

10-1-2000

The Great Sabbath Welcome (The President's Page)

Jo Ann Davidson

Andrews University, jad@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd>

Recommended Citation

Davidson, Jo Ann (2000) "The Great Sabbath Welcome (The President's Page)," *Perspective Digest*. Vol. 5 : No. 4 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol5/iss4/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Adventist Theological Society at Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspective Digest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.



Jo Ann Davidson

I didn't want to go. I *really* didn't want to go!

Andrews University had offered my husband, Dick, a chance to study Hebrew in Israel. He had already equipped himself to translate Hebrew readily, but he had always hoped to hone his language skills right on their home turf. I knew this opportunity was a dream come true for him. And since he is a professor of Old Testament, an intelligent use of the Hebrew language is a foundational skill.

However, it had never been *my* dream to travel to Israel. Besides, we had spent our life savings for his graduate work. And now I secretly hoped to reserve our last few hundred dollars to buy a new couch.

Ever since our marriage we had decorated in threadbare "Early Relative," and I'd been dreaming of a new couch in a color I liked.

When Dick told me about his chance to study in Israel, he eagerly added, "and we'll have such a won-

The Great Sabbath Welcome

derful time there!" I was thrilled for him, but realizing that if I went, I'd have to purchase my own ticket, I thought of the perfect solution. "Of course you should go, Babe! I'll just stay with my folks while you're gone." Dick looked me right in the eye and responded, "If you don't think it's financially feasible right now, let's wait till another time, because I won't go without you."

That night my conscience upped its clamor, and I admitted to myself that if I didn't give up the couch, we probably would never go to Israel. I well knew that opportunities like this are extremely rare. It was "teeth-gritting time." "Dick," I said, in a tone that I hoped conveyed sincerity, "I think we should go!" The next week we arranged our flight and drew the last of our savings to pay for my ticket.

I knew I was doing the right thing, but I sure was upset that it was God's will for our lives. Little did I know the surprises God had in store

for me. It took a few months and getting acquainted with the Jewish people before I realized that God was not only fulfilling Dick's lifelong dream but also opening my heart to a deepened appreciation for the Sabbath!

What's to Learn About the Sabbath?

As a fourth-generation Seventh-day Adventist, I thought I knew all that I needed to know about Sabbath. I knew it began at sundown Friday night. I knew that God's Sabbath, the biblical Sabbath, was the seventh day. I knew how to guard the edges of God's holy day. I knew all the biblical texts to support my understanding. But after living in Israel and celebrating the seventh-day Sabbath with our Jewish brothers and sisters, I realized I had a lot more to learn.

For example, though I *liked* the Sabbath, I discovered that I really didn't *love* the Sabbath as the Jewish people do. They guard its edges not as a guilt-ridden burden, but rather a joyful insurance to prevent ordinary work from encroaching upon such a royal occasion. My focus on Isaiah 58:13 had overlooked God's bidding to call the Sabbath a "delight," theirs had not. Furthermore, being able to read the Bible in its original language, the Jewish people had perceived nuances lost in translation. For example, the Sabbath "delight" of Isaiah 58:13 is not

the run-of-the-mill delight our English word conveys, but rather the exquisite delight royalty might share in an elegant palace.

Also, in the very heart of the decalogue, the Sabbath commandment and the commandment honoring family ties are formulated differently from the other eight. Accordingly, over the millennia that the Jewish people have celebrated the seventh-day Sabbath (Seventh-day Adventists are relative newcom-



Candlelight represents the blessing that shines from Creation's first joyous Sabbath

ers to Sabbathkeeping!), they have perceived and reflected this close tie by reaffirming family ties each Friday night at sunset. The mother blesses her family as she lights the Sabbath candles; the husband reads to his wife either the Proverbs 31 passage about the "woman of strength" or the Song of Solomon texts that extol romantic married love. The father also blesses his children, placing his hands on their heads or around their shoulders, and prays for them individually.

This heartwarming time each Friday at sunset is followed by an elegant meal served on the "Sabbath dishes," usually of sterling silver or crystal. Thus the Jews have noted, as I had not, that God expressly desires us to regard the Sabbath as a royal delight.

The Sabbath's close includes traditions such as the sniffing of a spice box filled with fragrant spices to assure that "all the senses will have been blessed on the Sabbath, even the sense of smell."

After having my eyes and heart opened to new levels of Sabbath appreciation, I asked God to forgive my initial resentment of having to forgo a new couch and travel to Israel. We still have the old couch. Now it serves to remind me to tell Dick, "If you ever again have the chance to go to Israel, I'll just need an hour to find someone to feed the animals and water the plants!" I

finally came to understand that God intended the Sabbath to be the greatest blessing He could design for His children.

A Blessing at Eventide

At a recent Christmas, my folks invited all their four children with spouses and grandchildren for a gala holiday at their home. On Friday evening, my father told us that he had seen Dick bless his children each Friday night and wished he had known of that practice when we children were growing up. On this Friday night, he said, he wanted to give us each his fatherly blessing. He then walked around the family circle, placing his hands on the shoulders of each of us and praying for us individually. It took almost an hour and was such a sacred time I could hardly breathe.

Even as a grown woman, I found it a wonderful thing to be blessed by my father. And that experience affirmed again the exquisite nature of the Sabbath, when my heavenly Father bends low each Friday sunset to bless each of His children personally on the day He set apart to remind us of all the love encased in His creative powers. Observing the Sabbath is much more than knowing the right day, though that, of course, is of key importance. Even more, it is a day of royal fellowship with the Creator, in His "palace in time." □