

Sabbath

(Genesis 2:2-4, Exodus 20:8-11, Mark 2)

After six days of separating and filling, God's work of creation ends. God saw everything that He had made, and it was very good (Gen 1:31). "And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he **rested** on the seventh day from all his work that he had done" (2:2). Then God "blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (2:3). The seventh day was set apart from the other six days for humanity because, on the seventh day, God rested. God's deliberate act of resting on the seventh day is the foundation for the biblical concept of the Sabbath. That includes sabbath for both those under the Mosaic law and the new covenant believer.

The verb translated rested in Genesis 2:3 and 4 is שָׁבַת or šāḇaṭ and means to cease, desist, or rest. It is the root word for the noun Sabbath, as in the special day set aside to rest in devotion to God. This is the fourth commandment in the Ten Commandments. In the ESV, it reads,

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is **a Sabbath** to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and 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. (Exo 20:8–11)

The foundation for the fourth commandment is the example Yahweh provided in Genesis 2. He worked for six days and then rested, and all of Israel must follow God's example. This commandment remains in force all the way to the days of Jesus on the earth in Judea. This commandment is for man's good. Notice the commandment is not limited to just Israelites – everyone needs a day of rest, including the livestock. In fact, even the land gets a year of sabbath or rest. Leviticus 25:3-4 reads, "For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, ⁴ but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of **solemn rest** for the land." If dirt needs rest, how much more do living creatures need periods of rest?

By the time Jesus, the Son of God, arrived on the planet (about 1400 years later), the Jews had made keeping the Sabbath a chore to Israel. There were rules on top of rules concerning what was and wasn't working on this day of rest. In Mark 2, Jesus confronts the religious establishment with the manner in which the Sabbath was burdensome. He says, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (v. 27). He then declares Himself the LORD of the Sabbath. These words provide incredible clarity. The Sabbath was a gift from God to humanity. The human body needs physical and mental rest. The Sabbath set Israel apart from its neighboring countries. Israelites were not to buy, trade, or conduct business on the seventh day of the week. Essentially, their economy was closed every seventh day.

Although today's follower of Jesus is not under the law of Moses, the principle behind a day of rest remains valid and applicable. Humans do better when they make rest a part of their week. Humans need nightly rest. Challenges due to sleep deprivation are real. God did not need to rest. God doesn't sleep or become weary. Resting on the seventh day was how God deliberately chose to provide an example for His creation. Jesus was accused of not keeping the Sabbath, but Jesus kept the Sabbath in the way God intended for it to be kept. He did what was necessary and good to be done on the Sabbath. To use a modern example, Jesus would change a flat tire on the Sabbath but not rebuild a transmission. Jesus healed on the Sabbath, but that doesn't mean a doctor should open their medical practice seven days a week. But hospitals are open 24/7; therefore, doctors, nurses, support staff, etc., must work on the seventh day.

First, today's Christians must remember they are not under the law of Moses. These Old Testament laws are studied and applicable as their principles are applied. Second, the nurse who must work on Sundays needs another day of the week devoted to God and rest. If he or she must work seven, eight, or even ten days in a row because of the demands of the job – the principle of needed rest remains in force. This person might need two days of sabbath after such a grueling schedule. Third, God set the seventh day apart as holy. All Christians need purposeful times and mechanisms to take them back to their God – their Creator. For many or most, Sundays can serve as that day. A combination of rest from work and an intentional focus on worship, prayer, the Word of God, and the people of God is good and pleasing to the LORD of the Sabbath. Is practicing sabbath a deliberate part of your life?