

The Sabbath Day

Key Verse: *“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”*
—Exodus 20:11

Selected Scriptures:
Exodus 20:8-11;
Romans 14:5,6

The institution of the Sabbath can be traced in the Scriptures back to the record of creation and its completion. (Gen. 2:1-3) At this time God had finished his design of preparing the earth for human habitation following six lengthy periods, or “days.” The Creator ceased from this activity after our first parents were created “in the image of God; ... male and female created he them.”—Gen. 1:27

Centuries later, following the Israelites’ deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the Heavenly Father set forth a set of divine standards which they were to adhere to, in order to receive his favor and blessings as his covenanted people. One of these laws was to take time away from secular pursuits to especially worship and honor God for all his provisions on their behalf.

The following account specifies various features of this sacred day. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.”—Exod. 20:8-10

The weekly Sabbath was established as part of the Ten Commandments given exclusively to the nation of Israel. However, our Key Verse implies that all individuals, including devoted Christians, should take the time to especially render praise and gratitude to the Creator for the many blessings he has bestowed upon them.

Paul saw with great clarity that the Early Church was in a period of transition during his ministry. What was once obligatory under the Mosaic Law did not apply to Jews who had come into Christ, nor for Gentiles who never were under this restraint. Here is one of his quotes: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.”—Rom. 14:5,6

In these verses, Paul seems to indicate that a Jew might, because of religious conviction, choose to observe the Sabbath. However, it is not incumbent upon believers, who have accepted Christ, to obey the conditions attached to the Law such as literally keeping Israel’s Sabbath. To the Christian, every day should be a “Sabbath” day of devotion and praise to our Heavenly Father.

Entering into God’s Sabbath of rest involves faith, obedience, surrender, and reliance on Christ. It encompasses peace, assurance, salvation, and relief from striving for self-righteousness. God’s rest is both present and eternal. We enter it by trusting his precious promises, obeying Scriptural injunctions, and by casting our burdens upon the Lord. By striving to live in faith and obedience, we can experience God’s rest daily, while looking forward to the eternal rest promised in the “first resurrection” if we are “faithful unto death.”—Heb. 4:9-11; Rev. 20:6; 2:10 ■