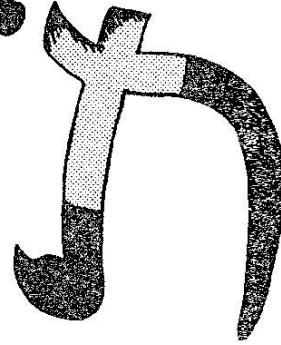


# THE MARK

OF YHWH'S  
FAITHFUL  
REMNANT



— DANIEL BOTKIN —

There has been a significant movement among believers in recent years to rediscover and reclaim what could be called "the neglected elements of Torah." This movement is especially obvious among Messianic Jews, of course, but is by no means limited to Jewish believers. Because so many non-Jewish believers are involved in this movement, I prefer to use the term "Messianic Faith" (or "Messianic Movement") rather than "Messianic Judaism," a term which implies that all those involved are Jewish.

Regardless of what terminology is used to describe this movement, it is a phenomenon that every sincere believer should prayerfully consider. When comparing the Messianic Faith with Mainstream Christianity, an observer will notice four distinct practices emerging in the Messianic Movement that differentiate it from Mainstream Christianity. The four resultant differences could be summarized and categorized as follows:

#### Messianic Faith

1. Honors the seventh day as a Sabbath of rest and worship.
2. Celebrates Biblical holy days of Lev. 23.
3. Practices Biblical dietary laws.
4. Practices miscellaneous laws that could be considered "the least of the commandments" (tsitsiot, t'filin, mezuzot, etc. )

#### Mainstream Christianity

1. Uses Sunday morning as time of weekly worship.
2. Celebrates holidays of pagan origin.
3. Ignores Biblical dietary-laws .
4. Labels these miscellaneous commandments unimportant and/or "just for the Jews," and therefore ignores them.

Some believers think this dichotomous arrangement is what God intends for His people. But does YHWH really want a paganized "Gentile Church" which meets on Sunday, celebrates Xmas and Easter, and has church-sponsored hog roasts, while a "Jewish Church" keeps the Sabbath, celebrates holy days, and keeps kosher? Such an arrangement results in two separate faiths, not one. If Jewish and non-Jewish believers are to be one body in practice, and not just in theory, the above arrangement will not do.

What are the answers to these questions of Sabbath versus Sunday, holy days versus holidays, dietary laws, and "the least of the commandments"? We can gain some insight into these areas by examining one of Ezekiel's visions.

Ezekiel was one of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. The glory of God had departed from the Temple, and Jerusalem had been destroyed years before. In Ezk. chapter 8, the Spirit brought the prophet "in the visions of God to Jerusalem," and showed him Israel's former sins that had caused God's glory to depart.

In the vision, Ezekiel was first told to look toward the north gate of the inner court of the Temple, where he beheld an "idol that provokes to jealousy." The Lord then said to him, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations which the house of Israel are committing here, things that will drive Me far from My sanctuary? But yet you will see still greater abominations." This first sin could be called "the least of the abominations." Yet even by itself, YHWH said, it was enough to cause His glory to depart.

Next, Ezekiel was told to dig into a wall at the entrance of the court. Ezekiel dug until he came to a door. When he went in, the prophet saw "creeping things and unclean animals" portrayed on the walls, and seventy of the elders of Israel standing before them. YHWH again told him, "Yet you will see still greater abominations."

The third abomination Ezekiel saw was "women weeping for Tammuz" at the north gate of the Temple. "Weeping for Tammuz" was a custom associated with a pagan holiday. For forty days, pagans mourned and fasted for the god Tammuz, in preparation for the spring festival and its lewd fertility rites. Again YHWH said, "Yet you will see greater abominations than these."

The fourth and final abomination Ezekiel saw was "about 25 men, with their backs toward the Temple of YHWH, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

The correlation between these four abominations and the four areas of Torah that are presently neglected by Mainstream Christianity, and re-emerging in the Messianic Movement, should be obvious. For those who do not see the correlation, I will explain.

The first abomination Ezekiel saw was "the least of the abominations." Mainstream Christianity ignores "the least of the commandments." The second abomination Ezekiel saw was seventy elders of Israel standing with unclean animals. The leaders of Mainstream Christianity teach that unclean animals may be eaten by God's people. The third abomination Ezekiel saw was women participating in a pagan festival at the Temple of YHWH. In Christian churches, Christians celebrate religious holidays that have their origin in pagan idol worship. The final and worst of the four abominations was that of Israel's spiritual leaders turning their backs on God's sanctuary, and worshipping the sun. The spiritual leaders of Mainstream Christianity turned their backs on the seventh-day Sabbath, God's "sanctuary in time," and replaced it with the observance of Sun-day. The reason for the change was three-fold: 1) to "show contempt for the Jews"; 2) to "avoid appearing to observe the Sabbath with the Jews," and thereby avoid Roman persecution that the Jews were experiencing; 3) to make Christianity more appealing to the pagan masses, who already used the first day of the week (Sun-day) to honor the sun god. (See S. Bacchiocchi, "How It Came About: From Saturday to Sunday." Biblical Archaeology Review, Sept./Oct. 1978, 32-39.)

Of course Christians today do not go to church on Sunday to worship the sun god. But when we learn why Mainstream Christianity turned its back on God's Sabbath and holy days, we should then turn our backs on the observance of Sun-god day and pagan holidays, and return to the Biblical Sabbath and holy days. In like manner, we should also return to keeping the dietary laws and "the least of the commandments."

Ezekiel's vision of the four abominations was immediately followed by a vision of the slaying that took place in Jerusalem as a result of the abominations. Before the slaying began, however, YHWH told "an angelic being with a writer's inkhorn, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof" (Ezk.9:4). Others with swords were told to follow and slay all who did not have the mark, beginning at God's sanctuary.

There are similar passages in Revelation about YHWH's faithful remnant receiving a mark of protection upon the forehead before God's final judgment falls on the earth. (See Rev.7:3;9:4,•

14:1;22:4.) Of course God's "mark" is not some physical mark, like a tattoo, that can be seen with the eyes. What is the "mark"? In Ezk.9:4, the Hebrew word is tav, which can mean "mark," "sign," or "signature." According to Gesenius' Hebrew lexicon, it can also mean a "cross," and is, in fact, translated "cross" in the New Jerusalem Bible. For New Covenant believers, this aspect of the "mark" is plain: to have the mark, one must have faith in the One who died on a cross.

I see a second aspect of the mark, however, in light of the four abominations Ezekiel saw and the four elements that are re-emerging in the Messianic Movement. Tav is also the name of the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and corresponds to our English letter "T." (The diagram below shows how both the Hebrew letter "tav" and the English letter "T" evolved from a common script.) What could the Hebrew letter "tav" stand for? Among Bible students, probably the best-known Hebrew word beginning with "tav" (or "T" in English) is the word Torah ("Law"). The idea that the remnant in Jerusalem be marked with a "tav" for Torah makes sense when one considers the fact that the abominations they were grieving over were simply the abandonment of certain elements of Torah.

Thus we see that God's faithful remnant is characterized by two things: the keeping of God's Torah and faith in God's Son, Yeshua, who died on a cross. This is confirmed in Rev.14:12: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God and their faith in Yeshua." It is also confirmed in Rev.12:17: "And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Yeshua."

Let me close with a word of warning. We know Satan hates the Jews. Even though they have not put their faith in Yeshua as Messiah, they have preserved the Torah. Satan also hates Christians. Even though they have not practiced all the Torah, they have preserved the testimony of Yeshua. As can be seen in Rev. 12:17 (above), those who decide to do both — keep the Torah and put their faith in Yeshua -- will greatly anger the Evil One. It is these people he comes to make war against. Those who have the "tav" — both the Torah and the cross — will be targets for the Enemy's attacks. Let us be prepared!