




Aseret Hadiberot -

The Fourth Commandment



Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.

זְכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ: 

le·ka·de·sho

ha·shab·bat

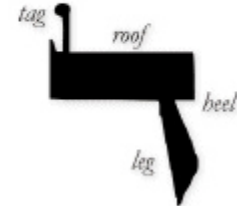
et·yom

za·khor

for holiness

the Sabbath day

Remember



Introduction



Shabbat begins at sunset on Friday evening and ends Saturday night when three stars are visible in the sky (25 hours). On Shabbat we remember that God created the world and then rested from His labors.

The commandment to observe the Sabbath comes from the Fourth Commandment, of course, which actually spans three *pesukim* (verses) and is by far the longest of the Ten Commandments. In its entirety the commandment reads:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex 20:8-11)

The Meaning of Shabbat

The word *shabbat* ("Sabbath") is clearly connected to the verb *shavat*, meaning "to cease, desist, rest." The root *first appears* in Genesis 2:2-3 regarding God's creative activity:

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִכָּל־מְלָאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:
וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ
כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל־מְלָאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

And He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done.
And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy,
because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.



On the seventh day of creation, God ceased (*shevat*) from His *melakhah* (creative activity), and blessed that time by setting it apart (i.e., called it "holy" (*kadosh*) as a memorial of the work of His hands. The seventh day, then, first of all celebrates God's role as Creator of the universe.

Acknowledging God as Creator

Jewish thinking regards the Sabbath as a testimony that God alone is the Creator of the universe (and secondarily as a sign or memorial of the redemption from Egypt (Deut 5:15)). According to Maimonides, God first commanded that we believe in His existence and then instituted the sign of Shabbat as a perpetual testimony that He alone is the unique Creator of all things. It is regarded as more important than other *mo'edim* (holidays) since it is one of the Ten Commandments.

Note: It is sometimes argued that the Sabbath was given to Israel when the Torah was revealed to Israel at Sinai, and therefore has no applicability to the Church today. This is incorrect for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that Abraham himself was said to have observed all of the *mitzvot* (commandments), *chukkim* (ordinances) and *torah* (law) of the LORD *before* it was revealed to Moses (see Gen. 26:5). Indeed, given Abraham's unique calling, we can be sure that he recognized God alone as Creator and celebrated that fact by remembering God's Sabbath day.

Zachor - "Remembering" Shabbat

The word translated "remember" (*zachor*) means more than merely recalling something past, but suggests actively focusing the mind upon something in the present. But what are we to "remember"?

Rambam states that *zachor* implies a positive commandment (whereas the parallel commandment in Deut 5:12 that uses *shamor* (keep, observe) implies a negative commandment). *Zachor* then means "You shall call to mind," and Shabbat is therefore understood to be the climactic day of the week from which every other day of the week is to be regarded. Thus there is no "Sun day" but rather *Yom Rishon* (the first day toward the Sabbath); there is no "Moon day" (i.e., Monday), but rather *Yom Sheni* (the second day toward the Sabbath), and so on.

According to midrash (Mekilta; Shavuot 20b), both *zachor* and *shamor* were uttered in a single utterance when the Ten Commandments were revealed. This comes from drash on Psalm 62:11: "Once has God spoken; twice have I heard..."



Kedushah - Sanctifying the Day

In Hebrew, the word *kedushah* (from the root k-d-sh) means sanctity or “set-apartness” (other Hebrew words that use this root include *kadosh* (holy), *Kiddush* (sanctifying the wine at the start of Shabbat), *Kaddish* (sanctifying the Name), *kiddushin* (the ring ceremony at a marriage), and so on). *Kadosh* connotes the sphere of the sacred that is radically separate from all that is sinful and profane. As such, it is lofty and elevated (Isa. 57:15), beyond all comparison and utterly unique (Isa. 40:25), entirely righteous (Isa. 5:16), glorious and awesome (Psalm 99:3), full of light and power (Isa. 10:7), and is chosen and favored as God’s own (Ezek. 22:26). Indeed, holiness is a synonym for the LORD Himself (*Hakadosh barukh hu* - The Holy One, blessed be He).

The idea of the holy (*kadosh*) therefore implies differentiation: the realm of the holy is entirely set apart from the common, the habitual, or the profane. The holy is singular, awe-inspiring, even “terrible” or dreadful (see Neh. 1:5; Psalm 68:35). As the Holy One (*hakadosh*), God is utterly unique, distinct, sacred, and “set apart” as the only One of its kind. He alone is worthy of true worship and adoration, since He alone is peerless, without rival, and stands in relation to the world as Creator and Lord. Yes, only the Lord is infinitely and eternally Other -- known to Himself as “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:15).

Holiness, then, implies more than an abstract or indifferent “metaphysical” separation (as is suggested by various forms of dualism), but rather separation from that which is mundane (*chullin*), banal, common, or evil. In other words, holiness implies absolute moral goodness and perfection. It is impossible that the Holy One could condone sin, since this would negate the distinction between the sacred and profane and thereby undermine the nature of holiness itself. The Holy is *in opposition to the profane* and therefore the LORD must hate and oppose that which violates the sacred.

The Sabbath day is considered separated from other days of the week by esteeming it as holy. It is to be marked by *shabbaton*, resting from the usual cares and concerns of this world. Studying, resting, and enjoying time for reflection are therefore appropriate for this day.

Avodah and Melakhah

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וַעֲשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלָאכָתְךָ

Six days you shall labor and do all your work

This part of the commandment implies something that might be overlooked, namely, that we are commanded to work during the days of the week before Shabbat. The word *ta'avod* (“to labor”) is related to the word ‘*eved*, slave, which means that we are to experience Shabbat as a time of liberation from the toil of our labors. *Ta'avod* is also related to the word *avodah*, which can mean work that does not yield immediate benefit to the laborer, whereas *melakhah* (work) means work done for one’s immediate benefit (Rambam).



The phrase “do all your work” also suggests that there is nothing left to do, nothing hanging over your head, so to speak, so that you are free to rest and experience the holiness of the day.

The Seventh Day is Shabbat

יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God

The observance of Shabbat is a testimony that God is Creator and acknowledges His rule over creation. Note that this verse clearly connects the seventh day of creation with the weekly Sabbath. Since this is a Shabbat *of the LORD your God*, the time must be spent in appreciation of God’s glory.

No Melakhah

לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה כָל-מְלָאכָה

you shall not do any work

According to Rabbinical Judaism, *melakhah* (work) refers 39 types of actions based on the activities necessary for the erection of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and its contents. These 39 categories of work are called the *Avot Melakhah*, the fathers or primary categories, since they are the foundation, the original source for all secondary types of *melakhah* which are similar and derived from them. The Rabbis added additional restrictions on Shabbat based on the idea of *gezeirah*, building a “fence” around the Torah (for example, it’s permissible to serve a large meal to others on Shabbat, but it is forbidden to carry a handkerchief or flip on a light switch).

In general, *melakhah* refers to activities that are intentionally based for yielding a desired outcome or action. Thus the actions of the angels (*melakhim*) are not necessarily based on labor (*avodah*), but rather on fulfilling certain commandments from God.

It should be noted, however, that the Mashiah Yeshua did not agree with this definition of the sages. When He said “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27; Luke 6:5), he had in mind *pikuach nefesh*, the duty to save life and heal, which takes precedence over holiday prohibitions (including Shabbat). One must sacrifice *mitzvot* for the sake of man rather than sacrifice man “for the sake of mitzvot.”

Since Yeshua was the consummate Torah observant Jew, it is unthinkable that He would have deliberately violated the commandments to refrain from labor and work on this sacred day. We must remember that He was the One who gave the Torah to Moses in the first place!



No, Yeshua affirmed the true meaning of Shabbat with the things that He did. His critics accused Him of breaking the Sabbath laws, but this must be understood in reference to the “traditions of men” and additions to the teaching of the Torah. He healed on Shabbat because healing is a form of being freed from labor, which is a central message of the meaning of the Sabbath.

Universal Rest

אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ עֲבָדְךָ וְאִמָּתְךָ וּבְהֵמָתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ

you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, or your resident foreigner who is in your gates

The Sabbath rest is for all of God’s creation, and reveals the idea of social equality under the rule of the LORD. No one is excluded from this blessing, including your children, your servants, your animals, or converts to the faith. There is no second-class citizenry in relation to being part of the created order. All people, from the Kohen Gadol at the Temple to the lowliest of servants, stand in relation to God as entirely dependent and radically contingent based on His good pleasure.

Shabbat as a Sign of Creation

כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The Sabbath is our testimony that God alone is the Creator of the universe. He is the Master of time and has decreed that we remember the seventh day, Shabbat, as a memorial of His creation. Shabbat is a day of blessing wherein a “double portion” of heavenly food is provided (Ex. 16:22) and represents a foretaste of *olam haba*, the world to come.

Yeshua is our Sabbath Rest

For Messianic believers, Shabbat represents the finished work of Yeshua on our behalf and our new lives as “new creations” before the LORD God of Israel.

1. The Sabbath remembers God as our Creator (Gen 2:2; Exod. 31:12-17).



2. The Sabbath is one of the first things God blessed (Gen 2:3).
3. The Sabbath remembers *Yetziat Mitzraim* - the Exodus from Egypt (i.e., God's salvation) (Deut. 5:15).
4. The Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12).
5. Yeshua and His disciples observed the Sabbath day and its customs (Mark 1:21, 6:2; Luke 4:16).
6. The Apostle Paul observed the Sabbath (Acts 13:13-42; Acts 18:4).
7. The Sabbath provides a means of identifying with the Jewish people. Learning about the Sabbath improves your Jewish literacy to make you a more effective witness to the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matt. 10:19).
8. The Sabbath is a *delight* – not a burden; a time for celebrating your personal rest in our Messiah Yeshua (Isa. 58:13; Heb. 4:9). Indeed, all those who honor the Sabbath - including the 'foreigners' of Israel - will be given a name that is 'better than sons and daughters' that will never be cut off (Isa. 56:3-8).
9. The Sabbath will be honored in the Millennial Kingdom to come: 'From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD' (Isa. 66:23).
10. The Sabbath will be honored in the heavenly Jerusalem. The Tree of Life is said to yield 'twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month' (Rev. 22:2). Notice that the 'twelve fruits' from the Tree of Life are directly linked to the 'twelve months' of the Jewish year: 'each month rendering its fruit'. In other words, the sequence of the holidays (*moedim*) – including Shabbat - were always intended to teach us great revelation about God. That is why God created the Sun and the Moon for signs and for 'appointed times' (Gen. 1:14; Psalm 104:19).

Are we regularly setting apart a time to remember the sacred work of God in our lives? If not, we are missing out on major blessings that God intends for us. Listen to the promise of the LORD concerning Shabbat:

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 58:13-14)

Note: For information about performing a Shabbat home ceremony see the Hebrew4Christians web site.