

What does it mean to “Violate the Shabbat?”

This weeks reading is from **Parsahat Shelach Lecha** (*Bamidbar / Numbers 13:1-15:41*) the Lord commands Moshe to send men to spy out the land of Canaan which He was giving to the Children of Israel (*13:1-2*). Moshe sends twelve men to spy out the land saying **יְהוָה וַיֹּרְאִיתֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ מֵהָהָר הַזֶּה וְאֶת-הָעָם הַיֹּשֵׁב עָלֶיהָ הֲחֹזֵק הוּא הֲרַפָּה הַמְעַט** *13:18* **‘See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many.** (NASB) According to the Torah, the men go to see whether the land is fat or lean, if the camps are well fortified or open, and whether the land is flowing with milk and honey (**וְזָבַת חֵלֶב וְדִבֵּשׁ הוּא**) and very plentiful? Having sent the men out (Shelach Lecha, **לך שלח**), the men return from spying out the land and bring a good report of the land being filled with milk and honey and a bad report of the inhabitants who live in the land (*13:32*). As a result of the bad report, the people wept all night long and grumbled against Moshe and Aaron. Caleb and Joshua stood up before the people and said the land is good and plentiful and filled with milk and honey. If the Lord is pleased with us He will give the land to us only do not rebel against the Lord and do not fear the people of the land for they will be our prey (*14:7-9*). The congregation of people however wanted to stone Caleb and Joshua (*14:10*).

ספר במדבר פרק יג *Bamidbar / Numbers 13:1-3*

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
ב שְׁלַח-לְךָ אַנְשִׁים וַיִּתְּרוּ אֶת-אֶרֶץ
כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי נֹתֵן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ
אֶחָד אִישׁ אֶחָד לְמִטֵּה אֲבֹתָיו תִּשְׁלְחוּ
ג כָּל נָשִׂיא בְּהֵם: וַיִּשְׁלַח אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה
מִמִּדְבַּר פָּאָרָן עַל-פִּי יְהוָה כְּלָם אֲנִי-
שִׁים רָאשֵׁי בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמָּה:

13:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 13:2 ‘Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers’ tribes, every one a leader among them.’ 13:3 So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the Lord, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel. (NASB)

This week’s reading is an important turn in the events of the Torah when God sends Israel back into the wilderness because of their lack of faith and rebellion. Studying these events, the Scriptures do not tell us what time exactly during the week these twelve men departed to spy out the land. What day during the week did these men depart for the Promised Land? This is a very important question because of the issue of traveling on the Shabbat and what is known as “*the sabbath days journey*.” The Scripture that bears upon this important question is taken from *Shemot / Exodus 16:29* which says:

Shemot / Exodus 16:29

16:29 “See, for 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.” (KJV)

כט ראו פי-יהוה נתן לְכֶם הַשְּׁבֹת עַל-כֵּן הוּא נָתַן לְכֶם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי לֶחֶם
יוֹמִים שָׁבוּ | אִישׁ תַּחֲתֵיו אֶל-יַצָּא אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי:

The Torah states that every man is to “*abide in his place*” (תַּחֲתֵיו) and he is not to “*go out from his place on the seventh day*” (אֶל-יַצָּא אִישׁ מִמְּקוֹמוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי). This is interpreted to mean he is not to leave to go on a long journey, he is to stay near his home. As a result of this commandment, the rabbinic authorities needed to determine the limitations in the observance of this command and so they placed restrictions upon the distance one may travel on the Shabbat so as not to violate this command. Based upon *Joshua 3:4-5*, it was determined that one may travel on the Shabbat from within the city boundaries a distance of 2000 cubits. Another comment on the distance one may travel is that “*place*” meant “*city*” and so it was acceptable to travel anywhere one wanted within the city and not more than 2000 cubits outside of the city limits on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees later doubled the distance that one might travel stating that if one placed food preparations at another location, then that place figuratively became his abode and he may travel to the place a distance up to 2000 cubits making the journey 4000 cubits (approximately 1 mile). In Apostolic times, the Pharisees concluded that if a person was to travel 4000 cubits on the Shabbat, then he would also need to return and thus allowed 8000 cubits, round trip, as the standard. (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995*) In the Apostolic Writings, we also find a couple references that allude to the Sabbath day journey according to *Matthew 24:20* and *Acts 1:12*.

Matthew 24:20

24:20: “But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, nor on the Sabbath day” (NASB)

Acts 1:12

1:12: “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day’s journey.” (NASB)

These texts refer to the “*sabbath day*” but do not give the distance that one is traveling. In addition to this, it is important to note that Yeshua states to pray you don’t have to flee on the Sabbath day and Luke mentions the sabbath day journey from Jerusalem, which suggests to us that we are to consider the distance being traveled on foot on the Lord’s day of rest. Observing this command is an important aspect of the life of a believer. As a result of the Torah concept of the “*sabbath day journey*,” the rabbis discuss this topic of the Sabbath day’s journey in the first midrash on Parashat Shelach Lecha in *Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar, Parashah 17, Part 1* (מדרש רבה במדבר פרשה טז סימן א). The midrash opens with a Halachic question on this topic: “*How far may one travel just prior to the Shabbat?*”

Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar, Parashah 17, Part 1

“Halachah, Is it permitted to set sail upon the Great Sea three days before the Shabbat? Our Rabbis taught (Talmud Bavli Shabbat 19a), One may not set sail upon the Great Sea three days before the Shabbat at a time when one is going to a distant place, but if one wishes to sail, for example, from Tyre or Zidon, he may set sail even on the eve of the Shabbat, because it is obvious that he can arrive while it is yet day. This applies to one whose errand is optional, but if he is engaged on a religious duty, he may set sail any day he pleases. Why? Because he is engaged in the performing of a religious duty, and such an one may override the Shabbat. Similarly, you find in the case of the Sukkah. For we learned that those charged with the performance of a religious duty are exempt from sitting in the Sukkah, because there is none so dear to the Holy One blessed be He, as one who is commissioned to perform a religious duty, risking his life in order to carry out his mission successfully. No other people sent to perform a religious duty and risking their lives in order to succeed in their mission can compare with the two men whom Joshua the son of Nun sent; as it says, And Joshua the son of Nun sent out of Shittim two spies heresh (Joshua 11:1). Who were they? Our Rabbis taught, They were Phineas and Caleb. They went and risked their lives and succeeded in their mission. What is the meaning of the word heresh? It teaches that they provided themselves with pots, and cried, Here are pots. Whoever wishes let him come and buy. Why all this trouble? That no one might detect them reading the word heres (earthenware) and that people should not say that they were spies. And they went and came into the house of a harlot whose name was Rehab, and lay there. She rose and welcomes them. The king of Jericho became aware of their presence and heard that they had come to search out the land; as it says, And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, etc. When they came to seek them, what did Rehab do? She took them away to hide them. Phinehas said to her, I am a priest and priests are compared to angels; as it says, for the priest’s lips should keep the knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the angel of the Lord of hosts (Malachi 2:7), and an angel, if he wishes, can be visible, and if he wishes, he can be invisible. How can we infer that prophets are compared to angels? From the fact that it says in reference to Moshe, And sent an angel, and brought us forth out of Egypt (Bamidbar / Numbers 20:16). Was it not Moshe who brought them out? Certainly, but you can infer from this that prophets are compared to angels. Similarly, it says, And the angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, I made you go up out of Egypt (Judges 2:1). But was it not Phinehas who said this? Yes, but you can infer from it that the prophets are called angels. Phinehas then, said to Rehab, I am

a priest and do not need to be hidden. Hid Caleb, my companion. I will stand before them and they will not see me. She did so; as may be inferred from the verse, and the woman took the two men and she hid him (Joshua 2:4), not she hid them, but she hid him is written. This proves that she did not hid Phinehas but only Caleb. All this serves to teach you how much these two righteous men risked their lives in order to perform their mission. The messengers whom Moshe sent, however, were wicked men. How can we infer this? From what we read in the present section, Send you men.

The rabbis in the midrash ask the question under what condition is it OK to travel prior to the Shabbat? They begin with the question of setting sail on the Great Sea three days before the Shabbat and the destination. If the destination is near it is OK to set sail, if not then one must wait. They say this ruling applies to one whose errand is optional. On the other hand, if one is engaged in a religious duty, he may set sail on any day he chooses. In fact, if one is performing a religious duty, one may even override this command on the Shabbat. The proof text that is given is that of the Sukkah, if one is performing a religious duty, he is not required to sit in a Sukkah and thus overriding the command on one of the Shalosh Regalim (שלוש רגלים). This is brought into context with today's Scripture reading regarding the twelve spies who are sent to spy out the Promised Land. They were risking their lives, this was a command of God to send them, and thus they are allowed to override the command on the Shabbat by traveling to and fro throughout the land since they were in the act of performing a religious duty.

In the Messianic community, these questions are very important regarding the Sabbath Day and taking time to rest and spend time with the Lord on the Shabbat. On a regular basis, within the Messianic community, this "*Sabbath Day*" topic always comes up. In more recent times, within the last couple months, I have heard people, who are attempting to be Torah observant, complain about the Shabbat. Not the kind of complaining that one needs to rest, but complaining about the Shabbat in a different way. Recently someone complained to me for having to host family, or a neighbor, or someone else, who is not Torah observant on the Shabbat. The complaint was regarding not being able to have a regular Sabbath day and their interpretation was because they had to be hospitable to someone in their home they were being "*forced*" to violate their period of rest for the Lord on the Shabbat. These kinds of comments reveal a zeal for the Lord while at the same time revealing that one does not have a reasoned understanding of God's word. My question: "*is this a valid complaint or is there a deeper spiritual problem?*" Do you think that it is a "*righteous*" deed to complain when being hospitable to family or strangers who are not Torah observant on the Shabbat?

To bring this into context, those who do not observe the Shabbat generally cite Yeshua's words that the Shabbat was made for man and not the other way around (man for the Shabbat) in *Mark 2:23-28*.

Mark 2:23-28

2:23 And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on

the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. 2:24 The Pharisees were saying to Him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' 2:25 And He said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; 2:26 how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?' 2:27 Jesus said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 2:28 'So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.' (NASB)

According to these Scriptures, the religious authorities in Yeshua's day were reproofing him for picking the heads of grain and eating on the Shabbat. Yeshua's response was that the Shabbat was made for man and not man for the Shabbat. Now there is not much to argue over the interpretation of Yeshua's words here; the basic idea is that we were not created for the seventh day of the week, we were created to bring glory to God. The seventh day is meant to give us a day of rest from our labor and to draw near and spend time with the Lord. According to *Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar, Parashah 17, Part 1*, one may set aside the Sabbath day if one is performing a religious duty (e.g. *circumcision on the 8th day*). In the discussions on religious duty and the command of God, we naturally enter into a subject matter what is known as "*Jewish Ethics*." Within Judaism, there is a diverse literature on Jewish ethics whose primary goal is to provide an answer on a broad range of moral, and normative ethics, and the difficulty of the struggle in the dynamic interplay between the Torah and ethical living. The traditional setting of rabbinic religious law known as halacha, addresses these various problems that is often associated with ethics, one such case being related to traveling on the Shabbat. Another topic within Jewish Ethics is being kind to others.

A major religious ideology found within Judaism is the concept of hospitality, or treating strangers with kindness. This is taken from the idea that Abraham entertained angels by feeding them according to Parashat Vayera (*Bereshit / Genesis 18:1-22:24*). As a result of the biblical text, it is said that it is a righteous deed to be kind to strangers as one might be entertaining angels unawares as Abraham had done. Yeshua himself also instructed his disciples to "*Love one another as I have loved you*" (*John 13:34*) and "*whatsoever you do to the least of my people, that you do unto me*" (*Matthew 25:40*). Note that the Gentiles (non-Jew) are also held within this covenant ethical requirement (see *Shemot / Exodus 22:20, Vayikra / Leviticus 29:33*) to "*love thy neighbor as thyself*" (*Vayikra / Leviticus 29:18*) where "*neighbor*" does not refer to a son of Israel exclusively. The Torah teaches us that there was to be one law for the native and the stranger (*Vayikra / Leviticus 29:34*). The Torah instructs us to also "*Remember the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt*" (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 10:19*), and this is considered important in Judaism and Yeshua based upon his teachings. During Passover Jews are expected to show hospitality to all, and to consider the needs and feelings of anyone who may be marginalized, for whatever reason. According to the Torah, the slaves of Jewish people had special rights that preserved their dignity as human beings which al-

lowed them certain freedoms, and forbade mistreatment. The Torah speaks extensively on treating others fairly and with hospitality.

In the principle of Kiddush Hashem (*Vayikra / Leviticus 22:32*) we are taught to conduct ourselves in every way as to prevent the name of God from being dishonored by non-Israelites. The idea is that the greatest sin is committed if we sin against a non-Israelite, because this may lead to the reviling of God's name. In Yeshua's day, religious activity revolved around the second Temple service. Despite the importance of the Temple worship, the Jewish home had always been the most important center of spiritual life. Following the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., the role of the home as a "*small temple*" or "*sanctuary*" (miqdash me'at, *Ezekiel. 11:16*) took on new significance. Dr. Marvin Wilson wrote in his book "Our Father Abraham," (pg. 216) saying "*Foundational to all theory on the biblical concept of the family is the Jewish teaching that the home is more important than the synagogue. In Jewish tradition, the center of religious life has always been the home. The Church has yet to grapple seriously with this crucial concept.*" The Jewish home is considered to be modeled after the Temple service. The home is considered a place of hospitality and hospitality is considered a religious duty. In his book Marvin Wilson writes:

"Hospitality is a fundamental function of the Jewish home. This practice is also central in the Hebraic heritage of the Church...the term used in rabbinical literature for hospitality is haknusat orhim, literally 'bringing in of guests' or 'gathering in of travelers'...First, the rabbis considered hospitality one of the most important functions of the home...one was not to discriminate in the showing of hospitality..." (Marvin Wilson, Our Father Abraham, p. 219).

In the biblical time, hospitality goes back even to Job, where the Scriptures say "*no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler*" (*Job 31:32*). According to *Isaiah 58:7*, we read "*...share your food with the hungry and provide the poor wanderer with shelter.*" If we consider the Apostolic Writings, itinerant teachers and rabbis, like Yeshua, the apostles, and even Paul, relied heavily upon the hospitality of homes as they carried the Gospel throughout the first century world. In Yeshua's day it was considered a great honor to welcome a respected teacher into one's home. The Mishnah states "*Let thy house be a meeting-house for the Sages and sit amid the dust of their feet and drink in their words with thirst*" (*Mishnah Avot 1:4*). The Apostle Paul said to Timothy that an overseer must be "*hospitable*" (*1 Timothy 3:2*).

So I ask again "*Do you think that it is a "righteous" deed to complain when being hospitable to family or strangers who are not Torah observant on the Shabbat?*" Is the complaint of having to be hospitable to an unbelieving parent or neighbor that prevents one from going to Synagogue a valid one? Would staying home to entertain strangers be a violation of the command to keep My shabbat? Based upon this analysis we are to be joyful in doing so and not angrily complacent. I hope that this places some context on the question "*What does it mean to Violate the Shabbat?*"