

DAY TWENTY-ONE

“SHABBAT SHALOM”

PSALM 119:161-168

The third Sabbath rest of my Omer Count is upon us. My commitment to take the time to focus on the Holy One and His Word has been extremely rewarding. Recognizing the value of a disciplined focus on the verse selections from the Book of Psalms has convicted me of a personal goal and desire to learn more of Scripture, and how to reflect on other similar disciplines during the other special seasons (or at least those times when I really need to press into the Lord). This morning, with the Hebrew *shin* (ש) as the stanza subtitle, two Hebrew words that Messianic Believers all know rather well, *Shabbat shalom* (שְׁלוֹמֵךְ שַׁבָּת), meaning “Sabbath peace,” have been on my mind. But before commenting on these and other thoughts, please take the time to lift up your praise to the Holy One as you consider the following passages:

PSALM 67:1-7

For the choir director; with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song. God be gracious to us and bless us, *and* cause His face to shine upon us—Selah. That Your way may be known on the earth, Your salvation among all nations. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy; for You will judge the peoples with uprightness and guide the nations on the earth. Selah. Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You. The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us. God blesses us, that all the ends of the earth may fear Him.

PSALM 119:161-168

Shin. Princes persecute me without cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your words. I rejoice at Your word, as one who finds great spoil. I hate and despise falsehood, *but* I love Your law. Seven times a day I praise You, because of Your righteous ordinances. Those who love Your law have great peace, and nothing causes them to stumble. I hope for Your salvation, O LORD, and do Your commandments. My soul keeps Your testimonies, and I love them exceedingly. I keep Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You.

Shabbat shalom is the common greeting that echoes on the day of the week set aside to observe the weekly Sabbath, *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת), from Friday evening through to Saturday evening. Ever since the Fourth Commandment was given to Ancient Israel in the

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wilderness, it has been categorically and unequivocally clear that remembering or observing this day of rest is something important to the relationship God's people have with Him:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11; cf. Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Without digressing into disputes over what day the “seventh day” actually is, and all the other related issues that the Jewish and Christian communities often disagree about—a simple reading of the Fourth Commandment requires that God's people spend one day a week to focus on Him.¹

Later in the Torah, in Leviticus 23, the Sabbath is listed as the first of the appointed times that the Lord has set apart for His people to commune with Him:

“The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, “the LORD's appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these: **For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation.** You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings”’” (Leviticus 23:1-3).

When you put these verses together and understand that God has listed the weekly Sabbath as the first “holy convocation” (*miqra qodesh*, מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ) among His other appointed times, you should realize that He considers the Sabbath to be a very important period spent with His people. As you continue in the Holy Scriptures, we see that the Prophet Isaiah gives us some other insightful things about the weekly Sabbath. Not only does he say that sojourners who enter into the community of Israel will be keeping it (Isaiah 56:2-6) along with natives, but he also declares some of the rewards of making the Sabbath a delight:

“If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, from seeking your *own* pleasure and speaking *your own* word, **then you will take delight in the LORD**, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; **and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father**, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

When you read this and consider some of your own experiences as a Messianic Believer who remembers *Shabbat* every week, you might conclude that what Isaiah has spoken has indeed occurred in your life. I know that our family testimony is one that certainly makes this verse come alive, because surely, as we have made the Sabbath a delight in which to take pleasure, we have been fed from the heritage of Jacob! The blessings for us as a family are difficult to list, because as we observe our Sabbath rest, we are exemplifying two of the very verses considered in today's meditation:

“I hope for Your salvation, O LORD, **and do Your commandments. My soul keeps Your testimonies**, and I love them exceedingly” (Psalm 119:166-167).

¹ For some useful reflection and commentary, consult the *Messianic Sabbath Helper* by Messianic Apologetics. (Keep in mind that the forthcoming paperback edition will be significantly expanded, with much more information being compiled on both the significance and theology of *Shabbat*.)

It is by our obedience to the Fourth Commandment and our fervent desire to delight in the Sabbath, that we can tangibly evidence that we truly value God's commandments. In so doing, we also declare the majesties of the One in whom our hope of "salvation" is focused, our Savior Yeshua (Jesus). *But it has not always been this way for us.* Since 1994, as we have embraced and live forth what it means to be "Messianic," we have noticed a definite trend of us steadily becoming more obedient and informed by the instructions of God's Torah. Practically speaking, our willingness to delight in the Sabbath is perhaps one of the most visible and tangible activities that we sincerely enjoy as a family unit, **which we get to remember every week.** When sundown approaches on Friday afternoon, we all begin to relish the relief we receive as we enter into the rest of our Heavenly Father.

But this did not all happen instantaneously. It took time for us to be convicted about "buying and selling" on *Shabbat* (cf. Nehemiah 13:15-22). Rather than go out shopping at the mall on Saturday afternoon after our *Shabbat* service was over, or go out to restaurants, or even go purchase food at the grocery store for a possible fellowship meal, we had to learn to prepare our food in advance. It took a little more planning and some discipline, but we believed that it would better honor the Word, and would not require others to have to work to serve meals or stand at cash registers. We even decided that filling up the gas tank prior to *Shabbat* was also something good to do. Since we drive to various fellowship gatherings on *Shabbat*, we try to know beforehand how much gas we are going to need, and we are now in the habit of filling up our vehicles prior to our activities.²

We have not, however, gone to the extreme of limiting our mobility on *Shabbat* like some in the Messianic community. In fact, in the next few weeks (2004) I will be in another city and another state, and am going to have to drive many miles in order to meet with some beloved Messianic friends. At this point, the Holy One has given me every indication that some limited travel is fine with Him, as it will largely be for ministry purposes. He has also been quick to point out to me that when I have not prepared properly for the Sabbath rest, that He is full of grace for my shortcomings.

I do not know where you stand in your walk with the Lord, and I do not know what your personal convictions are about *Shabbat*. But I do know that if you take the time to delight in *Shabbat*, that you will not only come to know the Lord in a more intimate way, but you will also be taught the heritage of Jacob as Isaiah declares (Isaiah 58).

In this hour, many who have started observing *Shabbat* are learning the heritage of Jacob. This includes not only evangelical Christians embracing their Hebraic Roots, but even Jewish Believers who were raised not taking *Shabbat* that seriously. **God is blessing them immensely,** by simply taking His day and setting it aside completely unto Him. *Shabbat*-keeping is definitely one of the defining elements of the restoration coming forth as the Messianic community continues to grow. Of course, the biggest part of this is that many people are actually learning to rest—not just spiritually—*but also* physically. The opportunity to *actually rest* for a full day is so unbelievably refreshing and fulfilling, all I can do is implore you to try it if you have not already!

² Please keep in mind that while working is prohibited on the Sabbath, that Jewish tradition allows those in professions where the saving of a life is in view to continue work. Today, this would mainly include those who work in hospitals, the police and fire department, and those who serve in the military.

For a further discussion, consult the article "How Do We Properly Keep Shabbat?" by J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Sabbath Helper*.

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Today when you consider Counting the Omer, you might ask yourself if you would even be Counting the Omer if you did not observe *Shabbat* first. To take it a step further, would you be doing many of the things you are doing today without first understanding the blessings of taking a day of rest and focusing on your Creator and the direction of His commandments?

Consider the great blessings of obedience to Him. In the next few weeks, there is another appointed time that He has told us to observe. Can you begin to see why the Counting of the Omer to the Feast of Weeks carries with it such a sense of anticipation?