

# GOD RESHAPES THE PEOPLE

The Law, part 2:  
Sabbath, Festivals, and  
Jubilee

## WHERE WE'RE HEADED:

Within the Torah we find numerous references to rhythms of rest and celebration. God commands them to keep Sabbath, observe festivals, and hold a Jubilee year--all of which would cultivate joy, generosity, rest and justice in incredibly important ways. It's a beautiful picture of what God was inviting the people to be together, and so this storied version of that part of the law invites kids to explore the 'why' of these 3 commands.

## STORY

Right now we are taking a big chunk of the Bible--three whole books!--and summing up some important things we find there. Specifically, we find God commanding the people to do 3 things that they never would have, never could have, done in Egypt.

What we want to think about together is: why?  
Why would God tell the people to do these things?

### Why would God tell them to... practice Sabbath?

When God first sent manna for the people in the wilderness, it came with specific directions, including this: "This is what the Lord commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the Lord. So bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow." Every day 7 the people stopped. They didn't collect manna at all.

And then just a bit later here's a little more on how this is meant to work. Listen for who is included in this practice. Exodus 20:10 says "The seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you."

These few books mention Sabbath 40 times! That's quite a lot. **Which leads us back to our big question: why? Why would God tell them to practice Sabbath?**

(Need a hint? Think about what kind of work the people did back then. Think about what work was like in Egypt. Think about what else you know about what God's like.)

### Why would God tell them to... hold festivals?

See, weekly Sabbath leads to something else. Listen to this verse from Leviticus 23:4 "In addition to the Sabbath, these are the Lord's appointed festivals, the official days for holy assembly that are to be celebrated at their proper times each year."

Festivals happened throughout the year and they were for everyone in the community, including servants and foreigners, and then often involved bringing offerings of food. A little bit of the food was given to God, as a way to remember and act out that God gave it to them first.

The rest became a meal for everyone to share together. Each festival celebrated or remembered something unique, and together they were a regular part of the year. It's similar to how we might break up the year by holidays.

**Back to our big question: why? Why would God tell them to hold festivals?**

(Need a hint? Think about what might have made them afraid and how festivals may help with that. Think about who God's people were invited to be—would this help? How? Think about what the group would be like if they did this together year after year.)

**Why would God tell them to... have Jubilee?**

Ok, we have one more command to talk about—the superest Sabbath of them all, the festivest festival of them all—Jubilee.

Jubilee was meant to happen every 49 years and was also known as the Freedom Year. There were lots of pieces to this. If in the past 48 years a family had needed to sell their land along the way to survive, in the Jubilee year, they would get the land back. If a person had needed to become a servant because they had no money, they would be freed. Even the land would rest—no one would plant things and people would eat whatever grew up on its own. It was a great big reset for whole community.

**So the question we want to talk about again is: why? Why would God tell them to have a Jubilee year every 49 years?**

(Need a hint? Think about what might happen without Jubilee. Think about what God hoped Israel would be or do for the world. Do you see any connection between Jubilee and the Exodus?)

You know what all 3 of these things—Sabbath, festivals, and Jubilee—have in common? They ain't happening in Egypt.

There isn't regular rest, or collective celebrations where no one is left out, or ways to get out of debt, slavery or poverty built into life in Egypt. Without God's commands, the people might have just copied now what they were used to then, and that would not make them into a community that worked in ways that match God at all. God is a life-giver, a freedom bringer, an invite everyone kind of God. And so God gives them life giving, freedom bringing, everybody in kinds of practices together.

## **KEY QUESTION**

Every Bible story tells us at least one thing about who God is or what God is like. What did you notice this time?

# WONDER

I wonder...

- What they did together on a Sabbath day? What do you like to do on a rest day?
- What you would put on the menu if you were in charge of a festival?
- Why Jubilee never happened. You see, as best we can tell, the people never did do that one. I wonder why not?

# PLAY

## Tic Tac Flip

Since Festivals were an ancient near eastern variation on a party—play a party game!

- **Supplies:** Paper, pencils, two plastic cups
- **Set Up:** Create a tic tac toe grid on a full sheet of paper. Divide into two teams and give each a pencil and cup.
- **Play:** On 'Go', both teams go head-to-head, flipping their cups and trying to land them right-side up – when someone does, they earn the right to claim a spot on the tic tac toe board. Then the next member of the team steps up to the cup. The first team to get 3 in a row wins.

# PRAY

## Body Prayer

Deuteronomy 6:4 says, Listen, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. And you must love Yahweh your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

We are going to pray with our bodies, asking God to grow that kind of love in us. We'll say, "God, may we love you with all our heart, all our soul, and all our strength." And we'll pick a movement for each part.

Select a movement for each of the four parts, then pray and move together 2 times.

If your kids wouldn't want to make up the moves, try:  
hug yourself // point to your heart // hands on your tummy // muscle arms.

Pray: May we love you // with all our heart// all our soul// and all our strength. Repeat.