



## **Parasha Bereshit**

October 22, 2022

*Torah:* Genesis 1:1 - 6:8

*Haftarah:* Isaiah 42:5 - 43:10

*Ketuvim Shlichim:* John 1:1-5

*Shabbat Shalom mishpacha.* Our *parasha* today is *Bereshit*, Genesis in English. The word is composed of the letter *beit*, a preposition meaning “in” and “*reshit*” meaning beginning. As we looked at the very beginning of our own *Torah* scroll this past *Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah*, we saw *Bereshit* with a large *beit*, similar to this: בְּרֵאשִׁית. The reason it is there is uncertain. Some say that it’s because of mysticism or *kaballah* and some say that when the *Torah* was five separate scrolls, the large letter at the beginning of each identified the beginning. We didn’t put it there, but for us, it is something different, a highly anticipated sign of ADONAI’s ongoing and repeating account of His relationship with Israel, of which we are a part. It means to us that His act of creation is extremely important and it is a delight for us to get to see this large letter once each year. It is a symbol for us, a symbol of not only the story of the beginning of our universe created by G-d, but also a new beginning each year as we anxiously follow the *Torah* cycle of reading each of the five books of *Torah*.

The seven days of creation in *Bereshit* were crowned by G-d’s resting on the seventh day. *2 God completed—on the seventh day—His work that He made, and He ceased—on the seventh day—from all His work that He made. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, for on it He ceased from all His work that God created for the purpose of preparing.* (Genesis 2:2-3 TLV). When G-d sanctified the seventh day of the week, He set it apart, made it holy. This is our first notification of the seventh day of rest which He will later prescribe in the *Torah*. It is here in Genesis chapter 2 that we learn that this is the day which ADONAI established as a day for rest and communion with Him.

Israel, the Jews, learned this early on and honored the *Shabbat*. Whether or not they honored it before their encounter with ADONAI in Egypt, we don’t know. We do know that ADONAI’s first mention of the Sabbath to Israel was just prior to giving the *Torah* at Mount Sinai. Approximately thirty days after leaving Egypt, He gave them manna and instructed that they not gather it on the seventh day, gathering enough on the sixth day. This was a glimpse of what was to be commanded at Mount Sinai. After Canaan was conquered, we don’t know exactly how Israel observed the Sabbath, except that on it they did not work or build fires. Later on, after the Babylonian captivity, the Jews themselves, the group which was to become the Pharisees, began to set up rules, *halacha*, to govern their *Shabbat* activities.

Those rules are still in effect today for the observant Jew, *halacha* based upon the different types of work required to build the Tabernacle in the wilderness. That there were 39 types of work, *melachot*, that were required to build the Tabernacle was only finalized sometime after 300 CE by Rabbi Akiva and his school. Yes, the same Rabbi Akiva who proclaimed *Bar Kosiba*, Son of a Lie, as *Bar Kokhba*, Son of a Star, to be *Mashiach* of Israel

prior to the second Roman War against Israel (and their defeat around 330 CE). For the orthodox and *Chassidim* today, those rules are now firmly established.

*Halakha*, הלכה, means “the way we walk” and is derived from the word *halak*, הלך, meaning “to walk.” It is religious walking, a system of rules which is reinterpreted generation by generation to apply to observant Jews. Re-interpretation is necessary because of new inventions. This means for the observant that the building of an actual fire now also includes the driving of a car which produces a spark and the turning on or off of an electrical switch for lights which may produce a spark. In Israel, this means that on *Shabbat*, the elevators constantly run up and down, stopping at each floor. You can’t push a button on *Shabbat*. It also means that in the hotels on *Shabbat*, room lights come on and go off by a hotel timer. These devices are also available for use in observant homes. No flipping switches. The original rules are written in the two *Talmuds*, Jerusalem and Babylonian and were originally written in the *Mishnah*, the Oral *Torah* which was written down in the year 200 CE. It is law for the observant Jew, equal in weight to the written *Torah* of Moses.

As Messianic Jews and Gentiles, we also honor the seventh day *Shabbat* because G-d sanctified it, set it apart, to be a holy day as is told in Genesis 2. We also understand what the *Torah* says about the *Shabbat*, that we are to do no laborious work and to rest from working. We do not follow the *halakha* of Orthodox or Chassidic Judaism, but have borrowed the term *halakha* and use it to apply to our understanding of how we should walk in or keep the Sabbath. We have no 39 *melachot* or written out list of prohibited practices, different kinds of work, which we cannot do and *halakha* may vary from Messianic Jewish congregation to congregation. We do have our own local understanding of what work is and how it applies on the Sabbath. It is primarily a matter of the heart and each person is responsible to ADONAI for how they observe His *Shabbat*.

Work on *Shabbat* is necessary for some to live, and so, we don’t judge them. But, the ideal is not to do regular work on the Sabbath, seeking wherever possible to have it off from work with a goal of eventually not working on *Shabbat*. We don’t have a fixed set of rules regarding the Sabbath, but a general teaching of our interpretation of the *Torah*. Each person must decide how they will observe the Sabbath, recognizing that they are under the observation of the Creator of *Shabbat*. How we observe *Shabbat* is not based on fear of punishment but on the desire to love and honor our Creator’s wishes as *Torah* for the Sabbath, His teaching and instruction for us.

Just as Genesis describes the beginning, John chapter 1 also describes it: *1 In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.* (John 1:1-2 TLV). This is about Yeshua. He is called “the Word” who was with G-d and is G-d. In Genesis 1 and 2, the word *Elohim*, a plural word, but usually translated G-d, is used to describe who created the heavens and the earth. Present at the creation as represented by the word *Elohim*, was ADONAI, the Father, and Yeshua, the Word, the Son, but the creating was done by “the Word.” John continues: *3 All things were made through Him, and apart from Him nothing was made that has come into being.* (John 1:3 TLV). This is also confirmed by *Sha’ul*, who said: *15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created— in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen, whether thrones or angelic powers or rulers or authorities. All was created through Him and for Him. 17 He exists before everything, and in Him all holds together.* (Colossians 1:15-17 TLV). That’s very clear. Yeshua even created His adversary, *HaSatan*. Why would He do that? It was to give us a choice. We can choose our Creator and all that He stands for

or we can choose our own path which most likely coincides with the path of the Adversary. It is exactly the same with *Shabbat*. We can do our own thing or seek to honor our Creator's wishes.

John 1 describes Yeshua as *logos*, "word" in Greek. In the *Septuagint*, the Greek language Hebrew Bible translation of the *Tanakh* of about 200 years before Yeshua's time, the word *logos* represents the Hebrew word *devar* which also means word. From this, we understand Yeshua to be the "living Word," as attested to by the action of the Word through so many Scriptures. The written Word is alive and active and Yeshua is its personification. In this regard, to us who follow *Torah*, He is the "living *Torah*," the Word made flesh and the author of the *Torah* throughout the Scriptures. Colossians 1:16 says that He created *the seen and the unseen*. That seems to include everything.

When a group of Pharisees questioned Yeshua about what could be done on the Sabbath, He responded: 5 *Or haven't you read in the Torah that on Shabbat the kohanim in the Temple break Shabbat and yet are innocent?* 6 *"But I tell you that something greater than the Temple is here.* 7 *If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you wouldn't have condemned the innocent.* 8 *For the Son of Man is Lord of Shabbat."* (Matthew 12:5-8 TLV). The question that we will examine here is how the *kohanim* break *Shabbat* in the Temple by working. There is no question that many of the things they were required to do violated some of the 39 categories of *melakha* held to by the orthodox, things that would have been considered *melakha*, work. Yet, Yeshua said that they were innocent. They were innocent because ADONAI allows the performance of *melakhot*, work, to facilitate worship which He has ordained. We relate that to what we do here in the synagogue on *Shabbat*. The work we do is to facilitate our worship and the events of the day here. Our desire is to only do that which is necessary and no more, not those things which can be done on a regular week day. Again, it is a heart thing. Our desire is to be obedient to ADONAI's commands to honor the *Shabbat* and we wish to do that both in the synagogue and outside it.

Outside the synagogue on *Shabbat*, if we don't have to work to live, we choose not to do so and that includes work at home. We choose not to wash clothes or mow the lawn, ordinary work, things which could be done on another day. The *Torah* also commands that your servant should not be made to work on *Shabbat*. We don't have indentured servants today, but we interpret that to mean that we should not cause someone else to work on *Shabbat* and that means that we should not buy or sell on *Shabbat*. Buying causes a salesperson to work. This includes eating in a restaurant. Not only is the sales person made to work, but also the cooks and the servers. If at all possible, we should arrange our buying of necessary things before or after *Shabbat*. In the Ten Words, ADONAI said: 8 *"Remember Yom Shabbat, to keep it holy."* (Exodus 20:8 TLV). That should be our desire, to keep ADONAI's *Shabbat* separate, holy, and not like the other days of the week. That's the reason behind our *Havdalah* ceremony. It celebrates the end of the *Shabbat* by lighting a candle, marking a separation that we are once again living in a common day of the week. If we do all the routine things that we want to do on *Shabbat*, we are not honoring it and keeping it holy, set apart.

A moment ago, we read that the "Son of Man," Yeshua, is L-rd of the *Shabbat*. (Matthew 12:8). As L-rd of the *Shabbat*, He has authority over it and has made some exceptions. We read about the *kohanim* working in the Temple on *Shabbat*, yet are blameless. They worked to enable worship. Another example is when Yeshua was eating a Sabbath meal in the home of a leader of the Pharisees and He healed a man. They objected: 5 *"Then He said to them,*

“Which of you, with a son or an ox falling into a well on Yom Shabbat, will not immediately pull him out?” (Luke 14:5 TLV). It is good to do good on *Shabbat*. *Mitzvah*’s done on *Shabbat* to help our neighbor is what Yeshua would do. Stop and change a flat tire for the elderly. We also interpret Yeshua’s words to mean that necessary things can be done, buying medicine or gasoline if you run out. But, preparation before the *Shabbat* is the ideal. Get your groceries and your gas on Friday. Plan ahead for what you will need on *Shabbat*. If you are on a trip in an automobile on *Shabbat* and need gasoline, buy it. If you need food. Go to a restaurant. Yeshua knows if our desire is to honor *Shabbat*. We choose to do what He wants us to do, honoring both the day and our Creator. One translation of the word *shavat* from which *Shabbat* comes, is “ceasing.” We not only cease to work, but also cease from seeking to do our own thing, instead seeking to appear before ADONAI in worship and honor Him by refraining from doing these other things.

We are told numerous times in *Torah* to honor the seventh day *Shabbat*. But, there are also special *Shabbats* which ADONAI has commanded to be observed. They are found as a complete group in Leviticus 23, every special day that is to be observed. 1 *Then Adonai spoke to Moses saying: 2 “Speak to Bnei-Yisrael, and tell them: These are the appointed moadim of Adonai, which you are to proclaim to be holy convocations—My moadim.”* (Leviticus 23:1-2 TLV). A *moed*, the singular of *moadim*, means appointed time, a time which ADONAI has set for those in covenant with Him to meet with Him. He has made an appointment with us to meet at these specific times. Next, ADONAI said: 3 *“Work may be done for six days, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You are to do no work—it is a Shabbat to Adonai in all your dwellings.”* (Leviticus 23:3 TLV). The command is repeated here to not work on the *Shabbat*, the time of ceasing from work. Solemn rest can be understood as sincere rest, sincerely ceasing from work. This day is also a holy convocation. That means that ADONAI has made an appointment with us and requires us to meet with Him each *Shabbat*. Our meeting with ADONAI is a set apart time on the Sabbath. Convocation means the formal calling of an assembly. We have been called. If we say that we believe that *Torah* is for today, can we choose which *mitzvot* that we wish to obey? No, we can’t. That Yeshua’s body is in such terrible shape today is partially due to everyone choosing to do what is right in their own eyes. Yes, I believe that we should be here every *Shabbat* unless we have a good reason not to be. And, there are reasons, valid reasons, but it should not be just because you’re a little tired. We are required to go the second mile to follow Yeshua. Incidentally, there are seven special Sabbaths listed in Leviticus 23 after the *Shabbat*. They are: the first and seventh days of *Chag HaMatzot*, Unleavened Bread, the day of *Shavuot*, Pentecost, the day of *Rosh Hashanah/Yom Teruah*, *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, the first day of *Sukkot*, Tabernacles, and *Shemini Atzeret*, the Eighth Day Concluding Festival. ADONAI commands on each of these seven, as well as the weekly Sabbath, that we refrain from work.

For us, observing *Shabbat* is not a matter of legal dos and don’ts, a rigid list of rules. It is a principle that is presented to us by our Creator. We no longer have to build fires to cook our food, but I personally don’t believe in lighting fires on the Sabbath. It’s possible that a situation could arise requiring a fire in an emergency and then Yeshua’s rules as L-rd of the Sabbath would apply. We would build a fire. But, it’s not rules and regulations, it’s a matter of the heart, a desire to please the lover of our soul. We have no *Shabbat* police and we are not watching you, but He is! May He be pleased with what He sees.

The seven special Sabbaths in Leviticus 23 are only required to be observed in the Land of Israel. We do observe them here to the best of our ability, commemorate them, not because

we have to, but because we see them as three spring fulfillments by Yeshua and four fall rehearsals of future fulfillments by Yeshua. Yes, we want to observe them, but we should not make them more important than the weekly Sabbath. It too, is a rehearsal, a rehearsal of the Sabbath rest of eternity and a promise of living with Yeshua our Savior and King. In that regard, it is more important than all the others. And, whereas the seven special *Shabbats* are not commanded for us, only commanded to be observed in Israel, ADONAI does command us to observe the Sabbath here in the United States. The Scripture says: 3... “*it is a Shabbat to Adonai in all your dwellings.*” (Leviticus 23:3b TLV).

The *Shabbat* kept the Jewish people for thousands of years. It was the glue which held them together as a people through all kinds of adversities. It is also essential for us in Messianic Judaism today. We cannot exist as individual entities, isolated believers. As a movement, we will not succeed unless we obey ADONAI. He ordained the Sabbath and it continues to be His desire for Yeshua’s followers to meet Him on *Shabbat*. May we all make the *Shabbat* a matter of heart. *Shabbat shalom!*