

The Ten Commandments
Lesson 9: Keeping the Sabbath
Following God's Pattern For Work, Rest, And Worship

Exodus 20:8 states, *"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."* God gave us a pattern to follow: six days of labour with one day uniquely set aside for rest and reverence toward Him. Why? What is the meaning of the Sabbath, and how are we to obey this command? Opinions and beliefs abound; discussions and arguments about this issue can be found in many quarters. Does this command mean that we must gather for worship on Saturday, the seventh day? Is there any other day that could be treated like a seventh or Sabbath day? These are just a few questions.

We must also look at the New Testament record. Did anything change when Jesus came? How did He keep the Sabbath day? Is Sunday the modern equivalent of the Sabbath? How did the New Testament believers treat the Sabbath? Does the New Testament give us any clear revelation concerning honoring the Sabbath as a Christian? Does it really matter anymore?

The Old and New Testaments have much to say to us about the Sabbath. There are Sabbath truths that go back to the creation and God's design for Adam and Eve, and we can learn much from the Old Testament experiences of the nation of Israel. This command was also greatly discussed in Jesus' day and in the days of the early church. We can profit from what Jesus said and how the Holy Spirit led the early believers.

To be sure that we are honoring what he wishes with respect to work, rest, and worship, we must understand what He meant when He gave the commandment and also how it applies to us today.

1. The Meaning of "Sabbath"

When we speak of the Sabbath, varied ideas and opinions come to mind. What does the Scripture reveal about the Sabbath? The Hebrew noun from which we get our English word *sabbath* is *sabbat*. It is rooted in the verb *sabat*, meaning rest, to repose, to cease, or to be still and is used to denote the action of celebrating the seventh day Sabbath. The Sabbath day of rest was very important to the Lord and to His relationship with His people.

- a. We need to understand some of the history of the Sabbath. Where is the Sabbath first mentioned? Read Genesis 2:1-3. What do you discover in those verses?
 - i. God created the heavens and the earth in six days. Genesis 2:2 record that *"He rested on the seventh day."*
 - ii. The Hebrew word *shabath* is translated *"rest,"* meaning *"to cease," "to still,"* or *"to rest."* God *"blessed"* this seventh day, setting it apart as a day for one to receive the fullness of His favor, experiencing optimum rest and refreshing. The word *"sanctified"* in verse 3 means to set apart as holy or to set apart from ordinary use for His unique purposes.
 - iii. Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day, and on that day, Adam also named the animals. The next day was the first Sabbath. When God rested on that Sabbath day, it was a time for Adam and Eve to meet with Him on their first full day on earth—a time for them to focus on their relationship to Him and for Him to lead them in knowing Him, His word, and His ways.
 - iv. God's intention has never changed. Sin entered the earth and multiple distractions arose to hinder our relationship with God, but God's desire never changed. He still wants His people to be close to Him all seven days every week.

- b. The next mention of the Sabbath occurs in Exodus 16:1-30, just after the children of Israel left Egypt on their way to Canaan. Please note verses 22-30.
- i. God had given them instructions about Him raining down bread from heaven. He told them to gather twice as much on the sixth day of the week and that it would be enough for the seventh day. He said that it would keep and not spoil. There would be enough to satisfy everyone's hunger.
 - ii. Several didn't obey God's instructions and gathered more than a daily rate and others went looking for bread on the seventh day. The seventh day was set apart as a day of rest, a day to cease from work, but also a day to focus on the Lord, trusting Him for provisions and remembering who they were as His people.
 - iii. Over the weeks, months and years to come, this manna schedule would become a training opportunity for Israel, each week's provision being a reminder of the Sabbath and the command to set aside that day to the Lord.
 - iv. It was evident that all of the people did not grasp the will of God concerning the observance of the Sabbath, nor did they grasp His intention to provide for them. The people needed further instructions about the Sabbath.
- c. Let's look at the fourth commandment in Exodus 20:8-11
- i. They were commanded to *remember* the Sabbath and to keep it holy set aside for God. In the original Hebrew it read, "Keep remembering the Sabbath."
 - ii. Verses 9-10 emphasize that "Six days shalt thou labour and do all your work." The seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord, and no one was to work. Even the cattle were not to be used.
 - iii. Verse 11 is a reference back to what God did during the creation; He made everything in six days and rested on the seventh. God also blessed and hallowed the seventh day.
- d. In Deuteronomy 5:12-15, forty years after Mount Sinai, Moses repeated the Ten Commandments to the generation that was about to go into the Promise Land.
- i. This version was different in that at Mount Sinai, they were to remember that they were servants (slaves) in Egypt, and that God brought them out by a mighty hand and a stretched out arm. They were reminded to "keep (observe) the Sabbath days", not just to remember them.
 - ii. Also, in this version more animals are listed, and the manservants and maidservants are listed twice. God delivered them, all of them from a seven-day work week. Israel was to remember what God had brought them from and treat others right.
- e. The Sabbath held a special significance to the Lord and to His people. Read Exodus 31:12-17. God presents a main truth to Moses and His people.
- i. The Sabbath was to be a continual sign of the covenant relationship that God had with His people. They enjoyed a special relationship with God who had sanctified them. The Sabbath was a weekly reminder that they were set apart for God.
 - ii. Observing the Sabbath set them apart from the inhabitants of other lands that did not observe the Sabbath.
 - iii. To violate the Sabbath meant more than just working a seven-day week, it meant breaking the covenant with God, and it was a statement of mistrust in the Lord as their provider.
 - iv. Since it meant breaking the covenant, the Lord saw it as acting against Him personally, it meant death.

2. Violating the Sabbath

How well did the children of Israel follow the fourth commandment? How well did they grasp the significance of the Sabbath? Now we'll look at some more of the regulations the Lord gave them, as well as

some of the violations the Israelites committed. We will also see how the Lord instructed them to deal with those violations.

- a. Look at Exodus 34:21.
 - i. The Lord told them "Six days thou shalt work, but on the seventh day thou shalt rest: in earing and harvest thou shalt rest." There was to be no plowing nor harvesting.
 - ii. This commandment was more than about work regulations; it was about the Israelite's worship of their holy God
- b. After the second forty-day meeting with the Lord, Moses instructed the people at Mount Sinai about the seriousness of breaking the Sabbath. Read Exodus 35:1-3.
 - i. The six days of working and the seventh day being a day of rest were repeated in this passage, but the penalty for anyone working on the Sabbath was included which was death.
 - ii. They were not even to kindle a fire or to cook on the Sabbath.
 - iii. God was serious about this commandment.
- c. Numbers 15:32-36 describes a violation of the Sabbath command.
 - i. Numbers 15:22-31 gives the information of offerings for unintentional sins (those out of ignorance of the law) and no offering for intentional sins.
 - ii. While they were in the wilderness, the children of Israel found a man gathering sticks on the sabbath. They put him in prison because it had not been revealed what should be done unto him.
 - iii. The Lord told Moses that the man should surely be put to death: all the congregation shall stone him without the camp. And the people took him outside the camp and stoned him with stones and he died.
 - iv. This may seem to be very harsh punishment until we understand the nature of the man's sin. It was a blatant, defiant disregard for the command of the Lord.
- d. Through the years, many in Israel did not honor the Sabbath. So, God sent His prophets to call the people back to Him and His Word. Isaiah 58:13-14 is one example of His calling the people back to honoring the Sabbath.
 - i. The people were told: if they turned back their foot [from unnecessary travel] on the Sabbath and from doing their own pleasure on the Sabbath; if they would call the Sabbath a spiritual delight and the Holy day of the Lord honorable, God would bless the people.
 - ii. Turning your foot also means making an about-face. If they turned back to delighting in the Lord and honoring the Sabbath, God would cause them to ride upon high places and feed them with the promises of Jacob.
- e. In Jeremiah 17:19-27, God told the people not to bear any burden on the Sabbath. Not to bring it into the city to sell nor take out the burden of their houses.
 - i. The people didn't listen nor obey. They didn't incline their ear unto the Lord. They made their necks stiff.
 - ii. God promised if they obeyed, there would be kings and princes of the house of David sitting upon the thrones. They would be riding in chariots and on horses. If they disobeyed, God would kindle a fire against them.

- f. In Nehemiah 13:15-22, there were some problems:
- i. He saw people treading the winepress on the Sabbath day, bringing in sheaves, lading asses, and brought in burdens in the gates. They were also selling goods and food.
 - ii. Nehemiah said that God had brought all the evil upon them because for their violations of the Sabbath.
 - iii. Nehemiah took actions: he closed the gates of the city prior to dark before the Sabbath and they stayed closed until after the Sabbath ended. There was no trading or selling at the gate during the Sabbath. He also commanded the Levites to cleanse themselves and to keep the gates.
 - iv. He did these things to sanctify the Sabbath.

Notes on the Sabbath:

- The Lord made provision not only for a Sabbath rest each week, but for a **Sabbath year every seven years**. In Leviticus 25:1-22, he commanded a Sabbath year in which the land would rest—no plowing, sowing, or harvesting. From an agricultural stance, this would prevent the land from being continually drained of nutrients. From a spiritual stance, this was an opportunity for the people to trust the Lord's promise that the harvest of the sixth year would be adequate to meet their needs for three years, the sixth, the Sabbath, and the eighth year.
- There was also the **Year of Jubilee celebration**. It was a rest declared every fiftieth year (the year after seven periods of seven years). The Jubilee was a year of rest not only for the people, servants, and livestock, but also for clearing all debts, freeing all servants, and returning all land deeds, the land going back to the original owner when it was given to each tribe by allotment from the Lord. Today, the Jubilee Year is a metaphor for the freedom and rest Christ brings—all sin debts canceled, all slaves freed, and every believer guaranteed an inheritance with Christ.
- The Jews measured their days from sundown to sundown rather than from dawn to dawn or midnight to midnight; the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday. To signal its beginning, a priest stood on the corner of the Temple wall and blew a trumpet. He would blow three blasts to signal the end of the workday Friday, and then another three to move from the ordinary day into the sacred Sabbath. The priest would also blow a trumpet to signal the end of the Sabbath Saturday at sundown. Then fires could be lit, and meals cooked because the new week had begun.

Homework: Read Matthew 12:1-14; John 5:1-18; and Luke 13:10-17

Lesson Topics: **Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath** and **Jesus, The Sabbath, and The Christian Lifestyle**.