

Emor (Say) (Mike Taber presenting)

Reading: Jack, p. 161 and Psalm 42. Jewish Hero Barnabas. Torah Carrier: Margaret

Passages: (Ex. 12:16) *The first day, you shall have a holy convocation and the seventh day, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no work on these days, you can only prepare the food for each person.* (Exodus 16:23) *And Moses said to them: This is what YHVH has ordained. Tomorrow is the day of rest, the Sabbath consecrated to YHVH: cook what you have to cook, boil what you have to boil and keep what remains in reserve until the morning.* (Ex. 35:3) *You shall not kindle any fire in any of your dwelling on the day of the Sabbath.*

This morning I want to examine with you what it means to abstain from all work on the Sabbath and I want to do it in four sections. First I want to examine what the Talmud teaches, then I want to look at what the Bible teaches. Then I want to look at work that was permitted to perform in the sanctuary on the Sabbath, then I want to give you a list of work we are to abstain from taken from the Scriptures. I will deal also with exceptions and acts of kindness.

As Messianic Jews and Gentiles, we need to both acknowledge the rich heritage which comes down to us through the Talmud and also understand that these traditional guidelines do not apply to believers who want to design their lives based solely on what the Scriptures teach. The portion of the Talmud which deals with the laws regarding how to observe the Sabbath, is the second longest tractate (section) of the Talmud, containing 24 chapters and 157 folios (discussions). It is both elaborate and very complicated and can make Sabbath observance a burden which the Scriptures never intended it to be.

I get tired of people who say that following the Scriptures alone, gives us a watered down version of Judaism, if we do not also follow what the Talmud teaches. I gratefully acknowledge the many insights and clarifications which the Talmud offers to serious students of the Bible, but at the same time I want to learn to base my life on what the Bible teaches, and nothing more and certainly nothing less. The teachings of men may help us understand the history of how our people viewed Sabbath observance, but the only authority to which we should be accountable is that which the Scriptures alone possess.

Talmudic Judaism may prohibit driving in a car on the Sabbath and may even prohibit pushing a baby stroller on this sacred day, but the day should be all about rest and worship and how creative we can get about learning to actually taking a rest, nothing more and nothing less. Some people feel that we should not answer the phone or even refrain from turning any machines off and on during this sacred day, but the focus of the day should not be on how many restrictions you can come up with. We need to follow what the Bible says and learn about dynamic rest, which is not always easy in our hectic 24/7 society.

The Bible clearly states that we are to abstain from servile labour and should focus our attention on the double Shabbat imperative which is rest and worship. It should be a day given totally over to resting in our King and to renewing our commitment to His righteousness.

This should include Bible Study and gathering with other believers for praise and worship, as we let the things of this world grow strangely dim as we focus our day onto the things of the

coming kingdom. We gratefully acknowledge that we can rest in the completed work of creation, as we also contemplate how many times YHVH has delivered us from the things of this world and continually calls us to focus on the things of the world to come.

The Talmud outlines 39 divisions of melachot (forbidden labour), based on the general idea that we should abstain from all and any activities which will require us to engage in anything which resembles being creative, when we should be resting from the work we are called to fulfil during the six days of the work week. The Sabbath is a time for us to stop working and allow us to absorb the peace of the L-rd in such a way that the trials and concerns of our lives, shrink back into their proper perspective, because in the L-rd, our weekly labours are not all about who we really are.

I remain grateful for all the tasks which my life brings my way and I am learning to be thankful for both the deep valleys I have had to wander through and those high mountains it has been my privilege to climb. But my heart and life remain homeward bound and the Sabbath remains my weekly spiritual reality check. What ever we face during the week as we pass through the hopes and fears of all the years, pales in comparison with the immeasurable weight of glory which is waiting for each of us when our time in this world is done.

So in a very real sense, the Sabbath is the one day of the week which should be completely given over to the world which is to come, no matter what else is going on in our lives. The circumstances of our lives may vary from week to week, as we grow up and age, from generation to generation, but one day a week, we look at who we are in our Creator, as we consider the things which will have an eternal impact on how we will spend eternity.

The Sabbath is not so much a list of things we refrain from doing, as it is a time to remove ourselves far from the maddening crowd and from the tyranny of the urgent. It is the ultimate heaven break where the L-rd and His Word have our full attention, from the time we are babes, until it is our turn to rest in the dust. How good are you at giving the L-rd your full attention, so that He can bring your life further into the light of His Word?

Why we do what we do is often more important than what we do and maintaining our Sabbath rest helps us to prioritize our spirituality, as we learn to view life from an eternal perspective. The 23rd Psalm and the L-rd's Prayer are actually calls for us to rest in the L-rd and in His goodness and His active provision in our lives. As we grow and mature in Him, our lives become all about Him and no longer about the lesser things which occupy our attention during our work week.

The L-rd was active on behalf of Israel so that they would be permitted to leave Egypt and become His bond servants. Sabbath observance seals that bond in a practical way so that we never forget where we came from and where we are going. Our Messiah never severed the bond between His people and the Sabbath, because He is still in the business of calling us to take up His yoke and to bear His burden so that we find rest and peace for our souls.

It is true that we should be able to rest in Him 24/7 and never lose our way as we wander through this life as strangers and pilgrims, on our determined way to our Father's Home in glory. The practical reality of spirituality is that if we do not make regular time for our Redeemer, then our spirituality slides into the heap of unfinished business with all the other: should of, could of,

would have's that we still hope to one day get around to unpacking.

In all that our Maker did and accomplished when He completed the work of creation, He built in a day of rest so that, along with Him, we could stop what we are doing and have a good look around to see what really matters, rain or shine. I am in my third decade of Sabbath observance and it always seems that I am just getting started discerning the difference between the light and the darkness and between that which is truly meaningful and that which will always just be trivial in the long run.

The long run should always be more important than any of the short terms our lives wander through and we should see the Sabbath as a short term commitment to the long term meaning of life, as the sands of time continue to run out for us, generation by generation, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. The Sabbath should be a time of Kingdom reflection, where we pause and put our lives on hold, so that we do not lose our way as we stumble and grumble our way to our eternal home.

Well, what is permitted for us to engage in on the Sabbath, according to the Bible. We are not given a list of prohibited activities, nor are we given a list of required activities. We are called to stop whatever it is we are doing, whenever and wherever we are doing it, and to be able to rest in the L-rd who is both our Creator and our sustainer, no matter what else is going on in our lives. It should truly be the L-rd's Day, which we set aside for Him and all that He has done and all that He still will still yet do.

It is a day which belongs to Him and is a practical sign that we belong to Him. Gentile believers try and make Sunday the day which they set aside for G-d, but there is only one day which we are called to set aside for our King and it is at the end of the week and not at the week's beginning. It is a day for the pursuit of the L-rd's business.

I have often heard people asking what Jesus would do in whatever circumstances come our way in this life and one of the biggest and surest answers to this set of questions is to say that taking a Sabbath rest is one thing He never failed to do. He rested on the Sabbath and studied and taught the Word on this special day, and as we do the same, Sabbath rest can help us move from glory to glory as we are transformed into His image and are renewed in the spirit of our minds.

It is a day where we should set about seeing what condition our condition is in, so that we never take the things of the Kingdom for granted and never allow our bond with the L-rd and with His Word, to loosen and slip from our grasp. We need to live every day seeking His Kingdom and His righteousness, but there is only one day which is set aside for us to examine how well this sacred process is doing in our lives and it is the Sabbath.

Well how does that look practically in our lives? I enjoyed looking up the 39 divisions of forbidden labour which are outlined in the Talmud.

But even though the chapters and folios (discussions) it contains, go into great detail, I felt that it was sadly incomplete and did not really take into consideration the kinds of challenges which my life has to content with on a regular basis. A concise list of does and don'ts may be a helpful beginning, but each of us need to maintain one of our own as we cycle through the various stages of our lives on our pilgrimage to our Father's home in glory.

Here is a partial list that should give you an idea of what we should be doing on the Sabbath and what we should avoid doing on this special day.

First of all there are two staples which our Sabbath observance should always possess: physical rest and spiritual renewal as we study and worship from sunset to sunset. We should take a real and substantial rest from work except when it comes to the essential business of living. We should continue breathing and be sure to get enough food as we dress in our Sabbath finery. We should attend corporate worship and have fellowship with one another, both at shul and in our individual homes.

Cooking is one of the issues which a strict, biblical observance needs to address. In our passages for today it both says that we should not kindle fires in our homes, but that it is permitted for us to make the food which each person needs. Three concerns about this vital activity.

Any fire which is kindled so that we can turn our homes into a workshop like the ones we have during the week, should not be allowed. In the wilderness, there were no factories which could be shut down and no stores which could be closed, because most of this work was done in individual homes. Kindling fire so that work could be engaged in is a violation of the Sabbath, but there is nothing wrong with boiling a kettle or using a toaster any more than there is anything wrong with flushing a toilet or brushing our teeth.

I work out of my home and yet I abstain from doing work in my home during the Sabbath. We are allowed to prepare food, like the double portion of manna which we have collected on the day before the Sabbath, but shopping for food and trying to collect more manna are activities we should avoid on the Sabbath. One activity which ceases in our home during the Sabbath is housework and cleaning up. Sure we will get our food ready and put away any leftovers, but we really do skip the dishes and leave the vacuuming and the laundry to another day.

Sometimes we will be caught out when we have unexpected guests and so being flexible on the Sabbath, prevents us from ignoring people and their needs and concerns. I like to take a break from handling money and paying bills, but I have been known to count the offering and sign checks for shul business on the Sabbath. I also freely engage in set up before our service and in the clean up which needs to follow our services. I see it as a good deed of mercy, similar to what the priests and Levites did as they ministered to the people from the sanctuary on the Sabbath.

Feeding our livestock and milking them is an acceptable Sabbath activity, but cleaning out the barn and scrubbing our animals should be left to the weekdays. Paying bills falls into this same category as well as engaging in commerce. This also means no housework or yard work on this special day, as well as no renovating or fixing up during this sacred time.

This does not mean that we cannot sell some of our materials on the Sabbath as a service to those who would not be able to do this during the week. It just means we are to be about the L-rd's work and not our own on the day which we surrender to Him and to His Word. I do not consider blowing the shofar as work and I certainly do not see singing and playing a musical instrument as prohibited work, as long as I am doing it for the L-rd and not for personal gain.

I do not pay bills on the Sabbath and do not run errands. I will shovel my walk in the winter, but only just enough to get to my car and be able to clean it off. Coming to shul in my car is not a

prohibited activity, any more than taking a Shabbat stroll or a Shabbat snooze. I will answer my phone on the Sabbath, but I will not do any surveys or conduct any weekday business online during the Sabbath.

Now necessity may mean engaging in these activities as a way of helping my neighbour to get his donkey out of the ditch, and making sure to always be a good Samaritan in the time of need. But I do not go searching the ditches and looking for good deeds to engage on when I should be taking a rest and should be being renewed in the spirit of my mind.

I also try and avoid counselling and answering difficult theological questions on the Sabbath and I realize that any number of ministry activities and recreational pursuits fall into grey areas where I have to seek the L-rd for His wisdom and mercy. The thing I want to avoid is filling my life up with so many grey areas that actually taking a Sabbath rest is one of those things that I rarely get around to doing.

It remains the Day of the L-rd, which He set aside for us to rest on and any departure from that mandate should be avoided at all costs, except when mercy and duty require our active participation and the Sabbath is the only day when these acts can be performed. Doctors and nurses and police officers may have to go into work when they would rather be resting, but unless we valiantly protect our sacred duty to rest on the L-rd's Day, we will wear out, burn out and not fill our lives with the spiritual principles of His Word.

We are truly only strangers and pilgrims travelling through this veil of tears and one of our principle mandates is not to become embroiled with the fears and pleasures of this life, no matter how compelling they seem or how much pressure is put on us. Keeping the Sabbath tames our use of time and makes our weeks turn around the L-rd in fact and in deed and not just in theory. Can't all of this be done on Sunday? If the L-rd had wanted us to do all of this on Sunday, He would have said so in His Word and our Messiah and His disciples would have included this departure from biblical truth in their core teachings. They did not.

Sabbath observance is part of the core teaching of His Word. It is not a competition to see who is the most observant and it is not a time to look down our noses at people who sometimes have to work a shift or two on the Sabbath. It should be a time when we separate ourselves from the cares and concerns of our lives and turn our attention to the things of the life which is to come, when our Messiah returns. It is the discipline of tithing our time and giving the L-rd one day where He has our full, undistracted attention.

It is a regular time of spiritual renewal where we bask in His light and step away from that which we are usually engaged in during the week. May you be granted lots of Shabbat and a good portion of Shalom, today and on every Shabbat you celebrate until the L-rd returns.