

Cooking on Holy Days

For many years, Hashabah Yisrael has held that cooking is permitted on the three feast days - Pesach/Chag Matsot, Chag Shavuot, and Chag Sukkot - provided they do not land on the 7th day Shabbat. Traditionally, cooking on the other holy days on which we are not required to fast - Yom Teruah and Shemini Atseret - have been forbidden.

The Shabbat

The foundation for the Shabbat is established in Genesis 2,¹ which explains that Elohim completed His work in creating the universe and everything in it, ceasing on the 7th day, blessing it and making it holy.

The newly freed Israelites are introduced to both the Shabbat and manna (*man* מן in Hebrew) in Exodus 16, where they are first commanded to gather and prepare twice as much manna on the 6th day.² They followed this commandment on the 6th day, and then received more instructions:

'This is that which the LORD hath spoken: To-morrow is a solemn rest (שַׁבְּתוֹן *Shabbaton*), a holy sabbath (שַׁבַּת-קֹדֶשׁ *Shabbat-Qodesh*) unto the LORD. Bake that which ye will bake, and seethe that which ye will seethe; and all that remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.'³

In Exodus 31, as the Tent of Meeting and all its components are being assembled, the Israelites learn that the punishment for violating the Shabbat is death, and here again it's referred to in the strongest possible terms as both a *Shabbat* and *Shabbaton*.⁴ The sanctity of the Shabbat and the consequence for desecrating it is repeated again in Exodus 35, this time explicitly stating not to kindle or cause fire to burn on the Shabbat.⁵ This lines up with the instructions the Israelites received in Exodus 16 to cook and bake their food on the 6th day, and to store their leftovers to eat the next day.

¹Genesis 2:2-3 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0102.htm>

²Exodus 16:5 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0216.htm>

³Exodus 16:23 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0216.htm>

⁴Exodus 31:13-17 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0231.htm>

⁵Exodus 35: 2-3 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0235.htm>

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Based on these and many other verses⁶ highlighting the sanctity of the Shabbat, which is defined as the 7th day of the week, Hashabah Yisrael's position is that it is **forbidden** to cook on the Shabbat, or on holy days that fall on Shabbat (with one exception).⁷

Holy Days

Leviticus 23 lists all of the holy days we are commanded to observe; the only two that are referred to as *Shabbat* are the 7th day sabbath, and *Yom Kippur*.⁸ On these days, the Torah tells us that all *melacha* (work) is forbidden. Since cooking and baking are among the things we can't do on Shabbat, we can assume that they are included in the category of *melacha*.

None of the other holy days (Chag Matsot, Chag Shavuot, Yom Teruah, Chag Sukkot, and Shemini Atseret) are referred to as *Shabbat*; instead, each is called a *miqra qodesh* (מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ), meaning a holy convocation.⁹ These are all special occasions with a level of holiness that's *like* a Shabbat, but not quite the same. The biggest difference is that on a Shabbat, all *melacha* is forbidden, whereas on the other holy days, *melechet avodah* (מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה) is forbidden.

The laws of Passover explained in Exodus 12 can help us understand a difference between *melacha* and *melechet avodah*, both having to do with “work.”

‘And in the first day there shall be to you a *miqra qodesh*, and in the seventh day a *miqra qodesh*; no manner of *melacha* shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done by you.¹⁰”

Here, we see that on the first day of Chag Matsot, *melacha* is forbidden, with the exception of cooking/food preparation. When the holy days are listed again later in Leviticus 23, we see the term *melechet avodah* used instead,

⁶ See Leviticus 19:3, 30; Leviticus 23:3, Leviticus 26:2, Isaiah 56:2, Isaiah 58:13, Nehemiah 13:15-22

⁷ *Pesach* (Passover) is the only exception in our community, we allow for cooking even if Passover falls on Shabbat based on Exodus 12:16 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0212.htm>

⁸ Leviticus 23 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0323.htm>

⁹ Yom Teruah is also called a shabbaton (שַׁבְּתוֹן), and Shemini Atseret is also called an atseret (עֲצֵרֶת). See Leviticus 23 <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0323.htm> for the full list

¹⁰ Exodus 12:16 - <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0212.htm>

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suggesting that *melechet avodah* may refer to *melacha* that does not involve cooking/baking/food preparation.¹¹

Conclusion

Based on the information presented above, we conclude the following:

1. The term *Shabbat* refers to the 7th day sabbath, on which cooking is forbidden.
2. The holy days on which eating is permitted are not called *Shabbat*, and therefore have slightly different rules, allowing us to cook on those days.
3. Cooking is expressly permitted in the case of the first day of Chag Matsot.

Since we have historically extended this permissions to all three feasts, and the restrictions for the feasts are identical to those of the other holy days on which eating is permitted, Hashabah Yisrael's position is that it is **permitted** to cook on all such holy days that do not fall on Shabbat.¹²

¹¹ There may be other meanings as well. While the term *melechet avodah* is used mostly in connection with the various holy days, it appears in two other places as well: (1) Exodus 35:24 <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0235.htm> in reference to the donations given for the *melechet ha'avodah* (building the Tent of Meeting) and (2) I Chronicles 9:13 <https://mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt25a09.htm> listing the genealogy of the men who were able to do *melechet ha'avodah* in the house of Elohim.

¹² see footnote 7 for the one exception to this rule.