

Handout 3-A

The Sabbath or Shabbat

Observant Jews celebrate Shabbat from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. They spend this twenty-four-hour period in rest, joy, and prayer. Here are some of the rules or customs that Jews observe on the Sabbath:

- Many Jewish families prepare for the Sabbath by cleaning the house, cooking a special meal, bathing, and dressing in nice clothes.
- Some Jews attend synagogue services on Friday night or Saturday morning.
- Families traditionally eat a festive meal on Friday night. A tablecloth adorns the table. The mother of the family lights candles to announce the beginning of the Sabbath. There is a blessing of family members, the reading of Bible passages, and the singing of songs.
- Many Jews change the pace of their week on the Sabbath. They refrain from work. They take longer to eat. They walk slower. They try to be more patient in listening. They spend time in spiritual reading. (Note: The Torah's prohibitions included thirty-nine types of work, including the following: lighting a fire, clapping hands, jumping, slapping the thigh, or walking more than three thousand feet.)
- Jewish spouses make time for each other on Friday evening.
- Many Jews practice hospitality; they invite guests or strangers to the community to celebrate Shabbat with them.
- Some Jews reach out to others by visiting the sick, the shut in, and the elderly on Saturday.
- No funerals are permitted on Shabbat.
- At the end of the Sabbath, there is a special ceremony called the *havdalah*. The family says goodbye to the Sabbath with the taste of wine, the fragrance of spices, and the light of a braided candle.

Remember the sabbath day—keep it holy. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God. You shall not any work, either by you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your work animal, or the resident alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex 20:8–11)

Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath. That is why the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.” (Mk 2:27–28)

What are some ways you and your family can make Sunday—the Christian day for worship and rest—a day of rest, joy, and prayer?