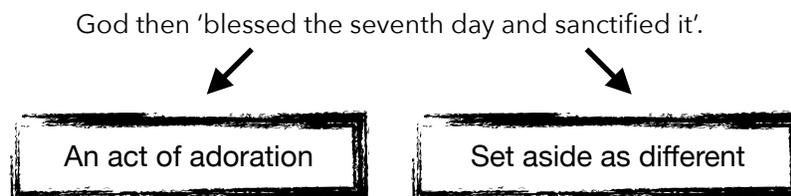


A Study of the Book of Genesis

A Day of Rest

After God created the heavens and the earth in six days, the Bible says that He rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2). The fact that He rested does not mean He had grown weary. God doesn't get tired! He doesn't wear out! It simply means that God completed the creation process and thus ceased from it. We see in Genesis 2:1-2 the words 'completed' twice and 'done' twice. Some versions use 'finished' or 'ended'. What ever Bible version you have, the fact is: all of the work of Creation was accomplished!

'Rest' in the Hebrew is *sabat*, from which we get the word Sabbath in the English.



The seventh day is very special to God! If it is a special day to God, then what does that mean for us?

The Scriptures indicate that 'sabbath' is a period of rest scheduled at regular intervals. It occurred on the seventh day (Exodus 16:25-26; 31:15; Leviticus 23:3), or the seventh year (Leviticus 25:4;).

When Moses received the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets, God told him: "*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*" (Exodus 20:8). Moving through the Old Testament, we find that the people considered the sabbath day to be at the end of their week, the seventh day. New Testament saints however chose Sunday as their day of rest (about 100 years after Christ). The church began calling it the Lord's Day because it is the day of the resurrection of Jesus.

Jewish rabbis took the command to keep the sabbath holy to such a detailed level that they created a list of 39 categories of forbidden labor, containing hundreds of very specific forbidden activities. In the Mishnah Shabbat, there were prohibitions against trimming your fingernails and applying makeup on the sabbath. You weren't allowed to throw an object more than four cubits, unless a person or a dog could catch it before it hit the ground. It was forbidden to climb a tree on the sabbath? Because you may possibly break a twig or branch which is considered harvesting or reaping, a type of labor prohibited on the sabbath.

It sounds over the top, but Christians do the exact same thing! Only a few short decades ago, cutting the grass on a Sunday afternoon or sewing fabric was an abomination. Shopping on Sunday or wearing jeans to church was simply not allowed! These sorts of rules are nothing more than high pressure tactics to train the mind to think mechanically about how well we can keep an organized list of forbidden activities. They are rules without reasons, which often lead to resistance and hypocrisy.

So, what exactly does it mean to keep the sabbath holy? When something is designated as 'holy', it means it is set apart for a special purpose. It is different. It is not like anything else. And so when God told His people to remember the sabbath and to keep it holy in Exodus 20:8, He was saying, 'it is important for you to set aside a day that is unlike the other days'. He specifies exactly what He means in the following verses (Exodus 20:9-11) when he says, (and I paraphrase), 'OK people, you have six days to work, and on the seventh day you will rest. You will not do any work; neither shall your kids, nor your servant or even your animals'.

Theological Considerations

It has been said that the command to keep the sabbath day holy is the only one of the Ten Commandments that isn't repeated in the New Testament. So, since Christians live according to the New Covenant, are they to disregard the Fourth Commandment just because it isn't quoted anywhere from Matthew to Revelation?

Since the intent of this Old Testament command is for God's people to cease from labor for a season, we must remember that *"the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath"* (Mark 2:27). There is great benefit to us when we utilize the sabbath as God intended. A familiar passage in Matthew and one in Hebrews help shed some light on what 'rest' looks like to the believer today.

Matthew 11:28 says, *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."* In this oft-misinterpreted verse, Jesus is making an appeal for people to stop in their striving for salvation. No one can obtain forgiveness for sins with even the slightest amount of work. Human achievement will NEVER purchase one's salvation, regardless of how hard one works physically, or how much spiritual and intellectual effort is exerted. You will weary yourself scratching and clawing and grasping for every shred of righteousness. You will wear yourself out, because it cannot be obtained in that manner. Jesus is saying in this verse, 'cease from your striving... stop... REST... come to Me, because I did all the heavy lifting'.

In Hebrews 4:9, we read, *"So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God"*. The writer of this part of Hebrews harkens back to the children of Israel, making several references to them entering (or not entering) into God's rest. After a long time of being slaves in Egypt, God delivered the Israelites from their bondage, promising them a land flowing with milk and honey. During their long journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan, the Lord showed them that He was to be trusted when they took a day off every week and there would be consequences for breaking the commandment to rest (see Exodus 16:22-30). Because of Israel's repeated disobedience, God swore that they would not enter into the rest that was offered to them in the Promised Land (Hebrews 4:3). Numbers 14:22-23 says that the people spurned God by ignoring His Word to them. As a severe consequence, most of the Israelites would not see the land... but Caleb and his descendants would take possession of the land because they followed God fully (Numbers 14:24). The children of Israel and their promise of entering into the land of milk and honey is a foreshadowing of what was to come with Jesus's offer of eternal rest. One group of people entered into the Promised Land... and one group did not. Similarly, there are people now who are entering into their rest because of their faith in Jesus Christ. And others, sadly, who have rejected this offer. The point in Hebrews 4 is that we do not want to be like those who stubbornly hardened their hearts back in Moses' day. If we hear His voice, we must respond in faith and

obedience... today! And when we do, Christ becomes our rest! And because Christ is our rest, maybe we should seriously re-evaluate how we view Monday through Saturday, not just Sunday.

Practical Considerations

There is a practical reason why God wanted his people to set aside a day to cease from work. The human body and mind is frail. We get tired. We suffer from exhaustion. We're physically and mentally drained at times. It is exactly why we say TGIF, why we highlight the next holiday on the calendar and why we always long for our next vacation. We know deep inside that we must rest from our labor.

Having a day of rest each week is a GIFT from God! Far from the obligatory nod to our checklist, using God's gift must be something to embrace with gladness! Sunday has traditionally been designated as the day of rest. But what about people who work on Sunday? Easy... pick another day! The point being: you must rest at regular intervals, or you will burn out and eventually suffer physical and mental ruin.

Do you need help in deciding how to use your day of rest?

- Give extra time to the reading of God's Word and to earnest prayer.
- Visit some friends and just hang out to encourage one another.
- Do some family things! Talk to each other. Play games. Go for a walk together.
- Enjoy God's creation: do some hiking; take a drive; enjoy the sunset.
- Turn off the news and social media for a while.
- Breathe. Relax. Think. Take a nap!
- Climb a tree. Trim your fingernails. Throw a ball, even if your dog can't catch.

These aren't hard concepts to grasp. They're easy to understand, but maybe much harder to do. Busy schedules and vain pursuits have stolen our day of rest. Take your special day back and use it wisely for your benefit and for God's glory!

“It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom; and by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens.”

~ Jeremiah 10:12