

Starting a Fire or Preparing Food on Shabbat

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Starting Fire on Shabbat

The context in Exodus about not lighting a fire is about not doing work on the Tabernacle in the desert. Many see this command as to not kindle a fire that is associated with work of the Tabernacle. That is the context of this verse in Exodus 35:3. By context, this command is also perhaps about the smelting work for the Tabernacle in the desert. My thoughts on this are pertinent.

Preparing Food on Shabbat

The Bible does not prohibit preparing food on God's feasts or on Shabbat. Preparing food is part of taking care of ourselves. It is important that we take care of ourselves; it is considered part of valuing life; Genesis 1:26; Deuteronomy 22:4; Luke 14:5.

Further Thoughts and Study

The context of Exodus 35:3 is about work on the Tent of Meeting in the desert. So the commandment is about starting a fire for work on the Tent of Meeting in the desert. Remember, context is everything. We can take a person's words out of context to say the exact opposite of what they meant. That's why we have to maintain the correct context here.

Exodus 35:3¹ reads in Hebrew: "לֹא-תִבְעֲרוּ אֵשׁ, בְּכָל מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם, בְּיוֹם, הַשַּׁבָּת." You all will not begin to burn (לֹא-תִבְעֲרוּ) a fire (אֵשׁ) in all (בְּכָל) your habitations (מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם)² in the day of rest (בְּיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת).

We can properly apply commands from the original command. This was even done in the Torah. It is important though not to micromanage or make irrelevant commands. Since the commandment is about work, things that require a lot of work like a bonfire would require a lot of maintenance or a large event that requires work (by implication) would be wrong.

It was about a fire they were using to do work on the Tent of Meeting on Shabbat. So, it implies that any activity that requires a lot of work on Shabbat would be wrong except for necessary self care or the work associated with our meetings. Maintenance work or any building activity on our places of worship would be wrong on Shabbat. Can the work wait? It goes without saying that God intended us to have a day of rest and again by implication, making plans that require a lot of work would be wrong. Use good judgment. Shaul said we are not to judge each other in regards to what we do on Shabbat (Colossian 2:16),³ but there are obviously some things that are work and that we shouldn't do on Shabbat.

¹ <https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0201.htm>

² מִשְׁבְּתֵיכֶם can refer to both larger and smaller places or assemblies. – Strong's 4186, "habitation, dwellings, seat, dwelling, dwelling place, dwell, places, sitting, assembly, situation, sojourning." – Strong's Enhanced Dictionary

³ Colossians 2:8 NKJV say, "According to the tradition of men." Colossians 2:22 NKJV says, "Which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men." The whole context of this section is not keeping man-made commandments. Keeping Shabbat is a commandment of God. Not keeping Shabbat is made up by man. What we do on Shabbat is a judgment call. We shouldn't make up reasons though to do work. We will have to stand before God. Keep Shabbat.

A simple fire lit by gas or set up ahead of time using fire starters could be considered as something that doesn't require much work – again, use your conscience. Turning on a light, pushing a button, turning a knob, driving a car, maintaining a fire, and even lighting candles in our day and time would not be a lot of work.

What about the man who was stoned for getting wood on Shabbat? He was probably doing this as his job or perhaps he was looking for wood to maintain his fire. Looking for wood would be a lot of work; especially in the desert. Many believe he was doing his job. We shouldn't work unless we absolutely have to or are doing a special important service on Shabbat.

At the very least, we should not start a fire that requires a lot of work on Shabbat. It actually is a lot of work to micromanage with all kinds of ridiculous commandments like not turning on a light switch or not driving a car. Think about it. Walking a mile with children would be a lot of work compared to using a car. Those who are making up commandments are making people work! Colossians 2:8-23 says we are not to make up man-made commandments. Man-made commandments won't keep us away from the sins of the flesh.

The Bible says that if our conscience bothers us, we should not do it. So, if we think it is okay to light candles (which is not a lot of work) and someone else doesn't, we shouldn't be a stumbling block to them. We should accept their feelings regardless of ours. In regards to a fire, most certainly starting a fire requiring a large amount of work would be wrong. I tend to be conservative in my applications; that might not be a bad idea though. We will have to stand before God someday.

Note that the instructions for Passover say it is okay to prepare food. This means that preparing food for a holiday is not wrong. God's feasts and Shabbat are holy days (holidays). Work related to the holiday would not be wrong. Remember, they gathered manna for two days the day before Shabbat. They did this so they wouldn't have to do the work of gathering their food on Shabbat; it doesn't say they weren't to prepare food on Shabbat. You can always prepare ahead of time or make simple meals on Shabbat if you think that would be more appropriate.

Yeshua allowed his disciples to pick grain on Shabbat. Deuteronomy 23:25 says it is okay to do that; they were just not to use harvest tools. Yeshua is applying the commandments properly and not making up ridiculous regulations. It should also be understood that it is okay to obtain food on Shabbat if we are hungry. The Torah that teaches us to take care of life (Deuteronomy 22:4; also Luke 14:5). So, not getting food on Shabbat for your baby that relies on you is wrong. Some actually believe they have to starve their child on Shabbat if they don't have food to prepare for them. They are breaking the Torah; they are not taking proper care of life. We should always try to have food to prepare beforehand. Sometimes circumstances prevent us from being prepared.