

# Shabat Shalom!

## UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCING THE AMAZING SHALOM OF THE SABBATH

BY VICTORIA SARVADI, TH.D.

I was reared in a traditional Christian home and had little or no exposure to anything Jewish. As a teenager in the seventies, my love for the Lord prompted me to unashamedly wear a *Jesus Freak* button to school to declare my devotion to him. Back then, I never

fully realized that the Lord and Savior that I embraced as my Messiah, had actually been born a Jew. Much later, I learned that he passionately practiced and displayed his faith as a devout follower of Torah. He was born in Bethlehem, Israel, during a time of great Roman oppression. He was circumcised in obedience to the Covenant, worshipped in the Holy Temple, he celebrated the festivals of the Lord as instructed in Leviticus 23, and he faithfully observed the Sabbath. Yet, it wasn't until my late thirties that it dawned on me that ***I really didn't know*** Jesus in his Jewish context at all. And it was then that I began to wonder why.

This revelation motivated me to go back to school and pursue an intense study of Hebrew biblical education, including anthropology and a study of the New Testament from a Jewish perspective. I found the Hebrew language and its ancient idioms quite fascinating. I became captivated by the first century historical and archeological aspects of Second-Temple Judaism—the



time when Jesus lived—and of the Jewish customs and traditions of his people. It was a whirlwind of incoming information—and I soaked it into my life and spirit. Some years later when I walked the stage to accept my Th.D. in Hebraic Studies, I realized that the Jesus Freak girl of my youth had found her calling and my journey was just beginning.

A significant part of this journey is to teach other seekers the truth of God’s Word as it has been revealed to me over the years. Many of these teachings can be found in a growing collection of articles I call *Precious Gems*, articles that share nuggets of wisdom and truth that I have learned as I have traveled through various denominations to reach the true roots of my faith. You are reading one of those articles now.

When I began to question why the Jewishness of Jesus was something I had never heard about in all my years of attending “church,” one of the first things I realized was that this deletion of facts was more about a language barrier than it was about intentional deception. The Christianity I grew up with—that most of us grew up with—was influenced and interpreted through Greek, Roman, and Western eyes. And it often failed to reveal the deep spiritual meanings of the first-century Hebraic faith of our Jewish Lord.

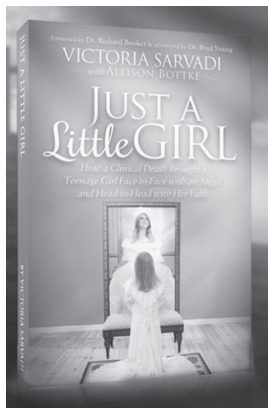
First-century Judaism (not to be confused with modern day Rabbinic Judaism) is our mother faith; and the faith and theology of Jesus is predicated on this foundation. However, over the years, something has gotten lost—very lost—in translation. How did we stray so far away from our original roots?

### THE TIME OF CHRIST

The teachings of Yeshua (the Hebrew name of Jesus) were initially directed to ancient Middle Eastern thinkers. To grasp the foundations of our faith more fully, we need to step back and approach the Bible from a *fresh* but nonetheless *ancient* Jewish perspective—a perspective that goes back long before denominations, before the Reformation of the church, and before Catholicism and Orthodoxy veered off from the initial matrix.

As European or Western thinkers, we have difficulty approaching the Bible in the mindset in which it was written. As Gentiles, we have struggled with misunderstandings for centuries. We lack the rich Jewish heritage and basic foundational understandings of those first century Jews whose ears actually heard the voice and instruction of Jesus.

One typical misunderstanding we have is the idea of the Sabbath. It is recorded in Genesis that *Shabbat* (the Hebrew word for the Sabbath or the seventh day of the week) is the day when God



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rested and the day that he instructed us to remember and to keep holy (set apart). According to the Hebraic and biblical concept of time, the Sabbath begins at nightfall on Friday and lasts until nightfall on Saturday. After a holy day of rest and remembrance, the followers of Yeshua would, by common Jewish tradition, meet for *Havdalah*, which was a time of extending one’s focus on God beyond the time of Sabbath. *Havdalah* occurred on Saturday evening after the sun went down (or the first day of the week). The Saturday evening *Havdalah* was for the purpose of study, prayer, and fellowship.

In today’s culture, Sunday morning (not Saturday evening) is primarily recognized as the time when Christians assemble and worship God. Yet for those who desire to walk in the dust of the Rabbi Yeshua’s feet, it is important to realize there is a difference between *worshipping God* on Sunday (which of course, is absolutely acceptable) and *keeping the Sabbath* which is one of the Ten Commandments. You can certainly do both if you are led, but it is important to know that these two days have two entirely different emphases.

### THE SABBATH AND SUNDAY

Corporate worship is man’s response to the Scripture that tells us “...do not neglect the assembly of the brethren” (Hebrews 9:25). In today’s mainstream Christian culture, this assembly is generally conducted on Sunday—a day when Christians around the world gather together in fellowship and for worship of Lord. Any day that man assembles to worship would be considered a day “dedicated unto the Lord”—again, something quite different than *keeping*

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*the Sabbath*, which is a sacred blessing given unto man by God **as a time of rest**. But, rest from what?

Yeshua says in Mark 2:27, “The Sabbath was made *for* man, not man for the Sabbath.” Sabbath is a gift from God that allows us to slow down—to focus on that which really matters in life by resting from our worldly ways and exhaustive pursuits and instead trusting in God. “*Keeping the Sabbath*” is a far more *personal* act than a *corporate* one—it is a weekly remembrance and commemoration of our personal decision to make Yeshua our Lord and Savior.

### A CATAclysmic CHANGE

For over three centuries a movement of believers called “The Way (of Yeshua)” instructed the new believing Gentiles on how to keep the sacred commandment among the nations. Then, in the fourth century, Constantine the Great declared by imperial edict that the observance of holy day of Sabbath that the early Christians celebrated on the seventh day was to cease. As emperor of the known world, Constantine declared that Sunday would now be recognized as the *Christian Sabbath*. By the stroke of a pen, the Gentile emperor instituted a one-world religion that he knew little about. In one fell swoop, he declared centuries of tradition irrelevant—an edict in complete opposition to what the sacred Scriptures instruct.

The Word of God concerning times and seasons—or any other command—cannot be changed, as Constantine so presumptuously did when he replaced the seventh day, the actual day of the *Sabbath* with the *first* day of the week. The word *Sabbath* is a transliteration

of the Hebrew word *Shabbat*, which is derived the root *sbt* (*shin, bet, tav*), meaning “to cease,” “to end,” or “to rest.” The word *shalom* is cognate with the word *shevet*, which means “to sit down” or “to dwell” (Psalm 133:1).

Constantine was deeply immersed in polytheistic pagan religions, so he systematically banned the beloved feasts of the Lord (Passover, in particular) and the Sabbath that Yeshua kept on the seventh day.

In doing so, he tried to blend a once pure faith with other traditions from the festivals of the sun god (Sunday worship), the fertility goddess, Ishtar (Easter), and Nimrod (December 25—what we now call Christmas). It was this cataclysmic time in history when the true first century faith, clarified and demonstrated by Jesus, became entangled in vines of misunderstanding and was corrupted by the pagan customs that Constantine refused to relinquish.

### PURPOSE OF SHABBAT

*Shalom* means “peace,” and *Shabbat* means “rest.” In Hebrew *Shabbat Shalom* means “Have a peaceful day of rest.” *Shalom* is the key word in understanding the true meaning of Sabbath. In our Western society, a common greeting is often “How are you?” In Hebrew, a similar greeting would be “*Ma shlomcha?*” or “*Ma shlomech?*” depending on your gender. The direct English translation for these Hebrew greetings is, “How is your peace?” Unlike “How are you?” this probing question of inquiring of one’s peace causes a person to do a deeper, far more personal, inventory of their life.

In Scripture, the Sabbath is considered to be one of the sacred feasts commanded in Leviticus 23. The Word calls these feasts *moedim* or “appointments” with God—times when God is summoning us to “meet with him.” The question then becomes, “How does one meet with God?”

Many of us find it difficult to take the time to realize that the Maker of all things created humanity in his own image, let alone contemplate what that actually means. It means that not only were humans made into a physical creatures who learn to use his or her senses to obtain knowledge and to discern pleasure or danger, but that they were also created humankind to be *of the spirit*. Man was the only creation that incorporated a “spirit life” that melded with the Spirit of God when one was “born again” as a new functioning creature not dependent on physical senses but rather on the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. This is a significant aspect of what it means to be a true follower of Christ.

When one dies a common epitaph that is often applied is, “May he rest in peace (*shalom*).”

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Resting in peace by death is the ultimate *shalom*. In death, the spirit is either united with God, or it is eternally separated from God. Eternity with God is Peace. Eternity in hell is torment.

When we take this Western idea of “Resting in Peace” into the life of the *here and now* instead of in death, a whole new level of significance emerges. Because Hebrew has several levels of meaning, the “*resh*” or prophetic level of meaning suggests that even though we are alive, our soul (which is our mind, will, and emotions) can still “rest in peace” or *die* with Christ. In essence, the questions could be, Have we died to our flesh? Or, is the Prince of Peace alive in us? Is our “spirit man” functioning now instead of only our physical senses?

In Mark 3:4 Yeshua instructed us to “do good” on the Sabbath, which means to “be selfless—walking in love toward God and one another, preferring one another over our own needs. In essence, it means to die to self and put carnality to rest... R.I.P!

### LEARNING TO TRUST

Another lesson God wants us to learn from *Shabbat* is trust. We see in Scripture that God told the Hebrews to gather twice as much manna on Friday so they could rest on Saturday. This exercise of faith in God was demonstrated when one did not try to show up for work on the Sabbath or take more than the extra day’s allotment.

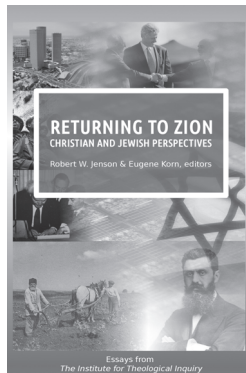
It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. Then the Lord said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? See, the Lord has given you the sabbath; therefore he gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain 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 (Exodus 16:27-30, NASB).

The purpose of the test would eventually be understood as his people learned to trust him for the provisions of the flesh so they could give more attention on the selflessness of life. The focus became rest from their toil and instead on engaging in the goodness of God. With the gift of the Holy Spirit we are now learning to operate from our spirit man, in order to minister to others. This is the difference between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh.

### LEARNING TO INCORPORATE

Along with countless believers who are re-examining the “Jesus time” roots of our Christian faith, I believe that God is asking us to set aside one day a week to “die” to the things of this world—choosing on our own volition not


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to be involved in the carnality of this life, not to be overwhelmed with a long list of “things to do.” Can we for just one day every week dedicate a “practice time” of trusting him as he multiplies our efforts of the work week? He blesses us as we take the focus off ourselves and show love to one another. As one grows in God this very practice becomes a new way of life that spills over even to the other six days of the week when we take opportunities to operate in the spirit showing his character in all that we do.

Matthew 12:8 teaches us, “For the Son of Man is Lord of *Shabbat*!” What a blessing it would be to Yeshua if we could embrace this gift of *Shabbat* (which is his New Life Spirit) that he has so freely given to us and walk in it on the eighth day. Think about it . . . *Shabbat shalom* is an eternal function of walking in the Spirit. May the joy of the Sabbath fill your life with God’s *shalom* and his blessings. 

Dr. Victoria Sarvadi is co-founder and vice-president of The Nathaniel Foundation in Kingwood, TX. She received her doctoral degree from The Center of Biblical Research in Redlands, CA, and has served the Messianic community as teacher and administrator. As a licensed minister, she is also Director and Minister of the Nathaniel Fellowship, a Hebraic community in McKinney, TX. She and her husband Paul have residences in Porter and McKinney, TX.



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