

The Invention of the Seven-Day Week

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LECTURE 1:

WHY DOES EACH VERSION OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS PRESENT SUCH DIFFERENT, AND SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTORY, ACCOUNTS OF THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE SHABBAT (CREATION VS. EXODUS)?

Let's look at the matter from a different perspective

1. Invention of the seven day week was necessarily a turning point in human history, a disruptive event that inaugurated a new of way of organizing our organizing our lives
2. At first blush, our sages ([source 1](#)) & book of Shmot ([sources 2 & 3](#)) point to creation as this key historical moment
3. But this is hard to accept:
 - ▶ It's not an historical turning point, it's the beginning!
 - ▶ Week isn't introduced at creation, only metaphysical idea of Shabbat
 - ▶ Puzzle: What does creation have to do with Israel specifically? How can event of universal significance be the basis for a particularistic covenant?

What about Devarim— A different historical anchor entirely??

Source 4: Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as your God יהוה has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of your God יהוה; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the stranger in your settlements, **so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.** And you shall recall that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and your God יהוה freed you from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore your God יהוה has commanded you to observe the sabbath day.

ברים ה':י"ב-ט"ו

שְׁמֹר אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ: שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשָׂה יָדְךָ כָּל-מְלַאכְתְּךָ: וְיוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת וְלַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וְחֹמְרְךָ וְכָל-בְּהֵמָתְךָ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ כָמוֹךָ: וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי-עַבְדְּךָ הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וַיֹּצֵאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָה עַל-כֵּן צִוָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת: {ס}

Rambam vs. Ramban (source 5)

Who is right?

1. Maimonides: Commemoration of Exodus is indirect and thematic, comes from experience of identifying with servants' need for rest
2. Nahmanides:
 - ▶ No one is reminded of the Exodus that way!
 - ▶ Rather, the connection is via the first commandment (“I am the Lord who took you out of Egypt”): If you’re confused or doubtful about God the creator (basis for Shabbat), the key is to remember the Exodus when God the Creator intervened in history (on our behalf)

Distinctive insights and areas of agreement

Key areas of agreement:

- ▶ Devarim as “complementary reapplication” (Berman)
 - ▶ Not simple review but selective and reframed to stress angles of special significance for the new generation
 - ▶ Special experience of God the creator is key to Exodus

Maimonides:

- ▶ A key part of the reason here is not historical at all. It's about the master-slave relationship and our need to identify with servants/slaves

Nahmanides:

- ▶ Maybe but a key part of the reason here is indeed historical! Something about the Shabbat experience makes us recall the Exodus experience

Supporting evidence for Ramban

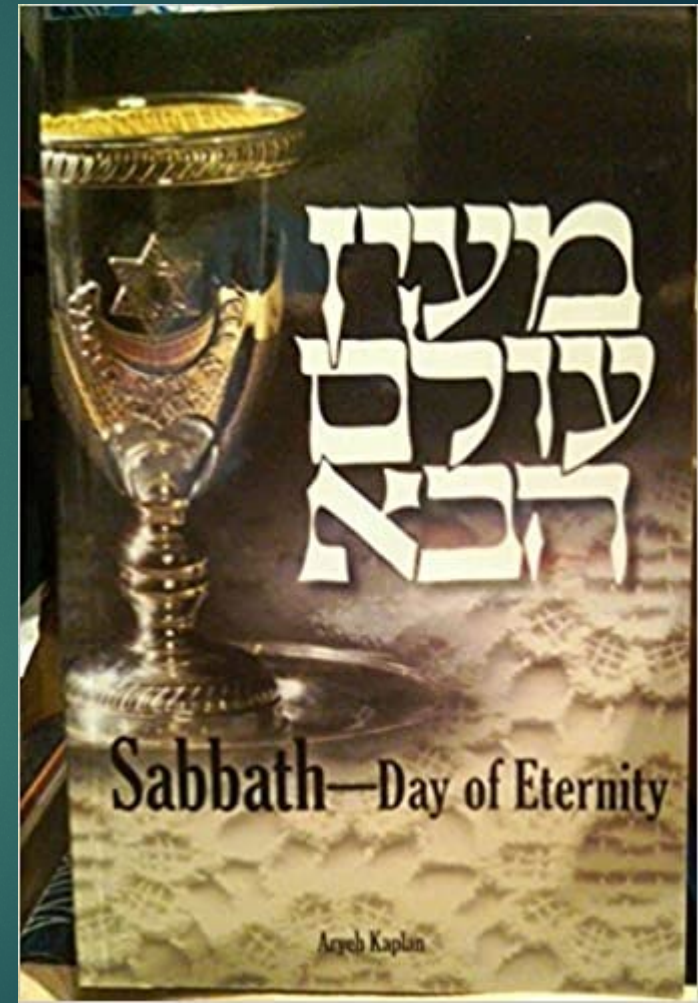
- ▶ Four instances of “And you shall remember you were a slave in Egypt...” in Devarim (sources 6a-6d)
 - ▶ All fine-tuned to the mitzvah under discussion
 - ▶ Only Shabbat is said to commemorate the Exodus process
- ▶ Evidence from later in Tanach and our Sages (sources 7a-7c):
 - ▶ Ezekiel 20
 - ▶ Nehemiah 9
 - ▶ Dayenu!
- ▶ ... and they suggest a particular moment when Shabbat was given!

R' Aryeh Kaplan

“We usually associate the Exodus with Passover. But it is just as intimately associated with the Sabbath. One of the most important miracles of the Exodus was the manna. For forty years, some three million people were literally fed by a miracle. This miracle, a lesson for the ages, dramatically demonstrates G-d's involvement in the day to day life of each one of us. In order that the Jews not forget that this was a miracle, the manna was presented in a most unique way. It only appeared six days a week, but was absent on the Sabbath. The miracle of the manna paralleled the miracle of Creation. ... This also answers another important question. **How do we know which day was the Sabbath? Who counted it from the time of Creation?**

The answer is that G-d Himself revealed the exact day of the Sabbath in giving the Manna. **This also answers another question. How do we know which day was the Sabbath? Who counted it from the time of Creation?**”

-- Kaplan, *Sabbath- Day of Eternity*,



But was the Manna/Shabbat story part of the Exodus?

Yes!!!

Evidence (in addition to Ezekiel, Nehemiah & Dayenu):

1. It's explicit in the story ([source 8](#)): Exodus 16:32!!!
2. Narrative prompted/motivated by Exodus! (Exodus 16:1, 3, 6)
3. It echoes and builds on the first mitzvot [[source 9](#): Exodus 12:1-20]
 - ▶ Calendrical revolution/emancipation proclamation
 - ▶ Proto-Shabbat of the manna experience! [esp. 12:16-17]
4. Fulfillment of key promise of Exodus process [[source 10](#); 6:7]-- Israel acquires knowledge of God [compare 16: 6-12]
5. Reversal of the narrative depicting depths of Egyptian slavery– toil “every day” without end [[source 11](#); Exodus 5!]

One more key piece of evidence from the other “zachor v’ shamor” (sources 12 & 13)

“A day which was to be remembered must have been previously experienced. We should recall that the *Torah* never demanded the recollection of any event which went beyond the memory of those alive then.... **The Sabbath day here, therefore could, not refer to the creation story, which had not been experienced by the people and also did not bear the name Sabbath.... This could only refer to the Sabbath just before the revelation (ibid.) on Sinai, i.e., during the previous weeks in connection with *manna* in the desert of Sin. That this was the first Sabbath celebrated by Israel.. and there we met the word ‘Sabbath’ for the first time... The expression *day of Sabbath* was, however first used here primarily because the name was derived from the previous experience with the *manna*. *Yom* as used here meant ‘experience.’... The imperative *za-khor*, to ‘remember’ a day, is used only once more== for the day on which Israel had left Egypt (1.2). The word did not have the connotation ‘do not forget,’ as there was slight danger of that for Israel in the desert; after all, the double portion of *manna* which fell on the previous day proclaimed the next day as the Sabbath.... *Za-khor* meant that the day of work were to be governed by a unique relationship in light of the coming Sabbath... (p.563).”**

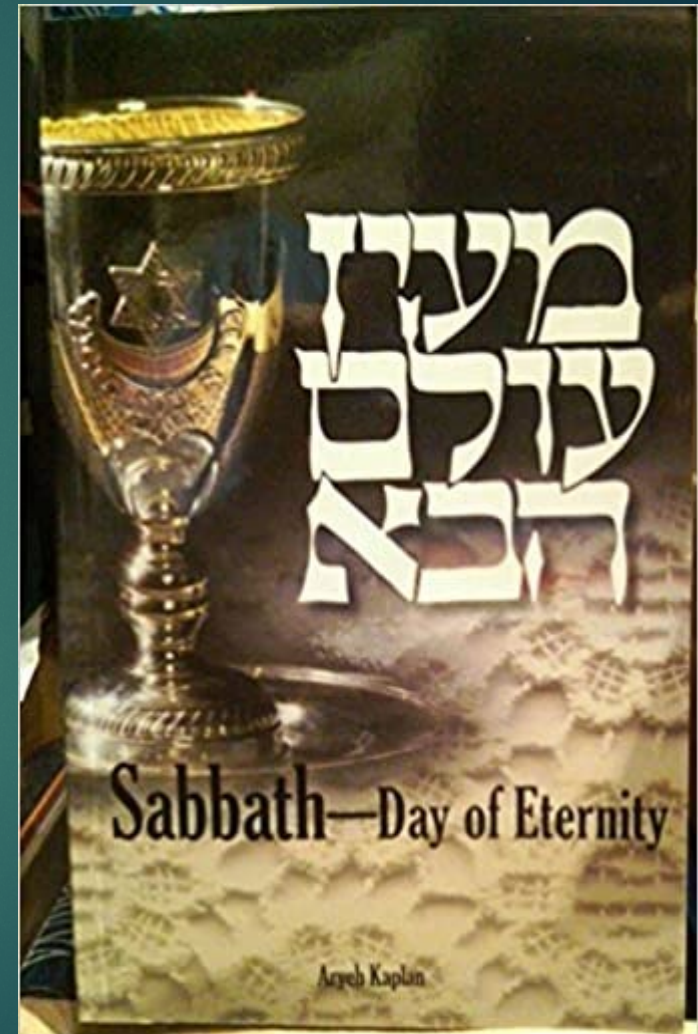
--Jacob, Benno. 1992. *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus. Interpreted by Benno Jacob*. Translated with an introduction by Walter Jacob in association with Yaakov Elman. Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav.

Ok, now how was manna special experience of creation?

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A special/particularistic experience of creation/Creator

Creation I (Imitatio Dei)	Creation II (Eden/Equality)
Something new is created each day, for 6 days	Raining sustenance (וימטר)
Day 6 includes an extra blessing	Human's role is to name God's creations
Not just unique experience of creation, but imitation: "And the people sabbathed on the seventh day"	Equality: No status differences, no movable property (no storage!)
See that it is good! " See that God has given you the Shabbat. That's why He is giving you a double portion. Dwell each man, under it. "	Humans live by picking God-given food
	Sin ning by violating edict not eat in/on specified time/place
	(Access to/Denial of) Divine knowledge

R' Samson Rapahel Hirsch

“No man has the right to lead women and children into a barren desert; no man has the right to order cessation of work for a whole day, let alone for a whole year periodically... However, if commanded by God; if required by God as a sign of our unreserved recognition and trust, then **what otherwise would be folly becomes the deepest wisdom, what otherwise would be considered a crime becomes the highest virtue befitting of man..** The foregoing points (that only are especially significant for **the institution of שבת, whose foundation was laid through the fall of the manna, which (p.271)** was witnessed by the people for forty years. More than any other mitzvah, Shabbos requires the unshakable conviction that God watches over the individual and over all the little but indispensable requirements of his daily livelihood and that of his family.” -- *Commentary on Exodus 16:5*

“(Prior to the Exodus, the Shabbat/week was known only) as an abstract idea; it lacked visible expression perceptible to the senses; it lacked an אֹת, a symbol. Hence it disappeared from man’s consciousness as man went astray...

The whole story from Avraham to Moshe is nothing but God’s creation of a nation to be the bearer of the Sabbath. Thus the Jewish Sabbath is at one time זכר ליציאת מצרים. and זכר למעשה בראשית” – *Commentary on 31:13*

Ok, so Manna/Shabbat is key! But why a story of Invention?

1. First time week is experienced by humans
2. Manna/Shabbat as something utterly unfamiliar and bewildering (cf., [Source 14](#); Deut 8)
3. They seem not to understand/trust it [[source 8](#); Exodus 16]

Need to be told to “observe” or “see” something they should have already seen

Seem to think that “Shabbat of the Lord” means for God (“that’s why God is giving you”)

Hoard the food rather than eat it

Some go out to gather

Seem not to get that it’s a cycle (“that’s why God is *giving you* a double portion”)

Summary

- ▶ The Story of Shabbat/manna is the paradigm for Israel's experience of the Shabbat/week
- ▶ It's also the vehicle for the Torah to present the arrival of the seven-day world on the world scene, as a story of radical invention
- ▶ It conveys three key ideas at once:
 - ▶ God the creator, with humans both "little creators" and God's children
 - ▶ Fundamental equality and fellowship
 - ▶ The Exodus as a vehicle for Israel to know God

For a written version of today's talk, see

Zuckerman Sivan, Ezra W. 2017. "Three in One: Creation, Exodus, and Equality." Accessible at <https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/three-in-one-creation-exodus-and-equality/>

For next session

1. Next session is in two weeks: Happy Purim!

2. Homework

Not necessary but a great idea to read Exodus 15 & 16. Consider: Why do they panic? Why then and why in that way?

3. May God protect those in Ukraine and elsewhere under great threat