

## What does Sabbath mean?

What exactly is the Sabbath? Is it limited to just a day? What is its significance? How does it apply today?

The English translation “Sabbath” finds its basis from the Greek “sabbaton,” which is a transliteration of the Hebrew “šabbāt.” Etymologically “šabbāt” is likely from the verb “šāḇaṭ,” which means “to cease or pause.” This definition is seen in Genesis 2:2.

By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested (**šāḇaṭ**) on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. (Gen 2:2)

### Sabbath as in Once a Week

After promising to obey God’s word, the nation of Israel is introduced to the Law. Beginning with the Ten Commandments, keeping the Sabbath is codified into the Law as the fourth commandment, and God reveals the basis for the weekly Sabbath.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; on it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male slave or your female slave, or your cattle, or your resident who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and everything that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Ex 20:8-11)

There is a significance for keeping the weekly Sabbath.

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Now as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You must keep My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. (Ex 31:12-13)

So the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a permanent covenant.’ It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.” (Ex 31:16-17)

The weekly Sabbath is the day for God’s people to assemble to worship and praise.

The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD’S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these: ‘For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings. (Lev 23:1-3)

Keeping the Sabbath was emphasized with a death penalty.

Therefore you are to keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. (Ex 31:14; 35:2; Num 15:32-36)

There is an appearance of some form of poetic justice here. With the Creation account in Genesis 1 centering on the creation of man (Gen 1:26-31), it climaxes with the Sabbath when God, resting from His creative work, blessed the day and set it apart as holy (Gen 2:1-3). God considered the Sabbath day as a source of blessing and universal significance, not only for the nation of Israel, but for all of humanity.

Not keeping the Sabbath doesn’t commemorate God’s blessing creating human beings; thus, the death penalty.

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### Sabbath as in Years

God extended the concept of the weekly Sabbath to years; the sabbatical year is the seventh year. The sabbatical year applies to land when it is left to fallow and devoid of any agricultural activity.

Now you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but in the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie uncultivated, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the animal of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. (Ex 23:10-11)

The concept of the sabbatical year includes when and how debt between fellow Hebrews are forgiven.

At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the regulation for the release of debts: every creditor is to forgive what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not require it of his neighbor and his brother, because the LORD'S release has been proclaimed. From a foreigner you may require it, but your hand shall forgive whatever of yours is with your brother. (Deut 15:1-3)

The concept of the sabbatical year includes when and how a Hebrew owner releases his Hebrew slave.

If your fellow countryman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you for six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. And when you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall give generously to him from your flock, your threshing floor, and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you. And you are to remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I am commanding this of you today. (Deut 15:12-15)

### Sabbath as a Special Day

Sabbaths included special days to commemorate an event or feasts of the Lord, set apart for the people of God, to contemplate and worship God for the various ways He has blessed them. Three annual festivals, called "feasts to the Lord" (Ex 12:14; Lev 23:39, 41), require the appearance of all males at the temple: 1) Passover, 2) Feast of Weeks, and 3) Day of Atonement.

**Passover** commemorated Israel's salvation from God's judgment of firstborns, and the **Feast of Unleavened Bread** celebrated their miraculous freedom from Egypt (Ex 12:1-51).

The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will come upon you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. Now this day shall be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. (Ex 12:13-14)

You shall also keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your multitudes out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall keep this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. (Ex 12:17)

Designating Passover (on Nisan 14) and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (starting on Nisan 15) as Sabbaths codified these days of rest and memorials into the Law.

These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work." (Lev 23:4-8)

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By the time of the New Testament, Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread were intertwined and the whole week was seen as Passover (Luke 22:1; Acts 12:3-4).

John the Baptist prophetically sees Jesus as the link between Passover and the Day of Atonement, the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29). Just as Passover heralded freedom from slavery in Egypt for Jews, the death of Christ heralded freedom from the slavery to sin for Christians (Rom 8:2).

**Feast of Weeks** (also known as the Feast of Harvest of the First Fruits [Ex 23:16]) commemorated God's provision of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest (Ex 34:22; Deut 16:9-10). This is the first of two main harvests of the year – spring.

“You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete Sabbaths. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread as a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the LORD. Along with the bread you shall present seven one-year-old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the LORD. You shall also offer one male goat as a sin offering, and two male lambs one year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits as a wave offering with two lambs before the LORD; they are to be holy to the LORD for the priest. On this very day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a permanent statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations. When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the stranger. I am the LORD your God.” (Lev 23:15-22)

The Feast of Weeks (or Feast of First Fruits) occurred on the first day of the week falling seven weeks and one day after the full moon of Passover Sabbath. The Feast of Weeks is often called the Pentecost (which means “fiftieth”) Sabbath, because from the day after the Passover Sabbath to the day after the Pentecost Sabbath is fifty days.

Pentecost, the Feast of Weeks, is of special significance in the New Testament. Fifty days after Passover and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-41), the first recorded filling of the Holy Spirit occurs on Pentecost Sabbath. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit attested to Jesus as Lord and Christ and led to the baptism of three thousand souls.

**Feast of Trumpets** marked the new moon of each month. While God does not reveal the purpose of this commemoration in Leviticus, He does so in Numbers and Isaiah. The sound of trumpets of this feast is intended to remind the nation of Israel that God is the Lord God of Israel of whom all mankind will bow down to.

Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall not do any laborious work, but you shall present an offering by fire to the LORD.’” (Lev 23:23-25)

The sons of Aaron, moreover, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be a permanent statute for you throughout your generations. And when you go to war in your land against the enemy who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, so that you will be thought of by the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies. Also on the day of your joy and at your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the Lord your God.” (Num 10:10)

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And it shall be from new moon to new moon  
And from Sabbath to Sabbath,  
All mankind will come to bow down before Me," says the LORD. (Isa 66:23)

**Day of Atonement** is the third annual feast and celebrated on the tenth day in the seventh month. It is a special Sabbath, because this is the only day, once a year, that the high priest can enter the Holy of Holies and make a sin offering to atone for the sins of the nation. The sacrificial ritual required two male goats that were physically perfect in age and condition. Sacrificed as the sin offering, one goat's blood and flesh were offered as a substitute payment of the nation's sin. On the head of the surviving goat (scapegoat), the high priest confessed all of the nation's sins and released to the wild to signify that sin left the Hebrew nation (Lev 16:1-34). This day was intended as a day of solemn rest, fasting and repentance – a day of humble reflection.

This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble yourselves and not do any work, whether the native, or the stranger who resides among you; for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It is to be a Sabbath of solemn rest for you, so that you may humble yourselves; it is a permanent statute. (Lev 16:29-31)

The New Testament authors certainly understood the crucifixion of Christ within the context of the Old Testament sacrificial system. By divine appointment (Acts 2:23), the time of Jesus' crucifixion took place during the sacrifice of the Passover lamb (John 13:1; 18:28; 19:14-18). When Jesus speaks of fulfilling the Law in Matthew 5:17, He meant it in a literal sense.

Jesus is the High Priest who provides His own blood to permanently cover the sins of human beings.

Just like the High Priest who alone entered the Holy of Holies and the presence of God with the blood of the goat he sacrificed, Jesus became the High Priest and mediator of the New Covenant (Heb 9:15, 24-26).

Jesus was the unblemished animal; He was sinless (2 Cor 5:21, 1 Pet 2:22-24; 3:18). Jesus' substitutionary death accomplished two purposes: a) for God, the judicial price for sin was paid in full, and b) for man, Jesus' substitutionary death cleansed us of our sins and removed the cause of God's wrath.

Jesus is the High Priest who completely satisfies the judgment of God for all sins of human beings.

Just like the blood of the sacrificed unblemished goat was sprinkled on the Mercy Seat, Jesus provided the blood to satisfy God's wrath (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:12-14).

Just like the Mercy Seat received the blood to appease God, Jesus was the person who appeased God (1 John 2:2; 1 John 4:10)

The atonement of Jesus Christ is so complete that Believers are absolutely reconciled with God, and He gives former offenders the privilege of representing Him (2 Cor 5:18-20).

**Feast of Tabernacles**, also known as the Feast of Ingathering (Ex 23:16; 34:22) or Feast of Booths (Deut 16:13), is the fourth annual festival that began on the fifteenth day of Tishri (the seventh month), which was five days after the Day of Atonement and lasted for seven days. It was a time of celebration and praising God for His provision at the end of the harvest season. It celebrated the gathering of the fall crops and their processing from grain threshing, olive presses, and wine vats (Deut 16:13). Booths were shelters that God required all Jews to live in during this week to symbolize the Exodus from Egypt.

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On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and branches of trees with thick branches and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. So you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a permanent statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” (Lev 23:39:43)

### Sabbath in the New Testament

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ, are Sabbath days, feast festivals, and years still commemorated? To the church of Rome, the apostle Paul addresses the issue of theological differences among Believers including the Sabbath.

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not to have quarrels over opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all things, but the one who is weak eats only vegetables. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person values one day over another, another values every day the same. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and the one who eats, does so with regard to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and the one who does not eat, it is for the Lord that he does not eat, and he gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

But as for you, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or you as well, why do you regard your brother or sister with contempt? For we will all appear before the judgment seat of God. (Rom 14:1-10)

Focusing on the corporate unity of faith in Christ among all Believers, Paul emphasizes that all are accountable for their own actions. These insignificant differences did not warrant the judgment of contempt.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul expresses his view that Believers do not need to memorialize the Sabbath feast festivals or sabbatical years any longer and implies that this reflects an immature faith.

However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles, to which you want to be enslaved all over again? You meticulously observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. (Gal 4:8-11)

Paul's view of the Sabbath is based on Jesus' statement about the Sabbath, which He revealed after being confronted by Jewish religious authorities on several occasions. Jesus declares, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

And it happened that He was passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:23-28)

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What does it mean that Jesus Christ is the Lord of the Sabbath?

On the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that the Law and Prophets is not abolished nor nullified. Instead Jesus Christ came to fulfill them!!

Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke of a letter shall pass from the Law, until all is accomplished! Therefore, whoever nullifies one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:17-19)

At His death and crucifixion, Jesus indicated the completion of His work, "it is finished."

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, in order that the Scripture would be fulfilled, said, "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (John 19:28-30)

Jesus' finished work fulfilled the Law of Moses.

Jesus taught what sin was, His death made the full payment of atonement for the sins of mankind, and He became the means of entering the Promised Land.

Jesus fulfilled the New Covenant prophesied by the Prophets.

Jesus' name "God is salvation," restored the holiness of God's name among all of mankind, and provided the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the guarantee that the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ is with the Believer.

Through Jesus, Believers would know God His Father, and Jesus Christ Himself would give Believers "rest for your souls." A Believer will find rest by yoking with and learning from Jesus Christ.

All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son determines to reveal Him. "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is comfortable, and My burden is light." (Matt 11:27-30)

The author of Hebrews makes the connection with the Lord's rest to the Sabbath rest: "for the one who has entered His [Jesus'] rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His." Furthermore, the author of Hebrews exhorts, "Therefore let's make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following the same example of disobedience."

Therefore, we must fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also did; but the word they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united with those who listened with faith. For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said,

"AS I SWORE IN MY ANGER,  
THEY CERTAINLY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," (continues...)

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although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; and again in this passage, "THEY CERTAINLY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who previously had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, He again sets a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. Consequently, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore let's make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following the same example of disobedience. (Heb 3:7-11)

As the Lord of the Sabbath and the One who grants rest for one's soul, Jesus Christ fulfills God's fourth commandment and purpose for the Sabbath.

Through faith in the name of Jesus, God is salvation, and His work of atonement, Believers know that God is the One who sanctifies:

Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Now as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You must keep My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, so that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. (Ex 31:12-13)

Through faith and yoking himself to Jesus Christ to learn the ways of the Lord, a Believer will find rest in Jesus Christ. For the one who has entered in Jesus Christ's rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.

So the sons of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to celebrate the Sabbath throughout their generations as a permanent covenant.' It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed." (Ex 31:16-17)

Through faith in Jesus Christ and entering in the Lord's rest, the Believer is absolved of God's death penalty.

Therefore you are to keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it must be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. (Ex 31:14; 35:2; Num 15:32-36)