

Keeping the Sabbath

Work

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. Shemot (Exodus) 20:9-10.

The Sabbath is a memorial of creation, (Shemot 20:11) and on this day we are set free from work so that we may fully seek Yahweh. This not only includes employment, but also physical labor, yard work, housework, etc. This also includes family, servants, guests, and those who own beasts of burden are to allow them to rest on this day as well.

Buying & Selling

In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food. Also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem. Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? "Did not your fathers do the same so that our God brought on us, and on this city, all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." And it came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the Sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates that no load should enter on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. Then I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you." From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the Sabbath day. For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Thy loving-kindness. Nehemiah 13:15-22

We are not to buy or sell on the Sabbath, nor are we to ask others to do it for us. This is also includes dining out, or ordering out food. In doing so we are not only buying, but we are also causing others to work on our behalf. As was discussed previously in *Sabbath: The Basics*, as far as Yahweh is concerned there is no such thing as a "Sabbath Goy".

Fire

You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day. Shemot 35:3

This commandment is pretty straight forward. Ba'ar, the Hebrew word for kindle, means simply to set

on fire. Why? Some people have said it is because kindling a fire was a laborious process when this instruction was given. This is true, but even though all we have to do today is strike a match, it is still setting a fire. This means no barbecue from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. Also, you may not light Sabbath candles after sunset on Friday, nor the havdalah candle before sunset on Saturday. (Candle lighting for Sabbath will also be discussed in another article.)

Pleasure

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, [and] the holy of Yahweh honorable; and shall honor it, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking [your own] words: then shall you delight yourself in Yahweh; and I will make you to ride on the high places of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 58:13-14

On this day we are to set aside the material things that give us pleasure and devote the day wholly to Yahweh, even our speech should be dedicated to the things which concern Him.

Halacha

Halacha is a Hebrew word which literally means "walk". It is a specific way to keep Torah. Messianic communities (synagogues, fellowships) often establish their own halacha. Why is this necessary? Because while the Torah is precise on some issues, on others it is not, therefore a community sets up it's own specific halacha to settle certain circumstances that are unclear. For instance, we are instructed to "remain in our place" (Shemot 16:29) on the Sabbath. We are also told in in Vayikra (Leviticus) 23:3 to have a holy convocation (which is a meeting or assembly). What constitutes, staying in our place? The Hebrew word for place is *maqom*, and it could mean a spot, room, locality, (general or specific), home or country. To establish how far travel was allowed, the rabbis developed the halacha of the Sabbath-day's journey. (Acts 1:12) This was the allowable distance that a person could travel on Shabbat. It also insured that the people would still be able to attend synagogue on the Sabbath day. This distance was set at 2000 cubits, (a little over half a mile). During this time most people in Israel didn't have to worry about traveling more than that distance to have holy convocation, but we live in a different time, and under much different circumstances. Most Messianic believers don't live in Israel within small communities. We are scattered all over the world, as Yahweh said we would be. If we do live near a fellowship that we can attend, we are blessed, but often this is not the case. What would now be the halacha? A congregation may set a halacha which allows it's members to travel unusually long distances to attend Sabbath service by car. However, it may not be comfortable or affordable for a family to do so. It may be alright with the congregation, but if it causes stress within your family on the Sabbath you are defeating the purpose, and should re-examine your options. Sabbath is the weekly feast that always begins in the home, and then extends out to others, when possible, who also keep the Sabbath. Therefore a family (or individual) halacha needs to be established first. In Messianic families, a husband's authority should not be supplanted by a congregation. In addition halacha must not supplant Torah. If, for instance, a group says that part of their halacha is to light a menorah during their Sabbath day service, this would be wrong because you are kindling a fire.

Some begin their Sabbath on Friday evening with a congregation or home fellowship, and then stay at home the next day. Others begin with their family on Friday evening, and then join with others on Shabbat the next day for service. The latter is the most common, but I do not believe one way is more correct. What happens if you can not join others for service, because of distance, lack of a congregation, or for some other reason? Then do the best that you can and Yahweh will accept it. He knows the situation that you are in and what is happening in your life. There are online messianic services where a person can, through the Internet, listen to the Word being taught. I have listed some of these on the Congregation page of this website. If all you can do is to gather your family together to read Torah and discuss Scriptures, (or perhaps you are alone), do not let anyone suggest to you that you are not doing enough. Remember that Yahweh sees the heart.

Yeshua is the Lord of the Sabbath. As Lord, He defines this day. The leaders of the time and Yeshua differed greatly on what was permitted on Sabbath and what was not.

He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and she was bent over, and could in no way straighten herself up. When Yeshua saw her, he called her, and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." He laid his hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight, and glorified God. The ruler of the synagogue, being indignant because Yeshua had healed on the Sabbath, said to the multitude, "There are six days in which men ought to work. Therefore come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day!" Therefore the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each one of you free his ox or his donkey from the stall on the Sabbath, and lead him away to water? Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound eighteen long years, be freed from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" Luke 13:10-16

If a boy receives circumcision on the Sabbath, that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me, because I made a man every bit whole on the Sabbath? John 7:23

Or have you not read in the law, that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are guiltless? Matthew 12:5

It is clear from these and other passages in Scripture, that Yeshua was teaching the people how to keep Sabbath properly. This was not how the Scribes and Pharisees taught. There is nothing wrong with healing, doing good deeds, caring for those who depend on you, and serving Yahweh, as the priests in the Temple did the same. As talmidot (disciples) of Yeshua we should always follow His example when seeking to become more obedient. If we do we can't go wrong. He will guide us in the proper direction. Remember Sabbath is a day to be looked forward to, and a delight.

Regarding those who are doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, EMTs, fireman, policeman, etc. There are some who would say that if you are not permitted to have the Sabbath day off from work, you should quit your job, and Yahweh will provide you with employment where you can have the Sabbath off. There was incident that happened at a congregation I once attended. One of the children got hurt when they were playing outside, and was taken immediately to the emergency room. The parents did not hesitate. What would happen if a woman went into labor, there was a fire, or some other emergency? These things happen on Shabbat too. Yeshua healed and rescued all who came to Him on

the Sabbath...this was one of the reason why the Pharisees sought to destroy him. Healing and saving lives on the Sabbath is a principle that the rabbis also teach as well. When we all enter the Kingdom, I would say that some of you may have to find other work if you are in one of these positions, but until that time, I do not believe you are condemned for doing your job on the weekly Sabbath. Of course if you can manage, you should try to get the Sabbath off, and also if an opportunity arises where you can switch to a position that offers you that option, by all means take it.

There is a story in Scripture which exemplifies this understanding. It comes from Melech Bet (2 Kings) It is the story of Naaman. He was the captain of the hosts of the King of Syria. He is described as "a great man" and "a man of valor". He was also a leper. His wife had a servant, a maiden who was one of the captives from Israel. It was she who told her mistress of the prophet Elisha in Samaria who was capable of healing Naaman of his leprosy. Naaman indeed was healed of his leprosy, and believed that the God of Israel was the one true God. He had, however, had an interesting request.

In this thing Yahweh pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, Yahweh pardon your servant in this thing. He said to him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way. 2 Kings 5:18-19

Naaman's earthly master was the King of Syria, and he was required by the king to attend him when he went into worship other gods, gods that Naaman now knew were false. Elisha told him to "Go in peace." He knew that in Naaman's heart he believed and worshiped Yahweh.

In a way, we are like Naaman. We know and believe in our hearts who the one true God is and we call him our Master. Most of us, like Naaman, aren't in Israel, but live outside, in exile, where others believe that they are our master. However, we know who our true Master is, just as Naaman did, and just like Naaman we receive grace. Grace abounds in the Tanak, (Old Testament) just as it does in the New Covenant. This is not an excuse to sin, (Romans 6:1) but to know that when we find ourselves in certain situations, Yahweh is merciful and forgiving.