

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 superceded 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.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Mark 2:27, 28*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Trace the biblical teachings regarding the Sabbath from Creation through the law that was given on Mount Sinai to Jesus' teachings and healings.

Feel: Nurture a sense of the importance of sacred time, made holy by God.

Do: Guard the keeping of the Sabbath as a holy possession of God, given to us as a blessing and a sign of Creation and re-creation.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Lord of the Sabbath

- Ⓐ What is the significance of the origins of the Sabbath? How has the meaning of the Sabbath been enlarged to encompass our needs after the Fall?
- Ⓑ How has God, throughout Scripture, emphasized the importance of the Sabbath? How did Christ highlight the true purpose of the Sabbath?

II. Feel: Temple of Time

- Ⓐ How does honoring the seventh day as the Sabbath reflect on our relationship with our Creator, as well as our Redeemer?
- Ⓑ What are the pitfalls of substituting another day for the one God made sacred?

III. Do: Keep the Sabbath Holy

- Ⓐ How can we keep the Sabbath in a way that reflects its true purpose, as designed by our Creator?
- Ⓑ How does keeping the Sabbath holy help to improve our relationship with God?

► **Summary:** Keeping the Sabbath holy in obedience to the commandment is a mark of honoring not only our Creator but our Redeemer, who rested in the tomb after completing His work on the cross.

Learning Cycle

► STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: When we learn to understand and appreciate the Sabbath more fully in the way that God intended, we will grow in our enjoyment of this day of “delight,” have something special to share with others in our community, and gain a greater insight into the kind of relationship that God wants to grow with us.

Just for Teachers: Lead a discussion based on the activity and questions described below. Allow students to spend time imagining an ideal day; then ask them to share aspects of their imagined day with the rest of the class. There would likely be some similarities to Sabbath in some of their responses. But as the discussion develops, also emphasize the extra-special nature of Sabbath as a day focused not just on ourselves, our family, and/or friends, but a day with God, made holy by God, commanded by God, and also—as seen in the example of Jesus—to serve others.

Opening Activity: Ask students to describe the best day that they can imagine. What would be some of the activities or experiences that would make up the “perfect” day? With whom would you want to share it? What would make such a day special? Probably many of the responses will include time spent with family and friends, absence of work and everyday responsibilities, and focus on things they enjoy or are more important to them. Ask students to assess how close their observance of Sabbath comes to that imagined ideal day. What does their imagined day have in common with what Sabbath should be? Then ask class members to describe what it is that makes Sabbath more important or special than their imagined “perfect” day.

► STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: This section provides an opportunity to explore an overview of the Sabbath in the Bible, from Creation to Jesus. By recognizing Sabbath as a recurring and special part of God’s law, class members can catch a glimpse of the God who wants the best for us and wants the best possible relationship with us.

Bible Commentary

I. Sabbath Created (*Review Genesis 2:1–3 with the class.*)

At Creation, God declared everything He had made as good, very good, or excellent, but only the seventh-day Sabbath did He describe as “holy.” As such, this “is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.”—Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), p. 9.

Consider This: What do we learn about God by His declaration of “holiness in time”? What can we appreciate about the uniqueness of this concept amid the world’s religions?

■ *Why do you think that time is more important than place for God?*

II. Sabbath Commanded (*Review Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 with the class.*)

Among the Ten Commandments, the fourth is unique in a number of respects. It is the longest and most detailed of the commandments. Additionally, as many people have commented, it is the commandment that most obviously makes the connection between our relationship with God and our relationships with others. Like the pronouncement at Creation, God gives special and specific attention to Sabbath, even above His other creation and His other laws.

Consider This: Why do you think that the fourth commandment specifically includes others, such as servants, strangers, and even animals? What does this tell us about what Sabbath is meant to be?

■ *What can we learn from the differences between the two versions of the fourth commandment, as recorded in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, respectively?*

III. Sabbath Delight (*Review Exodus 20:8–11 and Isaiah 58:13, 14 with the class.*)

When surveying the Ten Commandments, the unique nature of the fourth commandment has sometimes been a reason for suggesting that it does not really belong to the list, that it is a quirk not really part of the core moral

code and so not applicable beyond the people to whom this law was presented. On the other hand, others look at the Ten Commandments and see the Sabbath command as the most personal and intimate of the commandments, as an invitation for His people to spend a time of “delight” (*see Isa. 58:13*) with God. More than any other, the fourth commandment says, “This is not a list of rules, as important as that might be, but an invitation to a relationship, a covenant with God, your Creator and Redeemer.”

Consider This: How can you take the fourth commandment more personally?

IV. Jesus’ Sabbath (*Review Matthew 12:1–13; Mark 2:27, 28; John 9; 19:30 with the class.*)

Jesus lived as a faithful Jew. He attended the temple for festivals and had the habit of regularly going to the synagogue (*see Mark 1:21, Luke 4:16*). But by His actions, He challenged the status quo that assumed Sabbath was simply about keeping the rules. He said that Sabbath was not just another rule; instead, it was a gift to humanity (*see Mark 2:27, 28*). By His choice to heal people on Sabbath, He demonstrated that Sabbath was a day not just for us but a day to help and lift up others in order that they, too, might benefit from God’s gift of the Sabbath.

Consider This: Why do you think Jesus specifically chose to heal people on the Sabbath when He could have done it on another day of the week?

■ *How can we use the Sabbath to serve our communities or to lift up those who are hurting or forgotten?*

► STEP 3—Apply

Application Questions:

- ① Too often Sabbath keeping is criticized as a kind of legalism. Why is that wrong? In fact, in what way is Sabbath a gift of grace?
- ② How would you explain the primary purpose, or purposes, of Sabbath?
- ③ If Sabbath is not about legalism, why should we still be careful about the ways in which we keep Sabbath?
- ④ How does Sabbath enhance your spiritual life? In what other ways do you think you could learn to better appreciate or practice Sabbath keeping?

- ⑤ In what ways might it be difficult for you to keep or remember Sabbath?
- ⑥ The Sabbath commandments also focus on allowing others in one's household to benefit from Sabbath. How might we be able to share Sabbath with our household or community?
- ⑦ What does Sabbath, as explained throughout the Bible, teach us about God?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: These activities are intended to prompt class members to reflect on their own experience of Sabbath keeping and to highlight positive memories of Sabbath keeping that they might be able to share with their community.

Suggestions for Individual Activities: Provide paper and pens or pencils and ask class members to reflect on their own experience as Sabbath keepers by creating Sabbath-keeping maps or graphs, and detailing their Sabbath-keeping experiences. Perhaps they could draw graphs to plot their enjoyment of, or commitment to, Sabbath keeping. If at some point in their lives they specifically chose to become Sabbath keepers, this will be a significant memory to reflect upon and perhaps share. If they grew up as Sabbath keepers, they can reflect on their experience and appreciation or frustration with Sabbath while growing up. Explore how the experience of Sabbath has changed over time and how a renewed understanding of Sabbath might help Sabbath become a more spiritually focused event.

Suggestions for Team Activities: As a class, develop a plan to share the positive aspects of Sabbath with your community. Think about what Sabbath gives us to share with others. What are the best things we appreciate about Sabbath, and what differences could those things make in the lives of others? How could your community be a better place because there are Sabbath keepers there? Then brainstorm ideas for inviting people in your community to share the best of Sabbath with you. Perhaps you could invite community members to share the best of Sabbath with you in some way. Plan an event or process to raise awareness and appreciation of Sabbath among your friends, neighbors, and community members. When a plan has been created, perhaps your class could share it with the wider church and seek funding and/or support to put the plan into effect in your community.