

Weekly Scripture and Sermon Study: History & Context Guide
Exodus 20:8-11

History, Culture, & Context

In this section of the Book of Exodus, we are exploring the third of the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses for the people of Israel. The first three commandments dealt with “No other gods” (20:3) and “No idols” (20:4-6), “No misuse of God’s name” (20:7), and now we are exploring observing the Sabbath in verses 8-11.

Verses 8-11 tell us, “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.”

There are two reasons given in scripture as to why there is a *Sabbath* day. The first establishes a day of rest after working six days based on Genesis 2:1-3. This is where God rests on the seventh day preceding six days of creating the heavens, the earth and the sea and thus making this day a holy one. This seventh day of rest became known as the “Sabbath,” which comes from the Hebrew word *shavat*, which means “to rest.”

The second is rooted in Israel’s salvation from slavery. In Deuteronomy 5:15 we read, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.” Thus, the Sabbath is also to serve as a reminder for God’s rescuing of the Israelites freedom from bondage in Egypt.

Violating the observance of Sabbath was a serious infraction that resulted in the death penalty for the ancient Israelites. In Exodus 31:14 states, “Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death; those who do any work.” This is also discussed in Numbers 15:32-36.

In the Christian faith, a majority of churches observe the Sabbath as a day of worship to be held on Sunday and not on Saturday (the traditional day of Sabbath). This was changed to recognize Jesus’ resurrection on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; and 1 Corinthians 16:2), and thus to designate this day as a holy and reverent one.



Questions to Consider

1. What does this commandment teach us about the nature of God?
2. In what ways are we, as Christians and disciples of Jesus Christ, called to observe the Sabbath? Does this differ from some of the verses we read in the Old Testament? If so, how?
3. Read Romans 14:5-6. Does this help to shape our views of the Sabbath? Why or why not?
4. What benefits come to us from the observance of the Sabbath day?