

The Hebrew Corner

This is how Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the word sabbath:

“1a: the seventh day of the week observed from Friday evening to Saturday evening as a day of rest and worship by Jews and some Christians; b: Sunday observed among Christians as a day of rest and worship; 2: a time of rest.”

OK, so it's a time of rest, but which is it, Friday evening to Saturday evening, or Sunday? Let's turn to the Tanach for the answer.

First of all, the word sabbath in Hebrew is shabbat (שַׁבָּת, shahb-BAHT). From this Hebrew root word, we also get shabat (שָׁבַת, shah-VAHT), which means rest. We encounter this word at the end of the Creation story of Genesis 1:1 - 2:3, where we are told in Genesis 2:2 that God rested on day 7 from all his labors in creating the heavens and the Earth in days 1 through 6. In the Creation passage, the Hebrew phrase vahee erev vahee boker (וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר, vah-hee EH-rehv vah-hee VOH-kehr), which means "and there was evening, and there was morning," followed by the number of the day. So each day from the beginning started with the evening. Erev can also be translated in English as sunset, or the time of mixture of the light with the darkness. Each day for six days starting with evening, he made the heavens, the Earth, plants, animals, sun,

moon, stars, and man. On the seventh day he rested (Genesis 2:3). This was the first shabbat.

Next we encounter the first weekly keeping of shabbat in Exodus 16, after God brought Moses and the Israelites out of Egypt. Manna (מַן, MAHN), was provided by God as food every morning for 6 days. Moses tells them (Exodus 16:23) of the shabbat observance that they are to keep:

"And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord, bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe, and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning as Moses bade, and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein, and Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the Lord, to day ye shall not find it in the field. See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day."

In Exodus, chapter 20, the story is told of Moses receiving the commandments of God, later to be written by the finger of God on stone tablets. The fourth commandment concerns shabbat and reads as follows:

"Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work, But the seventh day, is the

sabbath of the Lord thy God, in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and that is in them is, and rested the seventh day, and hallowed it."

So we see that the seventh day starting with the evening (Friday night) up until the next evening starting the new week (Saturday night) is a period of time set aside for man to rest, and is a time hallowed, or made holy, by the Lord. In Leviticus 23:32 the period of the Day of Atonement, is declared to be a sabbath, and is specified as to be kept from evening to evening.

In Leviticus 25, we are introduced to the sabbath year, in which the land is to be sown with seed and cultivated for 6 years, but on the seventh year, only that which grows of itself is to be harvested. So we see that there is not only sabbath for the people, but sabbath for the land also.

Did Jesus (Yeshua, meaning salvation, is his Hebrew name) intend to abolish sabbath, He answers a question about sabbath from the Pharisees in Mark 2: 27-28:

"And he said unto them, the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: therefore the son of man is Lord also of the sabbath."

Proclaiming himself Lord of shabbat indicates that he did not want to abolish shabbat, but to keep it in the proper spirit, so that it would be a benefit to man and not a burden.

There is also a prophetic significance to shabbat. Paul indicates this in Colossians 2:16-17, after stressing the importance of the body of Christ as opposed to strict legal observance of dietary rules and holy days:

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ,”

In Hebrews 4:9-10, we are told, in the KJV translation:

“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into that rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”

The first occurrence of the word “rest” in this passage, sometimes translated as sabbath rest, is the Greek word *sabbatismo*, only used one time in the New Testament. This corresponds to the Hebrew word, *shabbat* (שבתון), *shah-bah-TOHN*) used several times in the Tanach referring to a type of shabbat, or a typical shabbat. A typical shabbat would be similar to the seventh day weekly shabbat, or the seventh year shabbat for the land, or the first day of the seventh month (new moon) of the year, known as the Feast of

Trumpets. A typical shabbat is a time period of rest, or cessation from activity, following six like periods of activity, usually involving some type of labor or toil.

From the passage, the author of Hebrews is pointing to a sabbath that is future to him, and to be a special time of rest for people in the Lord. The apparent reference here is to the millennial reign of Christ, in which there is a 1000 year absence of the destructive influence of sin, with Satan bound up, following six 1000 year periods after the fall of Adam, of the continual presence of sin, and of Satan who “walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” – 1 Peter 5:8. This appears to be the prophetic significance that Paul is referring to in Colossians.

So we see that shabbat has a threefold purpose (1) to honor God’s work in creating the universe by resting on the day he rested (2) to set aside a day for man to rest from his labor and to fellowship with God, and (3) to look forward with hope to the day that our Yeshua, Jesus comes back to rule over the earth for an entire millennium of rest in the Lord.

So perhaps there is more to the sabbath described in your Bible than you thought. Shabbat Shalom!