

THE SABBATH

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THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Lord said to Moses, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the Lord’ ” (Leviticus 23:1–3).

It might surprise some to see a discussion of the biblical holidays start with Shabbat. After all, this is such a common day. It occurs once a week. The Jewish perspective is different. It is not that Shabbat is so common, but that it is so special, that we are to observe it every seven days. With that in mind, it is perfectly logical to mention the Sabbath at the head of the list. Besides, in the chronology of Leviticus 23, Shabbat comes first.

Shabbat means “to rest,” which tells us a large part of the purpose of this important observance—restoration. From the ancient Greeks to the modern corporate executive, mankind tends to become obsessed with work and “getting ahead.” There is always more to do. Yet, without proper rest and refreshment, human strength and creativity fail.

In his infinite wisdom, God told the children of Israel to recharge themselves physically, emotionally and spiritually. God demonstrated this principle when he created the universe. For six days he formed the world and everything in it; but, on the seventh day he rested. Consequently, the seventh day, Shabbat, is to be a perpetual reminder of God the creator and our need to find rest in him (Exodus 31:16–17).

Based on the creation account of Genesis, Shabbat lasts from sundown Friday evening to sundown Saturday. God defines a day in the following order: “there was evening, and there was morning.” Hence, the Hebrew calendar traditionally starts a day at sunset of the previous evening.

Some Christians might call Sunday the “Christian Sabbath”; however, this is technically incorrect. Sunday is never called the Sabbath in the Bible. In fact, the word “Sunday” never appears in the original text of the Scriptures. It is called “the first day of the week” (see Matthew 28:1 and 1 Corinthians 16:2, NIV). This is the biblical way of reckoning days of the week. All days are counted in relationship to Shabbat (first day, second day, etc.), giving further evidence of the centrality of this day to Jewish people.

TRADITIONAL JEWISH OBSERVANCE

The traditional Jewish community understands the observance of Shabbat on many different levels. To the classical rabbis, verses such as Exodus 20:8 were to be eminently practical as we “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.” The implications of this verse have filled volumes of rabbinic commentaries, but the two-fold theme is clear: remember the creator and set the day aside to rest in him. Many beautiful Jewish customs have developed to remind people of these truths.

Preparation for Shabbat actually begins early Friday afternoon. Since it is a holy day, the most festive linens and silverware decorate the dinner table. It is customary to serve the finest meal of the week on the evening of Shabbat to emphasize its special quality.

Two candlesticks are set on the table, or in another prominent place. They symbolize the two-fold commandment to remember and sanctify. These candles are lit, according to rabbinic interpretation, eighteen minutes before sunset so that the act itself will not be considered work on the Sabbath. The Hebrew blessings are normally said by the woman of the house, though anyone may perform this duty. With a scarf covering her head, the woman lights the candles. She then circles her arms around in a motion as if to draw in the warmth of the light. Next she repeats the following blessings:

Barukh atah Adonai Elohenu melek ha-olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvohtav v'tzi-vanu l'hadleek ner shel Shabbat.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has set us apart by your commandments and has commanded us to kindle the Sabbath lights.

At this point, the woman closes her eyes for a moment of silent prayer. This also serves a good rabbinic purpose. If no work is to be done on Shabbat, how can the candles be lit? Rabbis say Shabbat does not start until the woman opens her eyes to see the lit candles; hence, the necessary time of prayer.

With the candles lit, the family now says the blessing over the wine or grape juice, which is in a special *kiddush* cup, a cup of sanctification. The fruit of the vine has always symbolized the joy of God's provisions in our everyday lives (Psalm 104:15). This may be a single cup or all those present at the table may have their own. As the cups are raised, the man of the house (if applicable) leads the group in the following blessing:

Barukh atah Adonai Elohenu melek ha-olam, boray p'ree ha-gahfen.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Next comes the blessing over the *challah*, the twisted egg-bread which is traditional for the occasion. Normally there are two loaves. They represent the double portion of manna provided before every Sabbath to the Israelites in the wilderness. These are placed on a decorative "challah plate" and covered by a special cloth, which represents the dew that fell with the manna. The leader at the table now removes the challah cover, holds the plate for all to see and chants the following:

Barukh atah Adonai Elohenu melek ha-olam, ha-motzee lekhem meen ha-aretz.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

The bread is usually broken by hand, not sliced with a knife. The idea is to symbolize the day when all weapons of war will be done away with at the coming of Messiah (Isaiah 2:4). A portion of bread is shared with each member at the table. Some people salt the challah to symbolize the salt on the sacrifices in the Temple era.

As the bread is shared by all, greetings of "Shabbat Shalom" (peaceful sabbath) are given to one another, often with a kiss or hug.

A final blessing is given before the actual meal—the prayer over the children. The father places his hand on the head of his son and says:

Y'simkha Elohim k'Ephrayeem v'kheem'nasheh.

May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:20).

For daughters, he gives a slightly different blessing:

Y'simekh Elohim k'Sarah, Rivkah, Rakhel v'Leah.

May you be like Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah.

The wife is also blessed, by reading *aishet khayeel*—the virtuous woman of **Proverbs 31:10–31**.

Shabbat is meant to be a wonderful time of worship to the Lord God and a time of family sharing.

The festival dinner is now served and leisurely table fellowship is enjoyed by all. For a change, no one is in a hurry. Even after dinner, many tradition *z'mirot* (songs) are sung, including the grace after dinner in Hebrew. Most synagogues have an Erev Shabbat (Sabbath eve) service.

On Saturday morning, preparations are made to attend the main synagogue service. An important part of Shabbat observance is attending corporate worship services. Since the days of Moses, these services have been held in the Tabernacle and Temple in order to fulfill the command to have a "sacred assembly" (holy convocation) to the Lord (Leviticus 23:3). With the destruction of the Temple, this practice has continued in the synagogues of the dispersion.

Shabbat not only provides the Jewish people with a time of rest, but allows corporate focus on the creator, the God of Israel.

The typical service, while having flexibility, has followed the same basic structure since the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8). There are opening praise psalms and hymns largely based on the Book of Psalms, along with later rabbinic readings. This is followed by the public reading/chanting from the scrolls of the Torah (Law) and *Haftorah* (Prophets). These readings are based on an annual or triennial cycle of selected passages. A third major section of the service is a sermon on the passage for that week.

After a closing hymn, the service ends with the *Oneg Shabbat* (Delight of the Sabbath), consisting of a small amount of wine or grape juice along with other refreshments. This custom is based on the passage in the prophets where Israel is told to “call the sabbath a delight.” What better symbolism than a tasty treat? After the oneg, most people go home for lunch and spend the afternoon visiting friends or resting.

Much of the liturgy each week is standardized. However, there are additional blessings chanted once a month for Rosh Chodesh (New Moon), a special holiday related to Shabbat. In biblical times this was evidently an important feast to remind the Israelites of the cyclical nature of life (1 Samuel 20:5; Isaiah 1:13, 66:23). Time marches on to its goal; therefore, we should number our days to walk in wisdom (Psalm 90:12).

Since the Jewish month starts with the New Moon, it became customary to bless God on the preceding Shabbat for the new month he provided. In modern synagogue observance, Rosh Chodesh is not a Sabbath itself. It is simply remembered by some additions in the liturgy such as the following:

May it be thy will, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, to renew unto us this coming month for our good and for blessing.... The New Month of _____ will begin on _____. May the Holy One, blessed be he, renew this month for us and for all his people, the house of Israel, for life and peace, for gladness and joy, for salvation and comfort; and let us say, “Amen” (Sabbath And Festival Prayer Book, p.129).

Because Shabbat is considered so special, there is not only a special start on Friday evening, but also a special close on Saturday evening. To distinguish Shabbat from all other days, rabbis created a service called *Havdalah* (Hebrew for “separated”). This is a simple service consisting of some interesting symbolic elements.

First a braided Havdalah candle is lit. This reminds us that the light of Shabbat will soon depart. The traditional verse read is Isaiah 12:2, “Surely God is my salvation.” In Hebrew salvation is “yeshua”.

A *b’sameem* (spice) box is passed around. Each person shakes the box and sniffs the sweet spices inside to remember the sweetness of the departing Sabbath. A cup of wine or grape juice is passed around the table, and after the traditional blessing is made, each person takes a sip. Then the candle is extinguished in the drops remaining in the cup.

The Havdalah service closes with the singing of a significant song. *Eliyahu Ha-Navi* (Elijah The Prophet). It is strongly messianic in content. “May Elijah come with Messiah, Son of David.” At sunset Saturday evening the new week begins. Having enjoyed the refreshing rest and worship of Shabbat, it is appropriate to consider the ultimate fulfillment of Shabbat, when Messiah will come with his kingdom of peace and rest.

SHABBAT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Because of its centrality in Jewish tradition, we would naturally expect to find the observance of Shabbat mentioned throughout the New Testament. Much of the Shabbat synagogue service is derived from Nehemiah 8. However, the most detailed account in Scripture of such a service is found in the Gospels.

Now when he went to Natzaret, where he had been brought up, on Shabbat he went to the synagogue as usual. He stood up to read, and he was given the scroll of the prophet Yesha’yahu. Unrolling the scroll, he found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of Adonai is upon me; therefore he has anointed me to announce Good News to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the imprisoned and renewed sight for the blind, to release those who have been crushed, to proclaim a year of the favor of Adonai.”

After closing the scroll and returning it to the shammash, he sat down; and the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. He started to speak to them: “Today, as you heard it read, this passage of the Tanakh was fulfilled (Luke 4:16–21).

The first-century synagogue service is described with amazing detail in this passage. Notice the reading from the Torah and Haftarah scrolls by a special reader. Yeshua read from the Haftarah portion that Shabbat as he turned to Isaiah 61, an obvious messianic section. The last reader was customarily given the honor of expounding on the reading with a sermon. And what a sermon it was! Yeshua claimed to be the very Messiah promised to fulfill this ministry.

There was mixed response to such a controversial sermon. Some people were “speaking well of him” (v. 22) while others were “filled with fury” (v. 28). The message of Yeshua, even today, brings controversy. Either he was a great deceiver or he is the Mashiach, the anointed one, who fulfills the Hebrew Scriptures. For many people today, both Jews and Gentiles, his words ring with the truth of God!

Yeshua made it his habit to worship at the weekly Shabbat service. What else would he do? He was born a Jew and lived a life consistent with much of traditional Judaism of his day. Likewise, the first Jewish disciples continued in the traditional forms of synagogue worship. (See Acts 13:13 and 18:4 for examples.)

This does not imply that Yeshua agreed with every detail or every rabbinic attitude of Sabbath observance. Indeed, he tried to correct imbalances in rabbinic perspective by reminding the people “Shabbat was made for mankind, not mankind for Shabbat” (Mark 2:27).

Sadly, too often the people forgot to make Shabbat a delight, relegating it to a list of rules instead. Yeshua challenged the people of his day to remain biblically balanced, to enter into the true rest of God’s spirit. This same appeal goes forth in this generation.

THE PROPHETIC FULFILLMENT

The prophetic fulfillment of Shabbat is summarized in the New Testament book “Hebrews,” or “Messianic Jews.” It was written to the Messianic Jews of the first century:

So there remains a Shabbat-keeping for God’s people. For the one who has entered God’s rest has also rested from his own works, as God did from his” (Hebrews 4:9–10).

Spiritual rest is the prophetic fulfillment of the biblical observance of Shabbat. The seventh day (Shabbat) is a wonderful reminder of a coming day set aside to rest in the Messiah. The 1000 year Kingdom of Yeshua will be a beautiful time of rest and corporate worship of the King. May it come soon! In the meantime, Messiah bids us to experience the truth of Shabbat in our daily walk: “Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). As we celebrate Shabbat, may spiritual rest in Yeshua constantly be our experience!

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR BELIEVERS IN MESSIAH

There are many wonderful lessons from Shabbat to be enjoyed by followers of Yeshua. As with all the feasts, the most important element is the spirit in which we observe the holy days. Many practical expressions of Shabbat observance were meant to illustrate the rest and refreshment God offers his people. Messianic believers fully appreciate this rest by abiding in Messiah.

As believers in Messiah, Shabbat can be observed in a multitude of ways, depending on one’s convictions and desires. Late Friday afternoon may be set aside to prepare for the day of rest (Luke 23:54). As sunset approaches the family gathers, dressed in festive attire, for the blessings to welcome Shabbat and sanctify the meal. (See traditional blessings above.)

Messianic Jews and Messianic Gentiles may want to modify the traditional blessing with a more specifically messianic one. Over the candles, the following may be said:

Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, asher kidshanu b’mitzvohtav l’hayot or l’goyeem v’natan-lanu Yeshua m’sheekhaynu ha-or la-olam.

Blessed art thou, O Lord Our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by thy commandments and commanded us to be a light unto the nations and has given us Yeshua, the light of the world.

Next, the blessings over the wine and bread are chanted. The traditional blessings are consistent with faith in Yeshua and should suffice for the kiddush and motzi (see above). Likewise, the beautiful Scripture blessings for the wife (Proverbs 31) and for the children (Genesis 48:20) can be wonderful focal points of the Erev Shabbat dinner.

At this point the festival dinner is served with all the best trimmings, enhancing the special nature of this holy day. Dinner may be followed by a joyous time of family fellowship and singing some traditional or messianic songs. All the customs are reminders of the complete rest we have found in Messiah Yeshua (Matthew 11:28).

There may be a messianic congregation in your area that has Shabbat services. Many have a Friday night Erev Shabbat service, which is a meaningful way to come together as the corporate family of God.

Most messianic groups have a Saturday morning Shabbat service. There are compelling reasons for this since this is traditionally the service where the Torah scroll is read. It may also be a more manageable time to have a children's Shabbat school program. Whatever the schedule, the Scriptures exhort to "not neglect our own congregational meetings for worship, instruction and fellowship (Hebrews 10:25; Leviticus 23:3). If there is no messianic synagogue in your area, why not consider celebrating the feast at home with other interested families?

There are some good ways to continue in the spirit of Shabbat after the Saturday morning service. Perhaps a lunch with the family or friends would create an opportunity to develop deeper spiritual friendships. In the spirit of rest, many prefer to nap and relax for the afternoon. In our fast-paced society people need a time for recharging their physical and spiritual batteries.

Messianic modifications may be incorporated into the Havdalah service, but no changes need to be made to the traditional service (see above). The Havdalah candle and spices serve as a graphic reminder of the coming day when Messiah Yeshua will establish his true Shabbat light and the sweetness of his coming kingdom! May we, his followers, appreciate the foretaste of this truth as we observe this rich holy day, Shabbat.

SHABBAT RECIPES

MAIN DISH CHICKEN

Ingredients:

Up to 4 lbs. chicken pieces, can remove skin.
1/4 cup flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/16 teaspoon pepper
1/4 cup olive or salad oil
1 small sliced onion
1 sliced clove garlic
3 or 4 chopped celery stalks
1 medium-sized carrot
1 1/2 cups hot chicken broth
1 cup sliced sauteed mushrooms

Directions:

Mix flour, salt and pepper in a plastic bag. Place 1 or 2 chicken peices in bag, close and shake vigorously. Repeat until all pieces are coated. In a large skillet, brown the pieces in oil. Remove the pieces and place them in a casserole dish that is large enough to lay them out singly.

In the remaining oil, cook the onion, garlic, celery and carrot for 10 minutes. Place the vegetables over the chicken. Pour the broth on top. Cover and bake at 350° for 1 1/2 hours or until tender. Place the mushrooms on top during the last 5 minutes of baking.

SHABBAT CAKE

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups sugar
1 cup oil
1 teaspoon vanilla
4 eggs
3 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
2 teaspoons baking soda
1 cup cocoa, either baking or sweetened drink mix
(baking chocolate makes a heavier cake)
2 cups liquid coffee

Directions:

Mix the sugar, oil, vanilla and eggs. Gradually add in the other dry ingredients, finishing with the liquid coffee. The batter will be very liquid. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes in greased bunt pan or 2 loaf pans. Check with a toothpick. Cool thoroughly before removing from pan.

CHOPPED LIVER

Ingredients:

1 lb. chicken livers
1 large onion, chopped
4 hard boiled eggs, sliced
oil

Directions:

Heat oil in a large skillet. Add the livers. Cook 3 minutes and turn over. Place onion on top and cook 1 minute more. Cut into the livers to check if they are cooked. Flip so that onions are underneath and cook until onions are translucent. Using a slotted spoon, place the liver, onion and eggs through a food processor until you have a spreadable mixture. Can season sparingly with garlic powder. Serve with bread, matzah or crackers.

AUNT SARA'S CHALLAH (SABBATH BREAD)

Ingredients:

1 cake fresh yeast
1/4 cup warm water
5 cups flour
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon salad oil
1 egg beaten
warm water

Glaze:

1 egg yolk diluted with 1 teaspoon water
poppy seed or sesame seed (optional)

Directions:

Soften yeast in 1/4 cup warm water. Sift together dry ingredients. Add oil. Add softened yeast and beaten egg. Mix thoroughly, adding just enough water for smooth kneading. Knead well. Place in a bowl and cover with a tea towel. Let stand until it "bubbles." Knead again. Cover; let rise until doubled in bulk. Divide dough into three equal parts. Roll into three strips and braid them. Place in a baking pan and let rise until doubled in bulk. Just before baking, brush with diluted egg yolk. Sprinkle with poppy seed or sesame seed if desired. Bake at 350° for about an hour until golden brown.

• *Note: This recipe is from Love and Knishes, a Jewish cookbook written by the author's relative, Sara Kasdan. See Bibliography.*

SHABBAT MUSIC

SHABBAT SHALOM

Slowly *Chasidic Melody*

Cm Fm Cm Gm

Bim bom bim bim bim bom bim bim bim bim bim bim

Cm (Women Only) Cm Guitar Vamp (Double Time)

bom lai lai lai lai lai lai lai

Cm Fm Cm

Shab - bat Sha - lom Shab - bat Sha -

Fm Cm Fm

lom Shab - bat Shab - bat Shab - bat Shab -

Cm Gm Cm Cm

bat Sha lom Fine Shab - bat

Ritard (Last Time) *D.S. al Fine*

Shab - bat Shab - bat Shab - bat Sha - lom

Translation:
Peaceful Sabbath

SONGS FOR HAVDALAH

Behold God Is My Salvation (*Isaiah 12:2*)

By Stuart Dauermann
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Lively

Em B7 Em

Be - hold God is my sal - va - tion I will

Em B7 Em E Am Em

trust and will not be a - fraid for the Lord my God is my

Em B7 Em E Am Em

strength and my song He al - so has become my sal - va - tion for the Lord my God is my

Em B7 Em E Am

strength and my song He al - so has be - come my sal - va - tion lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai

Em B7 Em E Em

lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai lai

ELIYAHU HA-NAVI

Elijah the Prophet

Liturgy *Slowly* *Folk Song*

E - li - ya - hu ha - na - vi, E - li - ya - hu ha - tish - bi,
 E - li - ya - hu, E - li - ya - hu, E - li - ya - hu ha gil - a di, *Fine*
 Bim - hey ra v' - ya - mey nu ya - vo — ei - ley nu
 Im ma - shi - ach ben Da - vid, im ma - shi - ach ben Da - vid, *D.C. al Fine*

Translation:

May the prophet Elijah come soon, in our time, with the Messiah, son of David.

¹Kasdan, B. (2007). *God's appointed times : A practical guide for understanding and celebrating the Biblical holidays* (2nd ed.) (1). Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Publishers.