

The Doctrine of Sabbath Keeping

Introduction

God created the Sabbath as a blessing for all humanity. The Bible gives general guidelines and principles for proper Sabbath keeping rather than an extensive list of rules that need to be memorized for each situation. God expects His people to learn these guidelines, use wisdom, and make decisions accordingly. This Bible study will review these guidelines and their application for the modern world.

The Sabbath Commandment (Ex 20:8-11)

- A command to “remember” which day is the Sabbath
- A command to “keep it holy” (i.e., not defile holy time)
- A command to “do all your work” within six days
- The seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God
- A command to “not do any work” (i.e., labor, occupation)
- No one under your control shall work: family, servants, animals
- The Creator blessed the seventh day and made it holy

The Commandment Restated (Deut 5:12-15)

- A command to “observe” the Sabbath (keep, watch)
- A command to “keep it holy” (i.e., not defile holy time)
- A command to “do all your work” within six days
- A command to “not do any work” (i.e., labor, occupation)
- No one under your control shall work: family, servants, animals
- A command to “remember” Egyptian slavery and God’s liberation

A Holy Convocation (Lev 23:1-3)

- The Sabbath is the Lord’s appointed time (Heb. *moed*, meeting)
- A command to proclaim a holy convocation (assembly)
- A command to hold a holy convocation on the Sabbath
- See also Hebrews 4:9-11, 10:23-25 (not forsaking the assembly)

The Preparation Day (Ex 16:1-30)

- A command to gather twice as much bread on the sixth day
- A command to bake or boil food ahead of time for Sabbath
- A command for Israelites and Gentiles to observe the Sabbath

Prohibitions: Secular Work

- Sabbath is always more important than work (Ex 34:21)
- Sabbath breaking is a death penalty offense (Num 15:32-36)
- Sabbath isn’t a time for trade, commerce (Neh 10:28-31)
- Sabbath is a time for businesses to close (Neh 13:15-22)

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Prohibitions: Secular Activities (Isa 58:13-14)

- A requirement to desist from doing your own pleasure
- A requirement to desist from your own ways (Heb. *derek*, paths)
- A requirement to desist from seeking your own pleasure
- A requirement to desist from speaking your own word
- A requirement to honor My holy day, the Sabbath
- A promise to “make you ride on the heights of the earth”
- A promise to “feed you with the heritage of Jacob” (rich blessings)

Exceptions

- Some laws take precedence over others, even over the Sabbath
- Minor, incidental food preparation (Ex 12:15-16)
- The work of the ministry (Matt 12:5, priests in the temple)
- Healing, ministering to the sick (Matt 12:9-13)
- Meeting basic physical needs (Luke 13:10-17, water an animal)
- Dealing with emergencies (Luke 14:1-6, sheep falls in a pit)
- Circumcision (John 7:23, required eight days after birth)

Application

Prepare for the Sabbath on Friday (finish shopping, cooking, cleaning)

Remember when the Sabbath begins, plan accordingly (sunset Friday)

Close your business before Sabbath starts (if you own one)

Leave the office before Sabbath starts, even if there is extra work

Make sure your boss knows not to call on the Sabbath

If the office calls anyway, let it go to voicemail

Protect yourself from employment discrimination; know your legal rights

Some occupations conflict with the Sabbath; change jobs if necessary

Put away textbooks or homework; turn off the TV & video games

Avoid secular subjects (work, news, sports, hobbies, & social media)

Switch from secular music to praise & worship or uplifting instrumentals

Spend time fellowshiping, encouraging family members & other believers

Spend time in Bible study, meditation and prayer

Spend time worshipping God; attend church if possible

Help your children learn about God through special activities

Use Bible oriented movies, games, activity books or nature walks

Doctors, nurses and dentists should avoid regular shift work on Sabbath, but a special emergency is a legitimate exception. The same rule applies to electricians and emergency responders if there is a major storm and power lines are down. Military and police work are usually incompatible with Sabbath keeping; seek other government or civilian opportunities as appropriate.