

# THE JEWISH SABBATH (SHABBAT)

## Objectives:

- To understand the Jewish celebration of the Sabbath by looking at the customs surrounding the Shabbat meal.
- To understand the history of the Sabbath.
- To identify the Messianic significance of the Shabbat observance

Approach: "Fiddler on the Roof" video. "Shabbat" segment

(transition)

This part of "Fiddler on the Roof" has always touched me. So many of the meaningful elements of the Jewish Shabbat are demonstrated in a beautiful manner. We said last week that it has been Sabbath observance that has preserved the Jews through centuries of persecution and dispersal. It has been their observance of this holy day that has preserved them, not them preserving the observance of Sabbath. Today we will look at how Jews celebrate the Sabbath and how many aspects of their observance point to Jesus, the Messiah.

## I. HISTORY AND PURPOSE OF THE SABBATH

### A. God established the Sabbath at creation. Gen. 2:2-3

1. It is a celebration of His complete and perfect creation. Remember, it is the 7<sup>th</sup> day and "7" is the number of completion or perfection.
2. He sanctified the 7<sup>th</sup> day and made it holy.
3. He established it as a "day of rest."
  - a. God's rest had nothing to do with exhaustion and everything to do with His sense of satisfaction with all that He had created.
  - b. The Sabbath is the only holy day mentioned in the Ten Commandments. Ex. 20:8-11

### B. God intended for observance of the Sabbath to occur primarily in homes.

1. Lev. 23:1-3<sup>1</sup> *"Adonai said to Moses: 'Tell the people of Israel: The designated times of Adonai which you are to proclaim as holy convocations are my designated times. Work is to be done on six days;*

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<sup>1</sup> Sterns, 1998.

*but the seventh day is a shabbat of complete rest, a holy convocation: you are not to do any kind of work; it is a Shabbat for Adonai, even in your homes."*

2. ". . .the main center of the Sabbath observance is in the family circle at the home and many of its ceremonies are calculated to strengthen the bonds of love and affection between the members of the family, to emphasize the parental care and duties, and to increase the filial respect and reverence for parents." (Jacob & Lauterback)

### **C. Christian observance of the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday.**

1. The New Testament is totally silent with regards to the change of day for the Sabbath. This change did not occur in the early church.

2. "In 132 A.D. Bar-Kokhba led a revolt against the Romans. When he was done, 50 percent of the population of Judea was dead and tens of thousands of men and women . . . were sold into slavery. Jews were forbidden to set foot in Jerusalem, and the province was renamed Palestine."<sup>2</sup> Gradually Christians began celebrating the Sabbath on Sunday rather than on Saturday due to the need to disassociate the Christian movement from the Jewish nation.

3. At the Council of Laodicea in 364 C.E. the following statement was adopted: "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, the Sabbath, but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day (Sunday) they shall honor, and as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ."<sup>3</sup>

## **II. OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH**

### **A. Ornaments of the observance:**

1. **Tallit** (Prayer Shawl): is worn by Hebrew men on the Sabbath and other holy days. It is a sacred garment and should not be treated frivolously. It is worn as a reminder to observe all of God's holy laws.

a. The prayer shawl has four corners with fringes. "In Num. 15, God directs the Hebrews to make fringes on the borders (also called corners or wings) of their garments to remind them of God's law!"<sup>4</sup>

b. During the first century it was believed that according to Mal. 4:2 ("*The Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings*") the fringe of the Messiah's prayer shawl would have healing virtues. Thus when the woman described in Matt. 9:20 touched the fringe or

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<sup>2</sup> Scarlata, 1997, p. 450.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 47

hem of Jesus' garment or prayer shawl, she acknowledged that He was the Messiah and believed that she would be healed simply by touching His "wings."

c. The prayer shawl is sometimes pulled up over the head in order to create a "prayer closet" of intimacy and privacy with the Lord.



*Prayer Shawl*

2. **Candles:** at least two must be present on the Shabbat table. "Candles are lit on all joyous occasions and holidays, preserving a Jewish tradition that dates back at least to the time of Esther (Esther 8:16)" <sup>5</sup> The two white candles represent creation and redemption.

3. **Havdalah candle:** used at the conclusion of Shabbat on Saturday evening. It is a blue and white braided candle.



4. **Spice box (bessamen):** it is shaken and passed around to each family member at the conclusion of the Sabbath. "It signifies the fragrance of life which has just been experienced in the Sabbath."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Howard, p. 35

<sup>6</sup> Zimmerman, p. 32.

5. **Kiddush Cup:** a special goblet for wine/grape juice. The man of the house pronounces a blessing over the wine (called the Kiddush) which sanctifies the Sabbath.



6. **Challah:** braided bread. Lev. 24:5-9 God commands that this special bread be set out before the Lord on each Sabbath as a reminder of the covenant between the Hebrews and God.



B. **Order of the Observance:** this is a time of great joy among Jewish people. The Sabbath is seen as a precious gift from God and not as a joyless, legalistic requirement. It is eagerly anticipated and joyfully celebrated.

1. **Sabbath preparation:** begins early Friday and is concluded by sundown. The preparation is much like what we would do for a special guest: cleaning, cooking and everyone bathed and dressed in nice clothes. The table is set with the best dishes and tableware and a festive meal is prepared.

2. **Lighting of the candles:** marks the beginning and end of all Sabbaths and holidays. Sabbath begins at sundown, thus the candles must be lit no later than 18 minutes before sunset.

a. The woman of the house covers her head and encircles the lighted candles three times with her hand while repeating "*Blessed is He and blessed be His Name.*"

b. She then covers her eyes and recites the blessings: "*Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to light the Shabbat candles.*"

c. She might then add another brief, silent prayer for family members or recite a prayer such as the one on your handout.

d. She covers her eyes while reciting the blessing because a blessing is usually recited before the act (lighting the candles) and yet lighting the candles ushers in the Sabbath with its' prohibition against work (kindling a candle). The woman covers her eyes to deprive herself of the benefit of the candles' light--its as if the candles are not lit. Once the blessing is pronounced and the Sabbath has arrived, she uncovers her eyes and has the light!



3. **Evening Shabbat service** to welcome the Sabbath. It is held in the synagogue or in the home. Prayers and psalms are recited

4. **Kiddush**: prayer of sanctification over the wine. This is recited by the father: *Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.*"

5. **Hamotzi or blessing over the bread**: Beginning with the father each person in turn repeats the blessing over the challah: *"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."*

6. **Parental Blessing**: the father places both hands on each child, touches his lips to their forehead and recites a personal or traditional blessing over them.

a. Traditional blessing: *"May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."* (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah for the girls).

b. Personal blessing: a personalized blessing based on Scripture or on hopes and aspirations for the child's future. *Samples on handout*



7. **Spousal Blessing:** Husbands read or sing Proverbs 31:10-31 to their wives. Wives read Psalm 112 to their husband.

8. **The meal is eaten** and then thanks is given. Deut. 8:10 says, *"When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you."*

9. **Saturday morning is spent in the Synagogue.** Saturday afternoon is unstructured.



*Sabbath in Jerusalem  
Going to synagogue*

10. **Havdalah ceremony** is held on Saturday evening just after dark. "Havdalah" means separation or distinction. This is a short man-made ceremony to formally mark the end of Shabbat. The Havdalah candle is lit, the spices are shaken, wine is sipped, a final blessing is spoken and a song is sung.

### III. MESSIANIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SABBATH OBSERVANCE

A. **The Sabbath rest God ordained is more than physical rest, it is a spiritual rest as well.**

1. This spiritual rest is not accomplished through the Law but through our Messiah. Jesus said in Matt. 11:28-29 *"Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* (NIV)

2. "Entering that rest requires that we stop trying to save ourselves and rest in the finished work of Jesus."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Scarlata, 1997, p. 457.

**B. The two candles that are lit to mark the beginning of Sabbath are called the "witness candles".** They are symbolic of the two witnesses that stand before the Lord: Moses and Elijah. Lighting these candles remind us that the Messiah is witnessed throughout the Torah and the prophets. In John 8:12 Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

**C. The wine points to the shed blood of Jesus that cleanses us from sin--it makes us holy just as the wine sanctifies the Sabbath as holy.**

- a. The blessing said over the wine, *"Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth fruit from the vine."* points to Jesus who said of Himself, *"I am the vine, you are the branches."* (John 15:5)
- b. The wine points to the blood of Christ that established the New Covenant. Jesus said unto His disciples, *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."* (Mark 14:24)

**D. The bread points to the death and resurrection of Christ.**

- a. It is covered with a linen cloth while the Kiddush is recited. The cloth is then removed and the bread is lifted up while the blessing is said, *"Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth."* After his crucifixion, Jesus was laid in the earth and covered with a linen cloth, then He was lifted up from the dead and brought forth from the earth.
- b. "The Sabbath blessings have not changed since before the time of Jesus."<sup>8</sup> So when Jesus took the bread at that last Passover Seder, we know what blessing He said before breaking the bread and dispersing it to His disciples. That blessing is a prophecy regarding Jesus' resurrection.

**E. The Sabbath observance points to the millenium.** God created the Sabbath after six days of work. We are approximately six thousand years from creation and the millennial reign of Christ will be a Sabbath reign. "The Sabbath is a mirror of the world to come."<sup>9</sup>

### Conclusion:

Today is our Sabbath--a time set aside as holy unto the Lord. It was ordained by God as a reminder that our days are to be spent in work and worship. Now is the time for worship. Let us not fail at this most important work we have. Let us resolve now to enter into the worship of our body this morning and celebrate the Lord of the Sabbath.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 458.

<sup>9</sup> Scarlata, 1997, p. 459.





*Sabbath prayers at the Western (Wailing) Wall  
Jerusalem, 1999*

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