



SABBATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR ISRAEL

- **Sabbath as a Word:** There are two primary words for rest in Hebrew. Shabbat (Sabbath) means to stop working. Nuakh means to dwell, settle, or abide. God introduced both words around the same time. In the creation account, God worked for six days and rested (shabbat) on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3). After God created humans, He “rests them” or “settles them” (nuakh) in the garden with Him (Genesis 2:15). The literary structure communicates a link between shabbat and nuakh. God rests from His work (shabbat) and then He settles (nuakh) His people to dwell with them.
- **Sabbath as a Day:** Sabbath is the seventh day of the week. On Sabbath, the children of Israel were to rest from their work in remembrance of God resting from His work in creation. He created the universe in six days and “rested” on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8-11). Observing Sabbath was outlined in the Mosaic Law (Exodus 16:23-29; 31:14-16; 34:2-3; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Nehemiah 13:15-22; Jeremiah 17:21-27).
- **Sabbath as a Sign:** Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between Israel and God (Exodus 31:13, 16-17).
- **Sabbath as a Reminder:** When Sabbath was given to Israel, Moses reminded them that they were slaves in Egypt and God rescued them (Deuteronomy 5:15). As slaves, they were unable to stop working. As God’s people, they were called to rest.
- **Sabbath for Creation:** Rest was important for every aspect of creation. God instructed rest for people, land, and animals. Exodus 23:10-12 says, “You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.” Similar instructions regarding land are found in Leviticus 25:4.



SABBATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT FOR CHRISTIANS

- **Sabbath as a Day:** While the Jewish people met in synagogues on the Sabbath (Mark 6:2; Luke 4:31; Acts 13:14, 27, 42-44; 15:21; 16:13; 17:2, etc.), the New Testament does not command that the Sabbath be the day of worship. Traditionally, Christians have held their primary corporate worship services on Sundays, the first day of the week, to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). However, it's not commanded that Sunday be the only day for Christians to worship either. In fact, Acts 2:46-47 tells us that Christians met daily. When New Testament passages describe Christians meeting on the Sabbath (Acts through Revelation), it was for evangelistic efforts at Jewish synagogues (Acts 13-18; 1 Corinthians 9:20).
- **Sabbath as a Law:** The church is not under Mosaic Law. We are free from Sabbath-keeping regulations (Romans 14:5-6a; Galatians 4:9-10). Christians are free to observe a special day or live like every day is special (Romans 14:5-6; Colossians 2:16).
- **Sabbath as a Principle:** Jesus called to those who are weary and burdened and offered to give them rest (Matthew 11:28-30). Hebrews 4:1-13 has much to say about the believer's rest.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF SABBATH

- Some believe Sabbath law was instituted in Eden because of the connection between God's rest and creation. While God's rest on the seventh day was a foreshadowing of the coming Sabbath law, there is no record of the children of Israel practicing Sabbath before leaving Egypt.
- Some groups view the Sabbath as the only legitimate day of worship for Christians to attend church or worship services (i.e. Seventh Day Adventists). This view does not align with New Testament teachings as shown in the previous section.
- Some groups believe that Christians are required to practice Sabbath-keeping according to Mosaic Law. However, Christians are free from the bondage of the Law (Galatians 4:1-6; Romans 6:14). There is spiritual freedom and not a command from God.
- Some groups believe that since Sabbath-keeping is part of Mosaic Law, there is no value in observing principles of Sabbath. While believers are no longer under the Law (forced to observe Sabbath-keeping), we do find principles of rest in Scripture that are not connected to the Law (i.e. creation, sleep, weariness from work, spiritual rest, etc.). There is freedom to walk in biblical wisdom.