

Invocation by Rabbi Jack Moline
Christians United for Israel Night to Honor Israel
May 20, 2007

Thank you.

My name is Jack Moline. I am a rabbi right here in Alexandria, and if you remember nothing more about what I say this evening, please remember just those two words: thank you. Thank you for your love of God and God's sacred word. Thank you for your love of the Jewish people, my people. And thank you most of all this evening for your enduring love for the land of Israel and the State of Israel.

Now, just because I asked you to remember those two words doesn't mean I wouldn't appreciate your attention for a few more. After all, Jew or Gentile, you give a member of the clergy a pulpit and it's a fair bet you're going to hear more than two words.

This week, fifty days after the commencement of Passover, the Bible enjoins us to observe the Feast of Weeks, in Hebrew, *Shavu'ot*. *Shavu'ot* is the plural of *shavu'a*, and *shavu'a* comes from the word *shiv'ah* which means "seven." Seven is a complete number in the Bible, and when some mention of seven occurs, it is worth paying attention.

On that day long ago, seven times seven weeks after the Exodus from Egypt, my ancestors stood at the foot of Mount Sinai as God revealed to them the Torah, the record of God's intent for the world, in fact, according to our tradition, the very blueprint for the world. All sorts of legends exist about that moment of revelation, but one of my favorites is that the people who were there heard only one letter of one word from the voice of God, and they were so overwhelmed with awe that they pleaded with Moses to listen for them to the rest. The first letter of the first word of the first command is an *aleph*, and *aleph* is a silent letter in Hebrew. Each person at Mount Sinai heard God's presence in that still, sacred silence and was filled with awe.

There are, says the tradition, seventy different ways to look at Torah – there's that number seven again – meaning that it cannot be understood completely in less than seventy ways. And there are, says the tradition, seventy nations in the world, including the Jews, meaning that the world is incomplete without each of those nations. Seventy aspects to Torah, seventy nations – it means that none of us is complete without the Torah we each perceive in those moments of deep and reverential silence in which we strive to hear God's voice.

In every generation we listen to hear God's intent for the world. In a generation long ago, a woman from among those sixty-nine other nations listened especially hard. Her name was Ruth, and she was a Moabite, one of the least among the seventy nations. Her people were named for their ancestor who was the child of drunken incest between Lot and his daughter. And yet, in a distant land, in a distant people, she came to know a

family of wandering Jews and in the profound love she felt for them came to understand that she could not turn away, saying to her mother-in-law, “Do not entreat me to leave you, to turn away from you. For where you go, I will go and where you sleep I will sleep. Your people is my people and your God is my God. Where you die, I will die and there be buried. So may God do to me and more if anything but death separates me from you.”

Friends, Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi was suspicious of that proclamation. The people in the land of Israel called her an outsider, treated her as second class, some of the men even saw her as fair game. But Ruth did not waver in her devotion. It was as if she anticipated the prophet Amos, who said, “When the Lord speaks, who can help but bear witness.”

I know that many of you identify strongly with Ruth. You are not Moabites and you are not my sons- and daughters-in-law, but you have sought God’s voice in your sacred silence and you cling to my suspicious people and their land with professions of love. I admire that love. I bask in that love. I love that love, and love you right back. And in that love I remind you that we are but two of the seventy, and there are sixty-eight more voices, sixty-eight more peoples who are needed to make this world complete.

Do you know Ruth’s reward? She bore a son, whose name was Obed. He was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David. David was the father of Solomon. And our tradition tells us that Ruth lived to see her great-great grandson rule over a peaceful and prosperous Kingdom of Israel, and that King Solomon set a chair for her at the right hand of his throne.

I invite you to a moment of silent prayer to listen one again for the voice that spoke to each heart at Sinai.....

I conclude with the words of Ruth’s grandson David, words he may have written for his grandmother in love and gratitude: *y’varekh’kha h’ mitzion ur’ei b’tuv yerushalayim, ur’eh vanim l’vanekha shalom al yisrael*; May God bless you from Zion, and may you see the goodness of Jerusalem, and may your children’s children see lasting peace settle over all of Israel.

Amen