

Once we conclude that the Sabbath is for Christians then come the questions about how to keep it. This article takes a comprehensive look at the scriptures supporting the Sabbath and explains how it is kept in plain terms.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20: 8-11)

Explaining the Sabbath

The key word in the above verse is "holy." In this context "holy" means to be "set apart, dedicated, hallowed, or consecrated." This is a serious word. Think about the fine dishes or silverware that only come out for special occasions. Think about a special suit or dress you have that you only wear to the most important events. This is the same concept in which God has placed the seventh day of the week. It is a day that we are to treat specially. The opposite of holy is common. In other words, the clothing or silverware you use from day to day is commonly used, not set aside for special purposes. The extreme opposite of holy is profane, which is something reprehensible that one would not consider using for anything. For instance, if you used one of your daily dishes to get rid of a dead mouse, most people would throw out that dish because it has been effectively profaned. However, when something is supposed to be holy and is used as anything less than holy, it is considered profaned. Not keeping the Sabbath is to profane it. This article provides a framework for keeping the Sabbath holy.

The first concept in the commandment is work:

We are commanded to work for six days a week. The Sabbath starts at sundown on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday night. This is based on the sun wherever you live. The hours of the day are not tied to Jerusalem. The majority of Sabbath keepers use Sunday for household chores and then work at secular jobs for five days. In other words, six days are common but one day - the Sabbath - is holy.

The next concept broadens out the Sabbath about who can work and who cannot. In this respect, the Sabbath is *completely comprehensive*. God listed out every possible person or thing that could work on Sabbath and made sure that we know it means "nobody." Not even cattle can work. We cannot control how mankind operates, but we can control how we operate. Even though the world works 7 days a week, we who know the truth of the Sabbath must not contribute to mankind's sins.

The last part is the "why." There are many reasons for us to keep the Sabbath. Principally, it is because God said to. Other benefits are for the purposes of rest, recuperation, and a de-stressing from the challenges of the world. But the **specific** reason given in the commandment by the voice of God: He rested on the seventh day after creating the heavens and the earth. This means nothing was done by the Creator of the universe to honor His creation.

Why we keep Sabbath

From the New Testament:

"He (Jesus or Yeshua) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him." (Col 1:15-16)

In case there was any doubt, it was Yeshua and His Father who rested on the universe's first Sabbath day. To call ourselves Christians, means we emulate Christ aka the Messiah. Therefore, why wouldn't we want to follow His example set forth from Creation? If He rested from his works on Sabbath, who are we to do otherwise?

What is acceptable on the Sabbath?

Now comes the nitty-gritty:

What is acceptable to do on Sabbath and what is not?

This is an individual's decision to make. While the Rabbis and clergymen have written extensively on what *they* deem is legal or not to do on Sabbath, our relationship is with God and His Son. No Rabbi, Priest, or Pastor is going to stand in our place at the Judgment. Only Yeshua can do that and only Yeshua and His Father know our hearts. It is up to us to study to show ourselves approved.

From the 4th commandment, it is clear that we do not work and we do not make anyone or any beast do any work on Sabbath. This requires preparation and planning. We need to plan to keep the Sabbath in advance. Cleaning the dishes, gassing up the car, getting the laundry done, catching up on email, etc., etc. all should be done on Friday before sunset.

"Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." (Numbers 15:32-36)

Ouch. This verse comes to my mind each time I have to do something on Sabbath that I should have done ahead of time. Yes, it happens. We plan and plan, but inevitably something happens once in a great while that requires our attention on Sabbath. We are not perfect and can't remember to do everything. And there are always emergencies, both small and great.

This, however, is addressed in the New Testament:

"At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath."

But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him.

And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep (or an ox or a son in Luke 14), and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!"

He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. (Matthew 12:1-13)

Yeshua does not actually say the people working on Sabbath aren't sinning in these scenarios. He even pointed out that David sinned when he ate the consecrated bread. What Yeshua is saying is that emergency situations arise and need to be attended to.

If you have an ox or a sheep in the ditch of course you are going to save that valuable asset on the Sabbath. You will surely not let your son rot in a hole waiting for sunset. Rescuing an ox requires using more than a couple of people. But if you have an ox in the ditch each Sabbath, you are not following the commandment to work the other six days. Fill in the ditch or build a fence.

With respect to picking the grain, the disciples were not feasting or making a feast on the Sabbath. They were taking the food and eating it, which is really not much more than what they would do if they were in a house eating a meal prepared the day before. For the Pharisees to even bring that up is rather petty in my opinion.

Healings on Sabbath

With respect to healing on the Sabbath, well, that's a no-brainer. Children are born on the Sabbath. Male children are (or were depending on your perspective) circumcised on the Sabbath. The Seventh Day Adventists, strident keepers of the 4th commandment, own several hospitals across the world. Those hospitals are open for emergency procedures and to care for the admitted patients on Sabbath. To not heal someone on the Sabbath would be cruel.

The same applies to not putting out a house fire, not rescuing someone in physical peril, or not heeding the call to arms on a Sabbath day in defense of your nation or your neighbor. Yeshua says it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath but I regard it as a requirement. Yahweh wants us to be compassionate and empathetic. We must be merciful and ready to serve our neighbors 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Doing business on Sabbath

Next up is the topic of doing commerce on the Sabbath day, particularly that of eating out. The 4th commandment does not allow for any work to be done on Sabbath. In a perfect world, one that we will experience in the millennium, nobody will work on Sabbath so there will be no opportunity to buy or sell anything, let alone to temporarily hire a waiter and cook to prepare food for us.

In the millennium, no business will be open from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. We have a specific scripture that addresses this. The setup is that those who were going to return from the Babylonian captivity had recently done so. They were in the middle of reconstructing Jerusalem when Nehemiah recants the Sabbath being profaned:

"In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food. Also, men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the sabbath, even in Jerusalem.

Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the sabbath day? Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the sabbath.

It came about that just as it grew dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and that they should not open them until after the sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates

so that no load would enter on the sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent the night outside Jerusalem. Then I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you." From that time on they did not come on the sabbath. And I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the sabbath day.

For this also remember me, O my God, and have compassion on me according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness." (Nehemiah 13:15-22)

The text here is easy enough to understand. Nehemiah is not introducing a new law, rather reinforcing existing law. I would like to place emphasis on two sentences. The first is that they were selling food specifically. This is unacceptable to God. The second is that Nehemiah would not permit the vendors to sleep outside the wall. He wanted to push the temptation out of the sight of the people. This is a great lesson: We need to get the temptation to sin out of our sight as well!

Assembling on Sabbath

There is another aspect of the Sabbath that is not covered in Exodus.

"The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD'S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these: 'For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.'" (Lev 23:1-3)

We have already covered what holy means. Convocation means a public meeting or an assembly. This is the same as the word translated as "church" in the New Testament, which is the Greek "ekklesia." Here in Leviticus 23, the sabbath command is expanded to include having a called-out assembly of believers. To most believers, this means attending a church service. That church service can take many forms and be anything from a small group meeting in a home to a large group meeting in an official church building. Whatever form it takes, the command includes having an assembly so like-minded believers can fellowship, share their testimonies, teach, learn, network, etc.

The Sabbath is an easy commandment to keep with immense value and benefits. It is not meant to be a burden, but a liberating time where the called-out believers can commune with each other and, most importantly, with God. It can even be construed as a weekly glimpse at the future when the called-out believers will commune with the Almighty forever. We are supposed to plan and prepare in advance to set aside this 24-hour period for a holy purpose, just as God did in the beginning.

As you start to observe the Sabbath as the scriptures outline, you will likely find traditions to keep that help enhance the experience for you, your family, and your fellowship. Just remember, we do it all for the glory of God!