

What Does the Bible Teach About the Sabbath?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

Introduction:

- A. Sabbath (sæbæθ) (verb Shavath) is the seventh day of the Hebrew calendar week, first mentioned in the Creation narrative - Gen. 2:2-3
 1. Observation of Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments (the fourth).
 - a. Ex. 20:8-11, 31:13-17; Neh. 13:19
 2. Shmita - Hebrew: שמיטה, Strong's shemittah, literally "release," also called sabbatical year, is the seventh year of the seven-year agricultural cycle mandated by the Law for the Israel. The land is left to lie fallow and all agricultural activity, including plowing, planting, pruning and harvesting, is forbidden. Whatever fruits grow on their own during that year are deemed hefker (ownerless), not for the landowner but for the poor, the stranger, and the beasts of the field; these fruits may be picked by anyone.
 3. When the year ended, all debts, except those of foreigners, were to be remitted - Deut. 15:1-11; a slave who had worked for six years was to go free in the seventh year - Lev. 25
- B. Contemporary observation:
 1. In Eastern Orthodox Christianity, the Sabbath is on Saturday, the seventh day, while the Lord's Day; a weekly observance of the resurrection is made consistently on Sunday.
 2. Since Puritan times, most English-speaking Protestants equate the Lord's Day (Sunday) with Sabbath, as do Roman Catholics in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ; it is often celebrated with communion and a day of rest.
- C. A Sabbath observation has been practiced worldwide since ancient days
 1. Roman emperor Constantine the Great enacted the first civil law regarding Sunday observance in 321 AD. "On the venerable day of the sun let the magistrate and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country however, persons engaged in agricultural work may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain growing or for vine planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations the bounty of heaven should be lost."
 2. Zoroastrianism, the Babylonian rest days: Sapattu
 3. Buddhist rest day: Uposatha
 4. Cherokee rest days, empty moon days, called "un-time" or "non-days"
 5. Wicca - Esbat
 6. Folk tradition in English is the use of Sabbath as a synonym of midnight-to-midnight Saturday (literally, Saturn's day in 14 languages).
 7. In 38 other languages, the common name for this day in the seven-day week is a cognate of Sabbath. Sabbatini, Sabbadini, in Italian and other Mediterranean languages; Sabbatos in contemporary Greek, sâbotnichavi in Bulgarian.
 8. This speaks of a single origin - Gen. 2:3

9. Muslims replace Sabbath rest with jumu'ah. Also known as Friday prayer, jumu'ah is a congregational prayer (salat) held every Friday just after midday, in place of the otherwise daily (dhuhr) prayer; it commemorates the creation of Adam on the sixth day, glorifying the man on Friday, as opposed to glorifying God on the Sabbath.
10. The Quran states: "When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday, hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah, and leave off business: That is best for you if ye but knew. When the prayer is ended, then disperse in the land" (62:9).
11. Sabbatical: From the Biblical sabbatical year came the modern concept of a sabbatical, a prolonged, often one-year, hiatus in the career of an individual.
12. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) believe the Lord has commanded them to continue to observe the Sabbath. He has promised them that if they obey this commandment, they will receive "the fullness of the earth." They are taught that they should keep it a holy day and it should be reserved for holy activities. Founder Joseph Smith claimed revelation in 1831: "That thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day; for verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High." (D&C 59:9-10)

D. The Ten Commandments:

1. The first four deal with man's relationship with God.
2. The last six deal with man's relationship with man.
3. They illustrate the highest commands of loving God and loving neighbor as oneself - Matt. 22:36-40
4. The fourth commandment regards honoring God on the Sabbath.

E. Understanding Bible doctrine regarding the Sabbath:

1. The Rule for Israel to observe the Sabbath,
2. The Reasoning of God in establishing the Sabbath,
3. The Relevance of the Sabbath then and now.

I. THE RULE FOR ISRAEL TO OBSERVE THE SABBATH

A. Ex. 20:8 - "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy."

1. General authority, to be qualified by later instruction and examples.
2. Sabbath is to rest from labor for a specific purpose - Ex. 20:9
3. From Creation, God commanded man to work.
 - a. Gen. 2:15, 3:17-19; Eph. 4:28; 2Thes. 3:10

B. But God also commanded that one rest; even the earth is to rest - Ex. 20:10

1. This rule is true not only for the wealthy, but for their children, common laborers, slaves, and even the animals. The poor could not claim necessity as an excuse to work on the Sabbath.
2. God only gave them manna for six days each week - Ex. 16:23-26
3. One could not even gather firewood to keep warm - Num. 15:32-36
4. God's intentions were not to punish man for violating the Sabbath, but to give him a day to rest himself and honor his God.

II. THE REASONING OF GOD IN ESTABLISHING THE SABBATH

- A. Ex. 20:11 - It was the day God rested from His work of creation.
 - 1. Man ought not to go beyond God and do for himself things that God did not do for Himself.
 - 2. If six days were enough for God to labor, and a day of rest was good for Him, then the same is good for humankind created in God's image
- B. The Sabbath demonstrated God's love for man.
 - 1. God did not want man to wear himself out with incessant labor. He wanted man to have days of rest so as to be able to enjoy life and the fruits of his labors - Ecc. 2:22-24, 5:18
 - 2. Jesus proved that the Sabbath is a manifestation of God's love when He healed on the Sabbath - Matt. 12:5-12; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-9

III. THE RELEVANCE OF THE SABBATH THEN AND NOW

- A. Is the fourth commandment still binding on God's children today?
 - 1. Many want to say that the Sabbath day is still binding, but that Sunday is now the Sabbath. Not true, at least as they practice it. They need to keep all of the Sabbath law in order to be consistent
 - 2. Some insist that Saturday is still the Sabbath and must be observed: Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Eastern Orthodox.
 - 3. The Ten Commandments as originally given were only for the nation of Israel - Ex. 34:27-28; Deut. 5:1-3
 - a. The covenant was made with Israel; it was never binding on righteous Gentiles in any dispensation - Acts 15:23-24, 28-29
- B. We are under a different, far better covenant.
 - 1. Heb. 8:6, 13, 10:9; Col. 2:13-17; Gal. 5:1-4
 - 2. The fourth commandment regarding remembering the Sabbath is not binding on anyone today.
 - 3. At the same time, Paul respected the customs of the Jews to observe it as a day of rest to accommodate their tender consciences.
 - a. 1Cor. 9:19-23; Rom. 14:5
- C. The first day of the week was never the Sabbath day.
 - 1. Christians in the first century worshiped upon the first day of the week.
 - 2. Jesus arose from the dead on the first day of the week.
 - a. Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; John 20:1
 - 3. The day of Pentecost when the church was established was on the first day of the week, Sunday - Acts 2
 - 4. The church ate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week - Acts 20:7
 - 5. They took up the contribution on the first day of the week - 1Cor. 16:1-2
 - 6. This isn't the Sabbath day, but the Lord's Day - Rev. 1:10
- D. Ultimately the Sabbath is symbolic for the rest of God's people in eternity.
 - 1. Heb. 4:9-11
 - 2. Today we honor the Sabbath by working for the Lord and waiting for the day of eternal rest.