

The Doctrine of the Sabbath

1. The word Sabbath is derived from the Hebrew **Shabbat**, which means "to cease" or "to desist."

1.1 The Greek word **Sabbaton** is sometimes used to designate a single Sabbath. The word is also applied to several festivals in the Old Testament, but principally and usually it refers to the seventh day of the week, the Jewish day of rest and worship.

2. The Sabbath was instituted at creation (Gen 2:2, where the root occurs from which the word is derived). God ceased from His labor on the seventh day of creation and set a pattern for man to follow.

Gen 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

Gen 2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

3. The incorporation of the Sabbath into the Decalogue was based on God's resting at the time of creation and on His deliverance of Israel from Egypt. (Exo 20:11; Deu 5:15)

Exo 20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the **sabbath** day, and hallowed it.

Deu 5:15 And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the **sabbath** day.

4. Some have tried to trace the institution of the Sabbath back Babylonia. Although the word appears in Babylonian inscriptions, it was not attached to the seventh day of the week (the Babylonians had a five-day week), nor was it a day of cessation from labor.

4.1 J. R. Sampey remarks: "Hence the assertions of some Assyriologists with regard to the Babylonian origin of the Sabbath must be taken with several grains of salt." The Bible attributes the origin of the Sabbath to God's example at creation.

4.2 After the creation account, the Sabbath is next mentioned in relation to the giving of the manna (Exo 16:23-30); then at Sinai, when it became part of the Decalogue. (Exo 20:8-11)

Exo 16:23 And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy **sabbath** unto the LORD: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.

Exo 16:24 And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein.

Exo 16:25 And Moses said, Eat that today; for today is a **sabbath** unto the LORD: to day ye shall not find it in the field.

Exo 16:26 Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the **sabbath**, in it there shall be none.

Exo 16:27 And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none.

Exo 16:28 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?

Exo 16:29 See, for that the LORD hath given you the **sabbath**, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.

Exo 16:30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

Exo 20:8 Remember the **sabbath** day, to keep it holy.

Exo 20:9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

Exo 20:10 But the seventh day is the **sabbath** of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

Exo 20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the **sabbath** day, and hallowed it.

5. God ordained keeping the Sabbath as the sign of His covenant with Israel.

(Exo 31:12-17)

Exo 31:12 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

Exo 31:13 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my **sabbaths** ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.

Exo 31:14 Ye shall keep the **sabbath** therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

Exo 31:15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the **sabbath** of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the **sabbath** day, he shall surely be put to death.

Exo 31:16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the **sabbath**, to observe the **sabbath** throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

Exo 31:17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

5.1 Thus it acted as the seal of the Mosaic covenant (Isa 56:4 and 6), corresponding to circumcision as the seal of the Abrahamic covenant. (Gen 17:11)

Isa 56:3 Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree."

Isa 56:4 For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my **sabbaths**, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant --

Isa 56:5 to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.

Gen 17:11 You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.

6. The other books of the Pentateuch contain legislation for Sabbath observance. The Day of Atonement was designated a Sabbath of complete rest, and the first, fifteenth, and twenty-third days of the seventh month (Feast of Trumpets, Feast of Tabernacles) were to be observed with a Sabbath rest.

7. The seventh year was to be a sabbatical year. (Lev 25:2-7)

Lev 25:2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a **sabbath** to the LORD.

Lev 25:3 For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops.

Lev 25:4 But in the seventh year the land is to have a **sabbath** of rest, a **sabbath** to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.

Lev 25:5 Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.

Lev 25:6 Whatever the land yields during the **sabbath** year will be food for you -- for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you,

Lev 25:7 as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

7.1 Not only were the fields to enjoy a rest from cultivation but the debts of fellow Israelites were to be cancelled. (Deu 15:1-9)

Deu 15:1 At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.

Deu 15:2 This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the LORD'S time for canceling debts has been proclaimed.

Deu 15:3 You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your brother owes you.

8. After every series of seven sabbatical years the fiftieth year was to be observed as a year of jubilee when property reverted to its original owner and Israelites in servitude regained freedom. (Lev 25:8-54)

Lev 25:8 "Count off seven **sabbaths** of years -- seven times seven years -- so that the seven **sabbaths** of years amount to a period of forty-nine years.

Lev 25:9 Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land.

Lev 25:10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan.

Lev 25:54 "Even if he is not redeemed in any of these ways, he and his children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee,

Lev 25:55 for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

9. With the development of the synagogue during the inter-testament period, the Sabbath became a day of worship and study of the law as well as cessation from work. The beginnings of legalism and petty restrictions on Sabbath observance began during this period.

10. Jesus declared Himself to be Lord of the Sabbath (Mar 2:28), and that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. (Mar 2:27)

Mar 2:27 Then he said to them, "The **sabbath** was made for man, not man for the **sabbath**."

Mar 2:28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the **sabbath**."

11. Jesus pointed the Jews back to the original intent of the Sabbath ordinance, to provide rest for man, and taught that the higher principle of mercy should take precedence. (Mat 12:5-12)

Mat 12:5 Or haven't you read in the Law that on the **sabbath** the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?

Mat 12:6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.

Mat 12:7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.

Mat 12:8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the **sabbath**."

Mat 12:9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue,

Mat 12:10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the **sabbath**?"

Mat 12:11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the **sabbath**, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"

Mat 12:12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the **sabbath**."

12. Early Christians may have used the Sabbath for witnessing to Jews (Acts 13:14-15), but the first day of the week was their day of worship. (Acts 20:7)

Acts 13:14 From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the **sabbath** they entered the synagogue and sat down.

Acts 13:15 After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak."

Acts 20:7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

13. It is significant that the decrees of the council of Jerusalem made no mention of keeping the Sabbath in the requirements for Gentile Christians. (Acts 15:28-31)

Acts 15:28 It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

Acts 15:29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

Acts 15:30 The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter.

Acts 15:31 The people read it and were glad for its encouraging message.

13.1 However, the Sabbath will apparently be part of worship in the Millennium. (Isa 66:22-23)

Isa 66:22 "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.

Isa 66:23 From one New Moon to another and from one **sabbath** to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD.

Isa 66:24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

14. Numerous biblical regulations governed the observance of the Sabbath.

14.1 The chief biblical prohibition concerning the Sabbath was against work on that day. (Exo 20:9-10)

Exo 20:9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Exo 20:10 but the seventh day is a **sabbath** to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

14.2 The Old Testament does not define work in detail except that it specifically forbids the kindling of a fire for cooking (Exo 35:3) and the gathering of wood. (Num 15:32-36)

Exo 35:3 Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the **sabbath** day."

Exo 35:4 Moses said to the whole Israelite community, "This is what the LORD has commanded:

Num 15:32 While the Israelites were in the desert, a man was found gathering wood on the **sabbath** day.

Num 15:33 Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and the whole assembly,

Num 15:34 and they kept him in custody, because it was not clear what should be done to him.

Num 15:35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must die. The whole assembly must stone him outside the camp."

Num 15:36 So the assembly took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD commanded Moses.

14.3 However, in keeping with the purpose of the Sabbath, bearing burdens (Jer 17:21-22.), traveling (Exo 16:29), and trading (Neh 10:31) were also forbidden.

Jer 17:21 This is what the LORD says: Be careful not to carry a load on the **sabbath** day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem.

Jer 17:22 Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the **sabbath**, but keep the **sabbath** day holy, as I commanded your forefathers.

Exo 16:29 Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the **sabbath**; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out."

Neh 10:31 "When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the **sabbath**, we will not buy from them on the **sabbath** or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

15. The Jewish Sabbath was also to be observed with a holy assembly, the doubling of the daily offerings, and the placing of new showbread in the holy place. (Num 28:9 ff.; Lev 24:5-8)

Num 28:9 "On the **sabbath** day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil.

Num 28:10 This is the burnt offering for every **sabbath**, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.

Lev 24:5 "Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf.

Lev 24:6 Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD.

Lev 24:7 Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire.

Lev 24:8 This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, **sabbath** after **sabbath**, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant.

16. The Sabbath was to be a day of gladness for it was to provide man an opportunity to put aside the duties of life and concentrate on spiritual activities for the refreshing of his soul. It was soon distorted and became an onerous legalistic burden--a heavy yoke as our Lord termed it.

17. For the believer in Christ, the Sabbath rest of God at the original creation is made an illustration of the rest into which the believer enters in the new creation when "he also hath ceased from his own works" by trusting Christ not only for his salvation but for daily living.

Heb 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

Heb 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Heb 4:3 For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.

Heb 4:4 For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

Heb 4:5 And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

Heb 4:6 Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief:

Heb 4:7 Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

Heb 4:8 For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

Heb 4:9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

Heb 4:10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

18. Two views are held today concerning the Sabbath:

18.1 It has been done away with completely, and though man needs one day of rest in seven, it and all of the Mosaic law--and the Decalogue in particular--are no longer binding. (2Co 3:6-11)

2Co 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

2Co 3:7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

2Co 3:8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

2Co 3:9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

2Co 3:10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

2Co 3:11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

18.2 Many Reformed theologians believe, however, that it is not possible to maintain that the Ten Commandments are no longer valid. That since the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath He had the right to change the day of its keeping for His Church from the last day of the week to the first, and did so in order that it might become a commemoration of His rising from the dead.

19. This appears to many to be the only explanation that fits all the facts. Since the Sabbath was made for man, Christ changed its celebration to bless man.