



the Sabbath *Keeping It Holy*

by Tim Kelley

^{KJV} **Exodus 20:8** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

In Isaiah 58, God indicts His people who have forgotten the intent of God's way of life. Israel had focused on form and not substance. They had taken a casual approach to God's instructions concerning His fast day¹ and had failed to understand the intent of the fast. As long as they went through the form – and everyone was doing it “their way” - that was all they were concerned about. Likewise, God indicted them in regards to their casual approach to the Sabbath. Though they were going through the motions, their minds were on other things – their jobs, what they were going to do that evening, you name it – but they were not really focused on the intent of the Sabbath and the importance YHVH placed on it.

I have been a Sabbath keeper for most of my life. I married a Sabbath keeper, and my children were raised as Sabbath keepers. But I had taken a casual approach to the Sabbath. For years I thought that “keeping the Sabbath” simply meant that at sundown on Friday I was to put the lawn mower away and turn off the TV, then spend the next twenty-four hours talking with my wife and children, sleeping, taking walks, and going to church. Sometimes we would break the Sabbath up a little by taking the children to the zoo, going to IHOP for breakfast or eating out with friends after church. Then as the clock struck 6:33 PM, or whatever the official sundown time was that day, we'd turn the TV back on and resume what we were doing 24 hours previous. *I too had become an Isaiah 58 Sabbath keeper.*

Interjected between these two indictments against Israel, God revealed the blessing that would come to those who would rise above their brothers and treat His special days with the honor they deserved. He said –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 58:12** Those from among you shall build the old waste places; You shall raise up the foundations of many generations; And you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, The Restorer of Streets to Dwell In.

Those who grab hold of God's intent in giving the Sabbaths, and implement it in their lives, will be the ones who restore the foundations of God's way of life into their families for generations to come. They will begin to close the gap that has allowed the destroyer to infiltrate the people of God.

In 1997, as part of a small home fellowship, Angie and I began to dig a little deeper into the Bible and as a result, we learned a little bit more about the Sabbath. We saw how we had been casual about our observance, and were introduced to ways we can enhance our observance of this very special day, and thus honor YHVH in it.

In this study, I want to share a few of the things we learned, and how we put them into effect in our home.

As Angie and I began to earnestly study the Bible, one of the first things we realized is that the King James translation (and most every translation for that matter) oftentimes misses the intent of the meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek words. One example that stands out is found in Moses' instructions to the generation that was about to cross the Jordan. In rehearsing the words that were spoken 40 years earlier on Mount Sinai, he said –

^{KJV} **Deuteronomy 5:12** Keep the sabbath day to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee.

Whereas at Mount Sinai God instructed the people to *remember* the Sabbath, Moses rephrased the commandment when reminding the new generation, telling them to *keep* the Sabbath. One might think that remembering and observing the Sabbath is keeping it, but that's not necessarily so. In the Biblical

¹ Yom Kippur

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sense, to *keep* the Sabbath means to *guard* and *protect* it. In the Deuteronomy 5 passage, the Hebrew word for keep is *shamar* (שָׁמַר - Strong's 8104). *Shamar* means to *guard* and protect. In Genesis 2:15, Adam was told to *shamar* the Garden of Eden, which if he had, the serpent would have more than likely not been able to deceive Eve . . . but that's another story.

How do you *guard* and *protect* the Sabbath? The scripture is not real clear, but throughout the Tnakh, there are hints as to what you can do. For instance –

- After Moses was given instructions for the Tabernacle, he was reminded to not work on the Sabbath. Since God gave similar instructions again just before construction began, the Jewish sages believe God did this so as to make it clear that you don't even build the Tabernacle of God on the Sabbath – thus 39 different categories of work were defined (Exodus 31:12; 35:1).²
- When the Jewish people rebuilding Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity, they interpreted the Torah to indicate that they should not buy and sell on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 10:31).

These were practices that were adopted in order to avoid breaking the Sabbath. As time went on, other practices were developed to help “fence in” the Sabbath. One of those fences was the *sabbath's day journey*³, a definition of how far a person could walk on the Sabbath. Being that they are not clearly delineated in the Torah, I believe it best to classify these *fences* as tradition.

Tradition is not bad. All of us have traditions. Even churches have tradition that, when a person departs from it, others get upset. For instance, if it's your church's tradition to kneel for certain prayers, if a person fails to do so, others are oftentimes offended. Thus it's good to honor another group's tradition if you're able. The primary way tradition becomes bad is when it is used to trump the Law of God. Yeshua made this very clear.

^{ESV} **Matthew 15:1-6** Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders . . . ? ³ He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' ⁵ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God, ⁶ he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word¹ of God.

When your traditions cause a person to violate God's law, that tradition is bad, but if a tradition helps a person obey God's law, then it could be considered good. An example of a Jewish tradition that helps guard the Sabbath is that of beginning the Sabbath before sundown.

Most Jewish calendars list what is called “Candle Lighting Time”. This time is traditionally 18 minutes before sundown and is considered the time when a Jewish family should light their Sabbath candles and thus usher in the Sabbath. Likewise, it's tradition to end the Sabbath when three stars are visible. These are traditions that, if a person would follow them, would insure that you are not still working when the Sabbath begins. As far as I can tell, this tradition is not even hinted at in the Tnakh or in the New Testament, and likely became a part of Jewish oral law sometime after the first century.

But there is one Sabbath-related tradition that was apparently a part of the first century Jewish culture. That tradition is called *Kiddush*.

God's word tells us to both *remember* (*zakar* – זָכַר) the Sabbath day and to *keep it holy* (*kadash* - שָׁמַר). Both of these words, *zakar* and *kadash*, are verbal root words and thus imply an action. In other words, to properly remember the Sabbath means that you must do something. For instance, when God *remembered* (*zakar*) Noah and his family - who were at the time confined to the ark - He caused a wind to blow so that the earth would begin to dry (Gen. 8:1). Likewise, when God remembered Rachel, He opened her womb so that she could conceive (Gen. 30:21).

² http://www.judaica-guide.com/39_melachot/

³ Acts 1:12 – this was actually a loosening of a much stricter law that was interpreted to mean that you cannot leave your home on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:29)

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In the same way, to make something holy – to *kadash* it – implies that you do something. *Kadash* simply means *to separate* or *to set apart*. When God made the Sabbath holy, He did so by ceasing from His creative work, thus separating it from the previous six days by making a distinction between it and the other days of the week (Genesis 2:3). If a person had been able to observe that first week, he would have seen a noticeable difference between the Sabbath and the six previous days.

Kiddush is an Aramaic word that comes from the Hebrew word *kadash*. Technically, Kiddush is the name of the prayer that's said over a glass of wine that's used to set the Sabbath apart, but has come to be used as the term for the entire Sabbath opening tradition. It usually consists of lighting candles, drinking a glass of wine (or grape juice), and sharing bread.

The Talmud records that in the early first century, there was an argument between the students of Rabbi Hillel and those of Rabbi Shammai as to which Kiddush tradition was to be done first – eating the bread, or drinking the wine, thus we know that Kiddush as part of the first century Jewish culture. That means Yeshua probably practiced this tradition along with His family and disciples.

These traditions probably came about as a result of the many challenges to Sabbath observance the Jews faced in the 1st and 2nd centuries BCE. Because of Hellenization, many Jews stopped observing the Sabbath. This led to the rise of the various Jewish sects, of which the Pharisees rose to the top. The Pharisees tried to lead the Jews back into the practice of strict Torah observance by establishing various traditions. Kiddush was probably one of them.

Kiddush begins by lighting candles, a chore the women in the house usually takes care of. There is no clear understanding of where or when the tradition of candle lighting began, but many believe it's origin stemmed from the fact that as the evening progresses, it gets dark, and since the Sabbath is supposed to be an *oneg* – literally a delight – it's more delightful to eat food you can see.

As the tradition of candle lighting continued through the ages, it acquired a meaning of it's own based on the scripture –

^{ESV} **Psalm 119:105** ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

As with everything Jewish, there is a blessing that's recited when lighting the Sabbath candles. In Hebrew it goes -

“baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melach ha'olam, asher kidishanu b'mitz'votav v'tzivanu l'had'leek nershel Shabbat”

The literal translation is -

“Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us to kindle the light of Shabbat”

Many non-Jews take issue with the latter part of the blessing where it indicates that we are commanded to kindle the Sabbath lights, but it's helpful to see the Jewish reasoning. It's really quite simple –

If we're commanded to set the Sabbath apart from the other days, and if we choose to begin the Sabbath by lighting candles, then we're commanded to light candles. It's the “if A=B, and B=C, then A=C” concept.

The sages teach that you should light the candles first, then say the blessing, because it's actually the blessing that signals the beginning of the Sabbath. In addition, they teach that once the blessing has been recited, the Sabbath has begun, even if it's recited an hour before sundown.

The next step in the traditional Kiddush ceremony is to drink a glass of wine or grape juice. According to the tradition, you and everyone at your Sabbath table takes a small glass of wine or grape juice in their right hand and recite the following blessing -

“baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melach ha olam, bereh perie ha gafen”

Again, the literal translation is -

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.”

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If a person were to follow the traditional Kiddush ceremony, the next step would be what's called *Netilat Yadayim* or *lifting up the hands*⁴. This is a ritual washing that's performed for the purpose of ceremonial purity and is derived from Leviticus 15:11. It's not actually a part of Kiddush, but we'll discuss it anyway.

As with many traditions, there's no clear understanding where and when the tradition began. One theory is that 100 BCE the Pharisees, out of frustration by the fact that the office of High Priest was being sold by the Romans, and that the priesthood had become corrupt, the Pharisees began to teach that each Jewish man was a priest and the table was an altar. Thus, you should approach the table with ritually pure hands. After the destruction of the Temple, that belief became even more widespread.

This practice is mentioned a number of places in the New Testament –

^{NKJ} **Mark 7:1** Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes came together to Him, having come from Jerusalem. ² Now when they saw some of His disciples eat bread with defiled, that is, with unwashed hands, they found fault. ³ For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash *their* hands in a special way, holding the tradition of the elders.

If you continue on in this passage, you'll notice that Yeshua does not condemn the tradition; He instead condemns the Pharisee's willingness to put their traditions above the Torah. In regards to hand washing, the Pharisees believed that simply washing their hands made them ceremonially pure, yet the words that came out of their mouths corrupted their followers if they were contrary to the Torah.

Because ritual hand washing is technically a part of every Jewish meal, it is only a part of the Sabbath *Kiddush* ceremony because it begins a meal. Thus we'll talk about the associated blessings some other time.

The final step in the traditional Kiddush ceremony is called *Hamotzi*. *HaMotzi* literally means "the bringing out", or "who brings forth". On the Sabbath table there are normally two loaves of bread called *challah*, a Hebrew word that means pierced cake⁵. The normal explanation for why there are two loaves is that God gave a double portion of manna on Friday in preparation for the Sabbath. The challah loaves are normally braided with six strands to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

Moses makes a clear connection between Torah and bread. In explaining God's way to the generation of Israelites who would cross the Jordan and enter the promised land, he said –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 8:2-3** ² "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you *and* test you, to know what *was* in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³ "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

You would think that the Hebrew word *dabar* would be found in this passage, but it does not. Instead, the phrase "by every word that proceeds" comes from the Hebrew words **עַל-כֹּל-מִצֵּא** (*al-kol-motzi*) which literally means "all that proceeds". So the bread of God is all that proceeds from His mouth. So when we break the challah bread and eat it, it can symbolize eating the Torah, the words that proceed from the mouth of God.

In many homes, it's the tradition for the children to lift up the challah as the traditional *HaMotzi* blessing is recited, possibly symbolizing that our children, just like the second generation in the wilderness, will eventually grow up with the responsibility to teach God's way, His Torah, to their families as well – hopefully in the Promised Land.

Like the wine that has its own blessing, the challah has a blessing as well. It's called *HaMotzi*, and it goes like this -

⁴ A reference to the position of the hands after they're washed

⁵ Strong's H2471

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“baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu melach ha olam, haMotzi lechem mein ha-aret”

Which when translated to English is -

“Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

So now the Sabbath has begun. We've made a clear distinction between it and the previous week, but how do we end the Sabbath in order to separate it from the coming week. To do this, the Jews have a ceremony called *Havdala* (הַבְּדִילָה). *Havdala* comes from the word *badal* (בָּדַל) which means to separate or divide. Thus *Havdala* literally means *the separation* or *the division*. In the creation week, God *separated* (*badal*) the light from the darkness, the day from the night.

Havdala is traditionally done at the appearance of three stars in the evening sky. Waiting for three stars to appear forces you to wait a few minutes after sundown, thus preventing you from encroaching upon the Sabbath. It's just another way to *shamar* – guard, the Sabbath.

Though there are variations to this ceremony, it typically begins by lighting a *havdala* candle which is a candle with two or more wicks. Each person passes their fingers by the light of the candle so as to see the light through their fingertips. Wine is then poured into a glass and allowed to overflow into the dish below. The wine is shared by all present. The overflowing wine symbolizes the overflowing joy of the Shabbat. Spices are then passed around to remind you of the sweetness of the Sabbath, and then the candle is extinguished in the wine-filled dish.

There are four individual prayers associated with *Havdala*. They are –

1. When lighting the candle -

(Hebrew) - *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, bo're m'orei ha-esh.*

(English) - *Blessed are You, LORD, our God, King of the universe, who creates the lights of the fire.*

2. Before drinking the wine (grapejuice) -

(Hebrew) - *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, bo're p'ri hagafen.*

(English) - *Blessed are You, LORD, our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.*

3. Before smelling the spices -

(Hebrew) - *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, bo're minei b'samim*

(English) - *Blessed are You, LORD, our God, King of the universe, who creates varieties of spices.*

4. Before extinguishing the candle.

(Hebrew) - *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha-olam, ha-mavdil bein kodesh l'hol, bein or l'hoshekh, bein yisra'el la-amim, bein yom ha-sh'vi'i l'sheshet y'mei ha-ma'a'se. Barukh ata Adonai, ha-mavdil bein kodesh l'hol.*

(English) - *Blessed are You, LORD, our God, King of the universe, who distinguishes between the sacred and the secular, between light and dark, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six days of labor. Blessed are You, LORD, who distinguishes between the sacred and the secular.*

This last blessing is particularly important as we see the society around us crumbling and the line between what is good and wholesome versus what is bad and degenerate being quickly erased.

We have just touched on the symbolism of these traditions. There is much more that you could dig out of each, especially for those who believe that Yeshua is indeed Israel's Messiah. You can also find the

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bread/wine pattern scattered throughout the scripture, especially in regards to the making of a covenant and fellowship.

The question for those of us who see value in learning about the culture of the first century Jewish people, as well as the culture of the Hebrew people throughout the ages, is whether we want to incorporate these traditions, variations of them, or even our own traditions, into our Sabbath observance so that we too can *shamar* and *kadosh* the Shabbat. Traditions strengthen families, and if we hope that our children will become the Repairers of the Breach as is indicated in Isaiah 58, we might want to consider making Sabbath related traditions part of our observance.

To help us decide, let's consider the words of the Apostle Paul to the believers in Thessalonica –

^{ESV} **2 Thessalonians 2:15** So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions⁶ that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

Shalom Alecheim

⁶ paradosis – Strong's 3682 – 9 out of 13 times used it clearly refers to the Jewish traditions of the first century