

Remember
the Sabbath
And keep it
Holy

Fourth
Commandment



Keeping the Sabbath Day Holy

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Keeping the Sabbath Day Holy

Just what does it mean to “keep the Sabbath?” What should a person do on that day? Or, as some would prefer to ask, what should a person NOT do? Can you work at your normal job? What about emergencies? Can you buy groceries on the Sabbath? What if you have unexpected guests? The Sabbath is indeed a “holy day,” and to worship God properly requires a right view of His day.

Too often we think of God's law as restrictive, prohibitive, taking away from us things we want. If you happen to be a person of leisure, you may feel the Sabbath interferes with your recreation. But if you are a working stiff, you are more likely to think of the Sabbath as a *day of liberty*, of freedom, of rest. You are more likely to welcome the Sabbath as the great gift it is. Here are some basic principles which will answer many of the questions you have been asking. *Unless you know the PURPOSE of the Sabbath, you can't understand HOW to keep it.*

When does the Sabbath Start?

How do we know when the Sabbath begins? Today we count time from midnight to midnight. But God says, “...from *even* unto *even*, shall ye celebrate your sabbath.” (Lev 23:32). The word “even” in the Hebrew is “‘ereb From H6150; dusk: - + day, even (-ing, tide), night.” (Strong’s #6153).

Strong’s 6150 says, “‘arab A primitive root (rather identical with H6148 through the idea of covering with a texture); ***to grow dusky at sundown***: - be darkened, (toward) evening.” So we are to begin the Sabbath from sundown to sundown, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

Robertson's Word Pictures puts it, “...the twenty-four-hour day which began with *sunset....it was sundown, not sunrise when the Jewish Sabbath (twenty-four-hour day) began.*” (emphasis added). An examination of Genesis chapter 1 clearly shows from the beginning how the days were counted, “And the evening [Heb. “ereb”] and the morning were the first day.” (Genesis 1:5).

The JFB Commentary says, “a natural day, as the mention of its two parts clearly determines; and Moses reckons, according to Oriental usage, *from sunset to sunset*, saying not day and night as we do, *but evening and morning.*” (emphasis added).

Is there historical proof for this?

Josephus writes, “Had it not been for our practice, ***from the days of our forefathers, to rest on the seventh day***, this bank [thrown up by Pompey] could never have been perfected, by reason of the opposition the Jews would have made; for though our law gives us leave then to defend ourselves against those that begin to fight us and assault us, yet does it not permit us to meddle with our enemies while they do anything else. Which thing when the Romans understood, on those days which ***we call Sabbaths*** they threw nothing at the Jews, nor came to any pitched battle with them; but raised up their earthen banks, and brought their engines into such forwardness, that they might do execution the next day. The city was taken on the third month, on the day of the fast, upon the hundred and seventy-ninth olympiad, when Caius Antonius and Marcus Tullius Cicero were consuls.” Josephus adds, in the same account, that his testimony

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was confirmed by the writings of Strabo, Nicolaus of Damascus, and Titus Livius (Livy). (source: *Josephus, Wars of the Yews, Book 1, Chapter 7, Section 3, in The Works of Flavius Josephus, Page 618; See footnote 9; Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 14, Chapter 4, Sections 2, 3, in The Works of Flavius Josephus, Page 413*). Notice, this practice was from the days of their “forefathers.” The practice of the Sabbath in the first century was practiced in Old Testament times as well as in the time of Jesus, unabated. No doubt they celebrated the Sabbath from sunset to sunset as the scriptures say. The Romans called it the “day of Saturn” which of course responds to our day called Saturday!

Dio Cassius says in his account about the destruction of Jerusalem: “Thus was Jerusalem destroyed on *the very day of Saturn, the day which even now the Jews reverence most*. From that time forth it was ordered that the Jews who continued to *observe their ancestral customs* should pay an annual tribute of two denarii to Jupiter Capitolinus.” (Dio Cassius, Roman History, book 65, Chapter 7, in Loeb Classical Library, Dio’s Roman History, Volume 8, Page 271). Dio Cassius wrote about events right up till AD 229. In this passage he writes “even now” the Jews still observe the Sabbath on the same day, in his day, as well as in the days when the temple stood.

The date of the fall of Jerusalem, according to several authorities, was Saturday, September 8, 70 AD. (The New International Encyclopedia, Volume 22, Page 309, Article “Titus.”). When we read of the Sabbath Day in the New Testament, it means the Sabbath that the Jews were keeping, which history shows is Saturday, the same day they observe today. Jesus when he went into the synagogue “as his custom was” (Luke 4:16), went in and all the Jews of the town were there on the Sabbath and he read the scriptures. Jesus and the Jews kept the same Sabbath, Friday sunset to Saturday sunset (see Lev 23:32).

The Fourth Commandment

If we are to understand Sabbath observance, the obvious place to start is with the commandment itself, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Ex 20:8).

Most of us make a peculiar omission when we talk about “keeping the Sabbath.” For merely saying “we keep the Sabbath,” stops one word short. God said, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it *holy*.” Simply put, that which is *holy* belongs to God. The temple and all its accoutrements, for example, were holy because they belonged to God.

In this case, the Sabbath is declared to be *holy*, and we are commanded to keep it that way. The law goes on to explain: “Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ***But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God***; in it thou shalt not do any work...” (Exodus 20:10). *Six days of the week belong to us, but the seventh day belongs to God.*

Not only are we to keep in mind that the Sabbath day *does not belong to us*, and to avoid any work on that day, we are not to require work of others: “...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.”

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Does this mean you stop the boy from delivering your paper on the Sabbath day? *No, he doesn't work for you.* In most cases he is self-employed and makes his own decisions about when to work and when to take off. The commandment forbids *you* to *require* work of *anyone who is under your control*. Notice the use of the possessive: *thy* servant, *thy* daughter, even *thy* stranger. The commandment is to you and has to do with what *you* do and what *you* require. It does not call on you to prevent work by others, *nor does it prevent you from benefitting from the labors of those who decide to work!* Otherwise, you would have to avoid even the use of electricity on the Sabbath.

Why are we to do this? “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” (Exodus 20:11). Some funny arguments have grown up around the Sabbath. There are those, for example, who believe the Sabbath originated with Moses. And yet it is plain that in resting on the seventh day, God set it apart and hallowed it *from creation*. To hallow something is to make it holy. The Sabbath day was made holy right from the start, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

“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.

“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.” (Gen 2:1-3).

As Jesus put it, “the Sabbath was made for MAN.” (Mark 2:27). It was created when man was created. The fourth commandment itself points to creation as the origin of the Sabbath. Clearly Jesus is saying here that Adam and Eve kept the Sabbath!

The account in Deuteronomy adds another element to the Sabbath: “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*” (Deuteronomy 5:15).

To people born in slavery, the Sabbath was without a doubt the greatest expression of liberty these people had ever known. No longer did they have to work seven days out of seven. No longer were they left without time to think about God, to worship, to pray, and to rest as God Himself rested.

A Gift from God

The Sabbath day was also a *gift* from God. God told Moses *before* the giving of the Law on Sinai, “And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye *to keep my commandments and my laws?*”

“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.

“So the people rested on the seventh day.” (Ex 16:28-30). The law of the Sabbath was *still in existence before Moses*, as noted above since creation. Abraham kept the laws of God (Gen 26:5). There are many examples of Old Testament men in Genesis keeping the laws of God.

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The Sabbath was *given* to man from God because God is Gracious. “Be gracious to me *through your law*” (Psalm 119:29 NIV). God wanted man to rest on that day, and be holy as God is holy. God wants man to work hard, but not to overdo it and burn ourselves out. Not to mention the stress we have, and the responsibilities we have. The Sabbath is there to protect those who attempt to do too much. Man would not come to this knowledge unless the creator himself gave him this knowledge out of his grace, and give him the Sabbath as a gift.

The Sabbath also sets us free from our duties that we have to deal with every day of our lives. As noted above, the Commandment in Deuteronomy 5 reveals that the *Sabbath sets us free from the world and all of its obligations*. Jesus said the “Sabbath was made for man,” for man’s benefit, but the Israelites turned into a burden, “not man for the Sabbath.” They added “... heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay *them* on men's shoulders” (Matthew 23:4). The Sabbath in Jesus day, the meaning of it got all twisted and perverted and the true meaning was lost. This is why Jesus said, “Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:28). He gave examples of David in the Old Testament how he received relief because they “hungered” and the priests gave him the showbread to eat. David was burdened, but he received *relief* because the intent of the law is liberty not bondage (James 1:25; 2:12). When Jesus said, “Therefore the Son of man is Lord *also* of the Sabbath” He is saying as God set them free on the Sabbath (Deut 5:15) so “*also*” does the son of man set them free on the Sabbath from their burdens, as Israel was set free from their burdens on the Sabbath day. This why Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and *I will give you rest.*” (Matthew 11:28).

The “Do’s” and “Don’ts” on the Sabbath Day

The true Sabbath is *not* a *negative* thing! When we understand it properly, the Sabbath will be filled with *interest, liberty* and *joy*.

Let’s begin with the “do’s” on the Sabbath. So many people focus on the “don’ts” but many do not realize that the “do’s” outnumber the “don’ts” significantly. Jesus said, “And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do *good* on the sabbath days, or to do evil? *to save life, or to kill?*” (Mark 3:4). Jesus was preaching that doing “good” is lawful on the Sabbath. The work of Salvation “to save life” not just physically, but also spiritually, was lawful to do on the Sabbath day.

In this passage, he was about to heal the man with a withered hand. *Jesus always linked sin and sickness together*. “And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; *Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*”

“And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This *man* blasphemeth.

“And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?

“For whether is easier, to say, *Thy sins be forgiven thee*; or to say, Arise, and walk?

“But that ye may know that the *Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins*, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.

“And he arose, and departed to his house.” (Matthew 9:2-7).

Jesus knew the law that said, “And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, *and wilt give ear to his commandments, and*

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keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I *am* the LORD *that healeth thee*.” (Ex 15:26). Breaking the law which is sin (1 John 3:4) results in disease and sickness, and spiritually separate from God (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus came to forgive us of our sins, reconcile with God, and heal us. So the work of salvation was lawful on the Sabbath. Jesus also showed them by healing on the Sabbath-like the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a day of freedom from bondage of sin and sickness. (Deut 5:15).

Other examples of this are given by Jesus. A woman who had an infirmity, Jesus was in the synagogue teaching “on the Sabbath” (Luke 13:10). Notice what Jesus says to her, “Woman, thou art **loosed** from thine infirmity. (v.12). Jesus made a special point of saying to the woman that she was *set free* from her illness because that is the true spirit of the Sabbath day!

Let’s read on, “And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

“The Lord then answered him, and said, *Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?*

“And ought not this woman, being a *daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?*” (vv.14-16). Satan has the whole world in oppression (Acts 10:38) in sin and sickness. *The Sabbath was a symbol of setting people free from sin!* Egypt was a type of sin that God set Israel free from; that’s why he told them to remember the Sabbath day, *a day of freedom!* The Kingdom of God as well is likened unto the Sabbath- the time when God saves us, and set us free from Devil and his world (Heb 4:1-9).

Another example is John the fifth chapter. Jesus made a man whole on the Sabbath. His critics, “And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day” (v.16). Jesus answered them saying, “*My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*” (v.17). God’s work of salvation is allowed on the Sabbath day.

Jesus gave the example of the Priests, “Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?” (Matthew 12:5). Why were they blameless? You read what Jesus was speaking of in Numbers 28:9-10. Two lambs were killed on the Sabbath, *in addition to* the daily sacrifice. Their work was doubled on the Sabbath but were blameless because it was God’s work of Salvation and forgiveness of sins, *the very meaning of the Sabbath!* Saving lives whether physical or spiritually is allowed on the Sabbath. Relieving the oppressed, feeding the hungry, basically doing good on the Sabbath day (see Luke 4:16-19).

Human needs must be met on the Sabbath. That is the reason for the Sabbath. Jesus said to the Jews, “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day: (Luke 14:5). There are many factors **out of our control** that happen on the Sabbath. *Animal needs are met, why not man’s?* Snow storms, medical needs, family emergencies etc... These things take place on the Sabbath, and must be dealt with on the Sabbath.

Other “do’s” that are performed on the Sabbath is assembling together and fellowshiping on the Sabbath day with fellow brothers and sisters of the faith. Paul wrote, “**Not forsaking the**

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assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Heb 10:25). In church we comfort and exhort one another. We listen to sermons and drink in the word of God, like the church of God did in the days of the Apostles.

When the gentiles were coming into the faith and the Jerusalem conference was called, James said, “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God:

“But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood.

“For Moses of old time hath in every city *them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.*” (Acts 15:19-21). James tells them to write to the gentiles of the church to keep these things that are in the law, and for *further* instruction Moses is read every Sabbath in the synagogues and they can receive more information on how to live when the law is preached. So preaching the Bible in church is done when the brethren are all assembled on the Sabbath day.

This was also done in the Old Testament. The Sabbath was a day of worship and gathering together of Israel, “O come, *let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD* our maker.

“For he *is* our God; and we *are* the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. ***To day if ye will hear his voice,***” (Psalm 95:6-7). Paul quotes this passage in Hebrews the fourth chapter, and the meaning of “To day” is the Sabbath.

Lev. 23:1-3 tells us that the Sabbath is to be a *holy convocation* for God's people. A Convocation is a *commanded assembly*. God commands you to convoke or meet with other *true* believers *whenever this is possible* on the Sabbath.

Here is an example in the New Testament. Paul on his travels, “Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next *day* to Neapolis; “And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, *and* a colony: and we were in that *city abiding certain days.*” (11-12). Here Paul is “abiding” in the city of Philippi for a certain number of “days.”

The next verse reveals when they gathered for worship, and which day they regarded as sacred to them and other Christians, “And on the SABBATH we went out of the city by a river side, ***where prayer was wont to be made;*** and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted *thither.*” (v.13). On that day “prayer was wont to be made.” The Greek word here for “prayer” is “proseuchē” which in this context means, “‘proseucha’, an oratory, or a *place built and made use of for prayer;* that is, as they walked along, they saw a place, which in their opinion looked like a *religious house*, or a place for prayer, and so made up to it, where they found *some persons assembled* together on that account: this sense is confirmed by several versions; the Vulgate Latin version reads, ‘where there seemed to be prayer’, and so reads Beza’s most ancient copy; and the Syriac version is very express, *‘for there was seen’ צלותא בית*, ‘*an house of prayer*’; to which agrees the Arabic version, ‘we went out to a certain place, which was thought to be a place of prayer’; to which may be added the Ethiopic version, ‘and we thought there was prayer there’; *and that the Jews had their oratories, or prayer houses, is certain; ...*” (Gill's Commentary

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emphasis added). It was a “house of prayer” a place the Jews gathered on the Sabbath, and it was a “custom” of theirs to gather on the Sabbath in a place of worship. Strong’s # 4335 calls it a “chapel”

The Old King James word “wont” is “nomizō” and this means, “properly to *do by law* (*usage*), that is, to *accustom* (passively *be usual*); by extension to *deem* or *regard*: - suppose, think, be wont.” (Strong’s #3543). What law? The law of keeping the Sabbath! So basically this passage is telling us that it was by the law of God that they gathered together in a house of prayer on the Sabbath day! So the church gathers in a place of worship on the Sabbath day is commanded in scripture in both Testaments.

What about restaurants on the Sabbath? Most restaurants are open for business on the Sabbath, whether we choose to dine out or not. *By dining out, we are not creating work for them that they would not otherwise be doing.* Money exchanges hands on the Sabbath in this world by unbelievers, and in the Bible, in the days of Nehemiah, money was exchanging hands during that time on the Sabbath. The fourth commandment says that *you* are not to do any work on the Sabbath—the *believer*. The Unbeliever does not recognize the Sabbath and does what he or she wants including work. But there is nothing about money or goods exchanging hands on the Sabbath. So how is a Sabbath keeper supposed to interact in a world that does not recognize the Sabbath?

In Nehemiah’s day markets were set up inside and outside the city of Jerusalem. In the city Nehemiah was governor and he was setting up a Sabbath keeping society, outside he had *no* control. He told his fellow Israelites, “And *if* the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, *that* we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day” (Neh 10:31). Why? Was it simply going in and buying something quickly? No!

The issue of eating out on the Sabbath revolves around the concepts of commerce (doing business on the Sabbath) and causing others to work. There are two sections of Scripture that reference “buying” and “selling” on the Sabbath—Nehemiah 13:15-21 and Amos 8:5. These are the two primary sections that are used by those who believe that eating out on the Sabbath is a violation of the Sabbath command. Consider that out of 116 verses, there are only two that directly address the issue of commerce and the Sabbath.

In addition to the biblical account of Sabbath keeping, in the Jewish community there exists the oral law, to be interpreted by the Sanhedrin. Of course the Sanhedrin disappeared over 1,700 years ago, but its influence is still felt today. The oral law (now written in the Talmud) contains 39 categories of forbidden work on the Sabbath. Some of these are specified in the Bible, but not all, yet they were enforced by the Sanhedrin during the time of Christ. As in all matters, we must be careful to separate biblical fact from tradition. In his book Sabbath—Day of Eternity Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan writes this about commerce on the Sabbath: “The Sanhedrin legislated a prohibition against *all forms* of buying, selling, trading and other commerce for a variety of reasons. The Sabbath must be a day when all business stops” (Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, Sabbath—Day of Eternity (*Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America: New York, New York*) 2002.*emphasis added*).

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In Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15-21 it is dealing with commerce on the Sabbath. *The prohibition was against making the Sabbath a market day, either going or setting one up.* The Jews had made the Sabbath a secular day in which it was acceptable to go to market. *Going to market was an all-day activity.* In most ancient societies (as well as in several areas of the world today) a whole day was set aside as the day for market because it took so much time. This was the intent of Nehemiah's agreement. **Don't make the Sabbath a market day or a day to do your weekly shopping.** It was no doubt a gradual thing among the Jews. But by the time of Nehemiah, *the Sabbath had become a full blown market day.* This was wrong and did not allow for the proper keeping of the Sabbath. The agreement was that no "wares" or merchandise be bought by the Jews on the Sabbath. We are dealing with more than food items in this case. *Proof that this was a market day and required the whole day can be found in the example of the traders who lodged overnight outside the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:20-21).* They didn't lodge outside the walls every day. This was one day in the week when all the traders came to the city and not an everyday occurrence. *The lesson here is that the Sabbath should not become our shopping day.* This example, of and by itself, does not prohibit eating out in a restaurant. Eating out in a restaurant is not the same as doing your weekly shopping for all your household items. Eating at a restaurant with the brethren fellowshiping and enjoying a meal does not violate the Sabbath.

Nehemiah saw people treading grapes on the Sabbath—working in clear violation of the Sabbath command (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). They were loading up their produce and bringing it into Jerusalem to sell. They had again made the Sabbath a market day. All of these activities mentioned here (Nehemiah 13:15-17) dealt with a market day. This is not a restaurant nor does it have anything to do with eating a meal. It was a market day! Notice the items mentioned here: wine, sheaves, grapes, figs, provisions (corn and other items of sustenance), fish and "all kinds of goods." The Sabbath had become the one day in the week for going to market.

There is a *huge* difference between opening up a market or going to market on the Sabbath day and eating a meal in a restaurant. Nehemiah was appalled when he saw the temple in disarray, no tithes in the storehouse and the Sabbath being used as a market day. He set about to rectify this problem. The principles we should learn from Nehemiah 13 are respect for the Sabbath. *Secularizing the Sabbath day, and make it a day to go shopping instead of fellowshiping and going to church, and worshipping God on that day is the true meaning of these verses.*

Amos is referencing a similar type situation to that of Nehemiah 13. The discussion is about business and is not applicable to eating out in a restaurant. "Saying: 'When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? *Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit*'" (Amos 8:5).

In this case the Israelites had become corrupt in their business dealings. They wanted to continue their businesses on the Sabbath and they were deceitful when they did conduct business. In this verse they can hardly wait until the Sabbath is over so that they can go back to their deceptive practices. Their *intent* was not to enjoy the day and worship God, to them it was a nuisance because they could not work and make money.

So business is conducted on the Sabbath *by unbelievers.* These people are *not under your control* but one can *benefit* from this as long as the Sabbath is *not violated!* Nehemiah recognized this

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(Neh 13:21-22). What is your *intent* on the Sabbath? Do you need to buy something because it's an emergency? You have unexpected guests (something out of your control) and you need to pick up a few things? Do you go to a restaurant and fellowship with the church and enjoy a meal? For the Sabbath is a FEAST DAY (Lev 23:1-3)! Or is the Sabbath a day for you to shop, go out with friends, go to the movies concerts etc...? It's all a question of your *intent*!

The “Don’ts” on the Sabbath

So what are the “don’ts” on the Sabbath day? One must be careful in *developing* rules for Sabbath observance that are outside the bounds of what God has given.

Looking at the commandment God says, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

“*Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:*

“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:*

“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.” (Ex 20:8-11). Here God says that we labor and do work for six days, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, your work shall not be done. Whatever your occupation is, none of it shall be done on the Sabbath day. This includes your family members and gentiles *within your employ*. If you own a business your employees receive the Sabbath day off.

In other scriptures labor or work is called a “burden.” “In those days saw I in Judah *some* treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all *manner of burdens*, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified *against them* in the day wherein they sold victuals.” (Neh 13:15). (*See also Exodus 5:4-5*).

In Jeremiah’s book God says, “Thus saith the LORD; Take heed to yourselves, and *bear no burden* on the sabbath day, nor bring *it* in by the gates of Jerusalem;

“Neither *carry forth a burden* out of your houses on the sabbath day, *neither do ye any work*, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.” (Jer 17:21-22). To “carry forth a burden” does not mean to carry something heavy, but to work out of your home and conduct business on the Sabbath day. The K&D Commentary says, “The bearing of burdens on the Sabbath, both into the city and out of one’s house, seems to point ***most directly at market trade and business***, cf. Neh 13:15...” (emphasis added).

Many say you cannot build a fire on the Sabbath according to Exodus 35:2. Then what about people who live in cold climates? Won't they freeze to death?

Notice Exodus 35:2 with the *context* around it. Verse three says, “Ye shall *kindle no fire* throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day.” From the original Hebrew, this word, “kindle,” means a *consuming* flame, a flame that would *devour* — that is, a great, roaring fire! The question is why would you need such a fire on the Sabbath? Read the rest of Chapter 35 and you will see. They were building the tabernacle and needed a fire large enough to work metal!

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Haven't you ever looked out on the Sabbath day and noticed some trimming you would like to get done on your lawn, or have a job you would like to get finished — and catch yourself wanting to get it done in spite of the Sabbath? This is exactly what the Israelites were doing. They were so zealous for the tabernacle that Moses even had to tell them to stop bringing materials. God knew that if He did not stop them, they would work right through the Sabbath on the Tabernacle.

This was not a cooking or household heating fire! *It was an industrial fire.* The same principle holds true today. There should be no industrial fires kindled on the Sabbath. *On the other hand, fires of the proper type were commanded by God to be kept burning!* Notice Leviticus 6:13: “The fire shall be burning upon the altar; *it shall never go out.*” Hence a *sacrificial* fire (from which the Israelites *cooked* their meat and grain) remained burning on the Sabbath! God was not even discussing a cooking, sacrificial or personal heating fire — but a fire which is used for **work** that should be done only on one of the other six days provided for that purpose.

What of the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath? Why was he put to death? Notice the context. God said, “But the soul that doeth *ought* presumptuously, *whether he be* born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.

“Because he hath *despised the word of the LORD*, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity *shall be* upon him.” (Num 15:30-31). Here is the unpardonable sin. Those who sin “high handedly.” There is no “sacrifice” for sins offered here because he hates God, and his laws, therefore no mercy is shown to him and is put to death.

Then in the next verses *an example is given*, “And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

“And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

“And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

“And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.

“And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.” (vv.32-36). This man sinned because he *wanted* to sin. He *despised* God and his laws. The K&D Commentary writes, “The History of the Sabbath-Breaker is no doubt inserted here as a practical illustration of sinning ‘with a high hand.’ It shows, too, at the same time, how the nation, as a whole, was impressed with the inviolable sanctity of the Lord's Day.” (Emphasis added).

The gathering of sticks on the Sabbath was not a sin. “The mere gathering of sticks was not a sinful act and might *be necessary for fuel to warm him or to make ready his food.*” (JFB Commentary, emphasis added). If there was a sudden cold snap, and the wood he gathered in preparation for the Sabbath was not enough to keep them warm, and he went to gather more, *there is no sin in that.* But this man, his *intent* was totally different. He hated God and the Sabbath law and was put to death.

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The Preparation Day

Let's face it; the Sabbath is not a total surprise that comes every single week. We must prepare for it. God showed Israel that we must prepare for the Sabbath so all the duties are done so we can spend more time on God, and the brethren instead of wasting time preparing food etc...

On the Sixth Day of the week— Friday to us—God said, “Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the Lord; *bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe (boil) that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.*” (Ex. 16:23).

The preparation day is the time to get everything ready for the Sabbath so you won't even be tempted to do it on the Sabbath. Specifically mentioned are baking and boiling — or, *the heavier cooking and household duties*. The principle here includes everything which *can be done* before the Sabbath begins such as cooking a roast, baking a cake or pie, cleaning house, getting chores done, etc...

Obviously, there are some things *which cannot be done before the appointed time on the Sabbath*. Common sense will tell you which would be easier, to fry an egg on Friday, store it in the deep freeze, thaw it out the next morning and eat it, or to simply wait until Sabbath morning to cook and eat. These are simple and easy chores that are done quickly. But the items which take *a long period of time and effort* such as roasts, bread, etc... should be prepared ahead of time. This takes away from you spending time with God on the Sabbath. During the feast days which are also called “Sabbaths” God allowed small cooking duties to be done (Ex 12:16; 16:23).

The Sabbath a “delight”

The Sabbath day was meant to be enjoyed and celebrated. A time with God, and to be liberated from the world and all its problems, and to rest from all your burdens that you have. Isaiah says, “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from doing thy pleasure on my holy day*; and call the sabbath a *delight*, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words:

“Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it.*” (Isaiah 56:13-14).

Important points:

- The Sabbath is God's “holy day.” It's *his* day, not *ours*; it's the Lord's Day.
- The Sabbath is a “delight,” not a burden.
- God will honor those who honor the Sabbath.
- Blessings will come upon those who keep it.
- This promise comes right out of God's own mouth.

Now, let's analyze the other points in these two passages:

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1. **YOUR ways.** This means course of life, mode of action — that is, your employment, enterprises, finances, the more serious *business* of making a livelihood. You should not involve yourself in doing what you *normally* do *during* the week — those things by which you feed, clothe and care for yourself *physically*. This includes working at your job or business, working around the house, sewing, cleaning, washing the car — all the things that pertain to *your* physical maintenance during the normal course of the week. This is the day to be about God's *ways!* You *rest* from doing your ways. Devote this time to God's *business* of eternal life. The Sabbath gives you extra time to study and meditate about God's course of eternal life, His principles and mode of action. You will need all the knowledge about God's business you can acquire if you hope to be an active and living part of it one day!
2. **YOUR pleasure.** Your desire, delight, that which you take extra pleasure in doing — hunting, fishing, golfing, swimming, cards, movies, boating — those things which take up the majority of your “leisure” time. This would also include the many time-consuming hobbies such as the “ham” radio operator, woodworking shop, stamp collecting, etc. Of course, it would be impossible to list all the hobbies and activities available, but you know what yours is. Whatever *your* pleasure, or leisure-time activity is, you should not engage in it on the Sabbath. You should engage in *God's* pleasure on the Sabbath. What *is* God's pleasure? It is His *creation* — planning, working and building for the future of eternity! “... for thou hast created all things, and for thy *pleasure* they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). Just as you have or may have had an *absorbing* interest in your hobby or leisure-time interest and all of its interesting facets and details, God has an absolutely absorbing interest in His creation and all its myriad facets! He gives us the Sabbath to *learn* to have an interest and *pleasure* in His creation. His pleasure — the *true* and lasting pleasure — is to *become* our pleasure!
3. **YOUR words.** This is the *spiritual* application of the first two principles. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” We talk about what we are thinking. Our words show what is going on in our minds and hearts. This is obviously the most difficult of all! We may cease *our* ways and *our* pleasures, but it is much more difficult to cease *thinking* or *talking* about them!

Really, it is no problem just to *rest* and do no physical exertion on the Sabbath. You must serve God with your *mind*. Those who can't or don't control their minds call the Sabbath bondage, because they can't wait 'til sunset to be about *their* ways and pleasures which they have been thinking about all day anyway!

Once you are able to get your mind and thoughts on God's pleasure and God's ways on the Sabbath, you will find out what real delight and joy in the Sabbath is! “Then shalt thou *delight* thyself *in the Lord*” (Isa. 58:14).

How do you accomplish this? Devote your Sabbath time to *extra* Bible study, *extra* prayer and especially *extra* meditation! Also fellowship with people in the church of God and talk about God's purpose in your life and his ways and will. This is your one time in the week when you don't have to worry about getting to the job, making payments,

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working out schedules, cleaning house and all the other things you find that takes away from your study, prayer and meditation during the week. This is *free* time — free from all your daily cares and worries — free to be completely absorbed in God and His word.

Other questions regarding the Sabbath

Some people feel that we should stay in our homes when it comes to the Sabbath day. They quote Exodus 16:29-30 that says, “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.*”

“So the people rested on the seventh day.” But, as noted above God commands an assembly on the Sabbath. The context in these passages is for people to stay in their homes, and not go out on the Sabbath *to get more manna*, not that we should stay in our homes the whole Sabbath day.

Taking a walk on the Sabbath is fine in a natural setting communing with Nature is fine on the Sabbath. God did tell us to “remember” the Sabbath and linked to creation. Some people ask about the mention of “a Sabbath day’s journey” in Acts 1:12. There is no special command *anywhere* in the Bible limiting travel on the Sabbath. This “Sabbath day’s journey” was a custom of the Jews and is not a biblical command (see *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*, page 573, under “Sabbath day’s journey”). Rather than strive to understand and obey the principle of the Sabbath, they punctiliously set about *on their own* to draw up definite physical limits for Sabbath observance. God has never set on his people a “Sabbath day’s journey”!

After sitting in church or studying for some time, a leisurely walk is very refreshing and beneficial. Also, a lengthy drive is sometimes necessary to enable you to meet with other true worshippers on the Sabbath-this is not wrong. It serves to strengthen you spiritually and therefore glorifies God.

What about watching T.V. on the Sabbath? The Bible is filled with stories, actual events that happened to the people in the Bible. We read and study these stories every week on the Sabbath. Movies are stories as well. David said, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes.” (Psalm 101:3). Watching stories of biblical heroes, and people of faith in history, historical movies, as well as watching the news, because we are to be watchmen, is fine on the Sabbath. Watching R-Rated films on the other hand, on the Sabbath, or any day should not be done. Horror movies and things of that nature should not be done.

Let’s remember what Jesus said about the Sabbath, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.” (Mark 2:27). He didn’t say it was made for the Jews *alone*, but for MAN — for *all mankind* in other words. And it was made for mankind as a blessing. *Keep* this principle in mind. It was made *for you*, to help *you*, to enable *you to* live a happier and godlier life. IT WAS MADE FOR YOUR BENEFIT! Let’s not turn it into a burden they way they did in Jesus time.

God's true Sabbath is one of the greatest blessings that has ever been bestowed upon mankind. It *signifies* that the Creator is our God and we are His children.