

Keeping Shabbat: What did Yeshua teach?

It is often taught that Yeshua abrogated the Torah, and ushered in a new religion with His death and resurrection as a new focus. For Yeshua's first century followers this would have seemed incomprehensible. Much detailed and academic research has been done in recent years which illustrates Yeshua's both positive and observant attitude towards Torah¹. This study will focus on just one element in Yeshua's Torah teaching: His Shabbat observance and 'Oral'² teaching based on 'You shall keep the Shabbat holy'³. To illustrate the Jewish aspects of this Messianic Jewish faith, I have included some terms and names in this study in a transliterated form from the Hebrew. They are italicised on their first appearance and they appear in a glossary at the end to help.

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine why the church of the fourth and fifth centuries temporally moved the prescribed day of rest (from both Creational and Covenantal aspects) from Shabbat to Sunday. Likewise we shall not examine the theological changes made (from Shabbat according to the Torah and Judaism to Church teaching about the 'Lord's Day'). There are many good articles and books already written which document this process. A good solid reader on this topic is 'From Sabbath to Sunday' by S. Bacchiocchi⁴.

Needless to say, for Yeshua the Shabbat could and would only have meant one thing: the seventh day of the week, or as it is now known in English, Saturday⁵. He never went to a church on a Sunday,

1 Much of this research has been done by non Messianic Jewish scholars who have wanted to 'rehabilitate' Yeshua as a first century prophet, but not to accept Him as the Messiah. Equally, research from some within the more evangelical wing of the church has been keen to point out the many parallels between Yeshua's teaching and the broader Pharisaic Torah interpretation of His time. This has led to an increase in the interest in the 'Jewish roots of Christianity', although this falls short of the full Messianic Jewish vision.

2 For fuller information on the use of the term 'Oral' in this study, please read Study 4.

3 Exodus 20:8-11

4 Bacchiocchi, S, *From Sabbath to Sunday*. 1977. Pontifical Gregorian University Press, Rome. This book is written from an Adventist stance, yet contains much useful historical information.

5 Some have attempted to insist that Yeshua could not have possibly known what day was the 'real' Shabbat. However, there was a long chain of historical observance from at least the time of the giving of the Torah on Sinai. Equally, in Hebrew the days of the week are not given names but numbers. Saturday or Shabbat is 'Day Seven'. The names we currently use have pagan origins.

because they did not exist, neither did Yeshua ever tell His *Talmidim* that they were to begin keeping a new day after His death⁶. Some arguments about Yeshua's 'neutrality' on the issue of Shabbat hinge on the fact that Yeshua never (or so it seems) taught about Shabbat keeping. However, this is at best to argue from the apparent silence of Scripture. Neither by that argument does Yeshua ever say that we should not keep it! I say 'by the apparent silence of Scripture', because of course Yeshua does teach about Shabbat observance, and He kept it Himself as we shall see later in this study.

When we think of keeping Shabbat, a long list of prohibitions and exclusions almost automatically springs to mind. This is of course due to the long-standing traditional interpretation of Shabbat observance codified down the ages and taught by Orthodox Judaism, presented to us in numerous school and other textbooks. Before we look at Yeshua's teaching about Shabbat, it is worth looking again at what the Torah actually says about it **and what it does not!** What we shall see is that Torah actually says very little on the subject. The vast majority of commandments associated with Shabbat observance are in the realm of 'Oral' Torah. Of course, at this point we must differentiate between what Yeshua taught and what non-Messianic Judaism has accepted as authoritative.

We begin with looking at the first Torah 'proof' text and its parallel.⁷

Remember the Shabbat day, to keep it holy.

Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Shabbat of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Shabbat day and hallowed it.

From this we may deduce that we need to keep Shabbat 'holy' and that we may do no 'work'. Of course, as we have stated elsewhere, once a commandment has been given, there also needs to be an

⁶ Note that nowhere in Yeshua's teaching do we ever read that He instructed His followers to set up a new religion.

⁷ Exodus 20:8-11 and Deut 5:12-15.

interpretation of it. Here the terms 'holy'⁸ and 'work' need to be defined. Within rabbinic Judaism and its derivational forms, 'work' has been closely defined. It seems clear however, that Shabbat is in contrast to the other 'working' days, so it is easy to conclude that 'work' here means one's normal, customary or usual occupation. We are commanded to desist from that with which we fill the rest of the week. On the face of it however, ceasing from work does not seem very restrictive. Anyone who works would surely recognise the benefit of having this one day in the week free from the need to work. The Deuteronomy passage echoes the same message except that the Creational rationale found in Exodus is replaced with the Exodus deliverance from Egypt motif. This 'deliverance from suffering' is another strong theme of Shabbat, as we shall see reflected in Yeshua's teaching later. Our next passage is⁹

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed.

This does not add too much more to what we have already seen. Our normal, customary work is to cease for the Shabbat. The next passage is¹⁰

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
"Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: 'Surely My Shabbats you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.
You shall keep the Shabbat, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.
Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Shabbat of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Shabbat day, he shall surely be put to death.

⁸ 'Holy' in Torah terms means 'set apart' or 'consecrated', or even 'different from'. It doesn't refer to an emotion or the level of one's relationship with God. While I shall concentrate here on the 'work' aspects, nevertheless we are commanded to 'set apart' Shabbat in a meaningful and different way to the other working days.

⁹ Exodus 23:12

¹⁰ Exodus 31:12-18

Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Shabbat, to observe the Shabbat throughout their generations as a **perpetual covenant**.

`It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.'"`

And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

This recurring theme of the Shabbat recalling the Creation act is very important for our interpretative process as regards a Messianic attitude to Shabbat observance¹¹. Shabbat is a direct weekly testimony to the fact that God is the Creator of everything. Our observance of Shabbat on a weekly basis testifies pointedly to this fact. However, the main thrust in this passage is, once again, to do no work. This is linked to Shabbat as a Sign that God is the one who makes you holy. The Torah is the 'Life' code for all Israel and all His people, a walk of holiness for all God's redeemed community. The cornerstone Sign of this is Shabbat. It is worth noting, that once Shabbat has been 'done away with', so also one of the important Signs of a holy walk with Him is also removed. Further, a public testimony to God as Creator is equally removed from view. The section highlighted above also makes it clear that God would never abrogate the Shabbat. It is a perpetual covenantal Sign.

Our next portion adds a little to the growing development of Shabbat observance¹²:

Then Moses gathered all the congregation of the children of Israel together, and said to them, "These are the words which the LORD has commanded you to do:

"Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Shabbat of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.

"You shall kindle no fire throughout your dwellings on the Shabbat day."

Once again the theme of resting is strong, but here we do have an additional commandment included as an interpretation or elaboration to the original written Shabbat commandment. An issue of

11 See later comments in this study.

12 Exodus 35:1-3

interpretation had obviously arisen in the camp, and Moses, as he was directed to do, went before the Lord to ask for clarification. Pharisaic, and later Rabbinic Judaism, saw in this the early development of 'Oral' Torah. This scenario is much debated in Messianic Judaism, as it is in its non-Messianic forms. However, the text makes it clear that it was God nevertheless who commanded that no fire was to be kindled on Shabbat. This is no arbitrary judgement, lighting a fire has been seen as the act of preparing and cooking a meal from scratch, not just lighting a candle or a match! It involved the collection of firewood and building a hearth. Food would have to be prepared and finally cooked over a period of time. However, even here Torah is flexible, as we shall see later in the study.

Having established what one cannot do on Shabbat, there is also something that we must do¹³.

Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Shabbat of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Shabbat of the LORD in all your dwellings.

We are commanded to meet together, 'a convocation', and dedicate ourselves in worship to the Lord on Shabbat. It is assumed that believers, and Israel in general, are in community for this; worship is a community activity. This may, of course, not always be possible, although worshipping as part of a community is the Torah norm. We may find ourselves isolated on a Shabbat for any number of reasons. However, even if on our own, we should worship Him on the day He created for such worship. This allows time itself to be sanctified, just as we are to bring sanctification into every other realm of our lives that God has created. While we may debate over what actually constitutes 'a holy convocation' on Shabbat (form, size and structure of congregation etc.), we are not to move it to another day. That would be a violation, not an interpretation!

To summarise then main Torah teaching about Shabbat: No work (normal weekday employment) and no kindling of fire (cooking), a command to keep Shabbat holy, plus a meeting together to worship the Lord. In the later periods of Israel's history, the theme of Shabbat observance and its field of scope is further developed. The first key mention of this is in Nehemiah¹⁴.

13 Lev 23:3

14 13:15-19

In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Shabbat, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Shabbat day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions.

Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Shabbat to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Shabbat day?

"Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Shabbat."

So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Shabbat, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Shabbat. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Shabbat day.

The general prohibition of buying and selling on Shabbat stems from this passage. However, it is worth noting that shopping or trading is not explicitly forbidden within Torah itself¹⁵. Nehemiah's comments and subsequent actions certainly fall within the realm of interpretation. Rabbinic Judaism has seen in this the early development of 'Oral' Torah which, as discussed elsewhere, Messianic Judaism does not treat as authoritative. That is not to say, however, that within Messianic Judaism we should ignore it, especially because it is included in our written Bibles. It can be argued quite effectively that Nehemiah's decision was based on an issue prevalent at his time, and therefore reflects a solution applicable to his time (only). This on the other hand raises the issue of Scriptural applicability and inspiration, but we surely cannot ignore the fact that this was 'chiefly' aimed at the situation that had arisen in Nehemiah's day.

So far we have considered the 'practicalities' or regulations as regards Shabbat observance, very little has been said about the

¹⁵ I am using the term 'Torah' in its restrictive form here, designating the first five books of the Scriptures. In its wider form, of course, Torah covers all the Scriptures, even these passages. See comments in the text on this 'problem'.

motivational aspects¹⁶. While the Torah does touch upon these too, it is to the Prophetic Writings we now look to gain yet more insight. In the Prophetic Writings a different tone is hit. The Prophets were concerned with the lack of true Torah observance (sin) in Israel and the consequences of God's judgement as a result. Instead of focussing on the 'mere' external observance however, the Prophets were far more concerned with how Torah was impacting the life of Israel, both nationally and individually. The focus became more holiness orientated, and how Torah affected your Heart. One example of this follows below¹⁷. It hits a very different note in comparison with the earlier very direct commandments:

"If you turn away your foot from the Shabbat, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Shabbat a delight, the holy day of the LORD honourable, and shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The focus that God points to here is 'taking delight' in Shabbat, 'honouring' Him, refraining from human pursuits while pursuing Him and worshipping Him. That is what will make your Shabbat observance acceptable to God. Torah has always pointed beyond 'mere' externalism to the heart attitude and motivational aspects; it is not so much what you do but in what spirit/heart attitude you do it. An observance of Shabbat that is more focussed on the Shabbat itself misses the point. Shabbat is meant to be unto the Lord, offered and given willingly, delighting in it. This does not mean we can now work¹⁸, neither should we complain against God about not working, nor treat the Shabbat with disrespect. Instead of seeing Shabbat as a potential or real loss of income, we need to see it as gaining His closeness. If we honour Him and put Him first on this day, then all the

¹⁶ These motivational aspects will also help us to determine the 'relevance' or otherwise of Nehemiah's injunctions for example.

¹⁷ Isaiah 58:13-14

¹⁸ Sadly much Christian teaching has seen the Prophetic material as a 'better' way, therefore replacing the former 'less useful' Torah teaching. No such conclusions can be drawn from the texts themselves however. A close reading reveals that the Prophets were concerned about the lack of genuine Torah observance and its effects upon Israel. They were at pains to point out the very point I am making above: the motivational aspects, the need for a changes in the human heart are fundamental to our ability to actually keep Torah.

rest will come easily. This is certainly how Yeshua taught about Shabbat. This motivational theme is often used as a basis for the observance of other Torah commands in the *Messianic Writings*. For example, we are told to be 'a cheerful giver' etc¹⁹.

From this review of the actual written Torah commands and statutes we can see that there is not a huge body of regulations or restrictions associated with Shabbat keeping. All of the common lists that have been popularised over time belong either to tradition or to the 'Oral' rabbinic realm. Messianic Judaism does not disparage this, indeed it is almost impossible to keep Torah without some form of 'tradition'. However, they are not authoritative for us.

When looking at how Yeshua taught Shabbat observance we need to look at what **His** Teaching contained. How did He base His Teaching on the written Torah? What interpretative principles did He use to develop His *Halacha*? All this is to be found in the *Messianic Writings*. However, before looking at the specifics, we shall look first at some other more general principles of Torah interpretation or application and then see how Yeshua applied them to His own Teaching.

Shaul teaches us an important first interpretative principle: Imitate me as I imitate Messiah²⁰. This imitation of God underpins Torah teaching from ancient times. It was never going to be enough to just teach Torah, it would always be necessary to see it being lived out, to see it being interpreted in real life situations with people responding to real events. This is one of the reasons why Yeshua took 3 years to pass on His Teachings²¹. He also had 12 *Talmidim* who went everywhere with Him, not only teaching them but also letting them see every aspect of His life. This imitation principle is one that we can immediately see in Yeshua's Shabbat teaching. Yeshua taught that 'Shabbat was made for Man, not Man for Shabbat'²². The Talmud also records that later rabbis understood 'For it (Shabbat) is holy unto you'²³ as meaning that Shabbat was there to serve you, rather than for you to serve Shabbat²⁴. This may be an occasion when later Rabbinic Judaism was influenced by Yeshua's teaching.

19 2 Cor 9:7

20 1 Cor 11:1

21 In Yeshua's time a Torah reading cycle took 3 years to complete. In His 3 year ministry then Yeshua covered the whole Torah in His expositions.

22 Mark 2:27

23 Ex 31:14

24 See Yoma 85b and comments later in this study.

Before dealing with the actual content and structure of this phrase in more depth, we shall focus on the *remez* tied to Creation and its link to Shabbat. We need to read this phrase in the Hebrew it was uttered in. Immediately two things become clear: Firstly, 'made' could be read as 'created' (*bara*), and secondly, Man is clearly referring to Mankind or 'people' not just to males. Both of these concepts point to Genesis and the Creation of Adam and *Chava* at the end of that first Creation Week. Indeed, the first act of observance to the Lord for them both was to keep Shabbat. Both Adam and Chava were created on Day six, a Friday. Even though they had not 'worked', the first full day of their lives was nevertheless dedicated to God, showing again the 'Prophetic' principle that positive dedication to God comes first in understanding Shabbat.

Beyond this *remez* tied to Creation, what was there to imitate about God in this?25

For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Shabbat day and hallowed it.

For 6 days God **created** and on the Shabbat He ceased **creating**, or rested. It is worth noting at this point that God did not stop working during the Shabbat, but He did stop creating. We shall show this distinction later in Yeshua's own teaching, but working and creating are not necessarily the same. If God had stopped working absolutely, Adam and Chava would surely have died instantaneously as Creation ceased to function. No, God continued **maintaining** His Creation, even though it was the Shabbat. Creation is not ruled and run by God for 6 days of the week, and then on the seventh it runs itself like a clockwork toy. God is sovereign and is always in control, upholding and maintaining the Universe. This will be important when we evaluate Yeshua's direct teaching in the Messianic Writings: imitating God is ceasing from creative work on Shabbat, not absolutely ceasing from **all** work. A second guideline is established from looking at Adam and *Chava*'s role in this: They had not been working at all during that first Creation week (they had not been created), and so had no basic problem with keeping Shabbat. There was no debate about what was allowed or not, no discussion on what they needed to stop doing. Rather the primary focus was as it should be: upon God Himself. This is very important for us, since keeping Shabbat could so easily become

a burden, if approached in the wrong way. It could ultimately even lead us to a legalistic form of bondage, if we allowed this to happen. If we set our hearts and minds on the Lord, to delight in Him and the Shabbat, as Isaiah wrote, we will truly find that Shabbat is **for** us, as Yeshua taught, and not against us. This view will certainly help us to develop a Messianic *Halacha* on the Shabbat issue. This does not negate prayerful consideration of what is 'acceptable' on Shabbat. However, if our primary focus is on our God, to delight in Him, and not to look at ourselves to see if we have got our observance 'right' to the nth degree, then the *Ruach HaKodesh* will lead us and show us what we are to cease doing and abstain from, as well as what He might positively want us to do!

The next principle to establish is that Torah was and is given for **Life**, not to bring death. Torah itself states this²⁶

You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments,
which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

There are many aberrant views about Torah and its place in the believing community of both Jews and *Gerim*, but it was never God's intent to give the Jewish people a Torah that was designed to cause harm. Neither was it merely meant to be a temporary dispensation until *Mashiach* came. No, Torah, if kept with trusting faithfulness, as God had always intended, would indeed show us the way of Life. It was meant to be a blessing to our lives. Shaul knew from personal experience how this verse had been and was misinterpreted to bring about a legalistic application of Torah. He had been taught that by observing Torah one would actually **attain** Life, rather than seeing it as the hallmarks of Life already attained by trusting in God's mercy. **Torah is Life, not a way of attaining Life** (see Stern's translation²⁷ of Gal 3:11-12.).

This being said, we now need to consider how we can apply this idea to a Messianic understanding of Shabbat observance. If Torah is meant to show us Life and be, through Yeshua, a source of Life, then Shabbat should demonstrate the same qualities. This thought is echoed in the Talmud²⁸ where it makes clear that to deal with **anything** that might threaten or even appear to threaten your life and well-being on a Shabbat is allowable, even if to deal with it would be 'work'. This does not, of course, include lack of foresight. We are

26 Lev 18:5

27 Stern, D. Jewish New Testament. 1989 JNTP Maryland USA.

28 Yoma 8:6

meant to plan for Shabbat to avoid things we could do at another time. However, if you had a blind or sick relative who needed food or drink on a Shabbat, and for whatever reason this has run out on a Friday evening, you would be able to cook, buy or do whatever was necessary to help that person. Indeed, as we shall see, you are actually obliged to do so in Yeshua's teaching of Torah. Putting it another way, to preserve life (or to avert a threat to life), 'breaking' the Shabbat commandments is obligatory. This is an example of Torah 'flexibility'. Torah is not as monolithic as some theologies have made out. For the Messianic view on this, we can say that if by doing or not doing something we might cause harm or pain, or we allow harm or pain to continue on Shabbat, then this is not an acceptable Torah interpretation. There is an inherent problem with this, however. It throws open the question of how far we can go with this before we begin to truly act presumptuously. Defining these boundaries also caused much debate for the rabbis of the first century and later, but the risk of misapplication was deemed worth it, if others were helped as a result. This interpretation sits very well with Yeshua's teaching about Shabbat, as we shall see.

We return now for a closer look at the statement made by Yeshua in Mark 2:27

And He said to them, "The Shabbat was made for man, and not man for the Shabbat.

This is repeated in an equivalent form in Talmud²⁹ and is based upon Exodus 31:14

You shall keep the Shabbat, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.

Much debate was centred on the phrase 'holy unto you'. The Hebrew word here is '*masar*' which means delivered up. This can work both ways: The Commandment is delivered up to you, or you are delivered up to the Commandment. The first meaning was always intended, but the second meaning often prevailed. An example of this can be seen in recent Israeli history: if during Yom Kippur the army had not mobilised (Yom Kippur War 1973) due to the command not to work, then the country would in all likelihood have been destroyed,

29 See footnote 24.

truly 'delivered up' to the commandment. Preservation of life made it possible to 'break' the very tight commands surrounding Yom Kippur. If Shabbat has been 'delivered up' to us, and by extrapolation Torah also, then it is **for** us in a profound way. This will not lead us to abolish it, but to establish it. We should seek Torah's correct application in each new situation as we are lead by His Spirit, and also as the Spirit leads the people **authorised** to make Halacha. This is an essential element of Messianic Torah; Torah now on our hearts through the Renewed Covenant, applied every day through His Spirit and leading. So Shabbat is meant to serve us, not for us to serve Shabbat. There is a very real warning here not to put Shabbat (or Torah per se) into such a high and vaulted position in our lives that we actually put it before God Himself and let it become almost idolatrous. We shall avoid this if we realise that Shabbat is meant to serve us and be a blessing to our lives; it is a gift from God because He knows we need it.

Another ruling found in Talmud³⁰ is that 'Positive Commandments take precedence over Shabbat, if they are time linked.' Within the Rabbinic community, the commandments of Torah have been broken down into 365 negative commandments and 248 positive commandments³¹. Positive commandments are ones that we must do as opposed to negatives, which we must not do. Rabbi Hillel taught that on *Pesach* itself, if it fell on a Shabbat, one was still to take the *Pesach* Lamb to the Temple (the work here is the carrying and slaughtering), this being a positive command and time linked. In Genesis Rabbah it records for us how Rabbi Judah HaNasi cooked and prepared a meal for the Roman Antonius on Shabbat because it was an act of hospitality to show God's love and mercy, especially to an outsider. Such acts of hospitality are to be shown **at all times**. This principle is fundamental when looking at Yeshua's teaching on Shabbat. We actually have a direct reference to Yeshua using this rule of interpretation³²

Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Shabbat.

30 Caution must be shown when using Talmud to date interpretative principles back to the first century. The dating of Rabbinic rulings is notoriously difficult, however, the following example seems relatively secure due to Yeshua's own use of it.

31 Maimonides' own listing is one such list. The list varies according to which source author/collator you subscribe to. Maimonides, M. *The Commandments*. Translated by Dr Charles Chavel. The Soncino Press, Jerusalem, 1967.

32 John 7:22-24

If a man receives circumcision on the Shabbat, so that the Torah of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Shabbat?

Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."

We shall return later to look at the implications of this as regards the healing episode, but we can clearly see the principle at work here. Circumcision is work (cutting) but it must be done on the 8th day, even if it is a Shabbat, thereby profaning the Shabbat. The rule laid down above was the way to resolve this; some work **is** allowable on Shabbat, if by so doing the full intent of Torah is upheld. It is interesting to note that circumcision is not a medical procedure related to saving life due to disease, nor is it one necessary to survival (threat to life by outside agency). We can see then that the 'preservation of life' rule was not the only Halachic principle in operation when deciding what was acceptable on Shabbat.

We now turn to the example of the Temple itself for a model of acceptable Shabbat work and the principles by which this work was done. We shall see that Yeshua fully understood and agreed with the *Halacha* allowing the work to continue in the Temple, even on the Shabbat. Scripture often makes the link (as in the Book of Revelation, and also Non-Messianic Jewish sources) that the Temple in Jerusalem was given as a copy of the Heavenly Temple. What happened there was a reflection of what was happening in the Heavenly Realm. Shaul develops this theme in many places, as does the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 9. As we saw earlier, God does not cease His upholding and maintaining work on the Shabbat. We would therefore also expect to see this kind of work carried on in the Temple, and we do. The sacrifices were prepared and slaughtered, covering the sins of the people, regardless of whether it was Shabbat or not. Just as Yeshua continues to pray for His people and cover them with His sacrifice on the Shabbat too. The Torah illustrates what would see in the Temple on a Shabbat³³:

And on the Shabbat day two lambs in their first year, without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, with its drink offering-- this is the burnt offering for every Shabbat, besides the regular burnt offering with its drink offering.

This makes it plain that there are actual commands that make the priesthood work **extra** to the normal daily sacrifices. These were Shabbat sacrifices. Furthermore they had to be **burnt** which involved the lighting of fire or at least the use of fire, which on a literal reading of Torah would appear to be forbidden. Secondly the Showbread also had to be prepared³⁴

And you shall take fine flour and bake twelve cakes with it. Two-tenths of an ephah shall be in each cake.

You shall set them in two rows, six in a row, on the pure gold table before the LORD.

And you shall put pure frankincense on each row that it may be on the bread for a memorial, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Every Shabbat he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant.

And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the offerings of the LORD made by fire, by a perpetual statute."

We shall return to this Showbread below when we consider David's actions in eating it (and Yeshua's Teaching on it). The Torah portion above makes it clear it is only for Aaron and his sons to eat. What is clear is that this bread had to be baked and made on the Shabbat, again apparently contradicting Torah. If we use the Temple as a model of interpretation, we can see that some work clearly did happen on the Shabbat. If the Temple is a model of the Heavenly reality (and it is), then the question we need to ask ourselves when considering work on Shabbat becomes clearer: What would God Himself do on the Shabbat? By looking at what Yeshua both did and taught on the Shabbat issue we can begin to answer this question. All the principles or Halachic guidelines seen so far should put Yeshua's teaching into a context where we can see how He intended us to live out His Shabbat commands.

We now turn to some of Yeshua's direct teaching on the Shabbat issue ³⁵and attempt to draw these strands together.

34 Lev 24:5-9

35 Matthew 12:1-14

At that time Yeshua went through the grain fields on the Shabbat. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Shabbat!"

But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

Or have you not read in the Torah that on the Shabbat the priests in the temple profane the Shabbat, and are blameless?"

Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.

But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Shabbat."

Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue.

And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Shabbat?" that they might accuse Him.

Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Shabbat, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?"

Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Shabbat."

Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

This passage contains some condensed Shabbat teaching, delivered in a truly Hebraic use of language and structure. Yeshua's arguments are ordered and structured from within a recognisably traditional Jewish understanding. At the same time Yeshua introduces His Truth to the issue. His *Talmidim* are plucking and eating grain heads because they are hungry. It is Shabbat, so the issue of 'Does this constitute work?' is immediately present; some local Pharisees seem to think so. It has normally been assumed that the Pharisees

who witnessed this act were giving the traditional view of the Talmidim's actions as work. However, some authorities have questioned this and it may be that this ruling was only representative of a regional ruling of a certain group of Pharisees. Either way however, the accusation is put to Yeshua that the Torah is being broken. However, the only ruling being broken here is an 'Oral' Torah ruling. The written Torah does not *literally* forbid this. There are comments in the Jewish writings about what constitutes plucking, and it may be these that the antagonists are referring to. Nevertheless Yeshua disagrees with their interpretation and backs it up with an event from the life of David (an *Aggadic* ruling)³⁶

"Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found."

And the priest answered David and said, "There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women."

Then David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was sanctified in the vessel this day."

So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away.

Note that in the original event no mention is made of David's men being hungry (although in the traditions, backed up by Yeshua, it does), neither does Yeshua say they were starving (danger to life), yet He does say that they were right to eat the *lechem hapanim*, the Showbread, which was designated by Torah to be eaten only by the Priesthood. We need to put this event in line with another Torah command³⁷

When you come into your neighbour's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbour's standing grain.

The purpose of this was to make sure the poor and hungry would and could be fed while not destroying the farmer's livelihood. We can now

36 1 Sam 21:3-6

37 Deut 23:25

see how Yeshua's use of the principle of maintaining life even on the Shabbat works. The context Yeshua quotes is important too: This was no casual need. David and his men were fleeing from Shaul and had no time to make provision. We could infer from this that while 'general' shopping might not be permissible on the Shabbat, if there is a real human need which could not have been satisfied prior to Shabbat, or planned for before Shabbat begins, Yeshua would understand this as a need to be satisfied, even on the Shabbat. Maintenance/preservation of life takes priority. This example quoted by Yeshua is drawn from an historical event, Aggadic teaching. Theology drawn from history needs to be very carefully handled, and even Rabbinic Judaism recognised this. In Rabbinic Judaism Aggadic teaching does not carry as much weight as teaching taken from, and directly derivable from, the Torah (first 5 books of the Bible). However Yeshua does go on to use the Torah to make it clear that this is the correct ruling by quoting indirectly from Lev 24 that the Priests 'profane the Shabbat' and are nevertheless 'blameless'. They do this by working, but it is allowable work. The Talmud³⁸ also makes this clear by stating that Temple service takes precedence over Shabbat, i.e. it is more important to continue the work of the Lord even (especially?) on the Shabbat, both in terms of His atoning work (Temple based sacrifice) and His general work looking after His Creation (human and physical). The other principle hinted at by Yeshua here is the issue of time-linked commandments. All offerings and sacrifices in the Temple are Time-based and therefore take precedence.

In our original quote³⁹ Yeshua makes an amazing claim: He is greater than the Temple itself. What is He trying to teach us by this comment in the context of Shabbat? Some work is allowable in the Temple since it reflects Heaven, and God Himself works on Shabbat. Yeshua is saying that He too will work on Shabbat within the Temple guidelines and *Halacha* laid down, because in fact the Priests are only copying Him anyway! Matt 12:8 backs this up; Yeshua is Lord of the Shabbat because He gave it in the first place. Rabbi Shaul draws from the Temple model extensively when describing the Body of Believers in Yeshua and calls them the Living Temple⁴⁰ and Peter calls believers a Priesthood, both of which mean we reflect how God deals and works, even on a Shabbat.

38 Shabbat 131a. This ruling seems to have been well known in Yeshua's time, especially as He refers to it here. This may be another instance of Yeshua's teaching being codified into the later Talmud.

39 Matt 12:6

40 1 Cor 3:16

The last comments of Yeshua need to be placed into their context of the healing done on the Shabbat. Let us consider the comments in verses 11-12 of Matthew 12 first. Yeshua claims that healing is 'lawful' based on Ex 21:33, namely that mercy would lead you to pull your ox or donkey out of the pit it had fallen into, even on Shabbat, because it would be suffering. Linking this to a '*kal v'khomer*' argument on the greater value of a human life⁴¹ means for Yeshua that mercy also must be shown to a human who is likewise suffering, so healing is allowable work on Shabbat. In verse 7 of Matthew 12 Yeshua links His teaching on the motivation for healing with Hosea 6:6. For Him, this is one of the crucial Torah interpretational keys: 'I desire mercy'. By putting the comments on the Exodus passage alongside the Hosea passage we have His justification for healing on Shabbat. Acts of mercy and service to one's fellow human being take precedence over the practical requirements of Shabbat observance. As Yeshua says 'It is lawful to do good on the Shabbat', in other words doing a 'mitzvah' or good work/deed of Torah, motivated by mercy and love is the final understanding of Shabbat. It fully expounds what is acceptable work on Shabbat.

There is one more 'humorous' element to this: Because Yeshua did not actually touch the man when He healed him, the actual definition of work related to the healing (according to that Pharisaic group) did not in reality take place! One can only imagine the shock of the onlookers as Yeshua 'works', but does not 'work' according to the teachings followed by some of the Pharisees of Yeshua's day. Yeshua's ability to ride above the false interpretations and faulty Torah observance around Him, while pointing out the true and genuine way, truly marks Yeshua as the Lord of Torah. He left them utterly dumbfounded, but plotting His downfall.

To conclude this, we need to have one more look at Time based commands. There are no time links mentioned in the Torah commands with the animal in the pit, or with the healings; **these commands are not to be carried out at certain times only**. We might logically ask the question nevertheless, When is it a good time to do good? The answer of course is **all the time!** As Neusner quotes in his writings on the Shabbat issue, 'no act of Mercy was to be left undone, even if it was the Shabbat'⁴².

41 Matt 12:12

42 Neusner, Jacob. *Judaism in the New Testament* Routledge London 1995. Chapter 6.

As we conclude this study, we can draw out some helpful principles from Yeshua's Shabbat teaching on how to interpret Torah from a Messianic perspective. Firstly, Yeshua teaches that Torah is for Life, i.e. any interpretation should add something beneficial to your life. Torah has not been given to cause you harm. Secondly, we are to follow Yeshua and imitate Him just as ancient Jewish teaching exhorts us to imitate God and do as He does. By looking at what Yeshua did, as well as what He taught, we can imitate Him in our own lives. He showed mercy and worked on Shabbat (just like the Priests carrying out the Temple services, and God Himself working to maintain His Creation). So do we. Thirdly, the needs of human beings are also to be met if we find ourselves, or others, in a situation beyond our planning. Either we do this ourselves if we are able, or involving others if we are physically unable. Finally, doing good to others always takes precedence over other Torah commands because it is always the right time to do good works, as defined by Torah. Time based commands take precedence over other commands.

When trying to clarify how Yeshua approached the Torah and taught from it we must always allow the *Ruach* to guide us in each and every situation. It is not the intention of this study to cover all possibilities, but to highlight some of Yeshua's principles of Torah interpretation. One area of debate between the rabbis of old on this issue was just how far mercy could go before the Torah really does become profaned, and this is clearly an issue here too. Yeshua upheld the Shabbat and did not abrogate it in any way; neither do Messianic Jews and Messianic Gerim. Yeshua's Halacha was not a charter for a 'free for all' interpretation, but one that brought out the essential nature of the Day that the Lord had created. On Shabbat especially we should show the Nations what our Lord and our God is truly like in Yeshua!

Glossary

<i>Messianic Writings</i>	New Testament
<i>Talmidim</i>	Disciples
<i>Talmud</i>	Collection of Oral teachings codified in Yavneh after dispersion began
<i>Chava</i>	Eve
<i>Ruach HaKodesh</i>	Holy Spirit
<i>Tanach</i>	Acronym for the Hebrew Bible
<i>Targum</i>	Aramaic translation/dynamic interpretation of the Torah.

<i>Pesach</i>	Passover
<i>Torah</i>	Law
<i>Mashiach</i>	Messiah
<i>Halacha</i>	Oral ruling based on written Torah
<i>Aggada</i>	Teaching based on events in Scripture
<i>Kal v'khomer</i>	argument based on progression, from the 'lighter' to the 'heavier'.
<i>Shaul</i>	Paul
<i>Remez</i>	a hint at another topic related to the one being discussed. A Jewish hermeneutic principle.
<i>Gerim</i>	Believers from the nations who follow Yeshua, those grafted into the Olive Tree (Rom 11).