

Is it necessary to keep the Sabbath?



What does keeping the Sabbath mean for God's people today? Are Christians supposed to observe the Sabbath? In this Bible study we are going to look at various scriptures from the Bible on the Sabbath so that you are able, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, decide whether you should keep the Sabbath or not.

When was the Sabbath instituted and by whom?

Genesis 2:2,3 (NKJV) And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Exodus 20:11 (NKJV) - For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

The Sabbath was instituted at creation, in a perfect sinless world, by God.

Why isn't there a command to keep the first Sabbath at creation?

While many persons acknowledge the institution of Sabbath at creation, they may argue that there is no command to keep it. Why is this? It's simple, the reason why God didn't tell Adam and Eve to rest on the first Sabbath is because God didn't bless or make the first Sabbath holy until it ended (Gen 2:2,3). What makes something holy? It is the presence of God. With each passing minute of the first Sabbath that went by, God made it holy with His presence, and **after** the seventh day had ended, he blessed and sanctified it.

Did the ten commandments including the command to keep the Sabbath exist before Mount Sinai?



Genesis 26:5 (NKJV) "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws."

Exodus 16:4 (NKJV) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not."

Gen 39:8-9 (NKJV) But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. "There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

The first mention of the Sabbath after creation can be found in Exodus 16. The children of Israel are in the wilderness, complaining that they will die from hunger (Ex 16:1-3). God then tells Moses He will rain bread down from heaven and test them to see if they will obey his law (Ex 16:4). But wait, wasn't this before God spoke His laws at Mount Sinai? How did the children of Israel know about this law? How did anyone know any of these commandments before Mount Sinai? While in Exodus this is the first time we are seeing a written form of God's law, there are many scripture references to show they existed before Mount Sinai.



God told Cain he was to rule over and avoid sin [the breaking of God's law 1 Jn 3:4], as anger was in Cain's heart (Gen 4:6-8). Abimelech knew it was a sin to sleep with Abrahams' wife (Gen 20:3) and Joseph knew it was a sin to sleep with Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:7-9). In Exodus we see that the midwives "feared God" and would not kill the babies when they were born (Ex 1:15-17).

Abraham was blessed because he obeyed the voice of God and kept His charge His commandments, His statues and His laws (Gen 25:6). These laws were already known to the people of Israel and pre-existed before Mount Sinai. It was passed down orally from generation to generation.

None of these commandments are new. The command for the Sabbath begins with the word 'Remember'. When someone is telling you to remember something, they are asking you to recall something, to bring something back to your memory that is already in existence. Yet the one command God emphasizes His people to Remember is the one command everyone has seemed to have forgotten.

Wasn't the Sabbath a commandment only for the Jews?

Exodus 12:37-38 (KJV) Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock.

Isaiah 56:2,6-7 (NKJV) Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil....Also the sons of the foreigner Who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him, And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants- Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And holds fast My covenant Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, And make them joyful in My house of prayer.

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



In Exodus chapter twelve when the Israelites were finally able to leave Egypt, we read that there was a ‘mixed multitude that went up also with them’. Not all the 600,000 were Israelites. Many Egyptians (and perhaps other foreigners) went with them because the God of Israel demonstrated that He was more powerful than the gods of the Egyptians. These Egyptians or non-Israelites would have also been present at Mount Sinai and were expected to keep all of God’s commands as any faithful follower of Christ would.

Isaiah tells us in his book that the foreigner who joins themselves to the Lord, serves him and keeps His Sabbath will be blessed! When we join ourselves to the Lord, we delight in keeping His commands (John 14:12).

Christ taught that “the Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). Jesus used the term “man” in the generic sense, referring to mankind. The fact is that Adam and Eve were the only “mankind” in existence at the time God made the Sabbath. There would be no Jews in the world for at least 2,000 years after creation.

Wasn’t the seventh day Sabbath abolished and nailed to the cross?

Colossians 2:14-17 (NKJV) Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.



Let's take a closer look at this text to understand what was nailed to the cross. **What is the handwriting of requirements that was contrary to us and nailed to the cross?**

Exodus 24:4-8 (NKJV) And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD. And he rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half the blood and put it in basins, and half the blood he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words."

Deuteronomy 31:9, 24-26 (NKJV) **So Moses wrote this law** and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. So it was, **when Moses had completed writing** the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying: "**Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark** of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there as a witness against you;

Exodus 31:18 (NKJV) And when He had made an end of speaking with him on Mount Sinai, He gave Moses two tablets of the Testimony, **tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.**

Exodus 34:1(NKJV) And the LORD said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and **I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets** which you broke.

Deu 10:2 (NKJV) And **I will write on the tablets** the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke; **and you shall put them in the ark.**



The Greek word for handwriting is cheirographon, something written by hand, like a document or note, that acknowledges a debt is owed. In Bible times, when a man was crucified, a note was nailed at the top of his cross where his crimes were written. He owed a debt that was paid with his life. The Greek word for requirements is dogmasin and refers to decrees, laws or ordinances. We too have a debt that we owe because of our sins we committed, but it had been paid in full by Christ.

An ordinance is an authoritative religious rite or ceremony. The book of the law Moses wrote is commonly referred to as the 'ceremonial laws' because they contained ordinances, customs, ceremonies and required sacrifices in the sanctuary system that pointed to the future redemption through Jesus Christ. We can clearly see a distinction between the laws given by God. The book of the law was placed "on the side of the ark"; but the Ten Commandments, which God wrote with His own finger upon tables of stone, were placed "in the ark".

What exactly is the text referring to when it speaks about food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths?

Leviticus 23:1-4 (NLT) The LORD said to Moses, "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. These are the LORD's appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as official days for holy assembly. "You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of complete rest, an official day for holy assembly. It is the LORD's Sabbath day, and it must be observed wherever you live. "In addition to the Sabbath, these are the LORD's appointed festivals, the official days for holy assembly that are to be celebrated at their proper times each year. (Read the entire chapter to learn about feast days and festivals)

Numbers 29:6 (NKJV) besides the burnt offering with its grain offering for the New Moon, the regular burnt offering with its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, as a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Ezekiel 45:13-17 (NKJV) This is the offering which you shall offer: you shall give one-sixth of an ephah from a homer of wheat, and one-sixth of an ephah from a homer of barley. “The ordinance concerning oil, the bath of oil, is one-tenth of a bath from a kor. A kor is a homer or ten baths, for ten baths are a homer. “And one lamb shall be given from a flock of two hundred, from the rich pastures of Israel. These shall be for grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to make atonement for them,” says the Lord GOD. “All the people of the land shall give this offering for the prince in Israel. “Then it shall be the prince’s part to give burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and at all the appointed seasons of the house of Israel. He shall prepare the sin offering, the grain offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offerings to make atonement for the house of Israel.”



In Leviticus chapter 23 we see that God is instructing Moses on festivals that should be celebrated by the people of Israel. In verses 3 and 37-38, we can see that there is a clear difference between festival sabbaths and the 4th commandment Sabbath. There were seven yearly holy days, or festivals, in ancient Israel that were also called sabbaths. For example, Shavuot or Feast of Weeks (verses 15-21), Rosh Ha-Shannah or Feast of Trumpets (verse 24), Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement (verses 28-32) and Sukkoth or Feast of Tabernacles (verses 39-42) all contained ceremonial sabbaths and holy days. The ceremonial sabbaths were in addition to, or “besides the Sabbath of the Lord” (verse 38). The feasts, ceremonial sabbaths and holy days written in the book of the law by Moses are distinct from the seventh day Sabbath written by God in the ten commandments.

The verses in Ezekiel and Numbers give more detail on what was done during the festivals, New Moons, and sabbaths. The ordinances written by Moses specified the meat and drink offerings that were to be made to atone for their sins.

What does “which are a shadow of things to come“ mean?

Hebrews 10:1-4 (NLT) The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time, and their feelings of guilt would have disappeared. But instead, those sacrifices actually reminded them of their sins year after year. For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.



The biblical festivals were linked to the sacrificial system. Indeed, the sacrifices were not just rituals they were central to the very meaning of the festivals. The Feast of Passover, for example, required the slaughter and eating of a lamb (Exod. 12:3-10). There were certain prescribed offerings for each of those yearly feast days, and they were shadows pointing to the future sacrifice of Jesus. Christ's sacrifice is the key to our participation in God's great plan. His sacrifice will always be the key to our salvation. The festivals, burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings, at the feasts, the New Moons, the ceremonial sabbaths foreshadowed the death of Jesus on the cross. These are handwritten requirements that were nailed to the cross and were done away with when Christ was crucified. They are no longer needed because the sacrifice of Christ which they pointed to has been fulfilled.



Doesn't the bible tell us to be convinced in our own minds as to whether we keep the Sabbath?

Romans 14:5-6 (NKJV) One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

First of all, let's take note that Paul doesn't mention the Sabbath here, so what days is he referring to? As the chapter speaks about abstaining from certain foods and eating, the context of the passage suggests Paul is speaking about days for fasting. While there were some believers who had specific days for fasting (Mark 2:18, Luke 18:12) the Bible does not designate days for fasting. Paul thought this matter should be a personal choice. Following God's commands, however, is not a matter of our personal conscience.

Are there blessings for keeping the Sabbath and consequences for breaking God's command?

Isaiah 56:2 (NKJV) Blessed is the man who does this, And the son of man who lays hold on it; Who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, And keeps his hand from doing any evil.

Isaiah 58:13-14 (NLT) "Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD's holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly. Then the LORD will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the LORD, have spoken!"



Those who keep the Sabbath are promised joy and fulfillment in life (Isaiah 58:13, 14). A special blessing for our children – As we show our dedication to God by keeping His Sabbath holy, He promises to gather our children to Him and bless them (Isaiah 56:2-9).

Was the Sabbath kept in the new testament?

Marrk 6:2 (NKJV) And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!"

Luke 4:16, 31 - 32 (NKJV) So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read..... Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.

Luke 6:6 (NKJV) Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered.

Luke 13:10 (NKJV) Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.

Luke 23:56 (NKJV) Then they returned and prepared spices and fragrant oils. And they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.

Acts 13:14, 42-44 (NKJV) But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down. So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God

Acts 17:2 (NKJV) Then Paul, as his custom was, went into them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures

Acts 18:4 (NKJV) And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.



The Bible tells us that Jesus kept the Sabbath and went to the synagogue to preach every Sabbath (Luke 4:16). After Jesus' death there are several scriptures that we can reference showing that his disciples (Luke 23:26), Jews and Gentiles kept the Sabbath (Acts 13:42; 18:4). Following Jesus' example, it was also Paul's custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day where he preached to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 17:2).

But didn't the disciples keep Sunday as a holy day in the new testament?

There are 8 references to Sunday or the first day of the week in the new testament. The first five texts below show that after keeping the Sabbath, Mary and Mary Magdalene went to Jesus' tomb to anoint him with spices.

Matthew 28:1 (NKJV) Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

Mark 16:2 (NKJV) Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.

Mark 16:9 (NKJV) Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.

Luke 24:1 (NKJV) Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

John 20:1 (NKJV) Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.

Let's examine the remaining three. **Do these texts show that the disciples kept Sunday as a holy day?**

John 20:19 (NKJV) Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

Acts 20:7 (NKJV) Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

1 Corinthians 16:2 (NKJV) On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.



In John 20:19 we see that the disciples were assembled together, however, this was not a gathering to worship. The Jewish authorities had arrested and crucified Jesus. They were afraid for their lives. They were assembled out of fear of the Jewish leaders.



Acts 20:7 is often used to argue that the early Christians met for worship on Sunday and that the disciples were meeting for communion. However, if we read Acts 2:46, we can see that the disciples continued 'daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.' It appears that breaking bread refers to the disciples eating their meals together, something they did every day. There is no command here to keep the first day holy. While it was Paul's custom to preach on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2) he preached on other days as well. We know that this meeting was held at night, for 'there were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together' (Acts 20:8) and Paul 'continued his message until midnight' (verse 7). What we should also note is that there is no command to keep the first day of the week holy or observe it as a day of worship.

The final text that references the first day of the week is 1 Cor 16:2. Some people believe this was a religious service where a collection plate was passed, indicating that it was a holy day. Instead of describing a church offering, where people pass their gifts to a deacon, the record says that each one was to "lay something aside". In other words, when the first day of the week had come, each one was to decide from the last week's earnings how much he wanted to set aside for the special collection that Paul was going to take to the poor at Jerusalem. Then he was to keep it in a special place apart from the other money of the house. This way it would be ready for Paul and there would be no need for collections when he came. The Bible does not mention Christ instituting Sunday worship on the resurrection day nor during or after those forty days the apostles recognized Sunday as a religious holiday.

What did Jesus teach about the Sabbath?

Matthew 12:12 (NKJV) Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep?
Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27, 28 (NKJV) And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Luke 6:5-9 (NKJV) And He said to them, "The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Christians who honor the principle of Sabbath follow the teaching of Jesus by doing good as part of their Sabbath observance. This may include participating in worship, feeding the poor, visiting shut-ins or practicing hospitality. Though we should be careful not to overdo our good works on the Sabbath, thus missing the crucial component of rest, we can feel free to use the time of Sabbath for doing good.

Will we keep the Sabbath in the new earth?

Isaiah 66:23 (NKJV) And it shall come to pass That from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD.

The Sabbath was made at creation, kept throughout our time on earth and we will surely keep it in heaven! Did you enjoy the bible study? Share it with a friend and let's globalize the gospel together!