

What is a believer to be doing on the Sabbath? Many believe it is a time to follow Messiah Yeshua's example and attend the assembly of God's people, i.e. the "synagogue" service, while others believe it is a time to rest and relax.

Resting on the Sabbath is the basic understanding, and it's easy to see why. Practically all Hebrew words that have to do with changing your normal work routine are translated "rest" in English bibles, even though the words actually mean something else when used in context.

In this study, we're going to look at six of those words (there are a number of others) and by doing so, hopefully find a deeper understanding of the Sabbath and what we are called to do on it.

Shabbat

We'll start with the word "shabbat" which is first used in the creation story.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 2:2-3** And on the seventh day God ended (kalah) His work (melakah) which He had done, and He rested (shabbat) on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. ³ Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested (shabbat) from all His work which God had created and made.

This passage contains three Hebrew words that we need to know if we are going to understand what the scripture is saying. They are:

- kalah (3615 כָּלָה) – accomplished, finish, end, complete
- mela'kah (4399 מְלָאכָה) – occupation, work, business
- shabbat (7673 שַׁבָּת) - to cease, desist, rest

"Mela'kah" implies that God's occupation is to create, and for six days that is what He did, and because He used the word "kalah" in the passage above, that indicates that His work of creating was completed on the sixth day. Thus, at the end of the sixth day, He ceased from creating – He had finished what He had set out to do. There is no indication that He rested because -

^{NKJ} **Psalms 121:4** Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 40:28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.

Right here at the beginning, we can see that God did not rest on the Sabbath, instead, He ceased from what He had been doing the previous six days. This should serve as a basis from which we try to determine subsequent instructions pertaining to the Sabbath.

Another place we see the word "shabbat" is in the exodus story -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 5:4-5** Then the king of Egypt said to them, "Moses and Aaron, why do you take (para) the people from their work? Get *back* to your labor." ⁵ And Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land *are* many now, and you make them rest (shabbat) from their labor!"

This passage seems to indicate that Moses instructed the Hebrews "rest" from their work, thus giving a different meaning to the word "shabbat" than what we found in Genesis 2:2-3; but is that really the case?



The word “para” (6544 פָּרַע) that’s used in the passage means “ to lead, let go, loose, to cause to refrain”. It does not mean “rest”. What Moses had apparently told the Israelites was that they could stop working. This wasn’t a work slow-down, it was a work stoppage. Apparently, Moses believed that YHWH was going to just release the Israelites within a few hours, or at most a few days. Obviously, he was wrong, and because of his mis-guided instructions, the Israelite’s work load was increased.

What we’ve seen so far is that at least in these passages, the word “shabbat” implies “ceasing”, but not necessarily “resting”. Let’s now look at the 4th of the Ten Commandments -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 20:8-11** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates. ¹¹ For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested (nuwach) the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it

In this passage we find the term “nuwach” which is another word that commonly translated “rest”. We’ll discuss that word in more detail later.

In the context of the passage, God is saying to work for six days, then cease from working on the seventh. Not only is the Hebrew to cease from working, so is the rest of your family, your servants, and your animals. Though you might keep them from doing work for you, you can’t necessarily make them “rest”. To me, this is the clearest example of what He meant when He said we are to “Shabbat”.

Shamat

Let’s now look at another passage in Exodus, this time regarding the Land Sabbath

^{NKJ} **Exodus 23:10-12** Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, ¹¹ "but the seventh *year* you shall let it rest (shamat) and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard *and* your olive grove. ¹² "Six days you shall do your work (ma’asah), and on the seventh day you shall rest (shabbat), that your ox and your donkey may rest (nuwach), and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed (naphash)

Here we find different word for rest – “shamat” (8058 שָׁמַת) which means to release, let loose, let drop.

We also find two other significant words – “ma’aseh (4639 מַעֲשֵׂה) which is the noun form of asah – (6213 עָשָׂה) which means “to do, make, fashion”, and the word naphash (5314 נָפַשׁ) – which means “to refresh”.

Though a different word (shamat) is used, in this case it means much the same as “shabbat”. After all, you’re being instructed to do basically the same thing on the seventh year of the cycle as you were on the seventh day of the weekly cycle, that is to cease from doing what you were doing the past 6 years – planting and reaping. By doing so, you give the land and opportunity to replenish itself.

Though I’m not a soil scientist, I do understand that when the soil lies fallow, it doesn’t necessarily rest. Instead, tiny organisms along with worms and other plant & animal life work to replenish the nutrients in the soil so it will once again be able to grow abundant crops.

Though the context of the passage deals with the Land Sabbath, it also mentions the command to work for six days and to cease from working on the seventh. Whereas YHWH rested on the seventh day from his “mela’kah” of creating, we are to cease from our work of “ma’asah” or fashioning things out of what God had created.



Note that YHVH gave us a reason for this 7th day ceasing from our work of “fashioning”. It is so that we can be “refreshed”. That’s interesting, because God said the same thing of Himself.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 31:17** 'It (the Sabbath) *is* a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested (shabbat) and was refreshed (naphash).

Yes – the creator of the universe apparently needed - or at least wanted to be refreshed, and so He created by His Word the universe and all the stars and planets, then fashioned man out of the dirt from the planet He called Earth, and as a result – He was “refreshed”.

The term “refreshed” is from the Hebrew word “naphash” (5314 נָפַשׁ) which is basically the same word as “nephesh” (5315 נֶפֶשׁ) or “soul” – a creature that when God breathed into it, became a “living soul”. So maybe the reason we need the Sabbath is so we can have the breath of God breathed into us every seven days and thereby be “refreshed” as well.

Shabbathown

Another term that is oftentimes translated “rest” is the word “shabbathown” (7677 שַׁבְּתוֹן) which is simply a Sabbath observance. In many translations we see it rendered as “Sabbath rest” or “Sabbath of rest”. It is oftentimes coupled with the proper name “Sabbath” as in “Sabbath shabbathown”. Though it is usually translated “rest”, there is no rest implied except for the rest that might come from “ceasing” to do the work one would do on the previous six days. Here’s an example –

^{NKJ} **Exodus 16:23** Then he said to them, "This *is what* the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow *is* a Sabbath rest (shabbathown), a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Bake what you will bake *today*, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.'..."

This, obviously, is the story of the manna that came down from God. The Hebrews were instructed to gather it for 6 days, and on the sixth day to gather and bake or boil enough for both the sixth day and the Sabbath so that no gathering or cooking would take place on the Sabbath. In the context, there is no indication of resting, but rather ceasing from gathering and cooking. Though rest could be a byproduct of not having to spend the time and effort to gather and cook the manna, the text does not imply that the additional free time could not be used in other ways.

This next passage has to do with the work that would be required in building the Tabernacle.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 31:15** 'Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh *is* the Sabbath of rest (shabbat shabbathown), holy to the LORD. Whoever does *any* work (mela'kah) on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.

The Hebrew’s primary occupation during that time was simply “building the tabernacle”, and so it was quite clear to Moses what God was meaning. It is interesting to note that the scriptures pertaining to God’s instructions regarding the design of the Tabernacle and the gathering of materials for its construction are “bookended” between His instructions pertaining to the Sabbath. In other words, God was telling Moses that even while building His residence on Earth, the people were to cease that work on the Sabbath.¹

The book of Leviticus introduces the understanding that one of the reasons we are to cease from our daily work is to be able to set apart time for the “micra”, the called assembly or holy convocation.

¹ The other “bookend” is Exodus 35:2-3



^{NKJ} **Leviticus 23:3** Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* a Sabbath of solemn rest (shabbathown), a holy convocation (miqra). You shall do no work *on it*; *it is* the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.

A “miqra” (1744 מִקְרָא) is a calling together, a sacred assembly. In other words, it’s a time that God calls his people to gather together. The root word of “miqra” is “qara” (7121 קָרָא) which means - among a number of other things - “to recite, read, and proclaim”. With this, we can begin to see that on the Sabbath we are to cease from our work so that we can meet together to “recite, read, and proclaim”.

The last instance of “shabbathown” that I want to discuss is in the context of the Land Sabbath.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 25:3-5** Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; ⁴ 'but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest (shabbat shabbathown) for the land, a sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. ⁵ 'What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, *for* it is a year of rest (shabbathown) for the land.

Once again, the context is very clear – you sow and reap for six years, and on the 7th year you cease from sowing and reaping. The land might still produce fruit (it doesn’t “rest”), but it will do so without any intervention from man.

I wanted to explain the words “shabbat”, “shamat” and “shabbathown” first because when it comes to REST, these words are a part of God’s overall plan to bring the true REST to all mankind. The sabbaths (both weekly and annually) are not the plan, but they are there to keep us focused on the plan.

Nuwach

Let’s now move on to a couple of words that actually do imply REST. The first is “nuwach” (5117 נוּוַח) which means “to rest, settle down, remain”. As is the case with most Hebrew root words, the consonants that make the word “nuwach” create a picture that is associated with pictographic meaning of its consonants, which in this case are ‘noon – vav – chet’. In the illustration below, the ancient Paleo glyphs create a picture that means “to continue securely outside”.

noon	נ	fish, grandson, continue, endure (Ps. 72:17)	}	to continue securely outside
vav	ו	tent peg, secure		
chet	ח	wall, hedge, outside, protect		

This is seen in the example of how Noah’s ark came to rest in the hill country² of Ararat..

^{NKJ} **Genesis 8:4** Then the ark rested (nuwach) in the seventh month, the seventeenth day of the month, on the mountains of Ararat.

For months the ark had been tossed around by the wind and waves, but finally it was coming to rest. But not only was it coming to rest, it was coming to rest in a different era. The violence of the storm was now behind them, just as the violence of mankind was now over. The world was now a clean slate – a new and refreshing start for mankind. Not only was the ark at rest. Now Noah and his family could be at rest as well.

² The Hebrew word “har” (Strong’s 2022) has a number of meanings including “hill country”. See Deut. 8:9; Joshua 13:6, 21:11; Psalm 50:10. We’ll see more as we move on.



Another place we see “nuwach” is in the story of the plagues of the Exodus.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 10:14** And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested (nuwach) on all the territory of Egypt. *They were* very severe; previously there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them.

As you will recall, the locusts flew into Egypt from all parts of the earth and settled in Egypt where they, for the next several days, ate all the produce of the land that had not been destroyed by the hail. In this case, the locusts “settled down” and ate until Moses ended the plague.

Finally, we’ll look at the case of Moses holding his rod during the battle with the Amalekites.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 17:11** And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down (nuwach) his hand, Amalek prevailed.

³⁴In the story, Moses stood holding his rod over his head, and as long as he did, Joshua advanced in the battle with the Amalekites. But when Moses’ arms got tired and he lowered the rod to rest his arms, the Amalekites advanced on Joshua. After a while, Aaron and Hur found a rock for Moses to sit on, each of them held up one of his hands. Thus the stone, along with Aaron and Hur’s support, provided rest for Moses’ arms, which in turn provide the Hebrews “rest” from the Amalekites.

Going back to the word picture formed by the letters, we see that “rest” is when you feel just as safe and secure outside the protective walls of the city as you do inside the walls. It’s like sheep, who feel secure while inside the sheep pen, but who also feel secure in an open pasture as long as their shepherd is with them. It’s like David’s 23rd psalm –

The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still (menuwach) waters. ³ He restores my soul ...

In Hebrew thought, a place of rest is when you are in the open plain, where you can see if your enemies are near, and where you have many options for escape.



Manowach

The next two words in our study are rooted in the word “nuwach”. The first is “manowach” (מנוח 4494) which means “the state or condition of rest”. We find it in the story of Noah.

^{NKJ} **Genesis 8:6-9** So it came to pass, at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made. ⁷ Then he sent out a raven, which kept going to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth. ⁸ He also sent out from himself a dove, to see if the waters had receded from the face of the ground. ⁹ But the dove found no resting place (manowach) for the sole of her foot, and she returned into the ark to him, for the

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waters *were* on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took her, and drew her into the ark to himself.

The phrase “found no resting place for the sole of her foot” does not necessarily mean that there was no visible land on which she could light, but rather nothing for her to eat. Thus there was no place that would provide her needs – a place to light and food to eat,

When Noah released the raven, it obviously found the remains of a few dead animals that it could eat. The dove, on the other hand, eats mostly seeds, fruits, and vegetables along with an occasional live insect. Being that the ark rested in the spring of the year (the months were reversed in Ex. 12), it was still too early for these to grow. Nevertheless, seven days later the dove plucked an olive branch which indicates that nearby trees were beginning to blossom, but apparently there was still nothing for her to eat. Seven days later, she found food to eat. With her needs fulfilled, she now had a place to “rest”.

Another example of ‘manowach’ is found in the story of Ruth and Boaz. In the story, Naomi had hoped that after the death of their husbands, her daughters-in-law could find rest (manowach) in the home of their parents.

^{NKJ} **Ruth 1:8-9** And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹ "The LORD grant that you may find rest (manowach), each in the house of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

Though one of the daughters-in-law did return, Ruth chose to stay with Naomi and follow her back to Judea. There, Naomi noted that Ruth was gleaning in the fields of Boaz, a near kinsman, and hoping to find “rest” for Ruth, she tried to orchestrate a marriage between her and Boaz

^{ESV} **Ruth 3:1-2** Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, should I not seek rest (manowach) for you, that it may be well with you? ² Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor.

As the story goes, Ruth and Boaz did get married and Ruth did find “rest”. Of their offspring came King David, one who brought “rest” to all Israel.

“Manowach” is the type of rest a woman should have once she is married – the sense of security that her husband will protect, provide for, and love her. For believers in YHVH, we should find that same rest since we are in fact “married to the Messiah”

Menuwchah

Whereas “manowach” is “the state or condition of rest”, our next word ‘menuwchah’ (4496 מְנוּחָה) is “a place of rest”. We first find it in a prophecy given to Jacob’s son Issachar which states that his descendants would end up in a good place of rest (Gen. 49:15), but the next place we find ‘menuwchah’ gives us an understanding of what true rest really is. The passage is in the context of the Israelites leaving Mount Sinai for what could have been their entry into the Promised Land.

^{NKJ} **Numbers 10:33-36** So they departed from the mountain of the LORD on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them for the three days' journey, to search out a resting place (menuwchah) for them ... ³⁵ So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: "Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You." ³⁶ And when it rested (nuwach), he said: "Return, O LORD, To the many thousands of Israel."



As Israel made their way northward from Mount Sinai, they would follow YHVH who was in the cloud. But when the cloud stopped moving, it is assumed that YHVH had found a resting place (menuwach), so Moses would cry out for YHVH to return to being in the midst of His people.

God being among his people implied a number of things to the Hebrew people, including:

- Protection from their enemies
- Rain in due season (abundant crops)
- Righteous judgments (which implies a righteous ruler)

But that first generation of Hebrews did not find many resting places. Within days of leaving Mount Sinai, they had rebelled a number of times and God finally had to cast them off as described further on in the story –

^{NKJ} **Numbers 14:22** ... because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, ²³ certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.

This event is described in a psalm called “the Psalm of the Sabbath” –

^{NKJ} **Psalm 95:10-11** For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation, And said, 'It is a people who go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' ¹¹ So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest (menuwach).'

We know that the “rest” spoken of here was the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, a place where God would dwell among them, protect them, and provide for them.

So these people who were saved by grace, had entered into a marriage covenant with the God of the universe, and had seen God visibly dwelling in their midst, lost out on the rest that God had promised them. Yet over and over, YHVH offered His rest to a generation that would walk in His ways, and forty years later, Moses told the 2nd generation –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 12:8-9** "You shall not at all do as we are doing here today -- every man doing whatever *is* right in his own eyes – ⁹ "for as yet you have not come to the rest (menuwach) and the inheritance which the LORD your God is giving you.

Based on the context of Moses' statement, “doing whatever is right in his own eyes” implied offering sacrifices just anywhere – a practice that was available to the patriarchs, but not to the Hebrew nation. Once they were firmly established in the promised land, and after God had driven out their enemies, the Tabernacle services, with their structured praise, worship, and offerings would be expected of the people. At that point, as Moses went on to say, the people would have entered God's “menuwach” – His rest.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 12:10** "But *when* you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest (nuwach) from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety ..."

God followed through on all that Moses had said. He provided the “rest” that He had wanted to give Israel all along –

^{NKJ} **Joshua 21:43** So the LORD gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. ⁴⁴ The LORD gave them rest (nuwach) all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the LORD delivered all their enemies into their hand. ⁴⁵ Not a word failed of any good thing which the LORD had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.



God fought their battles, drove out most of the Canaanites, and apparently gave them rain in due season so that in a short time their storehouses were full. They were at “rest” – a sense of security they had never witnessed since the days of Joseph. But their rest did not last very long. Within 40 years, the Israelites were once again worshipping idols⁵ and subsequently entered a roller coaster ride of idolatry, followed by God sending them a deliverer, followed by a short period of peace where they would once again fall into idolatry.

Nevertheless, God continued to offer Israel the rest He had promised for generations. Roughly 300 years after Joshua died, God raised up David as king over Israel. David subdued Israel’s enemies and brought prosperity to the land. God called that rest “menuwachah”⁶. He then promised that David’s son Solomon would continue to lead Israel in God’s rest -

^{NKJ} **1 Chronicles 22:9** “... (he) shall be a man of rest (menuwachah); and I will give him rest (nuwach) from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days.”

Peace and quietness. No problems with neighboring countries. People who could focus on making a living and feeding their family. No pandemics. Just prosperity and righteous judgments coming from a righteous king.

But even the “menuwachah” under Solomon was short – lived. After a number of years, Solomon himself succumbed to idolatry, and as a result, the kingdom was divided. Though Joshua, David, and Solomon gave Israel a type of rest, the real rest is still yet to come. This is made clear by the writer of the book of Hebrews –

^{NKJ} **Hebrews 4:8-11** ... or if Joshua had given them rest (katapauo) , then he⁷ would not afterward have spoken of another day. ⁹ There remains therefore a rest (sabbatismos) for the people of God. ¹⁰ For he who has entered His rest (katapausis) has himself also ceased from his works as God *did* from His. ¹¹ Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest (katapausis), lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

The writer is basically saying that even though Joshua did lead Israel into a period of rest, the eternal rest promised by God to Israel has yet to be obtained. Note that there are three different words translated “rest” in this passage - even though they different meanings. The first word – “katapauo” (2664) - means “to make quiet; cause to be at rest” and is equivalent to the Hebrew word “nuwach” as found in Joshua 22:4. The second – “sabbatismos” (4520) – means “a Sabbath keeping by ceasing” as does the word “shabbat” in Genesis 2:2. The third word – “katapausis” (2663) means “calming the winds, a resting place” and is equivalent to “menuwachah” in Deuteronomy 12:9.

The writer of Hebrews is saying that Moses spoke of another (end-time) rest for the people of Israel that would come after the scattering of Israel through the nations, and that this rest would come about as a result of the actions of the Messiah who finished His work⁸ and has entered His eternal rest. We can also enter that rest by avoiding the pitfalls that were prevalent in Joshua’s day, which were unbelief that led to idolatry. One way to avoid it is by keeping the Sabbath the way God intended – that is by ceasing from our own work and participating in the commanded assembly.

Dropping back to verse one, the writer says –

⁵ Joshua 24:15-15

⁶ 2 Samuel 7:1

⁷ Moses – See Deut. 30:1-9

⁸ Yeshua’s work is that of saving. Matthew 1:21



^{NKJ} **Hebrews 4:1** Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest (katapauo = menuwchah⁹), let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. ² For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. ³ For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest,' " although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

From the beginning, God put in place the way by which we can enter His rest, and it's very simple - believe what He says, and do it! Adam was given the opportunity, and he blew it. Noah was given a clean slate, but he and his offspring never achieved it. God started again with Abraham, but he never saw it, but the opportunity was passed on to Abraham's descendants.

God is offering us His REST – His “menuwchah”. He's give us an opportunity to live and serve Him in His Kingdom, and to make it possible for countless others to learn of His ways and become a part of His kingdom as well.

The key to achieving that rest is found in the Sabbath day, a day of ceasing so you can study His word and therefore build your FAITH. Let us all enter into His Sabbath Rest!

Shalom Alecheim

⁹ LXX uses same word in these passages