

TRANSLATION

THE SABBATH OF THE JUDEAN DESERT SECT

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The Sabbath is the only "holy convocation" that is mentioned in the writings of the Judean Desert Sect, and the Damascus Document, in particular, devotes considerable attention to the Sabbath. Particular attention to the Sabbath can also be found in the Bible and the post-biblical literature.¹ The question is whether the unique reference to the Sabbath in the writings of the Judean Desert Sect has a special significance and whether the Sabbath as observed by the sect was of a different character than that generally observed by the Jews in the period of the Second Temple.

In the course of time, the nature of the Sabbath necessarily must have changed somewhat, for conditions changed and the economic system became more advanced, and these undoubtedly brought about changes in the observance of the Sabbath as well, although these changes were not of a fundamental nature. In ancient times, it was customary among the Israelites to visit the prophet on the Sabbath.² The prohibition against work on the Sabbath, contained in the Pentateuch, is general,³ and

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1. The commandment to keep the Sabbath recurs in the Pentateuch 12 times, and the Sabbath is mentioned in numerous instances in the Prophets and the Hagiographa. In the "Oral Law" as well, the Sabbath is the commandment which is referred to on the greatest number of occasions. In the Book of Jubilees the Sabbath is mentioned both at the beginning and at the end (Jub. 2:26-31; Jub. 50:6-13).

2. See II Kings 4:23.

3. See Exodus 20:8-11.

only four specific types of work are actually mentioned: ploughing and reaping,⁴ kindling a fire,⁵ and gathering sticks of wood.⁶ Jeremiah makes mention of a prohibition on bearing a burden on the Sabbath;⁷ Isaiah instructs his listeners to "call the Sabbath a delight"⁸; and Amos and Nehemiah mention the prohibition of doing business on the Sabbath.⁹ Moore emphasizes that the specific prohibitions mentioned in the Bible concerning the Sabbath are only random examples of a general customary law which must have been expanded in the course of time to answer the needs brought about by changing circumstances.¹⁰

In the early Second Temple period, the synagogue became an important element in Jewish life and it influenced the nature of the Sabbath observance: On the Sabbath, in the days of the Second Temple, "Jews used to rise early [to sacrifice] the daily morning offering, and from there they would proceed to the synagogue; from the synagogue [they would move on] to the academy; and then [offer] the additional prayer service; then they would eat and drink."¹¹ During the second Temple period, the Jews were very strict in their observance of the Sabbath.¹² An indication to that effect can be seen in Jesus' comment to the Pharisees: "And he spoke unto them: the Sabbath was given for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). At that time, Jews would not go out to do battle on the Sabbath, even when they were besieged and their lives were in danger.¹³ Later, Matathias permitted them to fight a defensive battle on the Sabbath, to protect their lives and not allow themselves to die as many had in the past.¹⁴ Additional evidence of the strictness with which the Jews then observed the Sabbath can be seen in the reference, found in the Talmud, that "the Hasidim do not look with favor upon whosoever kills snakes or scorpions on the Sabbath" (Babylonian Talmud Sabbath 121b). However, the Sages later taught that "all dangerous creatures may be killed on the Sabbath" (*Ibid.*).

4. See Exodus 34:21.

5. Exodus 35:3.

6. Numbers 15:32-36.

7. Jeremiah 16:19-20.

8. Isaiah 58:13.

9. See Amos 8:5; Nehemiah 10:32; 13:16-23.

10. G.F. Moore, *Judaism*, (New York, Schocken Books, 1971), Vol. 1, pp. 22-25. It is worth pointing out the talmudic aphorism (Hagigah 1:8): "The laws of the Sabbath are like mountains hanging by a hair – the verses are few but the laws are many."

11. *Tosefta*, Sukkah 14:3. See also Moore, *Judaism*, p. 38. Philo relates that the Therapeutae used to assemble for prayer at sunrise, on the Sabbath, and would devote the whole day to study and analysis of the holy Scriptures, concluding the day with the evening prayer at sunset. Vermes thinks that the Therapeutae were the Essenes, but Driver rejects this. See: *The Judaean Scrolls* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 121-123.

12. See Chaim Tchernowitz, *Toldot Ha-halakhah* (History of the Halakhah) (in Hebrew), New York, 1952, Vol. 4, p. 299.

13. See I Maccabees 2:29-37.

14. See I Maccabees 2:38-40. At a later date, even an offensive war was permitted to be waged on the Sabbath. See *Tosefta*, Eruvin 4:7.

We must now turn to the question whether the Sabbath as observed by the Judean Desert Sect had a unique character of its own, different from that outlined above. The Damascus Document makes reference to laws practised by the sect which were not the common inheritance of all of Israel: “. . . hidden things concerning which all Israel had gone astray. ‘His holy Sabbaths and His glorious appointed times’ ” (6QD 3:14-15). Josephus says of the Essenes, who are identified by most scholars with the Judean Desert Sect, that “they are stricter than all the Jews in prohibiting work on the Sabbath; they not only prepare their food before the Sabbath, lest they kindle a fire on that (hallowed) day, but they also dare not remove a implement from its place and go outside (to relieve themselves).”¹⁵ Philo records that in the eyes of the Essenes the Sabbath day was the day “they refrain from all other work and assemble in the holy places called ‘synagogues’ where they sit in orderly rows, the older before the younger, and listen attentively, out of proper respect, as one of their number brings out the holy books and reads for them, and a second person, from among those learned in the Torah, stands at his side and explains the difficult matters.”¹⁶

Thus, according to Josephus, the distinctive feature of the Sabbath of the Dead Sea Sect was the strictness with which the members of the sect observed the prohibition on work. But we have already seen that in the Second Temple period all the Jews were strict in their observance of the Sabbath. On the basis of what is recorded in the Damascus Document concerning the prohibitions on work on the Sabbath it seems that the members of the sect were stricter in their observance of the Sabbath than was commonly practised, and that the Sabbath of the sect was different from the Sabbath of all Israel.

The Damascus Document mentions 28 different types of prohibitions concerning the Sabbath. The first is the prohibition on doing work on Friday “from the time when the orb of the sun is distant from the gate by its own fullness” (6QD 10: 15-16). This was also the custom among all the Jews during that period, for Josephus informs us that in the days of the Second Temple a Temple priest used to blow a trumpet to herald the start of the Sabbath and to inform the people that they should refrain from all work.¹⁷

The second prohibition mentioned in the Damascus Document is “let no man speak a lewd or villainous word” on the Sabbath day (6QD 10:18-19). A prohibition against conversing about profane matters on the Sabbath was already voiced by Isaiah: “And shalt honour it not doing thy wonted ways, nor pursuing thy business, nor speaking thereof” (Isaiah 58:13). And the author of the Book of Jubilees also warned that “whoever says he will do something on it (shall die)” (Jub. 50:8). Thus, this prohibition was not an innovation of the Judean Desert Sect, but the sect did put a special emphasis on it, placing it at the head of its list

15. *The Jewish War* II, 8:9.

16. *On the Freedom of the Just*, 12-13.

17. *The Jewish War* IV, 9:12.

of Sabbath prohibitions and enumerating immediately thereafter three other prohibitions of a related nature: "Let him not press his neighbor for repayment of anything; let them not dispute about property and gain; let him not speak of matters of labour and work to be done on the morrow."¹⁸ It is worth pointing out that the sect was strict about matters of speech in other contexts as well, e.g., they would eat their meals in complete silence¹⁹ and temporarily expel from their midst anyone who uttered a profane word or laughed at a public meeting.²⁰ It appears that the sect considered speech to be disruptive and a breach of sanctity, whether it was the sanctity of the Sabbath, of the meal, or the general sanctity that was to prevail in their midst.

In the list of Sabbath prohibitions of the Damascus Document are two which come one after the other and which relate to walking:²¹ "Let no man walk about the field (on the Sabbath) in order to do the work he requires. Let him not walk about outside his town above one thousand cubits" (6QD 10:20-21). The Book of Jubilees contains something similar: ". . . or goes on a journey, or tills his farm . . . shall die" (6QD 50:12). The author of the Book of Jubilees did not specify the distance a man was permitted to walk on the Sabbath, and from this Rabin concluded that the Book of Jubilees forbade leaving the house at all on the Sabbath.²² But Tchernowitz thinks that the author of the Book of Jubilees did not forbid leaving the house for a walk or stroll.²³ The author of the Damascus Document, in contrast, set two permissible limits for a Sabbath walk: 1000 cubits for walking outside the town and 2000 cubits for bringing an animal to pasture.²⁴ Thus, as far as walking on the Sabbath was concerned, the sect was stricter than the (Pharisaic) sages, who determined that it was permissible to walk 2000 cubits beyond the limits of a town on the Sabbath.²⁵

The sect was also stricter than the sages in regard to the wearing of cosmetics on the Sabbath. The Damascus Document states that "let no man carry upon himself medicaments to go out and to go in on the Sabbath" (11:9-10), while "the sages ruled that [a woman] was not culpable [if she went out] with a Kobolet and a balsam phial. (Mishnah, *Shabbat*, 6:3).

18. Damascus Document 6QD 10:18-19. According to a legend recorded in the Talmud, a Hassid once planned to fence in his vineyard but refrained from doing so because he had thought about it on the Sabbath, and a miracle occurred and a caperbush sprung up nearby from which he was able to sustain himself (Babylonian Talmud, *Shabbat* 150b).

19. See Josephus, *The Jewish War* II, 8:5.

20. Manual of Discipline 1QS 6, 24:27.

21. The basis of these prohibitions was the biblical verse, "abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29).

22. Rabin, *Qumran Studies*, p. 90.

23. Tchernowitz, *Toldot Ha-halakhah*, Vol. 4, p. 367.

24. Damascus Scroll 10:21; 11:5-6.

25. Babylonian Talmud, *Eiruvin* 51a.

The sect forbade opening a pitch-sealed vessel on the Sabbath,²⁶ while the sages permitted piercing a hole in the body of the vessel.²⁷

The sect was strict in observance of the Sabbath even when human life was in danger: "If a man falls into a place [full of] water or into a place from which [he] cannot come up, let no man bring him up with a ladder or a rope or any instrument" (11:16-17). The Sages, in contrast, permitted desecration of the Sabbath when human life was at stake: "Rabbi Simeon ben Menasseh said: 'And the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath' (Exodus 31:16). Said the Torah – desecrate one Sabbath so that you may keep many Sabbaths" (Babl. Tal. Yoma 85b).

From this comparison, it is difficult to determine whether the strictness with which the sect observed the above-mentioned matters was unique to the members of the sect or whether it was common practice at that time and only later did the sages elaborate a more lenient position. However, an analysis of what the Book of Jubilees – which in the opinion of the scholars was written towards the end of the Second Temple period²⁸ – has to say about the Sabbath may help us pin-point that which was unique in the Sabbath of the Judean Desert sect.

The Damascus Document enumerates twenty-eight Sabbath prohibitions while the Book of Jubilees lists only twenty-two. From this difference alone we cannot infer anything about the strictness of the Sabbath observance of the sect, since it is always possible that the number of prohibitions that were imposed was not at all a function of a tendency towards strictness. Moreover, according to Tchernowitz, the author of the Book of Jubilees enumerated twenty-two Sabbath prohibitions to offset the twenty-two "acts" of creation enumerated in Genesis.²⁹

In matters of law, a clear determination can be made between one who is strict and one who is not, if one forbids and the other permits, but no such determination emerges from a comparison of the Damascus Document and the Book of Jubilees.

Both books contain common prohibitions as well as prohibitions that the other does not mention at all. As far as the former is concerned, it appears that the author of the Damascus Document merely spelled out in detail what the author of the Book of Jubilees dealt with in general terms. Thus, the Book of Jubilees speaks of "whoever says he will do something (on the Sabbath)" (Jub. 50:8) while the Damascus Document lists, as we have seen, five specific prohibitions concerning speech on the Sabbath. The Book of Jubilees similarly speaks in very general terms of "taking up any burden" (Jub. 50:8) on the Sabbath, while the Damascus Document enumerates two specific cases. It is difficult to determine with any certainty whether this is an indication of a greater degree of strictness, or merely an expres-

26. Damascus Scroll 11:9.

27. Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat, 23.

28. See A. Kahane's edition of the Apocrypha (1967 ed.), pp. 217-218 (in Hebrew).

29. See *Toldot Ha-halakhah*, Vol. 4, p. 360.

sion of the importance the author of the Damascus Document attributed to these matters.

With regard to those prohibitions which are mentioned in only one of the two books, these may be a product of the different circumstances in which each of the authors lived, or of their specific ideologies. It is also possible that the authors mentioned certain prohibitions to underscore the fact that they did not countenance the lenient position of others. For example, in the opinion of Tchernowitz, the prohibition recorded by the author of the Book of Jubilees against setting sail on a voyage prior to the Sabbath reflects the fact that this matter was very much in dispute at that time.³⁰ There were those who permitted setting sail on Friday and others who forbade it, and the author of the Book of Jubilees sided with those who prohibited it.

In light of the above, we are now better able to outline some of the distinctive features of the Sabbath of the Judean Desert sect. It appears that among the members of the sect, sanctity and purity on the Sabbath were emphasized to a greater extent than among any other circles existing at the time. An atmosphere of sanctity and purity was achieved, among other means, by strictly ensuring that no one who belonged to the sect brought to his lips or uttered anything that might conceivably desecrate the sanctity of the Sabbath. Sect members were forbidden to talk about inconsequential matters on the Sabbath, they were forbidden to criticise others or to talk about matters of money or work. And the demand that sect members wear freshly cleaned clothing undoubtedly also contributed to this atmosphere.³¹ Moreover, the special sanctity and purity practised by the sect on the Sabbath was very much in line with the basic goal of the sect which was to strive for ritual and moral sanctity and purity.³²

The prohibition on a member of the sect not "to eat or drink unless (he) is in the camp" (6QD 10:23) and the prohibition not to "spend the Sabbath in a place near gentiles" (6QD 11:13-14) were instrumental in creating the conditions necessary for preserving sanctity and purity. They, in turn, brought about an additional, unique, feature in the Sabbath of the sect, namely their excessive isolation from their surrounding neighbors, on the Sabbath day.

An analysis of the Sabbath prohibitions enumerated in the Damascus Document reveals that in a number of matters the members of the Judean Desert sect were more stringent in their observance of the Sabbath than their contemporaries. Josephus noted that the Essenes were stricter than all the other Jews in their ob-

30. *Ibid.*, p. 363.

31. It should be pointed out that God told Moses that the people should sanctify themselves and wash their garments, prior to the Revelation at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:10). In the Book of Jubilees, this demand was associated with the sanctity and purity of the Sabbath (see 2: 26-27).

32. See: A.R.C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and its Meaning* (1966), p. 35.

servance of the Sabbath. Moore points out that a strict observance of the Sabbath, during the period of Antiochus Epiphanes' reign, was the decisive test of a Jew's loyalty to his religion and an important means of insulating the Jew from his environment.³³ This observation helps us understand why the members of the sect were even stricter than their contemporaries in observing the Sabbath, for they claimed that they were the chosen ones of God – they referred to themselves as "your chosen ones"³⁴ – and they saw a need to isolate themselves from their neighbors so as to be able to achieve religious and moral perfection.³⁵ A strict observance of the Sabbath was one of the means they adopted to strengthen this isolationism.³⁶

The Hellenizers, in contrast, revealed just the opposite tendency; they said: "Let us go and make a covenant with the nations that are around us; from the day that we parted from them much evil has befallen us" (I Maccabees 1:11). Antiochus Epiphanes forbade keeping the Sabbath since he sought to bar the Jews from insulating themselves from the nations surrounding them.³⁷ It is possible that the above-mentioned tendency of the Hellenizers also had the effect of heightening the sect's tendency towards strictness in its observance of the Sabbath.

Sabbath observance received particular attention in the writings of the sect because the sect, which was zealous for God's Torah, was active during a time that the idolatrous culture of Greece endangered the ongoing existence of the culture and religion of Israel, and observing the Sabbath – in the way that Scripture prescribed – served as a shield against idol worship. This may have been the reason why Sabbath observance was also stressed in the Book of Jubilees, a book which reflects circles that were quite close to the Judean Desert Sect.

In the writings of the Judean Desert Sect, the end of days assumes a prominent place, and one of the reasons the sect also made specific mention of the Sabbath was that in the Second Temple period the Sabbath was considered to be tied in with redemption, as can be seen from the Mishnah (Tamid 7:4) which records that the Levites used to sing in the Temple "a song for the Sabbath day, a song for the future that is to come, for the day that is all Sabbath and repose for life everlasting." And Moore theorizes that the Jews refrained from defending themselves on the Sabbath not only out of loyalty to the Torah which forbids desecrating the Sabbath but also because they believed that their loyalty would help bring about the redemption.³⁸

33. G.F. Moore, *Judaism*, Vol. 2, p. 26.

34. See Thanksgiving Psalms 14, 15.

35. See Manual of Discipline 5, 10; Damascus Document 6:14.

36. Cf. Book of Jubilees 2:19.

37. See I Maccabees 1:41-50.

38. G.F. Moore, *Judaism*, Vol. 2, p. 26. In this context it is worth pointing out the statement found in the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 118b: "Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimeon ben Yohai: Were Israel to keep two Sabbaths in accordance with all the laws, they would be redeemed."