



LifeLight™
FOUNDATIONS

Bible Feasts



LEADERS GUIDE

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Introduction

Welcome to LifeLight

A special pleasure is in store for you. You will be instrumental in leading your brothers and sisters in Christ closer to Him who is our life and light (John 1:4). You will have the pleasure of seeing fellow Christians discover new insights and rediscover old ones as they open the Scriptures and dig deep into them, perhaps deeper than they have ever dug before. More than that, you will have the pleasure of sharing in this wonderful study.

LifeLight—An In-depth Study

LifeLight is a series of in-depth Bible studies. The goal of LifeLight is that through a regular program of in-depth personal and group study of Scripture, more and more Christian adults may grow in their personal faith in Jesus Christ, enjoy fellowship with the members of His body, and reach out in love to others in witness and service.

In-depth means that this Bible study includes the following four components: individual daily home study; discussion in a small group; a lecture presentation on the Scripture portion under study; and an enhancement of the week's material (through reading the enrichment magazine).

LifeLight Participants

LifeLight participants are adults who desire a deeper study of the Scriptures than is available in the typical Sunday morning adult Bible class. (Mid-to-older teens might also be LifeLight participants.) While LifeLight does not assume an existing knowledge of the Bible or special experience or skills in Bible study, it does assume a level of commitment that will bring participants to each of the nine weekly assemblies having read the assigned readings and attempted to answer the study questions. Daily reading and study will require from 15 to 30 minutes for the five days preceding the LifeLight assembly. The day following the assembly will be spent reviewing the previous week's study by going over the completed study leaflet and the enrichment magazine.

LifeLight Leadership

While the in-depth process used by LifeLight begins with individual study and cannot achieve its aims without this individual effort, it cannot be completed by individual study alone. Therefore, trained leaders are necessary. You fill one or perhaps more of the important roles described below.

The Director

This person oversees the LifeLight program in a local center (which may be a congregation or a center operated by several neighboring congregations). The director

- serves as the parish LifeLight overall coordinator and leader;
- coordinates the scheduling of the LifeLight program;
- orders materials;
- convenes LifeLight leadership team meetings;
- develops publicity materials;
- recruits participants;
- maintains records and budgeting;
- assigns, with the leadership team, participants to small discussion groups;
- makes arrangements for facilities;
- communicates outreach opportunities to small-group leaders and to congregational boards;
- follows up on participants who leave the program.

The Assistant Director (optional)

This person may assist the director. Duties listed for the director may be assigned to the assistant director as mutually agreeable.

The Lecture Leader

This person prepares and delivers the lecture at the weekly assembly. (Lesson material for the lecture leader begins on p. 9.) The lecture leader

- prepares and presents the Bible study lecture to the large group;
- prepares worship activities (devotional thought, hymn, prayer), using resources in the study leaflet and leaders guide and possibly other, outside sources;
- helps the small-group discussion leaders to grow in understanding the content of the lessons;
- encourages prayer at weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings.

The Small-Group Coordinator (optional; the director may fill this role)

This person supervises and coordinates the work of the small-group discussion leaders. The small-group coordinator

- recruits with the leadership team the small-group discussion leaders;
- trains or arranges for training of the discussion leaders;
- assists the director and discussion leaders in follow-up and outreach;
- encourages the discussion leaders to contact absent group members;
- participates in the weekly leadership-team and discussion-leaders equipping meetings;
- provides ongoing training and support as needed.

The Small-Group Discussion Leaders

These people guide and facilitate discussion of LifeLight participants in the small groups. (Lesson material for the small-group leaders begins on p. 45.) There should be one discussion leader for every group of no more than 12 participants. The small-group discussion leaders are, perhaps, those individuals who are most important to the success of the program. They should, therefore, be chosen with special care and be equipped with skills needed to guide discussion and to foster a caring fellowship within the group. These discussion leaders

- prepare each week for the small-group discussion by using the study leaflet and small-group leaders guide section for that session (see p. 45);
- read the enrichment magazine as a study supplement;

- guide and facilitate discussion in their small group;
- encourage and assist the discussion group in prayer;
- foster fellowship and mutual care within the discussion group;
- attend weekly discussion leaders training meetings.

Leadership Training

LifeLight leaders will meet weekly to review the previous week’s work and plan the coming week. At this session, leaders can address concerns and prepare for the coming session. LifeLight is a 1½-hour program with no possibility for it to be taught in the one hour typically available on Sunday mornings. Some congregations, however, may want to use the Sunday morning Bible study hour for LifeLight preparation and leadership training. In such a meeting, the lecture leader and/or small-group coordinator may lead the discussion leaders through the coming week’s lesson, reserving 5 or 10 minutes for problem solving or other group concerns.

While it requires intense effort, LifeLight has proven to bring great benefit to LifeLight participants. The effort put into this program, both by leaders and by participants, will be rewarding and profitable.

The LifeLight Weekly Schedule

Here is how LifeLight will work week by week:

1. Before session 1, each participant will receive the study leaflet for session 1 and the enrichment magazine for the course. The study leaflet contains worship resources (for use both in individual daily study and at the opening of the following week’s assembly) and readings and study questions for five days. Challenge questions will lead those participants who have the time and desire a greater challenge into even deeper levels of study.
2. After the five days of individual study at home, participants will gather for a weekly assembly of all LifeLight participants. The assembly will begin with a brief period of worship (5 minutes). Participants will then join their assigned small discussion groups (of 12 or fewer, who will remain the same throughout the course), where they will go over the week’s study questions together (55 minutes). Assembling together once again, participants will listen to a lec-

ture presentation on the readings they have studied in the previous week and discussed in their small groups (20 minutes). After the lecture presentation, the director or another leader will distribute the study leaflet for the following week. Closing announcements and other necessary business may take another five minutes before dismissal.

In some places some small groups will not join the weekly assembly because of scheduling or other reasons. Such groups may meet at another time and place (perhaps in the home of one of the small group's members). They will follow the same schedule. The discussion leader will obtain the leaflets from the director. A congregation may record the lecture given by the lecture leader at the weekly assembly and duplicate it for use by other groups meeting later in the week.

3. On the day following the assembly, participants will review the preceding week's work by rereading the study leaflet they completed (and that they perhaps supplemented or corrected during the discussion in their small group) and by reading appropriate articles in the enrichment magazine.

Then the LifeLight weekly study process will begin all over again!

Recommended Study Resources for Biblical Feasts

The Lutheran Study Bible. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009. This resource contains more than 26,000 study and application notes, a most thorough reference guide (pp. lxx–cx), and over 90,000 cross-references, as well as a 31,000-entry concordance, maps, charts, and timelines.

Concordia Self-Study Bible. New International Version. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986. Interpretive notes on each page form a running commentary on the text. The book includes cross-references, a 35,000-word concordance, full-color maps, charts, and timelines.

The Lutheran Bible Companion. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014. This highly visual two-volume handbook welcomes Christians to a deeper exploration of the cultural and historical contexts of the events captured in Scripture and the Apocrypha

Roehrs, Walter R., and Martin H. Franzmann. *Concordia Self-Study Commentary*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979. This one-volume commentary on the Bible contains 950 pages and is tailored for lay use.

The Concordia Organist is a 31-CD collection of pipe organ accompaniments for all the hymns and liturgical music in *Lutheran Service Book*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House (order no. 99-2264). Use these CDs for worship hymn accompaniment.

Overview: Why Study Bible Feasts?

**Numbers 28–29; Deuteronomy 14:1–2;
Matthew 5:17–30; Genesis 12:1–3;
Romans 1:16; Matthew 22:34–40**

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

The Old Testament portrays God's seeking to reclaim His created and sinful people. He brought the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt because of His promise to their forefather Abraham: "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

A study of biblical feasts, established by God for His Old Testament people, enables us to better understand the Christian faith in its historical context. We see how the feasts are fulfilled in Christ. We are better equipped to witness to Jewish relatives and friends.

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. better understand God's working in history to rescue Israel and how, through biblical feasts, He kept them faithful to Him and pointed forward to Christ;
2. become equipped and motivated to share their faith, especially with Jewish friends.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn and by praying the psalm responsively, as printed in the study leaflet. (Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* [refer to hymnal index]. Note: Concordia Publishing House has available *Every Voice a Song*, a 9-CD set of organ accompaniments for 180 hymns and liturgy. All the initial wor-

ship hymns in the LifeLight courses are included in this resource. It's especially helpful for mission congregations and small parishes. See the list of study resources on page 7.) Follow with this prayer:

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, as we begin this study of Your Word, may Your Spirit give us a fresh understanding of the riches You shower on us through Your Son's death and resurrection. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Lecture Presentation

Today we begin a nine-week study on the biblical feasts of Israel. Our study will be broken down into three parts, as we look at the biblical foundation for each feast or holiday, how it is traditionally celebrated today within the Jewish community, and finally, how it has been fulfilled in Messiah, Jesus, and is therefore relevant for us today as Christians.

There are many reasons to study the biblical feasts and even to celebrate them. For one, they can help us better understand the Christian faith. Second, such study can equip us better to communicate with those who do not believe in Jesus as Savior and Messiah, especially our Jewish friends and relatives.

1 Over 5,000 Years!

If you were to look at a Jewish calendar to find one of the Jewish festivals, the first thing that you would notice is that the Jewish calendar is over 5,000 years old. This calendar was formalized in around A.D. 359 and dates back to the creation of the world as determined by the rabbis of that period. For example, one of the feasts we will look at is Rosh Hashanah. In the year 2003 this fell at sundown on September 26. The Jewish date for this festival is the 1st of Tishri, A.M. 5764 (A.M. stands for the Latin phrase *Anno Mundi*, or the Year of the World, and counts the years from creation).

The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar: ours is a tradi-

tional calendar, based upon the solar year. Why *lunar*? Let's look at Numbers 28:11–15. Note God's command in verse 11, "On the first of *every month*, present to the LORD a burnt offering ..." Each new month begins with the new moon (v. 14). This has led to a minor festival called Rosh Chodesh, which means "Head of the Month." Characterized in biblical times by the bringing of offerings from among the most treasured possessions of this people, today Rosh Chodesh is marked by special prayers in the synagogue to usher in the new month.

But the lunar year is only 354 days long, and because the Jewish festivals are annual cycles marking agrarian events, it is important that the festivals remain within their seasons. Since seasons are controlled by the sun, and our solar calendar is 365 days long, every two or three years the Jewish calendar has a month added (called Adar II), and there is an additional day added during some months so that the month is 30 days long instead of 29. As you can see, there would never be a "blue moon" in the Jewish calendar, so "once in a blue moon" would mean "never!"

According to the ancient biblical view, each day is counted from sundown to sundown rather than midnight to midnight. At the very beginning of time (Genesis 1:3), "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" and (v. 5) "there was evening and there was morning—the first day." Each day is then described successively in the same way. Since the biblical narrative indicates that the day begins with the evening, sundown is determined as when the new day begins. Sundown has then been defined as when three stars are visible to the naked eye in the night sky.

When does the Jewish *year* begin? (Numbers 28:16) "On the fourteenth day of the *first month* the LORD's Passover is to be held." In the Jewish calendar, this first month of the year is called Nisan, and Passover falls on the 14th day of that month. Yet, the *fall* festival Rosh Hashanah, which literally means "the Head of the Year," is celebrated as the Jewish New Year.

Remember that we are dealing with an agrarian people. (Numbers 29:1) In ancient Israel, the *seventh month* observation of the Feast of Trumpets became closely associated with the fall harvest. It was then that all of the crops of the year were harvested and the people began the cycle anew. This came to be considered a New

Year and to be called Rosh Hashanah (the Head of the Year). Ultimately, the Jewish people observed Nisan as the beginning of the civil year and Rosh Hashanah as the beginning of the religious year, hence two days on which the new year is observed.

2 God's Chosen People

Any study of the biblical feasts must also look at the people for whom the feasts were given. There has always been a sharp debate about the designation of the Jewish people as God's "chosen people." For some, this has led to envy and even to anti-Semitism. The author of this study grew up in a Jewish home and experienced ridicule from others because he was Jewish. He said, "I often echoed the comic cry, 'God, couldn't you choose someone else for a while?' " Even among the Jewish people there has been discussion about the appropriateness of this identification, because of the fear that it sounds arrogant or may lead to a false sense of superiority. Regardless of how we might feel about this label, though, it is biblical.

Most Jewish scholars will turn to the wilderness following the Exodus as the time in which God chose Israel. See, for example, Deuteronomy 14:2 where God says, "Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be His treasured possession." And they will often credit the unlikely survival of the Jewish people down through ages as evidence of God's hand upon them. But for what purpose did God choose this people?

As with all things when discussed by Jewish scholars, there is great debate as to the answer to this question. But most will agree that it has something to do with the people's acceptance of the Torah, the laws and commandments handed to them through Moses on Mount Sinai. These commandments, numbering significantly more than 10 (613!), include prohibitions and admonitions with regard to all manner of life in society. It is among these 613 that the observance of the feasts is commanded. It is further taught that the Jewish religion began at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah.

It is generally held by Jewish scholars that the Torah was given to us to purify us and help us to lead good lives. They teach that it is the strict observance of all these laws and commandments that determine our spiritual

condition before God. Many of these commandments revolve around the temple sacrificial system. Since the final destruction of the temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 ended that system, rabbis have practiced interpretation of the Torah, which has led to the codification of this interpretation in a series of books called the Talmud. Certainly, rabbinic interpretation went on before the destruction of the temple, and we see Jesus practicing that same thing in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) and throughout the Gospels. But following the destruction of the temple, the interpretation began to be the rule and norm for Jewish faith. The Talmud is essentially rabbinic commentary on the Torah and the whole of Hebrew Scripture. Today rabbis will often quote the Talmud more than the Scripture.

3 Why Choose Such a People?

I think we can give a definite answer as to why God chose the Jewish people, and it doesn't seem to have anything to do with the Torah. Deuteronomy 7:7–8 tells us why God chose the Jewish people to be His own. It was not because of anything they had done, not because they were a mighty people, and not because they accepted the Torah. He chose them because He loved them. He heard their cries of bondage in Egypt because He had already chosen them to be His own. And He brought them out of bondage because of His promise to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He chose them to be His own for a purpose, as He said to Abraham, (Genesis 12:3) "All peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Through Abraham's descendant Jesus, not only Abraham's physical descendants, but also *all* people would benefit by Christ's atoning sacrifice.

Since the fall of man into sin and the broken relationship with God that followed, God has sought to heal His relationship with the crown of His creation. And it would be through Abram (whose name means "exalted father") that He would choose to do this. He changed Abram's name to Abraham, which means "father of many," and built from him a nation through whom God's reconciliation with the world would come. Surely this is a chosen people, chosen to birth God's own Son, Jesus, the Messiah of Israel and all people.

So it is by God's love (mercy), received in faith by

Abram, that God's people were chosen. And as He brought them out of 430 years of slavery in Egypt, He gave them the Torah, the Ten Commandments, and also the 600 some other admonitions and prohibitions to teach them how to live in relationship with Him and with one another as free people. Coming from over four centuries of having nothing to being a free people with the riches of Egypt, it would have been easy for them to be possessive, to put their trust in their things, and to end up right where they started—slaves to their desires. So He taught them to give a portion of their wealth to the Lord and gave them the festivals to mark opportunities to praise God for His constant provision and for the salvation that they had freely received.

This is what the biblical feasts of Israel teach us. And they point forward to God's anointed one, Jesus, who, as the Law and the prophets testify, would be born of a virgin, suffer and die for our sins, be raised from the dead, and rule over this holy kingdom of priests who have received Him.

4 The Jewish People Today

Sadly, today most Jewish people have rejected God's reconciliation. What started at the foot of Mount Sinai with the construction of a golden calf to worship, proceeded through to the top of Mount Moriah, where God's Son would be sacrificed. It continues today in the unbelief of many of this people. Today, many Jewish people do not even believe in God, do not attend the synagogue, and live strained lives as they try to protect their cultural and ethnic identity. Jewish law has defined what it is to be Jewish. Surprisingly, this has nothing to do with faith. If you have a Jewish mother, you are Jewish. You can practice New Age arts of transcendental meditation, you can ascribe to the teachings of Buddha, or you can be an atheist and still be a good Jew. Ironically, if you continue to trust in God's promises and have faith in the Messiah of Israel, who is Jesus, you are no longer considered to be a good Jew, regardless of your family history.

This bit of illogical irony is a reaction to what Jewish people have experienced and call Christian anti-Semitism. They view, and in many cases rightly so, that the Jewish people have been persecuted throughout the centuries by the Christian church, and an honest

history would have to affirm some of this view. From Constantine through the Crusades and the Inquisition, even to the Holocaust, Jewish people have fought to retain their identity against the evil that mankind can perpetuate in the name of God.

Jewish persecution is not God's fault. It is the result of ignorance and superstition. And worse than that, it is a result of a refusal to search God's Word for truth. And the truth is, the most anti-Semitic thing we can do as Christians is to feel guilty about how the church has treated the Jewish people and withhold salvation from them by not sharing the good news of the Jewish Messiah of Israel, Jesus.

5 Overcoming History

How do we overcome history and Jewish objections to the Gospel? This is the real question that this study seeks to answer. Jesus' last words on earth were to go and make disciples of all nations, and that includes the Jewish people. When it comes to outreach, Jews are specifically mentioned in the Scriptures. Paul, the preeminent missionary of the New Covenant, writes, (Romans 1:16) "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."

We begin with prayer. We pray that God would continually assure us of the salvation we have in Christ through our faith alone. We pray that God would protect us from the sinful human tendency to want to earn our salvation by our works. For some reason, there is an element in the church that still maintains that faith does not seem to be enough and that God must demand more. Legalism sells! Many people blindly think that it is easier to have a grocery list of things to do by which to earn God's favor rather than to rely on this intangible thing called trust or faith in the God who has done it all and gives us all in Christ. But if it were up to our grocery list, we would work forever to no avail.

Jesus summarized the heart of the Torah, the Ten Commandments: (Matthew 22:37-40) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these

two commandments." These are well symbolized in Rome's favorite form of execution, the cross. The vertical beam of the cross is the first commandment, representing our relationship with God. The horizontal beam is the second, representing our relationship with one another. Because we have not and do not love our God and our neighbor as we ought, God Himself—Jesus the Christ—gave Himself on that cross into death and punishment and hell itself—in love for us and to give us forgiveness and new life in Him.

Concluding Activities

Close with a prayer thanking God for the Holy Scriptures, in which He discloses to us His marvelous plan for our salvation through Jesus.

Distribute the enrichment magazine and explain that "it provides additional background, *enrichment*, and review of the material studied not only in this session but in the entire course." Encourage participants to read it as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet 2.

The Sabbath: Our Daily Need for God

**Leviticus 22:32–23:3; Exodus 16;
Matthew 11:28–12:14; Acts 2:42–47**

Preparing for the Session

Central Focus

This session looks at Israel's festival calendar within the context of the church year. The Sabbath, the first festival, shows us our need for God on a daily basis.

Objectives

That participants, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word, will

1. understand why God commanded His Old Testament people to observe the Sabbath and why He commands His people today to observe a day of rest and worship every week;
2. grow in joyful *daily* worship and prayer.

Session Plan

Worship

Begin the session with the hymn printed in the study leaflet. (Accompaniments are available in denominational hymnals, such as *Lutheran Worship* [refer to hymnal index], or on the *Every Voice a Song* CD set.) Follow with the psalm as a prayer.

Lecture Presentation

Now that we have a brief context for our study, we can begin to look at the major feasts of Israel. If the feasts were given as "lasting ordinances" for God's people, and are part of God's teaching about living life in His kingdom, then what can we learn from studying and perhaps celebrating Israel's festival cycle? I think we can come to find that the Jewish festival calendar is much akin to the church-year calendar that Christians observe.

The church-year calendar is a celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus. Beginning with Advent, we celebrate the prophetic backdrop of Christ's birth through the Christmas Season; His revelation to the world in Epiphany; His ministry on earth and the foretelling of His Passion through Lent; His death, resurrection, and ascension during Eastertide; and His continued ministry on earth through the Holy Spirit given to the church during the Pentecost season.

When we look at Israel's festival calendar within the context of the church year, we find many of Israel's festivals are already incorporated in much of the church year.

A study of the festivals begins with a day. It begins with showing us our need for God on a daily basis, and especially through the remembrance of the Sabbath, the first feast that was ordained by God.

1 The Sabbath a Feast?

Most people probably don't think of the Sabbath as one of Israel's feasts. However, in Leviticus 23, when God speaks to Moses, telling him to tell the children of Israel of the festivals, the Hebrew word used is *mo'adim*, which means "appointed times." These are the times God has appointed to meet with His people, and the Sabbath is the first of the feasts mentioned (v. 3).

Interestingly, this is not the first mention of the Sabbath. The first mention of Sabbath even comes long before Exodus 20, where God includes it among the Ten Commandments He spoke to Moses, when He commanded that the Sabbath day be kept holy. Even by then, Moses and the people of Israel knew the significance of the seventh day of the week.

2 A Sabbath from Work

Sabbath means "rest," and of course we know that following God's creative work, which took place over the course of the first six days, He rested. He took a day off. It seems strange to think of our all-powerful creative God needing a rest. And actually, the Scriptures do not

say that He *needed* a rest; simply that He rested. One can imagine God, having finished filling the earth with all manner of marvelous things, simply wanting to lie back and marvel at His creation. Perhaps He contemplated all that He had done, or simply wanted to watch and enjoy the fruits of His labor. So God rested. He stopped working and set aside that day, making it a holy day, our first holiday.

But the Sabbath is not mentioned again until the people of Israel are in the wilderness. This stubborn people had just been delivered from the taskmaster's whip in Egypt. Traveling by God's grace with the plunder of Egypt in their possession, they had just witnessed miraculous deliverance from death under a chariot's wheel as God brought them across the sea, drowning Pharaoh's army (Exodus 14). And yet they still did not trust God. Still controlled by their desires, they grumbled against God for water, and He gave them fresh water from bitter pools (Exodus 15). And they grumbled against God for food, actually looking back and longing for their slavery, where they were whipped but at least fed. So God gave them food from the heavens, quail in the evening and manna with the morning dew (Exodus 16). Now would they trust Him?

Each morning they would collect enough manna for that day's meals. Any more than they needed quickly spoiled. And still some tested God, collecting more than the day's need. But then, on the sixth day, the people seemed to know to collect twice as much as needed. Leaders of the community, who had already witnessed the spoiling manna of excess, reported this to Moses, who then taught about the Sabbath. Somehow, in the oral tradition of the people, the Sabbath was known about, expected, and probably longed for. For 430 years of slavery they had had no day of rest or even a concept of taking a day to do nothing. So here, barely out of Egypt, the Sabbath is celebrated.

And still some tested God. They collected their share for two days on the sixth day, and still went out on the seventh to collect manna, but they found none. Clearly, God's people still needed to learn to trust Him for their provision, and they needed to learn to rest.

3 The Sabbath Is about Relationship with God

God left nothing to chance. Here were a people who

needed to learn how to live in freedom, so He gave them His expectations for them (Exodus 20). God gave them—and us—guidelines for living in horizontal relationships with one another, and He gave us guidelines for living in a vertical relationship with Him. And among those guidelines, He exhorts us to remember that He created us and all things. The Sabbath day is a day to remind us that God is our creator and provider. He gives us the food on our table, the air that we breathe, the clothes on our back, everything. This is what the Sabbath day is for. And we learn how to rest in the trust that God will continue to provide for our needs.

Unfortunately, God's people don't often seem to trust well. As time went on, this wilderness people established themselves in their new land. They grew to be a mighty nation and ultimately forgot God's promises. They began to rely again on their own works. Trust in God was replaced with trust in themselves.

God loved David and Solomon even though they often failed to live according to His standard. But following them were kings and people whom God would have to remind again and again that living life in the kingdom is all about relationship with Him and that all they have is by His grace. God, who brought them out of bondage into freedom, would send them into bondage to find freedom again. So God's people were exiled from Jerusalem, away from the temple, into foreign lands so that they might turn once again to Him.

Following Israel's "second exodus" and return from exile, some did seek God again. If only they had understood. They sought the glory days of Israel, when David and Solomon were on the throne, but rather than take the example of those kings, they made the Sabbath and other festivals into ordinances to follow in some vain attempt to please an angry God. This continued through Jesus' time and continues today.

4 The Sabbath Today

Today in observant Jewish homes the Sabbath is celebrated as the most important day of the Jewish calendar. It has become tradition to begin the observance of the Sabbath with the lighting of two candles 18 minutes before sundown on Friday night, because to light candles on the Sabbath would be prohibited. Lighting

these candles before the Sabbath would provide illumination during the evening of the Sabbath. As the Sabbath begins, a blessing (called “Kiddush,” meaning “holy”) is given over wine and bread, staples of the Sabbath meal, to give thanks and reaffirm our faith in God’s provision of these foods. Finally, at 18 minutes after sundown on Saturday, a “Havdalah” service is said to conclude the Sabbath, with lighted candles to emphasize the setting aside of this day as holy. Incidentally, 18 is a special number to Jewish people. Each Hebrew letter has a numeric value, and the Hebrew word *chai*, which means “life,” has a value of 18. So, it is taught, the observance of the Sabbath gives life.

It is the most important festival because it is the only one that can be celebrated away from the temple. And rabbis have taught that honoring the Sabbath is the way in which Jewish people will be redeemed. In fact, in many observant Jewish communities, it is taught that if any one community could keep the Sabbath perfectly, just once, that Messiah would come. And conversely, God has said that the penalty for desecrating the Sabbath is death (Exodus 35:2). The Sabbath was so important to the Jews that when the Syrians attacked Jerusalem on the Sabbath during the intertestamental period, the people of that city let themselves be slaughtered rather than defend themselves on the Sabbath (1 Maccabees 2:31–38). And so there is much discussion about how to keep the Sabbath.

What is it to work, and what is it to rest? That is the question. In the Scriptures, very few things are defined as work on the Sabbath. Exodus 34:21 says that Israel should *rest* from planting and harvesting during those seasons. Exodus 35:3 says that Israel should not light a fire in homes on the Sabbath day. So from these references, Jewish rabbis today have concluded that Jews may not work at their regular jobs and may not cook on the Sabbath. Additionally though, the rabbis through the years have identified other activities that translate into work on the Sabbath. In the Talmud there are 39 categories of work that are prohibited on the Sabbath. Observant Jewish people work very hard at resting!

For example, no lights (or any electricity) may be used on the Sabbath, because to turn on a light is to create an electric spark, which constitutes a fire. Interestingly, though the command to rest on the Sabbath is also to include sons, daughters, manservants, maidservants,

animals, and aliens among them, it has become common practice to hire what is called a *Shabbat goy*. The *Shabbat goy* is a non-Jewish person who is hired to perform activities for the synagogue or even the home that Jewish people are prohibited to do on the Sabbath, such as turning lights on and off, and cooking. Though this would also be prohibited by a strict observance of God’s command, it is held that modern living requires certain interpretations that would ease the observance of the Sabbath. This constant interpretation of Sabbath law has led to the fact that many Jewish people in America today treat the Sabbath as any other day of the week and rarely even worship on the Sabbath.

5 Worship on the Sabbath

As the Sabbath became one of those *mo’adim* for God and His people, it became also a day of “sacred assembly” (Leviticus 23:3). And as the generations passed and Sabbath laws were enacted, the Sabbath became the day of worship for the Jewish people. As synagogue worship developed during the Babylonian captivity, the Sabbath grew in importance because of the people’s inability to go to the temple. It developed as a day of prayer and study, and to this day, Jewish people who observe the Sabbath usually spend it engaged in discussions around the Torah and the Talmud. In Jesus’ time, He and the apostles who followed Him, used the Sabbath as an opportunity to teach the Jewish people about the Messiah, to show them that the Sabbath and other festivals of God’s people were signposts that pointed to Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s Law. For how could one truly rest on the Sabbath, thinking that proper observance was the difference between life and death? Surely, that must have been a heavy burden to face every week! So Jesus said, (Matthew 11:28) “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” He became our Sabbath rest, and the burden of our observance was lifted by the faith that God grew in our hearts.

But Sabbath observance continues to be a burden to many. Many Jewish people have dealt with the burden of observing the Sabbath by turning away from it and treating the Sabbath as any other day. In doing so, many have forgotten their creator God and lost their relationship with Him. It is no wonder that our country’s “national religion” of secular humanism has as the

cornerstone of its faith the denial of God's creative powers. And this doctrine of evolution has drawn in many, including Jewish people, who have forgotten this sign that God created the world in six days and on the seventh He rested (Exodus 31:15–16). To desecrate the Sabbath is to deny God's creative power and to trust ourselves for our own provision. To do this will certainly lead to the death we deserve because of our sin, for we are turning away from the One who would forgive us and who sacrificed His only Son as our sin offering that we might have life.

Curiously though, many Christians have increased their burden by insisting on Sabbath observance as a day of worship. They have thus separated themselves from the church and have added restrictions to God's grace, misunderstanding the Sabbath and thinking that His grace is not freely given, but is dependent upon Sabbath observance. Both positions are errors that can ultimately destroy God's relationships with us and lead us into spiritual ignorance or spiritual pride.

There are good reasons to worship God on the Sabbath. Messianic congregations worship on the Sabbath because the ethnic group that these congregations seek to reach is made up of people who would recognize the Sabbath as the day of worship. But we must be quick to teach that it is certainly not the only day God set aside for His people to worship. He wanted their daily worship and prescribed offerings to be made daily, weekly, and seasonally. The Sabbath was about more than just worship; it was about God's sovereignty over our lives. In Christ we mark every day a Sabbath when we enter God's rest in Jesus (Hebrews 4:9–10). So it is appropriate for our congregations to come together in worship on Sunday mornings, as the church has come to do in observance of the day that Jesus was raised from the dead. Indeed, it is appropriate to gather for worship every day in the model of the first-century church, as "every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts" (Acts 2:46).

Concluding Activities

If time permits, sing a stanza or two of "How Great Thou Art" or the common doxology ("Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow"). Again encourage participants to read the enrichment magazine as part of their weekly study. Then distribute study leaflet 3.