

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE II.

THE SAMARITAN SABBATH.¹

BY JACOB, SON OF AARON, HIGH PRIEST OF THE SAMARITANS
AT SHECHEM.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE following is the third chapter of a manuscript volume by the High Priest of the Samaritans on the rites and customs of his people. The first two chapters have already appeared in the *BIBLIOTHECA SACRA* (July, 1906 and 1907).

It cannot fall of interest to us to know in what manner the Samaritans observe the Sabbath day. In our New Testament lessons we are perplexed at times to know at just what points the scribes of Jesus' day had enlarged upon the legitimate applications of the Law of Moses to conditions of their own time. The customs of the Samaritans, while they cannot settle, do cast a side-light upon, these questions. They show to us a rigidly Sabbatarian sect; yet with very interesting differences from the customs of the Jews. These differences the High Priest discusses in detail. His treatise is an interesting, and in some respects an important, contribution to the literature of the Sabbath.

WILLIAM E. BARTON.

HOW THE SAMARITAN PEOPLE OBSERVE THE SABBATH.

As to the Sabbath and the manner of its observance and what must be done on it, in so far as the ceremonies current among the Samaritans are concerned, explanations are given in the following pages. Points of difference existing between us and the Jews will be shown to the reader, and substantial proofs will be adhered to convince him that the Jews violate the Sabbath through their unlawful practices.

¹Translated from the Arabic by Professor Abdullah Ben Kori, of Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon; edited by William E. Barton, D.D., Oak Park, Illinois.

THE PREPARATION ON FRIDAY.

From the outset every Samaritan individual must prepare himself for the observance of this noble day on Friday, which is the sixth day in the creation of the world, thereby following the command given in the Torah (Ex. xvi. 23) to the effect that the preparation for the Sabbath must be made on the sixth day. On this day all Samaritans procure for themselves, each according to his need and as far as his means may permit, the required provisions for both Friday and the Sabbath, and in such a state of preparation they await the oncoming Sabbath, on which they are commanded not to work. Cleansing of the body and changing the garments are also strictly carried out by them on the day of Friday.

THE ASSEMBLING ON FRIDAY EVENING.

About sunset on Friday they present themselves at the house of worship, where they offer their prayers, which are composed for that time and are of a brief nature, handed down to them from ancient times. With these prayers they are quite familiar, and it must be said that for offering them no more than thirty minutes are required. After prayer, those having food with them may eat it. Thereafter each family comes together (in the house of worship); and, forming a circle, they read portions of the Scriptures, known to them as the Surahs of the Sabbath, containing a memorial of the sabbatical duties, the worship of God (who is exalted) and the blessings due from the observance of the day. This is done after a very ancient custom. Having finished the reading of these surahs, they sing a hymn of most excellent sentiments. It contains thoughts that magnify God (may he be exalted), praises of thanks and gratitude and acts of the humblest adoration.

THE PRAYERS OF THE SABBATH.

This ended, a number of them, desiring to rest, lie down

for a time to rise at an early hour, that the other number may also rest a part of the night, and the reading of the Scriptures may not cease throughout the whole night until one hour or one and a half before daybreak, a short time before the morning prayer. Then the High Priest comes to begin the public prayer, according to the custom which is current among us, and to the rules and regulations which we have nowadays.

Portions of that prayer are taken from the writings of holy men, such as our lords Moses and Joshua (upon them be peace), and the elders of Israel in the days of the pleasure of God (may he be exalted), and from the writings of our doctors and the teachers and bulwarks of our religion. In addition to the foregoing are read therewith various other portions of the holy Torah. The reading is accompanied by appropriate kneelings, prostrations, risings to the feet, and by the uplifting and spreading of the hands. One part of the service is conducted by the High Priest alone, which he reads or delivers, such as preaching, lecturing, announcing, or reading; while the whole people, great and small, stand before him, in their white clothes with white coats, in all respect and devotion, the learned occupying the foreground and the illiterate standing behind, but the priestly family, related to our lords Moses and Aaron (upon them be peace), together with the High Priest, take the precedence of all. The prayer lasts a period of four hours and a half, with the addition of other suitable portions, which are read on a feast day, if such a feast falls on the Sabbath. At the end of the prayer everybody returns home.

THE SABBATICAL DIVISIONS OF THE TORAH.

Now the Bible is divided with them into forty-eight sabbatical divisions, according to the number of the Sabbaths of the year. Every family therefore or tribe comes together, and

reads that portion of the Torah which is designed for that particular Sabbath.

The Samaritan division of the Torah into sabbatical sections is so well defined that it applies both to the ordinary year and to leap-year. Thus for every Sabbath they have a special portion to read, and each portion is divided into several surahs, contrary to the division the Jews have. The Torah is divided by the Samaritans into nine hundred and sixty-three surahs. The one who opens the reading is the oldest member of the family or the most venerable of the tribe. He reads the first surah of that particular portion with a well-known intonation, and with punctuations for each single verse, according to the traditions handed to them anciently from the elders of the days of Blessing unto this day. And when the reader has finished his surah, those present reply with the well-known Hebrew expression meaning "well done, my lord." The next person to him on the right reads the second surah in the same manner, and still the next person on his right reads the third surah, until in this way every one of those present has shared in the reading, to the end of the given portion, in all good order.

THE SABBATH HYMNS.

Thereupon a hymn which belongs to the sabbatical portion is read. It is a composition of our doctors, containing thanksgiving and praise, and is sung with a splendid melody. Food is then passed around, and he who may desire to rest a short time may do so before the noonday sabbatical prayer. Some, however, continue to read until the appointed time for prayer; others go to the house of worship and listen to what may be helpful to them, as given by the teachers of our religion, who received their instruction from the former teachers of our days.

THE MIDDAY SERVICE.

In the meanwhile the time set for prayer is at hand; it begins exactly at six o'clock at noon. The prayers of that time and their requirements are a substitution for both the sabbatical and the daily or continuous offerings. It is among the obligatory prayers with them, together with that of the evening and the morning. The noonday prayer must be made in accordance with a set of rules which are well known and handed to them by traditions.

THE EVENING PRAYER.

After the noonday service has been finished, together with its adjuncts, some of those in the temple go home and partake of their food; others remain, and are given something to eat, awaiting the hour for the evening prayer; for the evening prayer, according to them, begins a half hour before sunset. It is introduced by a short sabbatical prayer, called the Prayer of Departure, in which is made mention of the state of our forefathers of Israel when they were by the sea and the Egyptians were close after them, when, as a result, they were exceedingly afraid. Mention is also made of the state of tranquillity which was brought about by the apostle Moses (upon whom be peace), and his help; for, according to them, this event took place on the evening of the Sabbath, when they left Egypt. They departed on the morning of Thursday and encamped at the sea-shore on Saturday; on this day the Egyptians pursued them and entered the sea on Sunday: so the traditions declare. After this prayer a hymn is read. It is one that was composed by one of their high priests, and contains the qualities and excellences of the day of Sabbath, that it may be observed with zeal for the good reward of those who observe it in worship; and that God may be praised and exalted on that day.

When the prayer of departure is ended, another one begins. It is that of the night of the Sabbath.

THE SEVEN SABBATH PRAYERS.

Now, according to the faith of the Samaritans, the obligatory prayers of the day of Sabbath are seven.

First, the prayer of the eve of the Sabbath.

Secondly, the reading of the sabbatical surahs and their adjuncts, as we have said before.

Thirdly, the morning prayer of the day of the Sabbath.

Fourthly, the reading of the necessary portions and their adjuncts, as we have already stated.

Fifthly, the noonday prayer of the Sabbath.

Sixthly, the reading together of the portions that we have already stated from right to left and left to right, surah by surah, together with the prayer of glorification, exaltations and praisegivings, composed by the wise and most learned writer, the famous High Priest, Merkah. This learned man composed four dissertations for the fourth Sabbath of the month. Each Sabbath has its own dissertation. He also wrote a fifth dissertation, in case the month may contain five Sabbaths.

Seventhly, the Prayer of Departure, which we have also mentioned before.

These are the seven prayers that belong to the day of Sabbath and which it is our custom to perform on that day.

THE ARGUMENT.

On that day, the Samaritans believe that it is not lawful to perform the least work, following the command of the noble revelation, as found in the Torah and of which the explanation may be given later on. It is not also lawful among them to speak about their business, or of anything that may bring profit to them. It is not lawful among them to sail the seas,

neither to leave for the outskirts of the town in which they live. They destroy entirely their fire, beginning with the evening on the day of Friday. They have no artificial light on the night of the Sabbath, and all their food on the day of the Sabbath is prepared for them on the day of Friday, and is kept apart from contact or the influence of fire. On that day they absolutely forbear from approaching their wives or of touching anything made on the Sabbath through fire, whether it be for them or for others. They even avoid visiting on that day with people of a different religion.

They possess, in the books of their instructors and learned men, discussions and thorough investigations as to the differences existing between them and the Jews, with reference to the keeping of the Sabbath.

THE SABBATH ORDINANCES.

Let us now mention briefly, as usual, the various ordinances which this people have for keeping the Sabbath. The ordinances are divided under various divisions and subdivisions.

First, the absolute cessation from labor.

Secondly, the refraining from leaving their homes and going into other places.

Thirdly, the necessity of being pure on that day, both outwardly and inwardly. The keepers of the Sabbath must not expose themselves to what may defile them, whether it be by an act of the soul or of the body.

Fourthly, cessation from labor and sanctifying the time imply that worship must be performed on that day; for the time is fitted for it, yea, even every admonition applied to the fulfilment of holiness must be observed. It is done by reading the Scriptures, by praying, and by sanctifying and exalting the Creator of all things. (Read Num. xx. 12.) As to

the cessation from all kinds of work, we understand the same from the saying of God: "See that God has made for you the Sabbath; therefore let every man among you remain in his place"; also, "Let no man leave his place on the Sabbath, and let the people cease from working on the day of the Sabbath."

Cessation from work is much to be desired for the Sabbath, and is indeed the first essential, but worship is also an essential, and is the fundamental principle of the day.

REST ON THE SABBATH MEANS TO WORSHIP.

To cease from working is necessary, simply for the purpose of worship; idleness has not in itself any praiseworthy element unless the rest is coupled with worship. And keeping the time itself of the Sabbath and magnifying it result in sanctifying the Creator of it.

GOD ALONE GIVES TIME ITS MORAL SIGNIFICANCE.

For the time itself is like any other, had the Creator not fitted it for his worship. Compare "and God blessed the day of the Sabbath and sanctified it;" that is to say he made it fitted and suitable for worship, and it has ever been among the holy days even from the beginning. Time in itself has no energy: it is an effect. The cause is the moving place, which divides it by its movements. God is the prime Creator (may he be exalted), both of the divisions of time and of their moral significance. The undivided firmament, unbroken by a single line or zero point from which reckoning might begin, is the receptacle of time. It is unitary, and has no divisions into days and hours, for time exists outside the planetary system. When the Place¹ was created, and was made to move out, and

¹ "The great Place," as used by the priest, is the earth, with those of the heavenly bodies that, related to it, constitute a measure of time.

was given a certain movement, passing through a certain amount of space, that period which it occupies in making the required definite distance is called time. But, besides the great Place, God (may he be exalted) created others, among them is the sun. Planets pass a certain amount of space around it, turning upon themselves to the extent of a period of a day. Motion was at first from the north to the south, beginning with the sign of Aries and ending with the sign of Libra. From the first motion we have the day and night, and from the second we have the various seasons. God (who is exalted) has established a time of worship in accordance with the days and seasons of the year, that we may know that he created divisible time, and has separated it from the meridian; that he created place and all existence, fitted them for their functions which are voluntarily done. It becomes therefore incumbent upon us to remember his mercies, which are both general and particular, by worshiping him, sanctifying him, and exalting him, which are called the fulfilment of righteousness.

THE HOLIEST HOURS.

It may be remarked here that some portions of the day are nobler than others, provided that worship is to cover only a part of the day. Thus the morning and the evening are the noblest parts of the day. If the worship is to cover the whole day, that day must be entirely made holy, as in case of the Sabbath and the various festival days.

The relations of the place must not also be neglected. Buying and selling must not be done in it. For both time and place in which worship is obligatory must have a peculiar standing of purity.

HOW THE JEWS BREAK THE SABBATH.

On the day of the Sabbath we should not resort to a place

wherein commerce is ordinarily transacted, but which on that day is prohibited by God (may he be exalted), nor to a place wherein live people who do not believe in the Sabbath's nobility and due observance. In this respect our customs are contrary to the conduct of the Jews, who violate the command of the supreme Legislator (may he be exalted), namely, "It shall be a holy day to you in all your dwelling-places." If there be in the place any one who does not believe in sanctifying the Sabbath and ceasing entirely from work, the Jews deal with him, thereby making the place unfit through having intercourse with a man who neither believes nor understands the keeping of both place and time. The command of the supreme God (may he be exalted) must be obeyed. The Jews, however, render null the command, and observe that of Jeremiah xvii. 22, forbidding the wearing of rings on the Sabbath according to what he said, "Do not carry burdens out of your houses on the day of the Sabbath." They prohibit even the wearing of a ring, but make it lawful unto themselves to go out of the town on the day of the Sabbath a distance of about two thousand yards. Do they not render null the command of the supreme God (whose name is exalted), which reads, "It shall be a rest unto you in all your dwellings"? God (may he be exalted) means here that one's movements should be confined only to a place wherein the Sabbath is legally kept, and wherein no work is done, whether it be the exchange of commodities or the coming in or going out for a gain, which in themselves defile the place.

What the Jews do is, therefore, wrong, viewed from all sides, and contradicts the command of the supreme God (who is to be adored), "Let no man go out of his place on the day of the Sabbath." Now the word *Makorm*, meaning "place," signifies both the general and the particular place. It is ap-

plied to the city as a whole or to a dwelling as a part of it. In some cases it may mean either. Then the command of God (may he be exalted) must be kept with reference to the general meaning of the clause, if need be, rather than with the particular, lest in limiting the command to the particular the general may be wilfully violated.

THE SINS OF GATHERING MANNA ON THE SABBATH.

The Israelites who went out to gather manna on the Sabbath committed the following transgressions: they doubted the statement of Moses (upon whom be peace), "To-day you shall not find it in the plain." They moved around and went beyond the lawful places, to which they were not permitted. They desired to gather manna, which is equivalent to the act of seeking gain, as it is said, "and some of the people went out to gather and they found not." They went out to find, and if they had found, they would have gathered, while going itself is prohibited, as we have mentioned above. They were also warned, namely, "You shall not find in the field"; also, "On the seventh day there shall be rest," meaning cessation from work. Therefore those who went out violated several commands.

THE JEWISH SABBATH FIRE.

The Jews also violate the Sabbath through their many unlawful practices, and contradict the will of the Legislator, ignoring his plain purposes as he revealed them. As an illustration: they keep fire in their places on that day, and take advantage of all the benefits accrued therefrom, utilizing it in many ways, contrary to the will of the great Legislator (may he be exalted), that fire on that day should be extinguished and its existence blotted out; that none of its benefits on the Sabbath should be procurable, as lighting, warming, and cooking.

They, however, place the fire within an iron receptacle, as it is their custom, so that whatever they desire to cook they place it in its proper pot over the fire which is enclosed within, as indicated above. They do this, however, before the ushering in of the time of the Sabbath, keeping the same unto the Sabbath, and bringing a union between the fire and its material. But the purpose of the Lord (may he be exalted) is that neither the fire nor its benefits should exist; for the command that prohibits is a sure indicator of the wickedness of what is prohibited.

CONCERNING FIRE KINDLED BEFORE, BUT PERMITTED TO BURN
UPON THE SABBATH.

It is plain that the supreme God (who is to be praised) desires that what he prohibits should not exist, and to bring about its existence is a daring affront to his majesty. It does away with his purpose, and nothing fulfils it except a perfect submission to do away with what is prohibited. Now the Jews think that what the fire does by itself cannot be attributed to another, which is vain indeed! Whatever way be considered as a result of fire is always attributed to the maker of it. For said God (who is exalted), "Let him who made the fire repay fully." If it happened that a man made fire in his vineyard or garden, in order to burn the brush or the like, but, owing to his neglect, it spread of itself and, on a day following the day on which he made it, it burned a fence, or a stack, or something left in a place belonging to some one else, the loss caused by such a fire, even if it were occasioned on the day of the Sabbath and the fire were started on Friday, must be repaired by its originator.

Thus what is prohibited on the Sabbath includes as well the effects of fire, though the fire and whatever may come in

contact with it may have been made before, on a workday. The guilt will be the maker's. The principle is of a general nature. It relates to causes and effects. Any harm that may have been occasioned by water and fire, which are naturally destructive, to a garden or a farm through the carelessness of a man, the responsibility falls on him. The Jews apparently do not understand, and ignore this fact. It is plain that, for everything prohibited, God (may he be exalted) has some reason or purpose; the prohibited thing must be done away with, or its existence provokes God (may he be exalted), and annuls his command. God (may he be exalted) said, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is threshing the wheat." Now God (may he be exalted) desires here that the beast should not be muzzled while it is doing the work, and he who muzzles it before the beginning of the work, and keeps it muzzled while actually in the work, becomes guilty; for the purpose for which the command is given, is rendered null. It is to keep off harm from the beast, and the owner of the wheat is surely not much affected by what the beast may eat. A similar command of God (may he be exalted) follows: "Do not plow with an ox and an ass at the same time"; for by doing so injury to the weaker animal will be avoided.

PURITY ON THE SABBATH.

As to the faithful, he must be pure, for purity is required for worship and is one of its greatest conditions. He must keep the time and the place holy, and himself in the same relative condition, aloof from anything that may defile him. The Jews are short of these conditions, for they dare to approach their wives on the day of the Sabbath, a condition that brings about pollution, according to Leviticus xv. 18. Thus it appears from the reference that either party is defiled throughout

that whole day. God (may he be exalted) chose the time of the Sabbath for his worship, and sanctified it, and chose those who keep it for his worship, commanding them to keep it holy, as it is said, "And the children of Israel kept the rest to perform the Sabbath." The Sabbath is sanctified, "Ye shall keep the Sabbath, for it is holy unto you." But since defilement is contrary to holiness, it must be avoided by the worshiper, who himself must be holy. And, as we said, since the Sabbath is well fitted for worship, and God (may he be praised) made it our duty to worship him thereon, it results that purity is one of the foremost conditions and duties for the keeper of the Sabbath.

Only prayers and worship and the reading of the word of God (may he be praised) can bring about what God (let him be praised) required of the worshiper on the Sabbath, namely, a fulfilment of righteousness and a holy conviction. Read the first few verses of Leviticus xiii., wherein everything which opposes the sanctification of that day is prohibited. The keeper of the Sabbath should not deal nor handle things that may defile him, whether it be in the body or in the soul. Read Exodus xix. 11, whereby may be known about the sanctification of the body and the condition of clothing. It is during three days wherein takes place the preparation for the hearing of the words of God (may he be exalted), and for sanctification and the convocation with his holiness. He called the Sabbath holy in many passages, and made it a sign of sanctification unto all the host of Israel. He appropriated it for himself, that he may be sanctified on it, and prohibited all manner of work in it, making it fit only for his worship. The Jews, however, through their licentious practices and violations of Sabbath keeping, deem it necessary to commit an act which is plainly prohibited, thereby defiling the day of the Sabbath.

THIS IS ALL THAT COULD BE BRIEFLY WRITTEN CONCERNING THIS QUESTION ; THE DETAILS ARE UNNECESSARY.

AND TO GOD BELONGS THE SUPREME WISDOM.

JACOB, SON OF AARON, HIGH PRIEST OF THE SAMARITANS
AT SHECHEM.