



Christians and Shabbat -

Celebration not Obligation...

הַשַּׁבָּת הוּכַן בְּעִבּוּר הָאָדָם וְלֹא הָאָדָם בְּעִבּוּר הַשַּׁבָּת

Shabbat was made for man, and not man for Shabbat.

- Jesus



Jesus our Sabbath Rest

Since the Sabbath was part of the terms of the covenant given to Israel on Mt. Sinai (i.e., it was part of the *sefer habrit* given to Moses, and ratified by the 70 elders of Israel through the shedding of the sacrificial blood of animals), Christians are *not* “legally” required to observe its sanctity as defined by Jewish religious authorities. In fact, we *cannot* attempt to merit righteousness through rule-following behaviors, no matter how noble or beautiful, since we trust that the finished *work of Jesus* is what makes us right before God (Titus 3:5; Eph 2:8-9).

Indeed, the Lord Jesus is the Substance of all the shadows and patterns we find in the Torah of Moses (Col 2:16-17). Jesus’ ministry is that of mediation of a better covenant, based upon better promises (Heb 8:6-7). He is the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) of the true *mishkan* (tabernacle) not made by human hands, who, through His sacrificial death, has forever obtained an eternal redemption for those who trust in Him (Heb 9:11-12). *It is finished!* Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. He came to give us life in abundance! He came to set us free from the demands of the Torah and its righteous judgment upon us. Those who attempt to “serve” in the Tabernacle of Levi (i.e., under the ritual expression of the covenant given to Moses), have no right to the altar of God’s grace (Heb 13:10).

The Lord Jesus is our Sabbath rest (Heb 4:9), the Giver of peace (John 14:27). He is the One who heals us and delivers us from the shame of our sinful condition. In short, Jesus is the fulfillment, goal, and answer of all that the Torah of Moses requires of mankind, and we are made right with God by means of His love for us.

“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this Man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by Him everyone who believes is *freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the Torah of Moses.*” (Acts 13:39)



So why observe Shabbat?

So why bother with Shabbat? Why should we learn about this special day that the LORD appointed for His people through the Torah of Moses? Let me give a few reasons:

1. Shabbat remembers God's creation (Gen 2:2).
2. Shabbat is one of the first things God blessed (Gen 2:3).
3. Shabbat remembers the Exodus from Egypt (i.e., God's salvation) (Deut 5:15).
4. Shabbat is one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12).
5. The Lord Jesus and His disciples observed Shabbat (Mark 1:21, 6:2; Luke 4:16).
6. The Apostle Paul observed Shabbat (Acts 13:13-42; Acts 18:4).
7. Shabbat provides a means of identifying with the Jewish people. Learning about Shabbat improves your Jewish literacy to make you a more effective witness to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:19).
8. Shabbat is a delight – not a burden; a time for celebrating your personal rest in our Mashiach Yeshua (Heb. 4:9).

We are free to celebrate Shabbat

Shabbat observance is a *means to an end, not an end in itself*. As the Lord Jesus taught us, "Shabbat was made for man, and not man for Shabbat" (Mark 2:27). In other words, Shabbat is a gift of God to us, a time of rest and reflection, a joyful time set apart from the busy week when we can focus on what is really important in our lives.

Christians are *not* obligated to observe Shabbat on Saturday; nonetheless we are invited to celebrate a holy day of separation each week. "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." (Rom 14:5-6). This is a "weaker brother" issue. We are free to worship the LORD on any day of the week, but note well that we are to worship and to enjoy the principles of *shevat*, or rest in the LORD.

If you perform a Shabbat home ceremony (i.e., Shabbat Seder), please keep these matters firmly in mind. You are not effecting any sort of spiritual merit by performing rituals or acts of tradition, since the Lord Jesus is our Torah righteousness before the Father. We are not made right with God through anything other than the shed blood of Jesus on the cross for our sins!

Let me also add that we should *not* observe a Shabbat Seder in the presence of brothers or sisters who may feel that it is "legalistic" or an attempt at "self-righteousness." Whenever possible we should follow the principle of charity in these matters and yield ourselves to the needs of others. We understand that we are free to enjoy this tradition and to learn from it, but we should not do so if it injures the faith of one our brothers or sisters in the LORD.

May the Lord God of Israel help us all steer clear of the perils of legalism and self-righteousness! It is only through Jesus, our precious Mashiach, that we are given true rest by the grace of God. Amen.