

Lord of the Sabbath



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:1–3, Exod. 20:8–12, Deut. 5:12–15, Matt. 12:1–13, John 9, 19:30.*

Memory Text: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” (*Mark 2:27, 28, NKJV*).

Key Thought: The seventh-day Sabbath, in every way, points us to Jesus, our Creator and our Redeemer.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (*John 1:1–13*).

These verses are, of course, pointing to Jesus, Jesus as the One who made “all things” and Jesus as the One who gives salvation to those who “believe on his name.” That is, Jesus as Creator and Jesus as Redeemer.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 18.*

The Sabbath in Genesis

One of the most deeply imbedded truths of the Bible is this: back in Eden, in a perfect world created by a perfect God, the seventh day was set apart from the rest of the week and made holy. That's how far back, and basic, the seventh-day Sabbath is. From the perspective of this world, you can't get much farther back than that. With the Sabbath, then, we're dealing with one of the most fundamental and foundational of all biblical truths.

What four actions of God are recorded in Genesis 2:1–3 as He created the Sabbath?

God created a day, He rested on that day, He blessed the seventh day, and He sanctified it, which means He made it holy or set it apart for holy use. How fascinating that God Himself “rested” on the seventh day. Whatever that means, it shows how seriously the day is meant to be taken, because God Himself rested on it!

Genesis 2:3 states that the Creator “blessed” the seventh day, just as He blessed animals and man on the day before (*Gen. 1:22, 28*). God refers to this blessing of the Sabbath in the fourth commandment, forever linking the Creation Sabbath with the weekly Sabbath.

Notice how many times the phrase “the seventh day” is repeated in Genesis 2:1–3. What possible significance does that repetition have?

Three times that specific day is mentioned. This accentuates the extraordinary nature of the seventh-day Sabbath and clearly sets it apart from the rest of the week. It should always remind us that God didn't make the first day special, or any other day. The special blessing is for the seventh day and no other.

With the creation of the seventh-day Sabbath, God ended His creative work. He took the seven days of time and crafted them into a week. This weekly cycle is observed throughout the rest of Scripture and history. Thus, God demonstrates His manifold power over not just space and the things of space but over time, as well. None of us can control an hour, or even a minute, of time. Time relentlessly marches on, completely beyond our machinations. How important, then, that we learn to trust the Lord with the little amount of time we have here on earth.

Think about the march of time, how it sweeps us along moment by moment, day by day, and year by year. Although we have no control over time itself, what we can control to some degree is what we do with it. How well do you use your time? What things occupy your time? How might you use your time better?

The Sabbath in Exodus

Read Exodus 20:8–11. What does the Lord tell us to do, and what reason does He give us to do it?

The entire family household, including any servants of either gender, the working class along with the “boss,” are to rest together. Sabbath is the great equalizer, the liberator of all inequities in the social structure. Before God, all human beings are equal, and the Sabbath is a unique way of revealing this crucial truth, especially in a world so dominated by class structures that place various groups “over” or “beneath” others.

This commandment is also a carefully structured literary unit:

- A. Introduction:** “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (vs. 8, *NKJV*).
- B. Command:** “Six days you shall labor and do all your work” (vs. 9, *NKJV*).
- C. Motivation:** “but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God” (vs. 10a, *NKJV*).
- B1. Command:** “In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor . . .” (vs. 10b, *NKJV*).
- C1. Motivation:** “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, . . . and rested . . .” (vs. 11a, *NKJV*).
- D. Conclusion:** “Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (vs. 11b, *NKJV*).

A contains, as an introductory opening statement, the essential principle of the Sabbath commandment as a whole.

B conveys the positive command to engage in work on six days.

B1 gives the corresponding prohibitive command of refraining from any work on the Sabbath day, including the inclusive application to the entire family. Even the domestic animals, as well as any guests in the home, are included.

C and C1 supply the motivation for the commands. C acknowledges the time factor in the six-days/seventh-day sequence by emphasizing that “the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.”

C1 contains the formal motivation clause with the introductory “for” or “because.” It presents the detailed motivation in terms of the Lord’s six days of work and His resting on the seventh day, rooting it directly in the first Sabbath of Creation week.

D is an independent clause, starting with a “Therefore” and also forming the conclusion. The last words of the commandment, “and made it holy,” correspond to the exhortation of the opening principle.

A “to keep it holy.” Both are linked to the holiness with which God endows the Sabbath in Genesis 2:3.

The Sabbath in Deuteronomy

Although Seventh-day Adventists are most familiar with the Sabbath commandment as expressed in the book of Exodus, the Lord gave it again (and all the other commandments) in the book of Deuteronomy. What's fascinating is that, although the commands appear in very similar language, the language isn't precisely the same. Moreover, the commandment in Deuteronomy is given another motivation, one not seen in Exodus.

Read Deuteronomy 5:12–15. Compare it with Exodus 20:8–11. What similarities exist between the two, what differences, and why are those differences important?

Although much is the same between them, there is a new element and emphasis. While both commandments talk about the servants resting on the Sabbath day, Deuteronomy goes out of its way to emphasize that point. The text reads that they should keep the Sabbath “so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, *as you do*” (*Deut. 5:14, NIV; emphasis added*). Here we see what was touched on the other day: how the Sabbath helps bring master and servant together on the same level; both are to rest on the same day. The Sabbath, on a purely practical level, offered servants some protection from the master who would work them nonstop—a protection built right into a commandment that had its origins in Creation itself.

Of course, this raises an interesting question. When the Sabbath was first instituted, it was to be a memorial of Creation in a nonfallen world. It had nothing to do with manservants or maidservants and certainly nothing about being in slavery in Egypt, itself a symbol of bondage to sin, and deliverance from that bondage. This new element, then, had been added onto the commandment after the Fall; that is, the original precept was altered to incorporate something that it originally didn't contain.

Thus, as first conceived, the Sabbath was a symbol of Creation; after sin, it came to be a symbol of both Creation and Redemption, which is itself a type of re-creation (*2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 6:15, Rev. 21:1*). Creation and Redemption are closely linked in the Bible; only God the Creator could be God the Redeemer, and we have them both in Jesus (*see John 1:1–14*). Both versions of the commandment show that the seventh-day Sabbath is the symbol of the work of Jesus, our Creator and our Redeemer.

Think about the bondage from which Christ has promised to free you. What promises of freedom do you have in Jesus? How can you learn to claim them and then allow the Lord to make them real in your life?

Jesus and His Sabbath: Part 1

Books have been written, and are still being written, with the sole purpose of showing that Jesus, when here in the flesh, was pointing people away from the seventh-day Sabbath, either toward Sunday worship or (more commonly today) toward the idea that the seventh day has been superseded and replaced with a more generic and general “rest” in Christ.

Neither option, though, seems to be found in any of the Gospel accounts of Jesus and the Sabbath. Besides the obvious reason for such books (a need to justify the rejection of the seventh-day Sabbath by the vast majority of the Christian world for centuries), they argue Christ’s healing on the Sabbath heralds the death knell of that commandment.

What about these arguments? A careful look at what Jesus did on the Sabbath shows the opposite of what these theologians are trying to milk out of the incidents themselves.

Carefully read Matthew 12:1–13, focusing specifically on the Sabbath healing. As you read it, ask yourself, **What is the context of the healing, why would Jesus have done it specifically on that day, and what is the major point that He is clearly making?**

Perhaps the key verse, the one that explains it all, is verse 7. This is what the issue was all about: it was about people, about mercy and kindness and loving others. Properly kept, the Sabbath allows us more opportunity to show kindness and mercy to those in need than would other days of the week when we are forced to earn a living. The problem was that the Sabbath day had become burdened with a host of man-made rules and regulations that soon became an end in themselves rather than the means to an end—and that end is love to God and to other people. Love, the Bible says, is the fulfilling of the law, and anything that turns the law into that which negates love, or that which works against love, is something that must be discarded. The Sabbath had become law without love, which is harsh legalism. This is what Jesus was fighting against by His Sabbath healing.

The hardness of the religious establishment could be seen in the healing of the man blind from birth (*John 9*). Look carefully at verse 16. Talk about law without love!

In the end, if Jesus were using His Sabbath healing to start pointing people away from the literal seventh-day Sabbath, it sure was a strange way to do it.

Ask yourself, What are other ways one can manifest the law without love? Might you be guilty of doing the same thing?

Jesus and His Sabbath: Part 2

“It is finished” (*John 19:30*).

Jesus, through His Sabbath miracles, demonstrated what the Sabbath is really about. It is a day for healing and restoration. Jesus intended for the Sabbath to call to mind God’s creative power. Thus, the Sabbath is the day when He frees the captives (*Luke 4:31–37*), makes the lame walk (*Luke 13:10–17, John 5:1–9*), and restores sight to the blind (*John 9*).

For Jesus, the Sabbath was more about people than about rules, which is no doubt partly why He made His famous statement about the Sabbath being made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath. At the same time, as we saw earlier in the week, if properly kept, the rules protected people.

Jesus not only reinforced the validity and importance of resting on the Sabbath while He was alive, but He did it in death, as well. (*Read Matt. 27:57–28:1, Mark 15:42–16:1, Luke 23:52–24:1, and John 19:31–20:1.*) **What’s the one common point all four Gospel writers make here? More important, what does this tell us about the Sabbath, especially in the context of the question of whether or not the Sabbath is still valid?**

After He cried out, “It is finished!” (*John 19:30*), that is, after His work of Redemption (prior to His heavenly intercession) was done, what did Jesus do?

He rested on the seventh day. Sound familiar? Where have we already seen that? Of course, in Genesis 2:1–3. After God’s work of creation, He rested on the seventh day. Now, after His work of Redemption, He does the same thing.

Also, in light of the whole question of Jesus’ moving humanity away from the seventh-day Sabbath, His example of resting in the tomb on the Sabbath is, indeed, another strange way of getting that point across. If anything, especially because His death sealed the new covenant, and the new covenant supposedly supercedes the seventh-day Sabbath, one is hard pressed to understand the logic of those who believe that the Sabbath commandment was abolished after the Cross. If it were abolished, why would resting on the Sabbath be the first thing Jesus did after the Cross?

Thus, both in life and in death, Jesus showed us the continued validity and importance of the Sabbath.

Further Study: “Should God forbid the sun to perform its office upon the Sabbath, cut off its genial rays from warming the earth and nourishing vegetation? Must the system of worlds stand still through that holy day? Should He command the brooks to stay from watering the fields and forests, and bid the waves of the sea still their ceaseless ebbing and flowing? Must the wheat and corn stop growing, and the ripening cluster defer its purple bloom? Must the trees and flowers put forth no bud nor blossom on the Sabbath?”

“In such a case, men would miss the fruits of the earth, and the blessings that make life desirable. Nature must continue her unvarying course. God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. And man also has a work to perform on this day. The necessities of life must be attended to, the sick must be cared for, the wants of the needy must be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God’s holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour’s pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 206, 207.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ It’s easy today, with hindsight, to mock the hardness and coldness of those religious leaders who attacked Jesus for His Sabbath healing. And they certainly will be judged for their actions. At the same time, try to put yourself in their sandals. These man-made rules had been around for so long that these leaders all but thought the rules were the very essence of Sabbath-keeping itself; hence, they truly believed that Jesus was violating the Sabbath. How would we feel were someone to come along today and, claiming great light and truth, maybe even doing miracles, yet was in our view trampling on the fourth commandment? How might we react? What important lesson can we learn from this exercise about knowing how to separate truth from mere tradition and why it is not always easy to do so?
- ❷ Further examine in class this idea that God rested after His work of Creation and His work of Redemption. How are we to understand the significance of this amazing fact?
- ❸ Place yourself in the shoes of someone who believes that Jesus’ miracles on the Sabbath showed that He was abolishing it. Compare what the Bible teaches He said and did with what you would imagine Him doing were He really making this change. What do you imagine He would have done differently?

Summary: The Bible reveals the Lord as the Lord of the seventh-day Sabbath, the most basic sign of Him as Creator and Redeemer.

Raquel's New Church

Raquel is 10 years old. She lives with her family along the Amazon River in northern Brazil. Raquel's family doesn't attend church, but sometimes Raquel attended church with her cousin on Sundays. One Sunday evening Raquel's cousin didn't come to take her to church. Disappointed, Raquel wandered outside.

She heard people singing in the Seventh-day Adventist church near her home. She hurried back inside and asked her mother to let her go to the Seventh-day Adventist worship service since her cousin hadn't come for her. Her mother agreed, and Raquel hurried down the street to the church.

The members greeted Raquel warmly; she was happy that she had come. She enjoyed the worship service and decided to return. One of the members invited her to come for Sabbath School; so on Saturday morning when Raquel heard people singing in the little church, she hurried down the street to join them.

Raquel loved Sabbath School, where the children helped her learn new songs and the teachers made Bible stories so interesting. Raquel continued worshipping at the Seventh-day Adventist church. When her cousin invited her to go to church again, Raquel told her that she had found a new church.

Raquel has joined Pathfinders, and she sings in a children's choir. She enjoys helping with the children's programs at church. She has invited her family to come to church with her, and her mother and brother have visited several times. Although they don't always attend, they are glad that Raquel wants to worship God. "I feel that I'm a light shining in my home," she says.

Raquel learned that nearly everyone in the church is involved in one or more small groups that meet during the week to study the Bible and talk about God. Members invite their friends to come, and many people have joined the church through these small groups. Raquel wanted to learn how to lead a small group, so she took a class. Now she leads a small group just for children. Raquel invites her friends from school to attend the small group and encourages the other children to invite their friends as well.

Raquel has learned that there's power in group prayer. When her father was seriously ill, she asked the small groups at church to join her in praying for him. Her father recovered, and she told him that she's sure his recovery was in answer to the prayers of her church friends. Her father has promised to visit her church one day. Raquel can't wait for him to keep that promise.

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