



Special Sabbaths -

Four Shabbatot and Other Special Sabbaths

On a regular Shabbat, the Parshah of the Week (Torah Portion) is publicly recited during the synagogue service. If the Sabbath occurs during a Jewish festival, an additional section (aliyah) is read from a *different* Torah scroll during the service. This additional reading requires some extra ceremony at the synagogue.



The Four Shabbatot

There are four special Sabbaths during the year that do not coincide with a Jewish holiday, but require readings from *two* Torah scrolls (along with an extra ceremony attending to these readings). All four of these Sabbaths occur just before the 1st of Nissan, the start of the Biblical Year and just before the occurrence of Passover. Collectively, these four Sabbaths are called “The Four Shabbatot.”

Special Sabbaths before Passover

1. Shabbat Shekalim

"The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less..." (Exod. 30:15)

שַׁבַּת שְׁקָלִים

(shab-baht she-ka-LEEM) n. “Sabbath of the Shekels.” Read on Sabbath before the 1st of Adar. The Maftir (additional reading) from Exodus (30:11-16) describes the census of every Jew and the obligation to give a half-shekel terumah (contribution) during the month of Adar to pay for the public korbanot (sacrifices) offered in the Bet Hamikdash (Temple) in Jerusalem. For us, it might be a time to remember those who offer personal sacrifices so that we also might draw closer to God.

2. Shabbat Zakhor

"Remember what Amalek did to you..." (Deut. 25:17-19)

שַׁבַּת זְכוֹר

(shab-baht zah-KHOR) “Sabbath of Remembrance.” The additional (*musaf*) portion recalls the enmity of the Amalkites (Deut. 25:17-19). Read on the sabbath *before* Purim.



3. Shabbat Parah

"This is the ordinance of the Torah which the Lord has commanded." (Num. 19:2)

שַׁבַּת פָּרָה

(shab-baht pah-RAH) n. "Sabbath of the Red Cow." The additional (musaf) portion recalls the Red Heifer sacrifice (Num. 19) and the making of the ashes for ritual purification. Read on the sabbath *after* Purim.

4. Shabbat HaChodesh

"This month is for you the first of months..." (Exod. 12:2)

שַׁבַּת הַחֹדֶשׁ

(shab-baht ha-KHOH-desh) "Sabbath of the Month." The sabbath before the 1st of Nissan (*Rosh Chodashim*), the start of the biblical year (Ex. 12:1-20).

Immediately Preceding Passover:

5. Shabbat HaGadol

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." (Mal. 3:23)

שַׁבַּת הַגָּדוֹל

(shab-baht hag-gah-DOHL) "The Great Sabbath"; the Sabbath immediately before the festival of Pesach (Passover), in commemoration of the time when the first generation set aside the Pascal lamb. The additional (musaf) is from Malachi 3.

Summer Special Sabbaths

In synagogue services the order of the Haftarat (readings from the Nevi'im, or prophetic writings) usually follow the Torah reading for the week. However, beginning with the Three Weeks of Sorrow until after the High Holidays, these readings change. First are three haftarat of punishment (leading up to Tishah B'Av), then seven of consolation (for the seven weeks until Rosh Hashanah), and finally one of repentance (on Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath before Yom Kippur).

1. Shabbat Chazon

"And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood." (Isa. 1:15)



שַׁבַּת חֲזוֹן

(shab-baht kha-ZOHN) “The Sabbath of Vision.” The Sabbath preceding the Fast of Av (Tishah B’Av) during the Three Weeks of Sorrow is called Chazon (“vision”). The Haftarah reading is from the first chapter of Isaiah (1:1-27) that reveals the coming destruction of the Temple. It is common during this time to confess the sins in our lives that likewise contribute to the lack of God’s Presence in our midst.

2. Shabbat Nachamu

"Nachamu, Nachamu ami - be comforted, be comforted, my people..." (Isa. 40)

שַׁבַּת נַחֲמוּ

(shab-baht na-cha-MOO) “The Sabbath of Comfort.” The Sabbath immediately following Tishah B’Av (the Ninth of Av) is called Shabbat Nachamu - the “Sabbath of Comfort”, based on the Haftarah reading (Isaiah 40:1-27) that begins: *Nachamu, Nachamu ami* - "be comforted, be comforted, my people..." The sages state that the word Nachamu is repeated to offer consolation for each of the Temples that we destroyed.

Fall Special Sabbaths

1. Shabbat Shuvah

"Take with you words, and turn to the Lord." (Hosea 14:3)

שַׁבַּת שׁוּבָה

(shab-baht shoo-VAH) “The Sabbath of Repentance.” The Sabbath between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Haftarah begins with Hosea 14:2, “Shuvah!”

2. Shabbat Bereshit

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1:1)

שַׁבַּת בְּרֵאשִׁית

(shab-baht be-ray-SHEET) “The Sabbath of Beginning.” This Sabbath follows the feast of Sukkot (Simchat Torah) and the begins first portion of the annual Torah reading cycle.



Winter Special Sabbaths

1. Shabbat Shirah

"The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation." (Exod. 15:2)

שַׁבַּת שִׁירָה

(shab-baht shee-RAH) "The Sabbath of the Song." When the Torah reading for the week is parashat *Beshalach* (usually in Shevat/late winter), the famous *Shirat Hayam*, the "Song the Sea," is chanted at services. This is a song of praise the Israelites sang after they crossed the Red Sea, and the Shabbat has therefore come to be called *Shabbat Shirah* ("Sabbath of the Song").

Rosh Chodesh and the Sabbath

In Jewish tradition, the last Sabbath of the month before the appearance of the new moon (i.e., Rosh Chodesh) is called *Shabbat Mevarkhim* (שַׁבַּת מְבַרְכִים, "Sabbath of Blessing"), and an additional prayer is recited asking God to bless the coming month.



If the Sabbath occurs precisely one day before the new moon, however, it is called *Shabbat Machar Chodesh* (שַׁבַּת מָחָר הַחֹדֶשׁ, "Shabbat of tomorrow's moon") and a different Haftarah (1 Sam. 20:18-42) is read (this is the case for this Shabbat's Torah reading). Note that if a Sabbath actually falls on the new moon, it is called *Shabbat Rosh Chodesh* (שַׁבַּת רֹאשׁ הַחֹדֶשׁ) and an additional Torah portion (Num. 28:9-15) and haftarah (Isa. 66:1-24) are recited during services. If in doubt, always check a kosher Jewish calendar!