

SABBATH KEEPING MADE SIMPLE

By Messianic Rabbi Ed Rothman,

with assistance from Summer Ministry Interns; Gordon Helle & Bruce Neiger

Fellowship with G-d & The Sabbath Rest Principle

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed and all their hosts. And by the seventh day G-d completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work that G-d had created and made (Genesis 2:1-3).

From almost the very beginning of the Book of Beginnings, in Genesis chapter Two, G-d had completed creating the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, on the seventh day He rested from all the work that He'd done. Then G-d blessed (favored and anointed) the seventh day and sanctified it (set it apart as holy unto the L-RD) because in it He rested from all His work of creation.

This reference to the Seventh Day pre-dates the 10 Commandments and the Law of Moses, so by virtue of the Law of 1st Reference, this becomes the initial lens through which we view the Seventh Day in the Older Covenant scriptures. This introduces the Seventh Day as a day of rest, thus providing a revelation of the Sabbath Rest Principle that is seen throughout all of Holy Scripture.

The Hebrew words for Rest in these verses are a variant of Shabbat, which is translated in English as Sabbath. The Sabbath Rest Principle is the deep-rooted Spirit birthed conviction and heart felt necessity of finding a time and a place of rest (through praise, worship, study & fellowship) in the intimate presence of G-d, both privately & corporately.

And they heard the sound of the L-RD G-d walking in the Garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the L-RD G-d among the trees in the garden (Genesis 3:8).

G-d has always wanted to have a one-on-one relationship with His creation. In Genesis 3:8 it talks about how He would walk in the garden with Adam & Eve in the cool of the day. They would enjoy the intimate presence of the L-RD G-d until sin caused them to fear His presence, rather than welcome it.

Then we see in Genesis 3:9-24, how G-d was forced to separate Himself from them because they had been seduced by the serpent and allowed Hasatan's rebellion to thoroughly infect them with the destructive nature of sin, which resulted in their spiritual and eventually their physical death. G-d would be forced to drive them out of the Garden and away from the Tree of Life, so that they would not be trapped eternally in their wretched rebellious body of sin and death.

Then the L-RD G-d said, "Behold the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever," . . . therefore the L-RD G-d sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed Cherubim at the east of the Garden of Eden and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:22-24)

G-d's heart must have broken as He was compelled to shut off the intimate fellowship He had enjoyed daily with them. In His sovereign wisdom, He had already revealed the first step in His plan of redemption; He set aside one day in the week when His people could dedicate time to focus solely on their relationship with their Creator. Y'shua, as L-RD of the Sabbath taught us in Mark 2:27, that the Sabbath was a gift, given to His

people, and His people were not made to keep the Sabbath. Try to remember that, it is a very significant key to unraveling the mess and maze that religion has made of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath Law & the Sanctity of Israel

Centuries ago, well-meaning Rabbi's feared that their people would break the sanctity of the Sabbath. So they created 1521 Sabbatic laws, compiled in the Shulchan Aruch (the Code of Jewish Law). Creating a protective wall around the Sabbath, keeping the Jewish community so overwhelmed and busy with worrying about how not to break the Sabbath, their hope was they would never even get close to doing that.

The religious confusion comes in when we do not differentiate between the Mosaic covenant separating Israel from all other nations and the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:4-18) that created One New Man (Ephesians 2:11-15). This grafted all of the nations into the olive tree of Israel, uniting them through faith in Y'shua the Messiah (Romans 11:16-24) resulting in a circumcised heart, which are the sacrifices of G-d, sacrifices that He will not despise.

Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart and be stiff-necked no longer (Deuteronomy 10:16)

The sacrifices of G-d are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, . . . these, O G-d, You will not despise (Psalm 51:17).

For he is not a Jew (one who lives to give praise to G-d) who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew (one who lives to give praise to G-d) who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter only, whose praise is not from men but from G-d (Romans 2:28-29).

By differentiate; we do not mean to denigrate the Torah, for the Torah is holy, spiritual, just and good (Romans 7:12). What were trying to clarify is that G-d has had a unique covenantal relationship with Israel that was unlike any other nation had with any other god. The Torah was Israel's national spiritual constitution and kept them separated unto the L-RD so that He could bring His Word to the world, both the written and Living Word. The Sabbath has kept Israel unique among the nations, even if all of Israel did not keep the Sabbath. If Israel did not survive as a separate and distinct people, the Messiah would never have been able to arrive when and how He did and our salvation would have been forever averted, to our eternal peril.

Thanks be to G-d who always causes us to triumph in Messiah (2 Corinthians 2:14). By means of His Torah (Deuteronomy 7:6-11), His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6-7) and His Angels (Daniel 12:a), Israel was kept as a nation wholly set apart unto G-d. And G-d was then able to bring His only begotten Son into the world to redeem it and will ultimately restore Israel to a greater glory than she has ever known.

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of the L-RD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come to say, "Come let us go up to the mountain of the L-RD, to the house of the G-d of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the Word of the L-RD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3).

The inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying, "Let us continue to go and pray before the L-RD, and seek the L-RD of hosts, I myself will also go. Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the L-RD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the L-RD." "Thus says the L-RD of hosts, 'In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jew, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that G-d is with you (Zechariah 8:21-23)." ' ' "

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the L-RD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (Zechariah 14:16).

The True Heart of the Sabbath

G-d further reveals His purpose for the Sabbath through the prophet Isaiah. In the latter portion of his prophetic ministry, Isaiah received words from G-d concerning how the Sabbath distinguishes the people of G-d and how they were to honor the Sabbath. Honoring the Sabbath was open and available to those Gentiles who were drawn to the faith of the G-d of Israel. G-d was especially pleased with those from among the Nations, who were not naturally responsible to love G-d and honor His commandments, but were provoked to jealousy by His nearness to His people (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

Thus says the L-RD, Keep justice and do righteousness, for My salvation (My Y'shua) is about to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this and the son of man who lays hold of it; who keeps from defiling the Sabbath and keeps his hand from doing evil. Do not let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the L-RD, speak, saying, The L-RD hath utterly separated me from His people: neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree. For thus says the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep My Sabbaths, choose the things that please Me, and take hold of My covenant. Unto them will I give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off (Isaiah 56:1-5).

It is through the enhanced spiritual intimacy that can be known by living in the Sabbath Rest Principle, that people can best enjoy a personal relationship with G-d. He is revealing that it is no longer based solely on our pedigree that we are allowed into relationship with Him, but through entering the eternal rest that He so graciously provides. The Sabbath Rest Principle is beyond time, it is eternal. It began in Eden, before the Mosaic Covenant and continues throughout the New Covenant into eternity, even into the future prophetic era of the new heavens and the new earth. His ultimate purpose is for all of humanity to know the precious blessing of everlasting Sabbath Rest by means of a personal redemptive relationship with G-d through His Son, Y'shua the Messiah.

For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me, says the L-RD, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another shall **all flesh** come to worship before me, saith the L-RD (Isaiah 66:22-23).

G-d further clarifies the proper attitude of truly spiritual Sabbath observance in Isaiah 58. Here, G-d explains the motivation for how people are to fast and observe His Shabbat. We are not to do it merely to afflict ourselves, but in order to yield our hearts and minds so that we can be more perfectly aligned to the will and word of G-d.

Is this not the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; and when you see the naked to cover them (Isaiah 58:6-7)?

Observing the Sabbath laws with scrupulous legalism, thinking that we are perfectly honoring the Sabbath by keeping every law, is not what G-d is getting at here. True Sabbath rest comes from fixing our hearts and minds on the things of G-d, such as looking after the sick, the needy and the poor. We are also exhorted to treat one another in a manner that is honoring to G-d. As we learn to live in the Sabbath Rest Principle, G-d promises that wonderful blessings will be for us and for our children's children.

If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, if you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. Then the L-RD will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a well-watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose streams will never fail. Those from among you shall build the old waste places, you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called The Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Paths to Dwell In. If you turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the L-RD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the L-RD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the L-RD hath spoken it (Isaiah 58:9b-14).

Isaiah clearly states G-d's plan. The Sabbath is a time to be freed from the distractions and trappings that this world places upon us, and it is an opportunity for us to more completely focus our minds on things above, upon which G-d also thinks. This is our time to dwell upon the needs of others, and upon delighting in the L-RD, who cares for us all.

The Sabbath Law vs. the Sabbath Rest Principle

It will also be important to understand the difference between the Sabbath Rest Principle and the Sabbath Law, which was given to and required of only the children of Abraham under the Mosaic Covenant given at Mt. Sinai. The Sabbath Law was given to Israel as a sign of their covenant, a symbol of their unique and special relationship to G-d, like an engagement ring given upon betrothal, and it was given only to them and to no other nation. In the New Covenant, the Sabbath Rest Principle is seen in the L-RD's Supper (Communion). It is the sign of our betrothal as the Bride of Messiah. It is meant to include believers from every tribe, every tongue, every people and every nation, and yet it is meant to be more intimate than any other religious ritual, being experienced on an individual, rather than a national basis.

Messianic Gentiles & the Law of Moses

In Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council was called to deal with the question of, "What should we do with all these Gentiles who are coming to faith in Y'shua?" On one side there was a group of Messianic Pharisees that were requiring the Gentiles to be circumcised and to observe the Torah in order to become converts to the new Messianic faith. On the other was the Apostles Paul and Barnabas, along with Peter and James, who saw that G-d was saving the Gentiles simply by faith in Y'shua alone.

Peter questions why would they even consider putting upon the Gentiles a yoke that neither they nor their fathers could bear. And then James gave only 4 rules for Gentiles obey so that they could worship and have table fellowship with the Messianic Jewish community. He required the new Gentile believers to abstain from:

- 1. things polluted by idols (food offered to idols / demons),*
- 2. from sexual immorality (fornication was a part of pagan worship),*
- 3. from things strangled (the food offered to idols / demons was strangled),*
- 4. and from blood (the blood of the offering was not drained and was either eaten or drank by the worshipper as an act of worship to their god).*

Why would G-d ask only 4 things of the Gentiles, and such unusual things at that? I believe there are two reasons for this. The first is that the G-d of Israel did not want the new Messianic Gentile converts to worship Him in the same manner that they worshipped their pagan demonic gods, with harlotry and

debauchery. The second is that these rules from the Noahic covenant (Genesis 9:1-7) were necessary to facilitate worship and table fellowship between Jews and Gentiles who were to become One New Man in Messiah (Ephesians 2:15).

Those pagan worship rituals would be totally repugnant to the any Jewish believer. These 4 rules did not include the 10 commandments, most noticeably the Sabbath commandment. James left the option of studying and observing the Mosaic covenant for those who chose voluntarily to do so by attending a synagogue on the Sabbath. The conversion process for a Gentile was not as easy as an oral confession of faith, but would include circumcision, ritual immersion, as well as a lengthy period of study under a Rabbi. This option would not be very popular among the large majority of the Gentile masses. Could you imagine Billy Graham giving an altar call that included circumcision?

I believe that the reason James made it so much easier for the Gentiles to convert to the Messianic faith is that the Moral commandments would be taught by the Apostles and then written on their hearts by the Holy Spirit. They would be disciplined by those within their local Messianic communities. Keeping the Sabbath is a Ritual observance commandment and those commandments are not required by anyone who accepts faith in Y'shua (see Romans 14).

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under the curse, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the Book of the Law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of G-d is evident, for "the just shall live by faith," yet the Law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them (Galatians 3:10-12)."

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Messiah (Colossians 2:16-17).

Because Y'shua was the fulfillment of the Torah as the Word made flesh, none of the ritual commandments are a requirement for salvation for either Jews or Gentiles. The Apostle Paul urges that our focus rather be on developing a faith that is motivated by selfless sacrificial love (Galatians 5:6).

How Y'shua Kept the Sabbath

"The word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory." These words are found in John 1:14. This Word, Y'shua, helps believers to better understand the first words, which can be found in the first thirty-nine books of the Bible. One of the areas that Y'shua helps to clear up is the importance of Sabbath keeping for believers in Messiah.

Y'shua makes it clear, in Matthew 5:17, that He did not come to this earth to put an end to the law. He states that His purpose is to be a fulfillment of the words of the first Covenant. Because of this, it is important to view the words and actions of Y'shua to gain an understanding of how believers should observe the Sabbath.

We first find Y'shua getting into trouble over the Sabbath in Mark 2:23-28. When challenged that His followers were eating from a field on the Sabbath, Y'shua said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not the other way around. In a parallel passage, Matthew 12:1-13, Y'shua reminds his accusers that David ate the showbread consecrated for the priests, and the priests themselves would violate the Sabbath every week. Declaring that He is L-RD of and greater than the Sabbath, Y'shua cites the Prophet Hosea where G-d cries out that He desires compassion rather than sacrifice.

The point is made clearer in John chapters 5 and 9 where Y'shua heals two people who are in need of His supernatural powers. Y'shua is showing that the typical understanding of the Sabbath is not the way that He sees it, that doing good does not cease at sundown on Friday and begin again after sundown on Saturday.

Loving, serving and blessing are meant to be 24 / 7 / 365, anytime, anywhere, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth, as it is in Heaven.

We see in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5-7, that Y'shua is more concerned about the heart of a person than his actions. He makes this plain in his commands not to hate, for it is equal to murder; and not to lust, in that it is the equivalent of Adultery. He is showing that it is not through ritualistic observance of any command, let alone the Sabbath, that a person is justified before G-d.

The Apostle Paul & the Law of Moses

The Apostle Paul expounds upon this point in Romans 3:20-22, which says, "*By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His [G-d's] sight, for by the Law is knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of G-d apart from the Law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of G-d through faith in Messiah Y'shua, to all who believe.*" Paul is saying that it is not through observance of the Law that a person is saved, but through belief in Messiah Y'shua. Thus, legalistic observance of the Torah is no longer a means of or a requirement for access to G-d, because that is now found through repentance from sin and trusting faith in Y'shua.

This does not mean that the Law is abolished. For by the Torah is the knowledge of sin and G-d's gracious provision of Messiah. As mentioned above, Matthew 5:17 makes it clear that Y'shua fulfilled the law. In Mark 12:28-31, Y'shua is asked what the most important commandment was. He responded that it is of utmost importance to love G-d with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves. Y'shua is thus saying that it is not a matter of actions, but a truly a matter of the heart. All that is required to keep the Law is to have humble devotion to G-d and selfless love for others, thus fulfilling both it's ultimate intent and maximum purpose.

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the L-RD and not to men (Colossians 3:23).

Paul further qualifies our necessary action in Colossians 3:23, where he says that all that a believer does should be done as unto the L-RD. He is not just talking about what we do on the Sabbath, but how we live every day. Thus, the New Covenant is requiring far more than the First Covenant did. It is not just on the Sabbath that a person must act appropriately, but everyday. Thus, Y'shua is calling His followers to a higher level of spirituality by asking us to live for G-d, with loving motives, at all times.

I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of G-d, that you present your bodies, a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to G-d, which your reasonable service of spiritual worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of G-d (Romans 12:1-2).

Thus, It is important not to be judgmental of any believers in Messiah, no matter when or how they worship. As Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, all of life should be worship unto God, not just one day of the week.

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced (persuaded) in their own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the L-RD and he who does not observe the day, to the L-RD he does not observe it (Romans 14:5-6).

So, we should follow the example found in Romans 14:5-6. Here, Paul says that certain people find one day exceptionally holy, while others find all days the same. He points out that, either way, it is imperative that this difference does not cause a rift in the body of Messiah. If a person wants to worship on the seventh day of the week, that is fine. If another person desires to worship on the first day of the week, that is also fine. Everyday, in every way, the followers of Y'shua should be worshipping Him and loving one another.

Entering G-d's Eternal Sabbath Rest

Finally, it is important to remember to keep in mind what Paul says in Galatians 2:15-16 which says, “A person is not declared righteous by G-d on the ground of his legalistic observance of Torah commands, but through the Messiah Y’shua’s trusting faithfulness.”

The goal of the Torah was to point people to Y’shua. It is now the responsibility of all believers in Messiah to follow the Law that He laid down, being the very essence of the Law. That is to love God and others. This is a daily command, not to be followed on only one day. Through doing this, a person is keeping the Sabbath, no matter what day on which they worship. Hopefully, after understanding the message of Sabbath, each day will be an opportunity to more deeply worship and serve the Creator and Redeemer of our souls.

It is our hope that we have laid out a clear explanation of G-d’s ultimate intention for the Law and particularly for the Sabbath. That it was to keep Israel separate unto Him so that He could eventually reach out to the ends of the earth with the Gospel of Grace and Forgiveness that was to be totally inclusive, rather than nationally and religiously exclusive. We are very blessed to live under a new Law, the Law of the Spirit of Life in Messiah Y’shua (Romans 8:1-4). We are now enabled to live in the perpetual rest of an intimate fellowship with G-d and an ever-growing unity with His Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Ephesians 1:23).

“There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of G-d. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as G-d did from His (Hebrews 4:9-10).”

