16). The Hebrew verb *zakar* (זָכַר) is rather significant, as it should remind His faithful ones, that God will always remember the promises He made with His own—certainly realized via His covenants (Leviticus 26:42-45), and His attributes such as mercy and compassion (Psalm 25:6; 79:8).<sup>1</sup>

For His followers, the opportunity to remember the Lord and all that He has done, is doing, and will do according to His Word—for *one day a week*—should

be a profound blessing. With the instruction to make that one day holy or set-apart (verb *qadash*, קָדַשׁ), a more significant level of importance is attached to the day of rest. As the Lord's personal possession among the nations, called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:5-6), *all followers* of Yeshua the Messiah should more fully understand and appreciate the following words issued by the Apostle Peter. He elaborated on the blessing of being a truth-seeking child of God, likened unto a "living stone" of the spiritual house that the Holy One is building, with Yeshua being the precious cornerstone of that house:

"Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Yeshua the Messiah. For *this* is contained in Scripture: 'BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED' [Isaiah 28:16]. This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone' [Psalm 118:22], and, 'A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE' [Isaiah 8:14]; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. **But you are A CHOSEN RACE** [Isaiah 43:20, LXX; Deuteronomy 7:6; 10:15], **A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD** [Exodus 19:6; Isaiah 61:6], **A HOLY NATION** [Exodus 19:6], **A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION** [Isaiah 43:21, LXX; Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 4:20; 7:6; 14:2], so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him [Isaiah 43:21] who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY [Hosea 2:23]. Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. **Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation"** (1 Peter 2:1-12).

By remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy, born again Believers can serve to be a visible witness to others in the world, that they have a very unique relationship with the Creator God. However, as noted in the passage above, the admonition to lay aside malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander—has not been adhered to by far too many—even in a Messianic community which observes the Sabbath. This has hindered individual spiritual growth and harmed the corporate testimony. Yet, observing the Sabbath was designed by the Lord God to be a perpetual, eternal sign of God's unique loving relationship with Israel—and by extension all who are joined to Israel via faith in Israel's Messiah—especially as the command was written by the very finger of God:

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, eds., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003), 289 summarize some of the significance of the verb *zakar*.

<sup>2</sup> A verb meaning to remember, to mention, to recall, to think about, to think on, to be remembered, to recall, to acknowledge, to mention, to make known. The basic meaning indicates a process of mentioning or recalling either silently, verbally, or by means of a memorial sign or symbol."

“The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, “You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for *this* is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant [*b’rit olam*, בְּרִית עוֹלָם].” It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever [*ot hu l’olam*, הוּא לְעוֹלָם הָאָז]; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed.’ When He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, **written by the finger of God**” (Exodus 31:12-18).

One should think that even a cursory reading of these verses, would indicate the importance that God places on the observance of His Sabbath. However, as time has progressed in religious history, with the actual day of rest being widely altered to Sunday—and in more modern secular times, reduced to a few hours of time spent on Sunday—the meaning of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy has been substantially distorted. Until the later part of the Twentieth Century in America, many states actually had religious “blue laws,” placing prohibitions on products that could be sold on Sunday (particularly alcohol), as most commercial enterprises were closed. But with increasing pressure from the irreligious majority, those laws have substantially been removed to the point where in just a matter of time, despite even the limitations of a “Sunday Sabbath,” the first day will just become another day of the week. So, one can only imagine how difficult it is for most people who have witnessed the sanctity of Sunday deteriorate over their lifetimes, to be reminded that God’s truly faithful people, *His kingdom of priests and chosen*, are commanded to take an entire day of the week to remember Him and keep it holy on Saturday.

To add to the meaning of the weekly Sabbath rest, Scripture also prescribes that there are certain times during the year (i.e., Exodus 23:14, 17; 34:23-24), when the Lord wants His people to observe His appointed times or *moedim* (מוֹעֲדִים), principally summarized in Leviticus 23. In consecrating these feasts or convocations (without necessarily going to Jerusalem as would be ideal), the Lord makes sure that these times are also considered Sabbath rests unto Him, in order to emphasize their importance and meaning to Him. He uses these convocations as times to not only commune specifically with His people—but also as an instructional tool to be reminded of all that He has done through the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread remembrances (Exodus 12:1-20), the *Shavuot*/Pentecost celebrations (cf. Acts 2), and what is anticipated for the Feast of Trumpets/Day of Atonement/Feast of Tabernacles. These annual Sabbath rests are part of God’s plan to keep His own, as a royal priesthood, focused on and growing in Him, in order to be about His Kingdom’s work.

Today, there has been, and continues to be, much resistance by many who claim to be Believers in Jesus Christ—to embrace the concept of taking a full day

of rest (especially Saturday)—and setting it apart to worship the Almighty, fellowship with others, and most especially cease from labor. However, the Lord has been using things such as Passover *seder* presentations, in a unique way, to introduce many curious Messiah followers to their Hebraic and Jewish Roots. It is during these consecrated times, when Believers from all sorts of religious backgrounds come together, and hear about the extraordinary parallels between Ancient Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt and the Exodus—compared to an individual's deliverance from bondage to sin via the salvation of the Messiah. When properly focused on the redeeming grace and mercy of the blood sacrifice paid by Yeshua, as the sacrificial Lamb of God, hardly anyone who truly knows Him can avoid seeing and understanding the obvious connections.

If the people are ready to sense the leading of the Holy Spirit—when told about the opportunity to annually celebrate Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread—some spiritual eyes are opened to a fuller understanding of the whole counsel of God, found in the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. The testimonies from many in the Messianic community, about how the Lord used a Passover *seder* meal to open their eyes, are telling. Many Messianic teachers, congregations, and fellowships utilize Passover *seder* commemorations, as times to reach out to family, friends, and acquaintances. Jewish people, who remember observing Passover growing up, and who may have distanced themselves from God—often get to see a dynamic to the Passover, which a traditional remembrance in the Synagogue would obviously not have shown them. Evangelical Christians, who are either curious or confused about the unique Messianic lifestyle that their relative or friend has embraced, get to see a more fuller understanding of Jesus as the Lamb slain.

This form of Messianic outreach, for a local congregation or fellowship, is highly recommended—because as many have personally witnessed, once the blinders start to come off about the Messiah in the feasts—it is generally just a matter of time *before the Lord reveals more of Himself*. For our family, in particular, the blessing and joy of making the weekly Sabbath rest a part of one's spiritual journey—toward maturing in the ways of the Lord—has been something quite profound! Consider how much more can be learned about the Lord, if true seekers of Him *concentrate on Him* for a full day of every week. This would give such Believers additional time to study the Torah, Haftarah, and related Apostolic Scriptures; praying, interceding, meditating on the Word; praising and worshipping Him; and fellowshiping with others for extended periods of time—not only on a weekly basis, but also when the appointed times appear on the annual calendar.

Just the amount of additional time alone devoted to pursuing the Lord, perhaps compared to one's previous Christian experience—where the concept of taking a full day of rest was rarely, if ever emphasized or even recommended—has the potential to accelerate the spiritual maturation process. But remember that the Adversary is very aware that such a return to the ways of the Lord, and the blessings attached to obedience of something seemingly as basic as remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy—threatens his agenda to distort or delay the will of the Almighty. Hence, due to the relative ease of accessibility to all sorts of teachings (especially on the Internet and via online social media), the

schemes of the Devil have been able to invade into many burgeoning Messianic groups—which are not necessarily focusing on either the meat *or* the milk of the Word of God. This becomes counterproductive when many Messianic Believers, be they Jewish or non-Jewish, have been truly inspired and impressed by the Holy Spirit to remember the Sabbath and make it holy. Too many, rather than focusing on the weighty imperatives of God such as justice or faithfulness (Matthew 23:23), at their *Shabbat* gatherings, may instead delve into extraneous issues at their fellowship times, various suspect theories, and any number of topics that might tickle ears—but are of little, if any, benefit for true spiritual growth.

With some potential areas of diversion possibly present at Sabbath gatherings, **Messianic Believers must be discerning about what they commit their day of rest to studying.** The admonition and exhortation of the Apostle Paul to the saints in Asia Minor, to take up “the full armor of God” to combat the struggle against unseen wicked spiritual forces, should be taken very seriously by all who are to be advancing in their knowledge of the Holy One and His ways:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. **Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.** For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH [Isaiah 11:5], and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS [Isaiah 59:17], and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE [Isaiah 52:7]; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION [Isaiah 59:17], and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. **With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, and pray** on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:10-19).

If one takes into consideration the course of salvation history down through the ages, it should be abundantly clear that the Evil One has for millennia strived to keep many born again saints of the Most High, from faithfully obeying the Word of God. One of the most clever twists was seen by shifting the remembrance of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first day. While there is nothing inherently wrong or immoral with worshipping God on Sunday; **Sunday is not the Sabbath.** While some Christian traditions have recognized Sunday as the Sabbath, many others think that the Sabbath has been abolished for the post-resurrection era. It does have to be recognized that for many previous generations of Christians, who kept a “Sunday Sabbath,” that their observance was far more strict and rigid than many Messianics who keep a seventh-day *Shabbat* today.

Now that the End of the Age is rapidly approaching (Daniel 12:4), and with the Lord in the process of fully restoring His people, there is a definite impetus toward the need for all to keep *Shabbat* at the appropriate time. There are many

Christians today, who are trying to recapture an appreciation of “rest” for God’s people, and many are being Divinely led, or being prepared, to keep *Shabbat*. In no uncertain terms, when the Messiah returns—all of humanity will be keeping the seventh-day Sabbath:

**“And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,” says the LORD** (Isaiah 66:23).

With the advent of knowledge and information increasingly available through the technological tools developed in the last century—the restoration plans of the Father (Acts 3:19-21) are more discernible to those called to be end-time saints. These are the children of God who will noticeably have (1) a testimony of or knowledge that Yeshua is the Messiah of Israel, and (2) they will obey His commandments (Revelation 12:17, 14:12). However, since the time described in the Book of Revelation cannot be absolutely determined, it is more spiritually uplifting to look back on the recorded history of Ancient Israel, and note the times in the past when God’s people were inspired to return to observing the Passover and the other feasts. It was during the reign of King Hezekiah, when he issued a decree to call both Israel and Judah to a Passover celebration. The following account reveals the blessing of returning to following the Word of God, even if not done perfectly by those seeking to please Him:

“Now Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month, since they could not celebrate it at that time, because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient numbers, nor had the people been gathered to Jerusalem. Thus the thing was right in the sight of the king and all the assembly. So they established a decree to circulate a proclamation throughout all Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to celebrate the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem. For they had not celebrated *it* in great numbers as it was prescribed. The couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with the letters from the hand of the king and his princes, even according to the command of the king, saying, ‘O sons of Israel, return to the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that He may return to those of you who escaped *and* are left from the hand of the kings of Assyria. Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were unfaithful to the LORD God of their fathers, so that He made them a horror, as you see. Now do not stiffen your neck like your fathers, but yield to the LORD and enter His sanctuary which He has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD your God, that His burning anger may turn away from you. For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your sons *will find* compassion before those who led them captive and will return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and compassionate, and will not turn *His* face away from you if you return to Him.’ So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. Nevertheless some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD. Now many people were gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very large assembly. They arose and removed the altars which *were* in

Jerusalem; they also removed all the incense altars and cast *them* into the brook Kidron. Then they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* on the fourteenth of the second month. And the priests and Levites were ashamed of themselves, and consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings to the house of the LORD. They stood at their stations after their custom, according to the law of Moses the man of God; the priests sprinkled the blood *which they received* from the hand of the Levites. For *there were* many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves; therefore, the Levites *were* over the slaughter of the Passover *lambs* for everyone who *was* unclean, in order to consecrate *them* to the LORD. For a multitude of the people, *even* many from Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the good LORD pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification *rules* of the sanctuary.' So the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. The sons of Israel present in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great joy, and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day after day with loud instruments to the LORD. Then Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good insight *in the things* of the LORD. So they ate for the appointed seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD God of their fathers. Then the whole assembly decided to celebrate *the feast* another seven days, so they celebrated the seven days with joy. For Hezekiah king of Judah had contributed to the assembly 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep, and the princes had contributed to the assembly 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep; and a large number of priests consecrated themselves. All the assembly of Judah rejoiced, with the priests and the Levites and all the assembly that came from Israel, both the sojourners who came from the land of Israel and those living in Judah. So there was great joy in Jerusalem, because there was nothing like this in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel. Then the Levitical priests arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard and their prayer came to His holy dwelling place, to heaven" (2 Chronicles 30:1-27).

During the reign of King Josiah, he commanded the people to celebrate the Passover. The Passover had been overlooked for a considerable time, but led to a great revival of purification against idol worship:

"Josiah also removed all the houses of the high places which *were* in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made provoking the LORD; and he did to them just as he had done in Bethel. All the priests of the high places who *were* there he slaughtered on the altars and burned human bones on them; then he returned to Jerusalem. Then the king commanded all the people saying, 'Celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in this book of the covenant.' Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was observed to the LORD in Jerusalem. Moreover, Josiah removed the mediums and the spiritists and the teraphim and the idols and all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might confirm the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. Before him there was no king like him who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, accord-

ing to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kings 23:19-25).

The account of the return of the Southern Kingdom exiles from Babylon depicts a return to the observance of the Passover, as Ezra was used to restore the people to following the word of the Lord:

"And the elders of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. This temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar; it was the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. And the sons of Israel, the priests, the Levites and the rest of the exiles, celebrated the dedication of this house of God with joy. They offered for the dedication of this temple of God 100 bulls, 200 rams, 400 lambs, and as a sin offering for all Israel 12 male goats, corresponding to the number of the tribes of Israel. Then they appointed the priests to their divisions and the Levites in their orders for the service of God in Jerusalem, as it is written in the book of Moses. **The exiles observed the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure. Then they slaughtered the Passover *lamb* for all the exiles, both for their brothers the priests and for themselves.** The sons of Israel who returned from exile and all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to *join* them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate *the Passover*. And they observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had caused them to rejoice, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them to encourage them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel" (Ezra 6:14-22).

In the Apostolic Scriptures, the Apostle Paul issued admonishing instructions to the Corinthians, using the Passover as a point of reference. In purging the sin or leaven/yeast from their lives, and from the midst of their assembly, the Corinthians were to be adequately prepared to celebrate the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread:

"It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Yeshua, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Yeshua, *I have decided* to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Yeshua. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? **Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened.** For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; *I did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and

swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the [assembly]*? But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES [Deuteronomy 17:7; 19:19; 21:21, 24; 24:7]” (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

When one looks at the context of the statement about celebrating the Passover, the key point that Paul made is that the saints were to avoid having fellowship with those practicing sexual immorality within their assembly. To what degree has this admonition been followed down through the centuries? Perhaps with the presence of, at least a wide degree of hidden sin—such as altered not only the observance of the Passover, but has been influential in altering even the Fourth Commandment, in remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy.

With these significant Biblical examples to remind modern-day followers of the Messiah about how the observance of the Passover—and by extension, the return to remembering the Sabbath—more and more truth-seeking people around the globe are adhering to these instructions. The resulting move of the Holy Spirit is the early stages of a fulfillment of some of the prophecies found in the Book of Malachi:

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the LORD of hosts, ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,’ says the LORD of hosts. **Remember the law of Moses My servant, *even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to *their* children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse*”** (Malachi 4:1-6).

Spirit-led children of God, from diverse cultures around the planet, are actually beginning to consider the Torah or Moses’ Teaching, by studying it on a regular basis. The spirit of Elijah is being poured out, as those zealous for the ways of the Lord, are seeking Him with diligence and fervor. *They are not intimidated if various leaders in Judaism, Christianity, or even Messianic Judaism, oppose or frown at what they are being convicted of.* The hearts of people are being certainly led to return to the prescription found in the *Shema*, to be instructed by the Law of God, and to then train up their children in the ways of His commandments. Many are being taught, for the very first time, about their spiritual ancestors in the Tanakh or Old Testament. These are exciting times in which to be living—especially when it is obvious to those with the eyes to see and the ears to hear—that the Holy One is ultimately orchestrating this return to Him and His ways!

Do not be discouraged if people challenge you, because you celebrate the Passover or remember the seventh-day Sabbath. After all, regardless of what people think, our Heavenly Father is mindful of heart motivations. He is the One

using these weekly and seasonal convocations to test many hearts, to see if they will be obedient to His ways. Messianic Believers should not be the ones who are found harshly judging others, if they willfully choose to disregard God's Word. Many people will be convicted by the Lord over time, and the ideal season for them to consider Passover or the weekly Sabbath may not be yet. Be mindful of Yeshua's warning about judging others—including the recommendation that a person is to ask, seek, and knock:

**“Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ and behold, the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened”** (Matthew 7:1-8).

If you and your family are being led to celebrate the Passover and other feasts of the Lord, and you are remembering the Sabbath and attempting to keep it holy—then praise the Lord that His Holy Spirit is leading you in more fully adhering to His Word! For His Divine purposes, you have been asking, you have been seeking, and you have been knocking. He has been faithful to His Word to give you understanding, as you have found out more about His ways, and He has opened the door for you to more fully enter into communion with Him. This understanding came at an appropriate time for you, as you sought Him. *Be aware that the appropriate time for others, might not be at the present.* You have the responsibility, in your observance of the appointed times, to demonstrate how you are more closely living like the Messiah Yeshua—**most especially by demonstrating His love and salvation to those who do not keep them right now.** More people will be guided to your love and wisdom, via your obedience, than harsh and unfair condemnation.

*May He be praised for the blessings of obedience to His Word!* And as for me and my family, we will continue to follow in the footsteps of Joshua, who summarized to his generation what he chose to do:

**“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD”** (Joshua 24:14-15).

As advised by the overwhelming weight of the Scriptures, do not *Pass-over the Sabbath*. Be sure to keep the Passover, the appointed times, and the Sabbath, so that as maturing followers of the Messiah, we can be used to advance His Kingdom on Earth, until the restoration of all things...