

Frequently Asked Questions:

THE SABBATH

By Glenn McWilliams of TK Torah Keepers

Every great movement, transition, or walk begins with a first step. For those who are new to the idea of keeping Torah there is always the question of where to begin. We may answer this question from the Scripture itself.

When YHWH was about to deliver the children of Israel out of their bondage in the pagan world of Egypt, He blessed the children of Israel with a brand new calendar.

*Exodus 12:1-2 And YHWH spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,
2This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.*

The purpose of this calendar was to help the children of Israel “walk” with YHWH. By following the Creator’s calendar, the children of Israel would find their lives coming into step with the Creator’s prophetic timing. By observing the Creator’s calendar, the children of Israel would become part of the visible proclamation of YHWH’S plan of redemption and restoration of all creation. This divine revelation is proclaimed and made visible through the shadow pictures contained in the various sacrifices, fasts, feasts, rehearsals, and appointed times contained in the Creator’s calendar of events.

The Creator’s calendar contains specific *mikrot* and *mo’adim*. The Hebrew word *mikra* (*mem, kof, resh, aleph*) means “convocation,” “public meeting,” or “rehearsal.” The Hebrew word *moed* (*mem, vav, ayin, dalet*) means “appointed time.” The purpose of the Creator’s calendar is to reveal to us YHWH’S holy, appointed rehearsals. These appointed sacrifices, fasts, feasts, and rehearsals serve several purposes.

First, each of these appointed rehearsals celebrates some past event in the life of YHWH and the children of Israel. The sacrifice of Passover¹ and the Feast of Unleavened Bread² celebrate the historical events of the exodus from Egypt. The offering of the Firstfruits³ commemorates the saving of the firstborn in Egypt as well as the first harvest brought from the Promise Land. The Feast of Weeks⁴ or Pentecost celebrates the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. The Feast of Trumpets,⁵ The Day of Atonement,⁶ and The Feast of Tabernacles⁷ celebrate the years that YHWH led the children of Israel through the wilderness. So in each of these appointed celebrations the children of Israel rehearse their history with their Creator and Deliverer. Rehearsing these appointed times in the present helps each new generation relate to their ancestors and history. By rehearsing these appointed feasts in the present we not only “retell” the story; we are given the chance to actually “relive” the events so that we may experience the events and deliverance for ourselves.

We must also recognize that there is prophetic significance to these appointed rehearsals. As rehearsals, these fasts, feasts, and celebrations are preparing the children of Israel for what is yet to come. We have already stated that these appointed rehearsals are prophetic shadow pictures and proclamations. The celebration of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits, for example, proclaim Yeshua as the Lamb who was slain, who was undefiled by the rot (leaven) of death, and who was the firstfruit from the grave! The Feast of Pentecost celebrates the outpouring of the Spirit of the Holy One, who writes the Torah on the hearts of all believers. Now we await the fulfillment of the fall appointed rehearsals, when Yeshua will

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return at the sound of the last trumpet, make atonement for the gathered Nation of Israel, and tabernacle with his people. Since these appointed rehearsals point to the future, they help prepare believers for what is yet to come. These appointed rehearsals are at the very heart of the Creator's calendar. We may read about these appointed rehearsals in the twenty-third chapter of the Book of Leviticus. While each of these appointed rehearsals deserves a great deal of attention, we will limit the focus of this teaching to just the first of these appointed times: the Sabbath.

In many ways observing the Sabbath is the first step on the lifelong journey of keeping the Torah, so let us now focus our attention on this wonderful and delightful event. We begin this teaching not with the commandment to keep the Sabbath, but with its origin as part of the events of creation.

***Genesis 2:1-3** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ²And on the seventh day Elohim ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. ³And Elohim blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which Elohim created and made.*

There are several important details that we should take note of in this opening passage of Scripture. First, we should note that the Creator divided His creation into a period of seven days. While often overlooked, it is important that we realize that from the beginning of creation the Creator divided time into days, weeks, months, and years. We see this in the pattern of dark and light and in the creation of the stars and planets.

***Genesis 1:14** And Elohim said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.*

The cycle of the sun declares the days – from evening to morning according to the pattern of the Torah. Biblically the new day begins at sunset, not at midnight. This pattern of evening and morning is well-established in the creation narrative.

***Genesis 1:5** And Elohim called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.*

***Genesis 1:8** And Elohim called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.*

***Genesis 1:13** And the evening and the morning were the third day.*

***Genesis 1:19** And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.*

***Genesis 1:23** And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.*

***Genesis 1:31** And Elohim saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

The cycle of the moon, which completes its path every 29.5 days, establishes the pattern of the month. We may note here that the English word "month" is in fact a linguistic cognate of the word "moon."⁸ By the sighting of the first sliver of the new moon the children of Israel established the "Rosh Chodesh" – the beginning of the month. The beginning of the year was established by the sighting of the twelfth new moon and the determination of the ripeness of the barley, which is called the "aviv."

***Exodus 12:1-2** And YHWH spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ²This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.*

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Exodus 13:4 This day came ye out in the month of the aviv.

Exodus 23:15 Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month of the aviv; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before Me empty.)

Exodus 34:18 The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, in the time of the month of the aviv: for in the month of the aviv thou camest out from Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:1 Observe the month of the aviv, and keep the Passover unto YHWH thy Elohim: for in the month of the aviv YHWH thy Elohim brought thee forth out of Egypt by night.

The pattern of measuring time in days, months, and years may be seen in the cycles of creation, but the division of seven days was established only by the Creator Himself. There is no cycle of sun, moon, planet, or star that divides time into an increment of seven days. The measure of a *shavua* or “week” was by the declaration and will of the Creator Himself. By His working for six days and resting on the seventh the Creator established this unique pattern of time.

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
²And on the seventh day Elohim ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. ³And Elohim blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which Elohim created and made.

We should note that it was the Creator who likewise set apart the seventh day, blessed it, and sanctified it; because on that day He rested from His work. We must therefore concede that this seventh day is not established by nature nor by mankind, but by the sovereign will of the Creator Himself. In many ways it is the pattern of the seven-day week, broken into a pattern of six working days and one day of rest, that proclaims the reality that the world did not begin with a spontaneous bang or by an accident of natural law, but was in fact established by an intelligent and orderly Creator! It is for this reason that the later celebration of the Sabbath is referred to as being the “Sabbath of YHWH.”

Exodus 20:10 But the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.

Leviticus 23:3 Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the Sabbath of YHWH in all your dwellings.

Deuteronomy 5:14 But the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou.

While from the beginning the Creator blessed and set apart the seventh day of rest from the other six working days, there was no commandment mandating that mankind was to follow this same pattern. In fact, there is no further overt mention of the weekly Sabbath until after the children of Israel have come out of Egypt. We have no record of Adam, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob keeping the weekly Sabbath. This does not mean that they did not keep the Sabbath; only that there is no mention made of it. There is a possible allusion to the children of Israel keeping the Sabbath while still in Egypt.

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After Moses returned to Egypt from the burning bush, he confronted Pharaoh and asked for the release of the children of Israel that they might serve their Elohim.

***Exodus 5:1-8** And afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith YHWH Elohim of Israel, Let My people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness. ²And Pharaoh said, Who is YHWH, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not YHWH, neither will I let Israel go. ³And they said, The Elohim of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto YHWH our Elohim; lest He fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword. ⁴And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? Get you unto your burdens. ⁵And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them **rest** (Shabbat) from their burdens. ⁶And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, ⁷Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. ⁸And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof: for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our Elohim.*

It is possible to conclude from the context of this passage that the “rest” Pharaoh was referring to was Moses’ request for freedom to go and serve YHWH, but it is also possible to conclude that Pharaoh was responding to Israel’s practice of resting on the seventh day. By increasing their workload, thus requiring the children of Israel to work an extra day, Pharaoh was demonstrating that he did not fear YHWH, the Elohim of Israel.

The first overt mention of the pattern of six working days and the seventh day of rest comes only after the children of Israel have safely crossed the Red Sea. In response to the murmuring of the children of Israel in the wilderness YHWH provided “manna” from heaven. This provision would not only sustain the children of Israel throughout their wilderness wandering; it would also test the children of Israel. As a test, the Sabbath would reveal whether they truly had a heart to submit themselves to living by the exclusive word of YHWH.

***Exodus 16:3-5** And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to Elohim we had died by the hand of YHWH in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger. ⁴Then said YHWH unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no. ⁵And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.*

***Exodus 16:22-26** And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. ²³And he said unto them, This is that which YHWH hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto YHWH: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. ²⁴And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. ²⁵And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a Sabbath unto YHWH: to day ye shall not find it in the field. ²⁶Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none.*

In these texts, keeping the Sabbath is clearly a commandment for the children of Israel. We also witness the Sabbath taking on a new meaning. While the original proclamation of the Sabbath declared the sovereignty of the Creator, we now see the Sabbath as a proclamation of YHWH’S ability to deliver and provide for His chosen people. This commanded pattern of six working days and the seventh day being a day of rest eventually became a formal part of the Sinai Covenant.

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Exodus 20:8-11 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰but the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: ¹¹for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as YHWH thy Elohim hath commanded thee. ¹³Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁴but the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. ¹⁵And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that YHWH thy Elohim brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore YHWH thy Elohim commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.

In fact, the Sabbath became the very sign or token of the covenant. It was the Sabbath that set the children of Israel apart from the nations as Torah keepers!

Exodus 31:12-17 And YHWH spake unto Moses, saying, ¹³Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am YHWH that doth sanctify you. ¹⁴Ye shall keep the Sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to YHWH: whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. ¹⁶Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed.

We cannot ignore the importance of this sacred day. Here we see that the Holy One commands that anyone among the children of Israel who is caught working on the Sabbath shall be put to death and cut off from among the people. In other words, if you are not going to bear the “sign” of the covenant, you will not be extended the benefits of the covenant. So important is this sacred rehearsal that YHWH gave it precedence even over the work being done to build the tabernacle.

Exodus 35:1-3 And Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said unto them, These are the words which YHWH hath commanded, that ye should do them. ²Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a Sabbath of rest to YHWH: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. ³Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.

If we truly feel that we have been called to enter the covenant and become citizens of the commonwealth of Israel,⁹ then keeping the Sabbath may be our first step on our journey. YHWH has declared that the Sabbath is to be the perpetual sign of our covenant relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, Deliverer, and Savior.

The question we must now address is how we are to keep the Sabbath. Within the various texts quoted above there are seven basic instructions for keeping the Sabbath.

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1. Remember the Sabbath
2. Keep the Sabbath
3. Sanctify the Sabbath
4. Cease from labor on the Sabbath
5. Rest on the Sabbath
6. Cause no one else to work on the Sabbath
7. Kindle no fire on the Sabbath

Let us now take a look at each one of these instructions in context so that we may discern the heart of the Creator concerning the Sabbath.

REMEMBER THE SABBATH

Exodus 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

The command to remember the Sabbath causes us to recall the seventh day of creation. It was on the seventh day of creation that YHWH Elohim established this pattern. By recalling the original seventh day of creation we also remember that the world was created by a sovereign Creator! I remember a time when no store, restaurant, car dealer, or barbershop would be open on Sunday to honor the “Christian” Sabbath. I find it quite interesting that at the same time our American culture stopped honoring the Sabbath (though it was thought to be Sunday), we began being taught the “Big Bang” theory and “Evolution” in our public schools. Without the Sabbath there is no weekly proclamation of the sovereign Creator who established the seven-day week and sanctified a day of rest. It is important therefore that we REMEMBER the Sabbath and declare YHWH the sovereign Creator of the universe. In that the Sabbath declares YHWH as the sovereign Creator of the universe, it always seems appropriate to spend time appreciating nature on the Sabbath. To take a gentle and restful walk in the woods, at the beach, or in a park is a wonderful way to recall the creative work of YHWH and to praise Him for the wonderful gift of creation. Six days did He labor and create, but on the seventh day He rested.

KEEP THE SABBATH

Deuteronomy 5:12 Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as YHWH thy Elohim hath commanded thee.

The Hebrew word translated as “keep” is the word *shamar* (*shin, mem, resh*). This word has several possible meanings, such as “to guard,” “to observe,” “to hedge about,” or “to protect.” I would suggest that what we are being commanded to do in this teaching is to literally protect the Sabbath. Our work week begins on the first day of the week. Throughout the week we build up a head of steam so that we may finish all of the orders, challenges, and projects that have come our way. Once we get lost in the work rhythm it is not always easy to change gears. There is always the temptation to push just a little harder or a little further to complete all the work. There are also times when we lose track of what day it is and schedule appointments and other tasks for the seventh day. To protect the Sabbath means that we are forever mindful of what day it is. To keep the Sabbath safe we must live each day to its fullest, value our time, and prioritize our labor so that we do not let it spill over onto this most holy of days. For six days we may be distracted from the beauty and holiness of the Creator, but the seventh day we are to protect in order to have uninterrupted time with YHWH.

SANCTIFY THE SABBATH

Exodus 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

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Deuteronomy 5:12 Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as YHWH thy Elohim hath commanded thee.

Not only are we to remember and protect the Sabbath; we are also to set it apart from every other day. In other words, this day should be different, special, and a delight. Ceasing our labor, resting, remembering, and protecting do indeed make this day different from the other six days of the week. By commanding that we sanctify this day YHWH is asking us to make this time with Him both special and a delight. The Sabbath is to be celebrated. This day has been set apart by the Creator for us. We may remember the words of Yeshua the Messiah as he taught concerning the Sabbath:

Mark 2:27 And he said unto them, the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

YHWH has set this day aside for us. This time is indeed special. We should realize that the Creator has set aside His laboring to be with us. We should feel very privileged that YHWH would desire to commune with us, therefore we do not want to spend the whole day sleeping or in front of the television. To sanctify this day is to focus our hearts, minds, and souls upon Him. I still remember the teachings of Martin Luther's Small Catechism concerning this commandment.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

What does this mean?

Answer: We should fear and love God, and so we should not despise His Word and the preaching of the same, but deem it holy and gladly hear and learn it.¹⁰

While there is no direct commandment to study the Torah on the Sabbath, I personally can think of no better way to sanctify the Sabbath than prayerfully studying and discussing the Torah with family and friends. Prayer, song, dance, and fellowshiping with other believers may also be ways to set this day apart.

CEASE FROM LABORS

Exodus 20:10 But the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.

A great part of what sets this holy day apart is the stopping of all mundane labor. The Sabbath is not a time to pay bills, mow the lawn, wash and wax the car, weed the garden, polish the silver, or any of the other numerous and menial tasks that we would normally do when our occupation allows. The Sabbath is not simply the "weekend." The Sabbath is a holy rehearsal, an appointed time. It is time that the Creator of the universe has set apart for fellowshiping with His creation, therefore we should think about hosting our Savior in our homes on the Sabbath. Would we cut the grass, do the laundry, weed the garden, or occupy ourselves in menial endeavors if the Messiah were visiting with us? Would we not rather visit with and commune with the Messiah uninterrupted and undistracted? So it is with the Sabbath. We should set aside everything possible and cherish this intimate time with the Creator.

With this said, let us now address some exceptions. While the intention of the Creator is that everyone would enjoy this time to commune with Him uninterrupted, we must also realize that there are some people who "must" work on the Sabbath. Police officers, firemen, emergency room doctors, and prison guards all must work on the Sabbath. Here we should remember that the *cohanim*¹¹ also worked in the Temple in Jerusalem on the Sabbath. We may ask why it is acceptable for certain people to work on the Sabbath and not others. We should remember that YHWH is all about life. The whole purpose of

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keeping the Torah is to restore life. Therefore those who protect life are permitted to “profane” the Sabbath without judgment. Yeshua taught:

Matthew 12:5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?

Matthew 12:10-12 And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse him. ¹¹And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? ¹²How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days.

Mark 3:4 And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

Clearly it is always acceptable to save life, restore life, and do good on the Sabbath. Going to the store to purchase necessary medicine or doing a good deed for a neighbor are not considered violations of the Sabbath.

Another issue that we must realistically address concerns those who must work on the Sabbath or lose their jobs. Here I will go out on a limb and state that if there is no other alternative but to work in order to support one’s family, then one must work. We may seek to find a new job or make other arrangements, such as volunteering to work on Sundays and other “Christian” or secular holidays. If it is mandatory that one must work on the Sabbath, then we must concede that we are, in many ways, still in Egypt. In this situation we should do everything in our power to honor the Sabbath. When we get home from our employment we should still keep what is left of the Sabbath. I believe that the Creator will honor our grieving hearts. It is situations like this that cause us to long for the return of Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom.

REST ON THE SABBATH

Ceasing from labor and resting are two entirely different things. Yeshua taught us that the Sabbath was made for us. Yeshua also taught:

Matthew 6:25-33 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ²⁶Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? ²⁷Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? ²⁸And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰Wherefore, if Elohim so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? ³¹Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³²(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ³³But seek ye first the kingdom of Elohim, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

While living in the wilderness the children of Israel were tested by a lack of food and water, and had to learn to trust YHWH for all of their provisions. When the children of Israel entered the land of milk and honey, the manna ceased and the children of Israel had to learn to provide for themselves. The

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temptation of self-sufficiency and prosperity is the fear that if we stop our laboring, even for a moment, we will not survive. While we may discipline ourselves to cease laboring, it is another thing to rest peacefully in the assurance that it was, it is, and it will always be YHWH who sustains us. The Sabbath is meant to be a time when we refresh not only our spirit and relationship with the Creator, but also the very body we use to serve Him; therefore we should seek to calm our minds and bodies and truly rest in YHWH. We should also avoid activities that will physically tax us. Quiet walks and play may be acceptable on the Sabbath, but we should exercise care not to lose sight of our time “resting” in YHWH. On the other hand, we should not so limit activity that we lose sight of the fact that the Sabbath was meant to be a delight.

CAUSE NO ONE ELSE TO WORK ON THE SABBATH

While there is no commandment for the unbeliever to keep the Sabbath, it is clear that as members of the covenant we are not to cause others to work on the Sabbath. I will present two possible reasons for this commandment. The first reason relates to what we have already stated above. By ceasing our labors and resting on the Sabbath we proclaim that YHWH is the true provider and sustainer of our lives. If we ourselves cease from our labor and rest but cause others to do our work for us, then we are acting like a hypocrite. Causing others to labor in our stead is declaring our lack of faith in the Creator’s ability to provide for us if we keep the covenant. The true witness of the ability of the Creator to sustain us is seen in our businesses shutting down for the Sabbath. By giving even our unbelieving employees the day off, we assure that no one may claim that it was their labor or provision that sustained us instead of YHWH. A second reason for not causing others to labor on the Sabbath is because our ancestors in bondage in Egypt were forced to labor on the Sabbath.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15** Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it, as YHWH thy Elohim hath commanded thee. ¹³Six days thou shalt labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁴but the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy Elohim: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. ¹⁵**And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that YHWH thy Elohim brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore YHWH thy Elohim commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.

***Exodus 22:21** Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

***Exodus 23:19** The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of YHWH thy Elohim. Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk.*

The prohibition against causing others to serve us, work for us, or labor in our stead frees us from the temptation to exploit or oppress others for the sake of materialism. The Sabbath is a reminder that we once lived under an oppressive taskmaster. By not causing others to labor on the Sabbath we are protected from becoming what we once despised. By giving even unbelievers the Sabbath day to rest, we open the possibility that they too will acknowledge the sovereignty of the Creator. This commandment likewise discourages us from going out to restaurants, movies, sports events, or shopping on the Sabbath. We should refrain from all financial transactions and business dealings of any kind.

KINDLE NO FIRE ON THE SABBATH

This last instruction concerning the Sabbath is a peculiar one. This commandment was given to the children of Israel during the time they were to build the tabernacle. YHWH affirmed that the Sabbath was

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to take precedence even over the work of the tabernacle. Since smithing and smelting were part of the workmanship involved in building the tabernacle, the prohibition against kindling a fire on the Sabbath may have been another prohibition against work of any kind on the Sabbath. This prohibition against kindling a fire may also be a prohibition against cooking on the Sabbath. We should note that in the first overt teaching on the Sabbath, the Torah specifically instructs the children of Israel to gather twice as much food on the sixth day and to prepare it for the seventh day.

Exodus 16:5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.

Exodus 16:22-23 And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. ²³And he said unto them, This is that which YHWH hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto YHWH: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.

Supporting this prohibition against kindling fires and cooking on the Sabbath is the clear license that is given by the Creator to prepare food on the days of rest associated with the various Feasts of YHWH.

Exodus 12:16 And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

If specific license is given to cook on the feast days, it would stand to reason that cooking would normally be prohibited on the weekly Sabbath. While eating and even feasting on the Sabbath is encouraged, the food should be prepared the day before so that no one need shop, harvest, kindle a fire, or cook on the Sabbath. Making prior preparation for the Sabbath is a part of “keeping” or “protecting” the Sabbath.

There is another, although somewhat allegorical, application of this teaching. When people have an abundance of time on their hands it is not uncommon for them to stimulate themselves by picking fights and starting arguments with each other. This prohibition warns us against using this sanctified time for gossiping, arguing, fighting, or annoying others. It is never appropriate on the Sabbath to kindle a fire with family, friends, or brethren.

I am writing this article in February in Michigan. The temperature outside is 1 degree and there are close to 24 inches of snow on the ground. Many people here in the great white North heat their homes with wood burners. Again, applying the principle of life, I do not believe that the Creator is intending that we should snuff out the pilot lights on our stoves and furnaces, or put out the fires in our wood burners, risking health and home to keep the Sabbath. But, we should not be out cutting, splitting, or gathering wood on the Sabbath. In fact, there is a very forceful story in the Torah about a man who gathered wood on the Sabbath.

Numbers 15:32-36 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day. ³³And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. ³⁴And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. ³⁵And YHWH said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. ³⁶And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as YHWH commanded Moses.

Just as is true for shopping and cooking, all the necessary preparations for heating our homes on the Sabbath should be made in advance. We should have all our wood cut, split, and stacked. We should also have the fire already kindled that we need not labor on the Sabbath.

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There is a tradition in rabbinic Judaism of using candles to set apart the Sabbath from the six working days. There are many Messianic believers who have blindly incorporated this tradition into their Sabbath practices as well. At sundown on the sixth day, believers will light candles while reciting a special blessing. These Sabbath candles are left burning throughout the Sabbath. At sundown on the Sabbath another special candle is lit, indicating that the Sabbath is now over and that it is alright to kindle fires once again. While these candle ceremonies are a quaint way to “set apart” the Sabbath, some thought must be given to this practice. This rabbinic practice of candle lighting is not without controversy. In the rabbinic prayers that are recited during the lighting of the candles it makes reference to the “commandment” that “commands us” to light the Sabbath candles.

*Blessed are you YHWH our Elohim, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us to kindle the light of the Sabbath.*¹²

The irony of this prayer is that the only commandment concerning lighting fires on the Sabbath is the prohibition against kindling a fire; therefore the lighting of candles prior to the Sabbath is a symbol of the rabbis' authority to change and even contradict the clear teaching of the Torah. The “commandment” referred to in this prayer is the commandment of the rabbis. In that the prayer states that it is YHWH who has commanded us to light the candles, the rabbis teach that they have the authority of the Almighty to add commandments to the Torah, and even to alter and reverse the Torah.

The Karaite Jews interpret the Hebrew word *ba'ar* (*bet, ayin, resh*) not as “kindle” but “burning.” This means that the Karaites do not allow candles or lamps to continue burning on the Sabbath. There are some who claim that the rabbinic tradition of candle lighting was established specifically to make a distinction between those who recognized the authority of the rabbis and those who did not.

Many debate the merits of using florescent lights on the Sabbath versus incandescent lights. Some also refuse to drive on the Sabbath due to the spark-plug kindling a fire in their combustion engine. Using electricity on the Sabbath likewise creates “sparks” and causes others at the electric company to labor on the Sabbath. The degree that one goes to satisfy the spirit of the Sabbath is a matter of one's personal conscience.

While some may argue that to enter the covenant and attempt to keep the Torah is a return to bondage, I believe that there is great freedom to be found in the Torah. Beyond these seven teachings we are free to develop our own customs and traditions. Every individual, family, or fellowship may, within the boundaries of the Torah, establish their own manner of keeping the Sabbath. For many families the Sabbath begins with a special meal, prayers, and blessings. In our home we gather at the kitchen table, read several passages of Scripture concerning the keeping of the Sabbath, and recite together the “Seven Laws of Sabbath.” I then bless my wife and my children and pray for other friends and families in need. We then bless YHWH and Messiah, break the bread and wine, and partake of a special meal. From sundown to sundown we turn off the television, computers, electronic games, and any secular music. After dinner we eat dessert and gather in the living room for Bible study, conversation, and game playing (Sabbath is supposed to be a delight). In the morning we sleep in and begin our day slowly. When weather permits, I like to go to Lake Michigan and walk and pray on the beach. Around 1:30 people begin showing up for our home fellowship. We begin our fellowship around 2:00 with prayers, Torah study, more prayers, and a shared meal. People stay and fellowship until sundown, and then go home.

It is likewise appropriate to visit hospitals, nursing homes, and shut-ins on the Sabbath. Visiting with other friends and believers is also appropriate. I would caution, however, that one must exercise care not to allow these visits to shift our focus from communing with the Creator.

We should remember that the Sabbath is a “sign” of our covenant relationship with the Creator. As a sign, it should be visible in our lives. We should also remember that the Sabbath is part of our proclamation concerning YHWH as the sovereign Creator of the universe, as well as our Deliverer, Redeemer, Sustainer, and Savior. Finally, we should remember that the Sabbath is a gift from YHWH.

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The Sabbath is a day for us to cease our labors and worries and grant our spirits, souls, and bodies rest. The Sabbath is also a time when we may put aside everything that distracts and keeps us from intimacy with the Creator. The Sabbath is the evidence that our Creator desires to commune intimately with us and bless us with His undivided attention.

I pray that as you begin your walk with YHWH, you will indeed find the Sabbath a delight. Enjoy your new-found freedom in Torah and develop your own practices for keeping the Sabbath with the guidance of the Spirit of the Holy One. I pray that you may be encouraged by your first step and be inspired to follow the Shepherd as he guides you into the next step on your faith journey with YHWH.

¹ The Hebrew name is Pesach. Pesach is a slaughtering and not a feast.

² The Hebrew name is Chag HaMatzot.

³ The Hebrew name is Bikkurim.

⁴ The Hebrew name is Chag Shavuot.

⁵ The Hebrew name is Yom Teruah.

⁶ The Hebrew name is Yom Kippur.

⁷ The Hebrew name is Chag Sukkot.

⁸ Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, edited by C.T. Onions, Oxford Press, Pp. 587, 588

⁹ Ephesians 2:12, 19

¹⁰ The Book of Concord, edited by Theodore G. Tappert, Fortress Press, Pg. 342

¹¹ Priests

¹² The Schottenstein Edition Siddur for Sabbath and Festivals, The Artscroll Series, Messorah Publications Ltd., Pg. 2