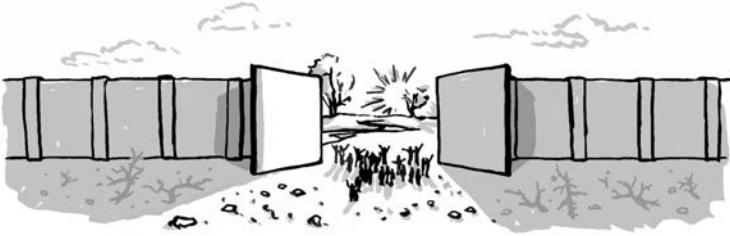


# Sabbath: A Day of Freedom



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Exod. 16:16–18, 20:8–11, Deut. 5:12–15, Matt. 12:9–13, Lev. 25:1–7.*

**Memory Text:** “And He said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath’ ” (*Mark 2:27, NKJV*).

God created the Sabbath as the final act of the Creation week. It has been said that on the seventh day, God not only rested, but He created rest as an integral part of the way that the world was to be. The Sabbath was a demonstration of how we were created to interact with God and with each other.

So, it is hardly surprising to find the Sabbath, as one of the commandments in God's plan for His people, appearing early on in the establishment of the new Israelite nation. It was to have a pivotal role in the life of the Hebrews.

Often when we talk about the Sabbath, the conversation quickly moves to how to keep it. What are the things that we should not do, and the like? However important these questions are, we need to understand the integral role that the Sabbath was designed to play in the world and in the lives of God's people as a symbol of God's grace and provision.

As Jesus said, the seventh-day Sabbath was created for all humanity. When we truly “remember the Sabbath day,” it will change us every day of the week, and—as Jesus demonstrated—it can be a means of blessing others, as well.

\* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 20.

## Manna Enough

After generations of slavery and the social degradation that such a condition could inflict on His oppressed people, God sought to lift up the newly freed Israelites, pointing them to a better way of living and giving them laws for the best ordering of their new society. But one of the first parts of this process came in the form of a practical and instructive object lesson.

Continuing for the full 40 years of their wilderness wanderings, this rhythm of life, visible evidence of God’s provision and practiced unselfishness, should have become part of the culture of Israelite society. It came in the form of manna, a food that appeared each morning on the ground around the Israelites’ camp.

**Read Exodus 16:16–18.** What do you think is the significance of the specific measure for each person emphasized in these verses?

---



---

In 2 Corinthians 8:10–15, Paul references this story as an example of how Christians should give: “At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality” (*2 Corinthians 8:14, NIV*).

The lesson for the Israelites, and us, was that God has provided sufficiently for His people and His creation. If we take only what we need and are prepared to share our excess with others, all will be cared for and provided for. Taking only enough for the day required the people to trust that there would be more the following day. Oppressed people, such as the Israelite slaves, tend to focus on their own survival, but God wanted to demonstrate to them a life of trust, generosity, and sharing.

But there was also another, more remarkable, dimension to this practice. Each Friday a double portion of manna appeared on the ground, and on that day—and only that day—the people were to collect the extra manna in preparation for the Sabbath. The special provision for the Sabbath became an additional way for them to learn to trust the Lord for all their needs. This extra portion of manna, an act of grace on God’s part, enabled them to enjoy even more fully the rest that God had promised them on the seventh-day Sabbath.

**What can we do on Fridays that will help us better enjoy what God offers us on Sabbath?**

---

## Two Reasons for Sabbath

**Read** Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15. How do these two versions of the fourth commandment complement each other?

---



---



---

Remembering is an important part of the relationship that God seeks to reestablish with His people, a relationship centered on the fact that God is our Creator and Redeemer. Both roles appear in the two versions of the fourth commandment and are thus linked closely with Sabbath and its practice.

Coming out of a land dominated by so many false gods, the Israelites needed to be reminded of the true God’s role as the Creator. The Sabbath was a crucial way to do that, made all the more significant in the context of the weekly cycle of providing extra manna on Friday, a powerful example of His creative power. In the Exodus 20 version of the fourth commandment, God as our Creator is revealed most clearly.

By contrast, their rescue, redemption, and salvation is the focus of the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy 5. This was a story that the Israelites were to retell regularly; they could reconnect with it especially every Sabbath. Their first story was one of actual, physical rescue from slavery in Egypt, but as their understanding of God and His salvation grew, Sabbath also would become a weekly symbol and celebration of their spiritual salvation.

Both of these motivations for Sabbath were about restoring the relationship between God and His people: “ ‘I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy’ ” (*Ezek. 20:12, NIV*). And, as we have seen, this was never about this group of people only. On the foundation of this relationship, they were to establish a new kind of society, one that was kind to outsiders and a blessing to the wider world.

“ ‘Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day’ ” (*Deut. 5:15, NIV*). By keeping the Sabbath as a way of remembering and celebrating both our creation and redemption, we can continue to grow in our relationship, not only with the Lord but with those around us. God is gracious to us; therefore, we need to be gracious to others.

**In what ways should Sabbath keeping make us better, kinder, more caring, and compassionate people?**

---

## A Day of Equality

One of the things obvious from a quick reading of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 is that the fourth commandment is the most detailed by far. Whereas some of the commandments are recorded in as few as three words in some versions (in the Hebrew some can be expressed in only two words), the fourth commandment gives space to the why, how, and who of *remembering* the Sabbath day.

**Read Exodus 20:8–11. What does it say about the servants and strangers, even animals, and what does it mean?**

---



---

Notable among these Sabbath details is the focus on others. Sigve K. Tonstad argues that this kind of command is unique among all the cultures of the world. The Sabbath commandment, he explains, “prioritizes from the bottom up and not from the top looking down, giving first considerations to the weakest and most vulnerable members of society. Those who need rest the most—the slave, the resident alien, and the beast of burden—are singled out for special mention. In the rest of the seventh day the underprivileged, even mute animals, find an ally.”—*The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), pp. 126, 127.

The commandment has a special focus on urging that the Sabbath is a day to be enjoyed by everyone. In the light of the Sabbath, we are all equal. If you are an employer during the week, you have no authority to make your employees work on Sabbath. And that’s because God gave them, too, a day of rest. If you are an employee—or even a slave—for the rest of your days, the Sabbath reminds you that you are equally created and redeemed by God, and God invites you to celebrate this in ways other than your usual duties. Even those outside the Sabbath-keeping people—“any foreigner residing in your towns” (*Exod. 20:10, NIV*)—should benefit from the Sabbath.

This idea would have been a remarkable change of perspective for the Israelites, fresh from their own experiences of slavery and marginalization. Now that they were to be established in a new land, God did not want them to adopt the habits of their former oppressors. As well as giving them detailed laws for their society, He gave them (all of us, actually) a weekly reminder, in a powerful way, of just how equal we all are before God.

**How can you share the Sabbath in your community, meaning how can others in your community benefit from your Sabbath keeping?**

## A Day of Healing

While the original vision for the Sabbath and Sabbath keeping was broad and inclusive, the Sabbath had become something quite different for many of the religious leaders by the time Jesus came to earth. Instead of a day of freedom and equality, Sabbath had become a day of human, traditional rules and restrictions. In His day, Jesus stood up against such attitudes, especially as they were imposed on others.

How interesting that He did this most significantly by performing a number of healings on Sabbath. It seems that Jesus intentionally performed these miracles on Sabbath, as opposed to any other day, to demonstrate something important about what the Sabbath should be. Often in these stories, Jesus made comments about the appropriateness of healing on Sabbath, and often the Pharisees used His statements as an excuse to further their plots to have Jesus killed.

**Read** the stories of Jesus' Sabbath healings in **Matthew 12:9–13, Mark 1:21–26, 3:1–6, and John 9:1–16**. What are the most significant things you notice in these stories?

---

---

---

Jesus confirmed that the Sabbath is important. We need to put boundaries around Sabbath time to keep it special and to allow this weekly time to be an opportunity to grow our relationships with God, our families, our church, and our community. But Sabbath keeping should not be selfishly about just us. As Jesus said, “ ‘It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath’ ” (*Matt. 12:12, NKJV*).

Many church members do much good work to care for others. But many of us also feel that we should do more to help. We know God cares about those who are hurting, oppressed, or forgotten, and that we should care, too. Because we are commanded not to pursue our regular work and are freed from the pressures of the week, on Sabbath we are given time to focus on this concern for others as one of the ways of true and active Sabbath keeping: “According to the fourth commandment the Sabbath was dedicated to rest and religious worship. All secular employment was to be suspended, but works of mercy and benevolence were in accordance with the purpose of the Lord. . . . To relieve the afflicted, to comfort the sorrowing, is a labor of love that does honor to God’s holy day.”—Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 77.

**What do you do for the good of others on Sabbath?**

## Sabbath Rest for the Land

As we have seen, Sabbath was an ingrained part of the life cycle of the Israelite nation. But the Sabbath principle was not just about a day each week. It also included a special rest each seventh year, culminating in the year of jubilee after seven sets of seven years, meaning each 50th year.

**Read** Leviticus 25:1–7. What is remarkable about this kind of instruction? In what possible ways could you incorporate this kind of principle into your life and work?

---



---



---

The Sabbath year allowed the farmland to lie fallow for the year. It is a remarkable act of stewarding the land, and the wisdom of this as an agricultural practice has been recognized widely.

The seventh year also was significant for slaves (*see Exod. 21:1–11*). In the event that any of the Israelites became so indebted as to sell themselves into slavery, they were to be freed in the seventh year. Similarly, outstanding debts were to be canceled at the end of the seventh year (*see Deut. 15:1–11*).

Like the manna God provided to the Israelites in the wilderness, not planting crops for a season was an act of trust that God would provide enough in the previous year and from what the ground produced by itself in the Sabbath year. Similarly, to release slaves and cancel debts was an act of mercy but also an act of trust in the power of God to provide for our needs. In a sense, the people needed to learn that they didn't have to oppress others in order to provide for themselves.

The principles and pattern of the Sabbath were to be closely tied to the structure of the Israelite society as a whole. Similarly, contemporary Sabbath keeping should be a spiritual discipline that transforms all our other days. In a practical sense, the Sabbath is one way of living out Jesus' instructions to seek first His kingdom: "Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs . . . and he will give you everything you need" (*Matt. 6:32, 33, NLT*).

**What difference should keeping the Sabbath make to the other six days of your week? After all, if you are greedy, selfish, and uncaring from Sunday through Friday, what does it really matter if you are none of these things on Sabbath? (Or truly can you *not* be those things on Sabbath even if you *are* that way the rest of the week?)**

**Further Thought:** Read Ellen G. White, “From the Red Sea to Sinai,” pp. 295–297, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Sabbath,” pp. 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*; Sigve K. Tonstad, “The Social Conscience of the Seventh Day,” pp. 125–143, in *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day*.

“Jesus stated to them that the work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath law. It was in harmony with the work of God’s angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity. . . .

“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:

- 1 In what ways have you experienced the Sabbath as a demonstration of your trust in God? Have you had a manna-like experience in your life, where God has provided in response to your trust in Him? If so, share it with the class and tell them what you have learned.
- 2 As we have seen in the fourth commandment as found in Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15, God emphasized different aspects of Sabbath. What is the one aspect of Sabbath that you most appreciate?
- 3 In class or individually, brainstorm some ways you can share the blessings and benefits of the Sabbath in your community.
- 4 What are some of the ways the Sabbath changes your life? Are there other parts of your life in which the patterns and principles of the Sabbath should have a greater impact?

**Summary:** God gave the Sabbath as a way of remembering Creation and Redemption, but it also has many practical benefits. It teaches us to trust in God’s provision for us; it teaches us to practice equality; and it can become a spiritual discipline that can transform all our relationships. Jesus demonstrated His ideal for the Sabbath by healing the sick and emphasizing the Sabbath as a day to benefit those in need.

# Snakebite Transforms Village

By WILSON MEASAPOGU

Sundar Rao, a 27-year-old farm worker, was intrigued when a white man showed up at his Indian village and read about a Creator God from a black book on Saturdays. Sundar was attracted to U.S. missionary Theodore R. Flaiz's Bible stories and decided to follow his God. Sundar's employer was furious when he didn't go to the field the first Sabbath. His anger grew as Sundar kept refusing to work on Saturdays.

At home, Sundar angered his relatives by no longer participating in family religious festivals, including the worship of Naga, a snake god.

After a time, Sundar sought peace by building a house just beyond the brook that marked the village's border. Soon he got married and had a daughter. One day when Sundar was 29, his employer asked him to work on a Saturday. "After your worship ends on Saturday, come and help count bales of hay," he demanded.

Sundar reluctantly obeyed. He arrived at the field after sunset but before darkness had set in. With help from others, he counted the bales. Noticing a small bale off to one side, he kicked it toward a larger bale. In a split second, a young cobra sprang from the bale, struck him on the leg, and fled.

No medical help was available, and Sundar knew he would die soon.

The villagers had no doubt that Naga was punishing him.

"Naga is very angry at you," one said.

"It's because you disobeyed all the village gods," said another.

Sundar started to sweat. Formerly estranged family members gathered around him and wept. The village waited for him to close his eyes and die.

But nothing happened. A snakebite specialist was summoned to check his leg. He was astounded at what he found. He declared that the cobra had struck Sundar with the top of his mouth, not with the poisonous fangs and had fled in fright without trying to bite a second time.

The next day, the villagers were amazed to see that Sundar was healthy and happy. "The protection of the white man's God has saved him from the cobra bite," they said.

From that moment, in 1957, many villagers joined Sundar in keeping the Sabbath. Five years after the snakebite, I was born to Sundar. Today, Gudem Madhavaram is an Adventist village. It has produced 40 pastors and Bible workers and many educators and health professionals. On Saturdays, the whole village stops to worship the Creator God. This is the power of the God who turned a snakebite into a blessing.



WILSON MEASAPOGU is executive secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Southern Asia Division, whose territory includes India. His father died in 2017 at the age of 77.