

command states that no work is to be done by “you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor the stranger who is within your gates” (Exodus 20:10). Though this was written to an agrarian society that practiced a certain form of indentured servitude, the principle that applies today is that employers should not have their employees work. Businesses owned by Sabbath-keepers should be closed on the Sabbath day.

3. Attend Sabbath services. God did not just create the Sabbath so that His people could stay home

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and rest throughout the entire day. In order to bring His people together for fellowship and collective instruction and worship, God designed the seventh day as a day of *convocation*. In Leviticus 23, the Sabbath is referred to as one of God’s “holy convocations”

(verse 2). A convocation is a *public meeting* where God’s people assemble together for the purpose of learning, worship and fellowship. Throughout His life on earth, Jesus Christ *assembled* with others on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). God’s people are specifically warned to not neglect “the assembling of ourselves together” (Hebrews 10:25). Every Sabbath, the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, holds Sabbath services in cities around the world where members regularly assemble to hear biblically based sermon messages, sing hymns of worship to God and fellowship with brethren of like mind.

4. Enjoy a spiritually fulfilling Sabbath. On the Sabbath, we are to pause from our normal rou-

tines—our work, shopping, errands, activities, sports, television—and spend the day doing things that are spiritually focused. God created the Sabbath to be a spiritually refreshing and enjoyable experience for His people. Jesus Christ proclaimed that “the Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27). Jesus, as “Lord of the Sabbath” (verse 28), reveals that the Sabbath was created *for the benefit of human beings*. God wants us to take every seventh day and dedicate it to doing the things that strengthen our relationship with Him. God wants us to “call the Sabbath a delight” (Isaiah 58:13). Some things we can do on the Sabbath (in addition to attending Sabbath services) to make the Sabbath a delight and strengthen our relationship with God are: use the Sabbath for extra prayer and meditation, spend more time than usual studying the Bible, spend quality time with family, spend time fellowshiping with other Christians, visit the sick or elderly and even enjoy some relaxing time in God’s creation. These are just a few examples of appropriate things Christians can do to have a spiritually fulfilling Sabbath.

This brief answer covered four basic biblical principles of Sabbath observance. This subject may raise other questions about what is and isn’t appropriate to do on the Sabbath day. If you would like further guidance on how to properly observe the Sabbath, feel free to contact us.

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Did God Observe the Sabbath in Genesis 2?

After God made the earth suitable for humans and created the first man and woman, what did He do? He created the Sabbath day and rested on it.

The historical record of God preparing the earth for mankind is documented in the first two chapters of the Bible. Here we find that God spent six days establishing and perfectly balancing all the aspects of our planet that make it hospitable for human life.

Commenting on this monumental task, the Bible says, “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. 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” (Genesis 2:1-3).

When God ceased from His creative work, it wasn’t because He was tired. As Isaiah 40:28 explains: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary.”

Having spent six days preparing the earth for man’s physical needs, God was now establishing the seventh day of the week as a time during which man could rest from his physical labor and have his spiritual needs met. Genesis 2:3 explains that God

“blessed” and “sanctified” the seventh day. As additional translations make clear, this means God made this day “holy” (New International Version and Bible in Basic English) and “set it apart as a special day” (Good News Bible) unlike any other day of the week.

Although the word *Sabbath* isn’t technically included in this passage, “the cognate verbal form *abat* (to cease, to stop, to rest) is used and the latter, as noted by U. Cassuto, ‘contains an allusion to the name “the Sabbath day”’” (Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*, p. 34). Additionally, when God spoke His commandments from Mt. Sinai, He linked the Sabbath with His resting on the

From mankind’s earliest days on earth, God designated which day of the week had His special blessing.

seventh day at creation. Hence, it is clear what God had in mind for this day (Exodus 20:8-11).

We have to go to other biblical passages to see how God instructs us to observe the Sabbath, but from mankind’s earliest days on earth, God had designated which day of the week had His special blessing. God has never revoked this blessing for the seventh day or bestowed a similar blessing on another day.

As for instructing mankind about His Sabbath, God may have begun this instruction for Adam and Eve on the very Sabbath He blessed the seventh day. The Bible reveals that God personally talked with Adam and Eve and others from the earliest days, but it doesn’t include all of these conversations. But when God gave the ancient Israelites manna to eat, which was before He gave the Ten Commandments from Mt. Sinai, He already expected Israel to be keeping His commandments and laws (Exodus 16:4, 28-29). It doesn’t make sense for God to rebuke these peo-

ple for not keeping the Sabbath and His other laws if they didn’t know about them.

Another indication of the Sabbath being kept prior to God listing the Sabbath along with the other commandments repeated at Mt. Sinai can be found in the life of Abraham. Of him, God said, “Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws” (Genesis 26:5).

How Should a Christian Keep the Sabbath?

Christians who take God’s Sabbath command seriously often wonder how to keep the Sabbath as a Christian. What principles should guide our Sabbath celebration?

One of the distinctive beliefs of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, is that we follow the example of Jesus Christ and the early New Testament Church in celebrating the seventh-day Sabbath. The book of Genesis reveals that after the creation week, “God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done” (Genesis 2:2). Verse 3 then records an important fact about the seventh day that has implications for all: “Then God *blessed* the seventh day and *sanctified* it” (emphasis added throughout). The Creator of all things actually blessed and sanctified—set apart for a special purpose—the seventh day of the week.

Because of this distinct blessing and sanctification, the seventh day of the week is very special to God. When God gave the Ten Commandments to Mo-

ses—His holy law that is permanently binding on His people (Matthew 5:18)—He specifically included the seventh-day Sabbath as the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11). God did not create the Sabbath to be a burdensome law. Jesus said the Sabbath was created as a gift from God (Mark 2:27). He and the apostles and New Testament Church continued celebrating the seventh-day Sabbath.

Once a Christian accepts that the seventh-day Sabbath is holy and a law of God, the question arises—how does a person properly keep the Sabbath command? The Bible provides Christians many principles on how to properly celebrate the Sabbath.

Four principles of Sabbath observance

1. **Abstain from work.** The seventh-day Sabbath was the day God *rested* from His labors. God is Spirit and cannot get tired or worn out. The reason He rested was to set an example for us. The Sabbath

Abstaining from work every Sabbath has tremendous physical and spiritual blessings for God’s people.

command in Exodus 20:10 specifically states: “The seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it *you shall do no work.*” The Sabbath is a day when we pause from our normal labors and activities and rest for 24 hours on the seventh day of the week (from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday as the Bible counts time). Abstaining from work every Sabbath has tremendous physical and spiritual blessings for God’s people.

2. **Do not employ others to work for us.** The Fourth Commandment has specific implications for those who employ others to work for them (e.g. business owners). Not only are Sabbath-keepers to abstain from work, but also those who are employed by them and under their direct control. The Sabbath