

Introduction to the Mitzvot of Shabbat

Shabbat: Its sources and mitzvot

Shabbat in the Torah and Prophets

Shabbat appears in many passages in the Torah. It is first mentioned at the conclusion of the account of creation, where it is stated that God rested on the seventh day, blessed it, and sanctified it. The initial commandment to observe Shabbat was given to the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sin, in connection to the receiving of the manna. A comprehensive command about Shabbat is formulated in the Ten Commandments. Later in the Torah, the mitzva of Shabbat appears many times in various forms, sometimes as a lengthy passage in its own right, in other instances briefly, as an isolated verse or a few words. At times the Torah states the purpose of Shabbat, but elsewhere it does not specify a reason for this mitzva (see below, in the chapter on the meanings of Shabbat).

Here is a brief survey of the mentions of Shabbat in the Torah:¹

In the **book of *Bereshit***, at the end of the account of creation: “And the heaven and the earth were finished... On the seventh day God finished... and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it” (1:1–3).

1. The main passages discussing Shabbat are cited in full below, pp. 97–98 [end of the section on the meanings of Shabbat].

Six times in the **book of *Shemot***:

1. When the manna was given in the wilderness of Sin: “And it came to pass that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread... tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord... Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none... sit 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” (16:22–30).
2. In the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor... but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; on it you shall not do any manner of work... for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth... and rested on the seventh day” (20:8–11).
3. At the end of *Parashat Mishpatim*: “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed” (23:12).
4. Upon the conclusion of the commandment about the building of the Tabernacle: “However, you shall keep My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you... whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. And the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath... for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He ceased from work and rested” (31:12–17).
5. After the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf: “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest” (34:21).
6. At the start of the construction of the Tabernacle: “Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day there shall be for you a holy day, a Sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day” (35:1–3).

Five times in the **book of Vayikra**:

1. At the beginning of *Parashat Kedoshim*: “You shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and you shall keep My Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God” (19:3).
2. At the end of the first chapter in *Parashat Kedoshim*: “You shall keep My Sabbaths, and revere My Sanctuary: I am the Lord” (19:30).
3. In *Parashat Emor*, at the start of the chapter on the Festivals: “These are My appointed seasons: Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no manner of work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings” (23:1–3).
4. In *Parashat Emor*, with regard to the offerings, at the end of the chapter on the Festivals: “These are the appointed seasons of the Lord, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to bring an offering made by fire to the Lord . . . beside the Sabbaths of the Lord” (23:37–38).
5. At the conclusion of *Parashat Behar*: “You shall keep My Sabbaths, and revere My Sanctuary: I am the Lord” (26:2); an exact repetition of the verse in *Kedoshim*.

Twice in the **book of Bemidbar**:

1. In *Parashat Shelah*, as part of the story of the wood gatherer on Sabbath (15:32–36).
2. In *Parashat Pinehas*, which lists the offerings sacrificed on Sabbath: “And on the Sabbath day two lambs of the first year without blemish . . . This is the burnt-offering of every Sabbath, beside the continual burnt-offering, and its drink-offering” (28:9–10).

In the **book of Devarim**, in the Ten Commandments: “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy . . . Six days you shall labor . . . but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God, on it you shall not do any manner of work . . . that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. And you shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you

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out of there . . . therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (5:12–15).

In total, Shabbat is mentioned on fifteen occasions in the Torah, which attests to its great importance.

Furthermore, Shabbat also appears in the Prophets and the Writings, especially in the books of *Yeshayahu* (56:2–8; 58:13–14), *Yirmeyahu* (17:19–27), *Yehezkel* (20:11–24; 23:36–39), and *Neḥemya* (10:32; 13:15–22).