
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read Genesis 2.1-3. God created people in his image, then he rested and declared – way back then at creation – that the weekly Sabbath day was holy. It seems even in the Garden of Eden, being God’s image bearer in part meant to reflect or imitate God by having this weekly sabbath day of rest. Read Exodus 19.5-6. After he had rescued them from Egypt, God gave this instruction to the people of Israel, whom he was forming into a representative nation. Read Exodus 20.8-11. As at creation, God declared that his image bearers must have a weekly Sabbath. The people of Israel were to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, just as God did.

At creation and just after the Exodus, God declared the Sabbath to be holy. Whether we translate as “to sanctify,” “to consecrate,” or “to make holy,” the Hebrew verb [שָׁבַת = khah-DAHSH] means to set something apart for God’s purposes. God created all the material universe to be holy, but he particularly sanctified people by creating us in his image. God made all of time useful for his purposes, but he particularly sanctified the seventh day, which became known as the Sabbath. Read Leviticus 23.3. God commanded that on the Sabbath Israel would have a sacred assembly. The people were to gather together to worship God and learn from his revelation. Read Deuteronomy 5.15. In Exodus the command was to remind them of creation; here it reminded them of deliverance from slavery. Part of Israel’s worship and teaching was to remember who God is, how powerful and majestic he is, what he had already done for his people, and his ability to deliver them from anything. Remembering that God has all power and authority would help them remain submissively obedient to him.

Reflect: Why would reflection and testimony about God’s character, capabilities, and deliverances [answers to prayer] encourage and build you up? Why should this also encourage you to submit to God and obey God?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read Genesis 2.1-3 [try a different translation!]. The Hebrew term [שַׁבָּת = shab-BAHT] or “Sabbath” refers to a day of rest. God ceased his creative work and rested on the seventh day; we saw yesterday [in Exodus 20.8-11] that God commanded Israel to imitate him as his image bearers by setting this day apart for rest. Later [Exodus 23.12], God elaborated that this Sabbath was necessary so everyone could rest enough to recover. Apparently, the way God made us, we need periodic times of rest, not only sleep at night, but also a weekly day off. God designed us to rest, as he rested. Read Exodus 34.21. People were to rest one out of every seven days, even when there was important work to do. Instead of relying on ourselves to accomplish earthly goals, we should trust God for those, and make it our priority to fulfill our worship obligations. The Sabbath is a reminder that God is in charge of us, that we need to depend on his provision and submit by doing things his way.

Read Exodus 31.12-17. Honoring the Sabbath was so important to God that those who violated the Sabbath in Israel were to be put to death by the covenant community, because observing the Sabbath day of rest and worship was to acknowledge the covenant between God and Israel. It was a time to cease working so as to worship, which meant admitting your dependence on God, your trust in God’s provision, and your submissive obedience to God. If you neglected the Sabbath you were being disobedient, thus not reflecting God’s image, not submitting to him, not trusting in him, not depending on him, not resting in him, not making him your priority, and thus not worshipping him. Observing the Sabbath was the way to acknowledge that it was God who sanctified you; that a person had no value, no purpose, no holiness except that given by God and lived out through obedient life with God. Being created in God’s image gives us value and purpose; but we throw that away if we are not worshipping, obeying, and depending on God; and one way Israel did those things was by affirming their covenant by honoring the Sabbath.

Reflect: Why do so many people in our society feel tired and stressed? How hard is it for you to set aside a full day away from any communications or thoughts about work? Is it hard to give up more income to get more rest? Is it hard to trust God enough to do what you know is best for your health when that might cost you your job? Why is it important to have one day each week when we meet together to acknowledge our devotion to God, dependence on God, and submission to God? How does our worship service accomplish God’s goals for a sacred assembly?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read Mark 2.27. Jesus shocked his listeners, but he was consistent with the intentions of God all along. God created the Sabbath as a blessing, part of his empowerment and provision for people; it was not meant to be a great burden. Read John 5.15-17. While God the Father rested from his creative work, he continued to sustain and provide for the universe; Jesus said he could avoid violating the Mosaic Law by focusing on God and experiencing rest even while doing good, like healing and teaching. Read Exodus 31.15. On the Sabbath, people were not to work their jobs, to provide for themselves; this included not just hard labor, but also the sale or transportation of goods. This gave them time for rest and worship, and reinforced their trust that God ultimately was the provider, no matter what they did. When God provided manna for the people to eat during their wilderness wanderings, they were to gather enough for two days on the day before the Sabbath, then refrain from gathering on the Sabbath [Exodus 16.22-26]. Later, God instructed them not to cook food on the Sabbath [Exodus 35.1-3]. The believers in Nehemiah's day extended this to not shopping on the Sabbath [Nehemiah 10.31]. All of these were extensions of the concept that you should not be striving [working] to provide for yourself on the Sabbath. Any other restrictions to behavior on the Sabbath were man-made and missed the point.

Reflect: What are examples of good things you could do for others on your worship day? What sort of fun activities might help people rest and recover for another work week, without violating the concept of the Sabbath?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read Colossians 2.16. While Jesus instructed his fellow Jews to honor the Sabbath, it is the only one of the "Ten Commandments" not reiterated in the New Testament as instruction for the church. Christian traditions wrestle with how much of the Mosaic Law remains binding on the believer today; they have a wide array of answers. What follows are three arguments why the Sabbath law does not pertain to the believer in the church.

- † Read Luke 22.20 and 2 Corinthians 3.6. Jesus said he was inaugurating the New Covenant [which previous revelation had said was to replace the Mosaic Covenant] with his blood, and Paul recognized that the apostles were ministers of that New Covenant.
- † The Mosaic Covenant was between God and the nation of Israel, who were his representative people in that era [or dispensation]. With the advent [arrival], death, and resurrection of Christ, and the coming of the Holy Spirit to indwell believers in the church, a new era has begun, in which the church – comprised of Jews and Gentiles who believe in Jesus as the Messiah-savior – is the representative people of God. While God made the original promise of a New Covenant to Israel, God has inaugurated this covenant with the blood of Jesus and dispenses many of its promised blessings on believers today.
- † In recognition of these two points, the apostles led the early church to not set their meeting day on the Sabbath, rather they chose to celebrate the resurrection of Christ on the day after the Sabbath [early church writings testify to this, including a letter [*Magnesians*] from Ignatius, who was the lead elder in the city of Antioch at the beginning of the second century, and the *Didache*, a church manual from the first century]. Paul in Colossians 2.16 said not to let anyone judge believers for not honoring the Sabbath.

Reflect: What do you know about the New Covenant? How could you learn more about this and about changes between God's expectations for Israel and those for the church?

Day 5

Learn: We still need rest; we still need to come together to honor and praise God, serve God through the church's ministries, remember what he has done for us through Christ and in many other ways, and reiterate our trust in his provision instead of our own; we still need to remind ourselves of our covenant relationship with God, as individuals made in God's image who seek to imitate and reflect him, also collectively as a church to whom God has promised eternal rest through Christ. Perhaps we should apply the principles of the Sabbath to our lives, even though it is not commanded for the church.

Reflect: How will you make changes to your life as a result of this study? Has your understanding of the Sabbath and perspectives on gathering for worship changed at all this week?