

# THE SABBATH

## *An Exhaustive Doctrinal Bible Study*

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From Creation to New Covenant

*Old Testament · New Testament · Theology · Doctrinal Positions*

Prepared for Personal Bible Study

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## INTRODUCTION

The Sabbath is one of the most debated institutions in all of biblical theology. It is embedded in creation itself (Genesis 2:1–3), commanded in the heart of the moral law (Exodus 20:8–11), declared a covenantal sign between God and Israel (Exodus 31:13), celebrated in the Psalms (Psalm 92), woven through the Prophets (Isaiah 56, 58, 66; Ezekiel 20; Jeremiah 17), debated by Christ and the Pharisees (Matthew 12; John 5), addressed by Paul in his most careful doctrinal letters (Romans 14; Colossians 2), and reinterpreted in the light of eschatology in Hebrews (chapter 4). It is simultaneously a day, a principle, a type, a sign, and a rest.

This study works through every major Sabbath text in canonical order, examines the Hebrew and Greek language carefully, and draws out the doctrinal implications at each point. It then surveys the three primary theological positions on the Sabbath under the New Covenant. The goal is not to adjudicate every controversy but to equip the student to engage the full scope of Sabbath theology with scriptural precision and theological depth.

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## SECTION 1: HEBREW ETYMOLOGY

### The Root of "Shabbat" (שָׁבַט)

The Hebrew noun shabbat (Strong's H7676) derives from the verbal root shabat (H7673), defined as "to cease, to desist from exertion, to repose." The noun shabbat is the intensive form of this verb — built by doubling the middle consonant bet — carrying the sense of complete intermission or full cessation.

**Related words in the same word-family:** shevet (H7674) = "rest, cessation"; shabbaton (H7677) = "a sabbatism or special holiday." All point to the same semantic core: *deliberate stopping of activity*.

Cross-linguistic cognates appear across Semitic languages. Arabic sabata means "to rest"; Ugaritic and Punic sbt carry the same sense. Some scholars connect shabbat to Babylonian shapattu (the full-moon rest day), though the theological connection to God's creative rest remained the dominant biblical understanding regardless of etymology.

### Shabbat vs. Sheva (שֶׁבַע) — Two Distinct Roots

These two words are often confused but are etymologically distinct:

- **Sheva:** Sheva (שֶׁבַע) — "seven." Its root (shin-bet-ayin) carries the sense of fullness, completion, satisfaction. Connected to the verb sava ("to be full/satisfied"). The number seven in Hebrew is the number of completeness. Sheva is also the root of shava ("to swear an oath"), because ancient oaths were made by "sevening oneself."
- **Shabbat:** Shabbat (שָׁבַט) — "Sabbath." Specifically names the seventh day of rest. It is not a generic word for "week" (shavua) or "seven" (sheva). The intensified form of shabat ("cease") gives shabbat its name.

The connection is theological and numerical: the Sabbath is shabbat precisely because it is the seventh (sheva) day — the day of completion and fullness. The two words converge in meaning at the seventh day without being etymologically identical.

## The Preposition "Bo" (בו) — "In It" vs. "On It" (Exodus 20:10)

This is one of the most important textual observations in the entire Sabbath commandment. Exodus 20:10 reads:

**Exodus 20:10** — *"But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. In it (bo, בו) you shall not do any work..."*

The Hebrew preposition used is bo (ב + pronominal suffix = "in it" or "within it"), not alav (עָלָיו, "upon it" or "on it"). This is not a casual word choice.

To say "on it" would place the person outside the Sabbath, looking at it as a surface on which rules apply. To say "in it" (bo) locates the person inside the Sabbath — as if the Sabbath is a sacred space to be inhabited, not merely a rule observed from without. The Sabbath is a temporal dwelling, a sanctuary in time.

This linguistic choice is consistent with the language of Hebrews 4:3, 10 — where believers "enter" (eiserchomai) God's rest. You do not merely observe the Sabbath from outside; you enter into it. The prepositional bo anticipates the entire theology of Sabbath as participation in God's own rest (Genesis 2:2-3).

Abraham Joshua Heschel famously captured this in *The Sabbath* (1951): "The Sabbath is a palace in time... The seventh day is a palace in time which we build." The preposition bo supports this: the Sabbath is something you inhabit, not merely something you observe.

## SECTION 2: GENESIS 2:1-3 — THE CREATION SABBATH

**Genesis 2:1-3 (ESV)** — *"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested (vayishbot) on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation."*

### Three Unique Divine Acts

God performs three acts toward the seventh day that he performs toward no other day in the creation account:

- **Shavat (שָׁבַת) — "He ceased/rested"**: God stopped his creative activity. This is not rest born of weariness (Isaiah 40:28: "He does not faint or grow weary"), but the rest of completion — there is nothing left to add or improve. The verbal form here is vayishbot (וַיִּשְׁבֹּת), the etymological root of the institution: God himself shabbat-ed on the seventh day.
- **Barak (בָּרַךְ) — "He blessed"**: God pronounced a blessing on the seventh day. While God blessed the creatures (Genesis 1:22, 28), he now blesses time itself. The blessing of the seventh day means it carries an inherent divine favor — when that day comes, it brings God's blessing with it, like a wave carrying energy from its source.
- **Qadash (קִדַּשׁ) — "He sanctified/hallowed"**: God separated the seventh day from the six working days and placed it in the realm of the sacred. The root qadash ("holy") is the same root

as qodesh (holy place) and qadosh (holy one). This is the only instance in the creation account where time itself is declared holy — not a place, not a creature, but a day.

## The Missing Evening/Morning Formula

Perhaps the most striking literary observation in the entire creation narrative is what is absent from Day 7. Days one through six each close with the formula:

**Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31** — *""And there was evening and there was morning — the [first/second/third...] day.""*

This formula marks the completion and succession of each creative day — it ends, and the next begins. The seventh day has no such closing formula. There is no "evening and morning, the seventh day." This is not accidental omission; it is a deliberate literary signal with profound theological implications:

- **Continuity/Openness view:** The seventh day remains literarily and theologically "open" — God's Sabbath rest has not been closed by an evening. His rest from creation continues. This is why John 5:17 can say, "My Father is working until now" — God works in sustaining and redeeming creation within the continuing seventh-day rest from creation.
- **Eschatological view:** The missing formula points forward to a final, eternal Sabbath that has not yet fully arrived — the eschatological rest of Hebrews 4:9. Day 7 is "unending" not as history but as promise.
- **Sabbatarian view:** The permanent, unending quality of the seventh day means the Sabbath rest is perpetual in God's design and therefore binding on his creatures in all ages.

## No Command Given to Humans

A critical doctrinal observation: Genesis 2:1–3 contains no command directed at human beings. There is no "remember," "observe," or "keep." The passage describes exclusively what God did. He rested, he blessed, he sanctified. No human being is instructed to do anything.

Two conclusions are drawn from this observation, representing opposite theological moves:

- **Sabbatarian reading:** The Sabbath as a creation ordinance was woven into the fabric of reality from the beginning. Just as God set the pattern of six-plus-one, so humanity was created to image God in that same rhythm. The lack of an explicit command reflects the pre-fall innocence in which holy living was the natural order — not a legal imposition but a gracious rhythm.
- **Fulfilled/New Covenant reading:** The Sabbath commandment had not yet been given to humanity in Genesis 2. It was only when Israel stood at Sinai that God formally commanded the Sabbath. Genesis 2 records divine activity as a theological foundation, not a human obligation.

Note also: the noun "shabbat" does not appear in Genesis 2:1–3. Only the verbal form (vayishbot) is used. The noun shabbat makes its first biblical appearance in Exodus 16:23 — in the manna narrative, before Sinai.

## SECTION 3: EXODUS 16 — THE MANNA NARRATIVE

### First Use of the Noun "Shabbat" — Before Sinai

Exodus 16 occurs in the Desert of Sin, on the fifteenth day of the second month after the Exodus — weeks before the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai (Exodus 19–20). This is the pivotal pre-Sinai Sabbath text.

**Exodus 16:23** — *""This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a rest day, a holy Sabbath (shabbat qodesh) to the LORD.'""*

This is the first occurrence of the noun shabbat in the Hebrew Bible. The creation ordinance of Genesis 2 now receives its formal vocabulary. The Sabbath is named before it is commanded in the Decalogue — which is why the Decalogue says "Remember the Sabbath day" (Exodus 20:8). You remember what you already know.

## The Four Manna Miracles

Every week in the wilderness, God enacted four supernatural signs to teach Israel the Sabbath rhythm:

- **Six days of daily manna:** Monday through Friday, manna appeared on the ground in the morning and melted when the sun grew hot (v. 21).
- **Double portion on the sixth day:** On the sixth day, the people gathered two omers per person (vv. 22, 5) — a double portion. This was erev Shabbat, Sabbath preparation, not a random surplus.
- **No spoilage overnight:** Normally, leftover manna "bred worms and smelled" (v. 20), but the double portion kept overnight from Friday to Saturday did not spoil (v. 24). God preserved it supernaturally for the Sabbath.
- **No manna on the seventh day:** "On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none" (v. 27). The manna stopped completely every Sabbath.

## The Rebuke and Its Theological Weight

When some went out to gather on the seventh day and found nothing, God's rebuke was sharp:

**Exodus 16:28–29** — *""How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See, for the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days.""*

The phrase "my commandments and my laws" (mitzvotai and torotai) indicates the Sabbath was already a recognized obligation — not a brand new institution being introduced in this text. This is decisive evidence that the Sabbath existed as a known obligation before the Sinai covenant. The manna narrative is not the origin of the Sabbath; it is its first post-creation enforcement.

The pedagogical logic: God encoded the weekly Sabbath rhythm into Israel's bodies and habits before it was encoded in law. They learned the Sabbath not by reading a commandment but by experiencing it through forty years of manna. Six days it falls; the seventh it does not. Nature itself (in this wilderness micro-economy) was structured around the Sabbath pattern.

## SECTION 4: EXODUS 20:8–11 vs. DEUTERONOMY 5:12–15

### The Two Decalogue Versions Compared

The Sabbath commandment appears twice in the Decalogue — once in Exodus 20 (the Sinai giving) and once in Deuteronomy 5 (Moses's rehearsal before entering the land). The differences between the two versions are theologically significant.

| Feature            | Exodus 20:8–11                    | Deuteronomy 5:12–15                                    |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Opening verb       | Zakor (זָכַר) — "Remember"        | Shamar (שָׁמַר) — "Observe/Guard"                      |
| Rationale          | God rested after creation (v. 11) | Israel was a slave in Egypt (v. 15)                    |
| Theological ground | Creation — cosmic memorial        | Redemption — historical liberation                     |
| Servant concern    | Listed briefly                    | "That your servant may rest as well as you" (explicit) |
| Livestock detail   | "Your cattle"                     | "Your ox or donkey or any of your cattle"              |
| Additional phrase  | None                              | "As the LORD your God commanded you"                   |

## "Zakor" (Remember) vs. "Shamar" (Observe/Guard)

These two verbs are not synonyms. Each has a distinct nuance that enriches our understanding of what the Sabbath demands:

- **Zakor (זָכַר) — "to remember":** To actively recall, bring to mind, commemorate. In Exodus, to remember the Sabbath is to recall its theological foundation — God's rest at creation. The Sabbath must be understood, not merely observed. Memory is the act of engaging the mind with the meaning of the day.
- **Shamar (שָׁמַר) — "to observe/guard":** To keep, guard, watch over, maintain. In Deuteronomy, to observe the Sabbath is to protect it, ensure it happens, guard it against encroachment. The Ramban (Nahmanides) explained: "Zakor refers to the positive commandments of the Sabbath (what you must do), while shamar refers to the negative commandments (what you must not do)."

Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai (Talmudic era) taught that both words were spoken simultaneously at Sinai: "Zachar u-shamor b'dibbur echad ne'emru" — "Remember and observe were uttered as one utterance." This teaching is sung to this day in the Lecha Dodi Friday-night liturgy.

## Creation Grounding vs. Redemption Grounding

This is the deepest theological difference between the two versions:

**Exodus 20:11** — *"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*

Ground: Creation. The Sabbath is rooted in the cosmos, in the six-plus-one rhythm established at creation. The obligation flows from who God is as Creator and from the structure of reality he made. The Sabbath is a weekly act of imitatio Dei — as God worked six days and rested on the seventh, so Israel works six days and rests on the seventh.

**Deuteronomy 5:15** — *""You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.""*

Ground: Redemption. The Sabbath is rooted in God's saving act in the Exodus. The obligation flows from what God did in history — he rescued his people from bondage. The extension of Sabbath rest to servants (emphasized in Deuteronomy) flows directly from this: because you were slaves and God freed you, you must not treat your servants as you were treated.

The two grounds are not contradictory but complementary. The Sabbath simultaneously celebrates God as Creator (the cosmic foundation) and God as Redeemer (the historical foundation). It is both a creation celebration and a redemption celebration — looking backward in two directions at once.

## The "In It" Language Revisited — Exodus 20:10

The preposition *bo* ("in it") in Exodus 20:10 recurs in the creation narrative: God rested "in it" (*ki vo*, Genesis 2:3). The day carries an interior quality. Rest is not merely an external restriction but something one inhabits. The Sabbath is sacred space in time — a weekly sanctuary. As Hebrews 4:3, 10 expresses it, believers "enter into" rest (*eisчеромai eis tēn katapausin*). The "entering" language and the "in it" language converge: the Sabbath is not a surface on which to not-work, but a space to enter and dwell within.

## SECTION 5: OTHER MAJOR TORAH SABBATH PASSAGES

### Exodus 31:12–17 — The Covenant Sign

Placed immediately after the detailed instructions for constructing the Tabernacle (Exodus 25–31), this passage makes a bold theological statement: even the sacred work of building God's house cannot override God's rest day.

**Exodus 31:13** — *""Surely you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign (*ot*, תּוֹכֵן) between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.""*

Key terms:

- **Sign (*ot*, תּוֹכֵן):** The same word used for the rainbow (Genesis 9:12–13), circumcision (Genesis 17:11), and the Passover blood (Exodus 13:9). A sign in this sense is a covenantal marker — a public, repeated act that identifies the parties to the covenant and their relationship.
- **"Between me and you":** "*Beyn — u-veyn*" (בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶיכֶם). The Sabbath is a bilateral covenant marker — specific to the Israel-YHWH relationship. Exodus 31:17 repeats: "It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel."
- **"That you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you":** The Sabbath is the regular reminder that Israel's holiness is God's work, not their own. They rest; he sanctifies. Every Sabbath reenacts the theology of grace.

Death penalty: Exodus 31:14–15 — "Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death... Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death." The severity corresponds to the significance: to break the Sabbath is to repudiate the entire covenant relationship.

**Exodus 31:17** — *"In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed (vayinnafash, נִפְּשָׁה)."*

The word vayinnafash is extraordinary. It derives from nefesh (נֶפֶשׁ — "soul, life, breath"). To say God was "refreshed" or "re-souled" is an anthropomorphism expressing that the Sabbath has a soul-dimension, a vitality belonging to the day itself. The Sabbath is not merely an absence of work but a presence of life.

## Exodus 35:1–3 — Pre-Tabernacle Reminder

Before Tabernacle construction begins, Moses assembles all Israel and repeats the Sabbath command. The practical boundary: the labor of building God's house does not exempt one from God's rest day.

Verse 3 adds a specific prohibition: "You shall kindle no fire in all your dwelling places on the Sabbath day." This detailed application (prohibiting even domestic fire for cooking preparation) gave rise to the later rabbinic classification of 39 major categories of prohibited work (melakhot), derived from the types of labor used in the Tabernacle's construction.

## Leviticus 23:1–3 — Sabbath as Moed (Appointed Feast)

**Leviticus 23:2–3** — *"These are the appointed feasts (moedim) of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations... Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest (shabat shabaton), a holy convocation (miqra qodesh). You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places."*

Key observations:

- **First in the festival calendar:** The Sabbath is the first item in the LORD's entire festival calendar. Before Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles — the weekly Sabbath leads all appointed times. Moed derives from yaad ("to appoint/fix a meeting") — the Sabbath is God's weekly appointment with his people.
- **Shabat Shabaton:** Literally "a Sabbath of Sabbaths" — an intensive double construction signaling the highest tier of sacred rest. The same phrase is used for Yom Kippur (Lev. 23:32) and the Jubilee year (Lev. 25:4).
- **Miqra Qodesh (holy convocation):** The people are called out (qara) to assemble. The Sabbath is not merely private rest but communal gathering — consistent with Psalm 92's liturgical character and Luke 4:16 (Jesus' synagogue custom).
- **"In all your dwelling places":** Unlike the Temple-centered feasts, the Sabbath is to be observed wherever God's people live. It is not geographically restricted to Jerusalem or the land.

## Leviticus 25 — Sabbatical Year and Jubilee

Leviticus 25 extends the Sabbath principle from days to years and from individual rest to social liberation:

- **The Sabbatical Year (vv. 1–7):** Every seventh year, the land itself observes a "Sabbath to the LORD" (shabat la-YHWH). No sowing, pruning, or harvesting. Whatever grows on its own may be eaten by everyone — owners, servants, strangers, even animals. The theological ground: "The

land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants" (v. 23). The sabbatical year is Israel's acknowledgment that they are stewards, not owners, of creation.

- **The Jubilee Year (vv. 8–55):** "You shall count seven weeks of years — seven times seven years — so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall be forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet..." (vv. 8–10). Proclaimed on Yom Kippur of the 49th year. Three provisions: (1) land rests, (2) all ancestral land returns to original families — preventing permanent poverty through land loss, (3) all Israelite debt-slaves are freed. The proclamation: "Proclaim liberty (deror) throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (v. 10) — the inscription on the American Liberty Bell. The word deror ("liberty") is the same word used in Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18.

The structural pattern: 7 (weeks of years) × 7 = 49, then +1 = 50. This mirrors the Omer count (7 weeks + 1 = Pentecost/Shavuot). The Jubilee is the Sabbath principle applied to social justice and political economy.

## Numbers 15:32–36 — The Wood-Gatherer

During the wilderness wandering, a man is found gathering sticks on the Sabbath. The congregation holds him "until they know what should be done to him" — possibly the first test case of the death penalty in application.

**Numbers 15:35** — *"The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp."*

The execution is carried out. The theological weight: the death penalty for what appears to be a minor act (picking up sticks) underscores that Sabbath violation was not merely a ritual failure but a covenantal offense — a public repudiation of the bilateral sign between Israel and YHWH. The gathering of sticks is melakha (work), and to perform melakha on the Sabbath was to signal that one did not belong to the covenant community.

## Numbers 28:9–10 — Additional Sabbath Offerings

**Numbers 28:9–10** — *"On the Sabbath day, two male lambs a year old without blemish... this is the burnt offering of every Sabbath, besides the continual burnt offering (al ol ha-tamid) and its drink offering."*

The weekly Sabbath had its own musaf (additional) sacrifices layered on top of the daily tamid offering. The phrase "besides the continual burnt offering" is repeated throughout Numbers 28–29 for every feast — always meaning "in addition to, not instead of." Significantly, this doubled the priests' workload on the Sabbath while the people rested — a theological paradox: rest for the laity, additional labor for those who serve God. This also answered a later challenge: Jesus used this logic in Matthew 12:5, noting that "the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless" — because Temple service (avodah) was its own category, explicitly commanded even on the Sabbath.

# SECTION 6: THE SABBATH IN THE PROPHETS

## Isaiah 56:1–8 — Sabbath for Foreigners and Eunuchs

One of the most radical expansions of Sabbath theology in the Old Testament. Two groups excluded by Deuteronomy 23 — eunuchs and foreigners — are now explicitly included through Sabbath observance:

**Isaiah 56:6-7** — *""And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD... everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant — these I will bring to my holy mountain... for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.""*

The Sabbath functions as the universal covenant sign: whoever holds fast to the Sabbath and God's covenant belongs to the house of prayer for all nations. In the post-exilic context — when Temple sacrifice was impossible in Babylon — the Sabbath became the primary mark of Jewish identity and covenant fidelity. Isaiah 56 extends that mark to all nations who join themselves to YHWH. This passage is directly quoted by Jesus in Matthew 21:13 in his cleansing of the Temple.

## Isaiah 58:13-14 — The Sabbath as Delight

**Isaiah 58:13-14** — *""If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure (chefetz) on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight (oneg) and the holy day of the LORD honorable... then you shall take delight in the LORD.""*

Two key Hebrew words:

- **Chefetz ("your pleasure"):** "Doing whatever you please" (BDB: "your affairs/business"). The prohibition is on pursuing your own commercial agenda on God's day, not on joy per se. The word more likely refers to negotiating business arrangements than to casual recreation.
- **Oneg ("delight"):** The positive characterization of the Sabbath. The contrast is not pleasure vs. austerity but your pleasure vs. delight in God. When you stop pursuing your own agenda, you discover that God himself becomes your delight.

The consequence: "Then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father." Sabbath faithfulness results in national flourishing. The Sabbath is not austere obligation but joyful encounter with God.

## Isaiah 66:22-23 — Sabbath in the New Creation

**Isaiah 66:22-23** — *""For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me.""*

This is the eschatological climax of Isaiah: in the renewed creation, all humanity (kol basar — "all flesh") will gather to worship God on the Sabbath. Key implications:

- The Sabbath is not a temporary Mosaic institution; it belongs to the new creation.
- It is universal — not just Israel but "all flesh" will observe it.
- The pairing with "new moon to new moon" (monthly) and "Sabbath to Sabbath" (weekly) shows the Sabbath as the recurring marker of sacred time in the eternal order.

Seventh-Day Sabbatarians cite this passage as conclusive evidence that the seventh-day Sabbath is an eternal institution. New Covenant theologians respond that this language is part of the typological/symbolic imagery of new creation and does not require literal day-counting.

## Jeremiah 17:19–27 — Sabbath and Jerusalem's Fate

God sends Jeremiah to the city gates to preach the Sabbath commandment with striking specificity:

**Jeremiah 17:27** — *""But if you do not listen to me, to keep the Sabbath day holy... then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched.""*

Sabbath violation is linked here to national disaster — the very destruction of Jerusalem. This is not an isolated prophetic theme: Ezekiel 20 and Nehemiah 13 make the same connection. When the people treat Sabbath as ordinary, they treat the covenant as void. This was fulfilled in 586 BC. Leviticus 26:34–35 explains the 70-year Babylonian exile as the land "enjoying its Sabbaths" — the land received the Sabbath rest that the people had denied it.

## Ezekiel 20 — Sabbath as the Sign of Sanctification

Ezekiel 20 contains the most extensive prophetic treatment of the Sabbath. In an Israel-history sermon tracing three generations of covenant failure, the Sabbath appears as the central repeated motif:

**Ezekiel 20:12** — *""Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign (ot) between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them.""*

This is a direct echo of Exodus 31:13. The Sabbath was given so that Israel would know (lada'at) that YHWH is the one who sanctifies them. To observe the Sabbath is to acknowledge God's claim over your time and self; to violate it is to deny that claim. Each generation in Ezekiel 20 "profaned my Sabbaths" (vv. 13, 16, 21, 24) alongside idolatry. The Babylonian exile is the consequence of this repeated repudiation of the covenant sign.

## Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15–22 — Post-Exilic Sabbath Reform

On returning to Jerusalem after his second stint as governor, Nehemiah finds the city conducting commerce on the Sabbath — winepresses operating, grain loads being transported, Tyrian merchants selling fish inside the city walls. His response:

- Confronts the nobles of Judah (not the poor), explicitly connecting Sabbath violation to the first destruction of Jerusalem (v. 18).
- Gates shut at dusk on Friday before Sabbath.
- Armed servants posted at the gates.
- Merchants who camped outside the walls warned: "If you do so again, I will lay hands on you" (v. 21). They stop.
- Levites assigned to guard the gates.

The covenant sworn in Nehemiah 10:31: "If the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day." The community covenanted not to buy from Gentile merchants on the Sabbath — a form of economic holiness. This post-exilic Sabbath reform demonstrates that the Sabbath was a live, practical issue in Second Temple Judaism, not merely a theoretical category.

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## SECTION 7: SABBATH IN PSALMS AND WRITINGS

## Psalm 92 — The Only Psalm for the Sabbath Day

The superscription reads: *mizmor shir le-yom ha-shabbat* ("A Psalm, A Song for the Sabbath Day") — the only psalm in the entire Psalter designated for Sabbath use. It was sung in the Temple on Sabbath morning.

**Psalm 92:1-2** — *"It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night."*

Key observations:

- **A day of joyful worship:** The instruments listed (ten-string lute, harp, lyre) indicate joyful, festal worship. The Sabbath is for music and celebration, not mere cessation. Derek Kidner: "This Song for the Sabbath is proof enough, if such were needed, that the Old Testament Sabbath was a day not only for rest but for corporate worship... and intended to be a delight rather than a burden."
- **A day of God-centered perception:** The foolish person (v. 6) does not perceive that the wicked's temporary flourishing is passing and God's permanent justice is certain (vv. 7-9). The Sabbath creates the contemplative space to see past surface reality to theological reality — to perceive from God's vantage point, not from the market's.
- **Eschatological dimension:** The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 31a) interprets the Psalm as pointing to the future age: "A Psalm, A Song for the time to come, for the day that will be entirely Shabbat and rest for everlasting life." The Sabbath day is both a present reality and an anticipation of the world to come — consistent with Hebrews 4:9.

## Amos 8:5 — Sabbath as Diagnostic of the Heart

**Amos 8:5** — *"Saying, 'When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great and deal deceitfully with false balances?'"*

The audience is outwardly observing the Sabbath — they are not working. But they are chafing inwardly, using the Sabbath hours to plan how to defraud their customers when the day ends. The Sabbath functions as a diagnostic of spiritual condition. Those who genuinely love God find the Sabbath a delight (Isaiah 58:13); those whose hearts are devoted to wealth find it an obstacle. Amos exposes the gap between outward Sabbath compliance and inner covenant faithfulness. This is precisely why Deuteronomy 5 grounds the Sabbath in redemption from slavery: those who remember their own liberation cannot exploit others.

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## SECTION 8: SABBATICAL THEOLOGY — THE PATTERN OF SEVENS

### The Heptadic Structure of Scripture

Scripture is saturated with the seven-pattern (heptadic structure). This is not incidental but reflects a deep theological grammar — the Sabbath principle generalized into the structure of time itself:

| Level              | Unit                                                  | Key Reference             |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Week               | 7th day — Sabbath                                     | Genesis 2:2; Exodus 20:11 |
| Month              | 7th month (Tishri) — Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles | Leviticus 23:23-44        |
| Year               | 7th year — Sabbatical / Shemitah                      | Leviticus 25:1-7          |
| Years × Years      | $7 \times 7 = 49 + 1$ — Jubilee                       | Leviticus 25:8-17         |
| Annual Calendar    | 7 appointed feasts / moedim                           | Leviticus 23              |
| Book of Revelation | 7 churches, seals, trumpets, bowls                    | Revelation 1-22           |

The pattern is consistent: six units of labor/activity + one unit of rest/release/renewal. The seventh is always the sacred, the different, the set-apart. The Sabbath principle is not merely a day; it is the grammar of God's relationship with creation and time.

## The Jubilee — $7 \times 7 + 1$

The Jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-10) is the most elaborate expression of the Sabbath principle. Seven Sabbaths of years (49 years) followed by the 50th year as Jubilee creates a meta-Sabbath — a Sabbath of Sabbaths. The Jubilee is proclaimed on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), the day of ultimate reconciliation, linking rest with forgiveness and liberation.

Jesus' inaugural sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4:18-21, citing Isaiah 61:1-2) proclaims "the year of the LORD's favor" — a Jubilee proclamation — on a Sabbath day in a synagogue. He connects his ministry to both Sabbath and Jubilee simultaneously, declaring that he himself is the fulfillment of both.

## The Eschatological Sabbath

The Sabbath day simultaneously functions on three temporal horizons:

- **Memorial:** Looking backward to completed creation — God's rest after his creative work was finished (Exodus 20:11; Genesis 2:2).
- **Present experience:** Present experience of proleptic rest in a fallen world — a foretaste of what is coming, a weekly declaration that "God is enough."
- **Type and foretaste:** Looking forward to the ultimate rest in the new creation — the eternal Sabbath that has not yet fully arrived (Isaiah 66:22-23; Hebrews 4:9).

Hebrews 3-4 develops this eschatological dimension most fully. The author traces the concept of rest through three historical "rests" that each fail to fully deliver: (1) Canaan rest under Joshua ("If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on" — Hebrews 4:8), (2) the weekly Sabbath (which pointed beyond itself), and (3) the remaining rest — sabbatismos — for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9). The "today" of Psalm 95 is still open. The rest is still available. The Sabbath points not only backward to creation but forward to the eternal city where God dwells with his people — the ultimate seventh-day without evening (Revelation 21-22).

## SECTION 9: NEW TESTAMENT — GOSPELS AND ACTS

### Matthew 12:1–14 / Mark 2:23–3:6 — Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath

Two Sabbath controversies occur back to back, forming the most extended NT Sabbath discussion in the Synoptics.

#### Controversy 1: Plucking Grain (Matthew 12:1–8)

The disciples pluck heads of grain while walking through fields on the Sabbath. The Pharisees classify these actions as four of the 39 prohibited melakhot: harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and meal preparation. Jesus gives three layered defenses:

- **Precedent of David:** 1 Samuel 21: David and his men ate the holy showbread reserved for priests — a more serious violation — and were not condemned. Human necessity can override ritual restriction.
- **Priests in the Temple:** Numbers 28:9–10: Temple service on the Sabbath involves more work than usual, yet the priests are "guiltless" (v. 5). Priestly service for God overrides Sabbath restriction — and Jesus is "something greater than the temple" (v. 6).
- **Christological claim:** "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28). Jesus claims authority over the Sabbath, not merely expertise about it. He is the Sabbath's Author and Master.

#### Controversy 2: Healing the Withered Hand (Matthew 12:9–14)

Jesus heals a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath. His argument: a sheep rescued from a pit on the Sabbath (customary mercy) proves that "it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." The key principle stated in Mark 2:27 is pivotal:

**Mark 2:27** — *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."*

The Sabbath is a gift to humanity, not an instrument of legalistic control. Its purpose is to serve human wellbeing. Healing is the highest expression of that purpose on the day of rest. The Pharisees' response: they go out to "destroy him" (Matthew 12:14). The Sabbath controversies are the flashpoint for the escalating hostility that leads to the cross.

### Luke 4:16 — Jesus' Custom

**Luke 4:16** — *"And as was his custom (kata to eiothos), he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read."*

The phrase *kata to eiothos* ("according to his custom") establishes that Jesus habitually observed the Sabbath by attending synagogue. His Sabbath controversies were not rejections of the Sabbath but corrections of its misuse. Luke 4:16 is the frame within which all NT Sabbath controversy must be understood: Jesus reformed the Sabbath's observance, not its existence.

His reading of Isaiah 61:1–2 on this occasion — in a synagogue, on the Sabbath, in Nazareth — and his declaration "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21) is a Jubilee announcement. The ultimate Sabbath/Jubilee rest that he embodies and brings begins here.

### Luke 13:10–17 — Woman Freed on the Sabbath

Jesus heals a woman bent double by a "spirit of infirmity" for 18 years, in a synagogue, on the Sabbath. The synagogue ruler protests: "There are six days for work; come and be healed on those days." Jesus calls him a hypocrite and drives the argument:

**Luke 13:15-16** — *"Hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"*

If you show mercy to an animal on the Sabbath, the Sabbath demands mercy to a daughter of Abraham. The Sabbath does not postpone liberation; it consecrates it. Jesus explicitly connects the Sabbath to freedom from bondage — a perfect Jubilee theology. The Sabbath is the most appropriate day for liberation, not the least.

## John 5:1-18 — "My Father Is Working Until Now"

Jesus heals a man who has been ill for 38 years (the same number as Israel's wilderness wandering after Kadesh Barnea — Deuteronomy 2:14 — likely deliberate typology). The man carries his mat at Jesus' command, violating Sabbath law by rabbinic reckoning. Jesus' defense generates the highest Sabbath Christology in all of Scripture:

**John 5:17** — *"My Father is working until now, and I am working."*

The theological claim: God did not "rest" from all activity on the seventh day — he continues to sustain creation, uphold life, and work redemption. The seventh-day "rest" (Genesis 2:2) was rest from creation, not from providence. Jesus joins his Father in this continuous providential-redemptive work. To "break" the ritual Sabbath (as the Jews charged) is to act as God himself acts — perpetually caring for his world. The reaction confirms the claim's force: they seek to kill him, "because he was not only breaking the Sabbath but was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God" (v. 18).

## John 9 — Man Born Blind

Jesus makes mud (a prohibited Sabbath activity under rabbinic law) and heals a man born blind on the Sabbath. The Pharisees divide: "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath" vs. "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" (v. 16). The miraculous sign and the Sabbath law are in apparent tension — and Jesus forces a choice between them. The healed man's progressive confession — "He is a prophet" (v. 17) → "a man from God" (v. 33) → "Lord, I believe" (v. 38) — is set against the Pharisees' progressive hardening. The Sabbath controversy becomes a crisis of revelation and faith.

## Acts — Paul and the Sabbath

Paul's missionary practice consistently involved synagogue attendance on the Sabbath:

- Acts 13:14 — Antioch of Pisidia: "They went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and sat down."
- Acts 13:42-44 — "As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath... On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God."
- Acts 16:13 — Philippi (no synagogue): "On the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer." Paul sought Sabbath worshipers even without a synagogue.

- Acts 17:2 — Thessalonica: "As was his custom, he went in, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures."
- Acts 18:4 — Corinth: "He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks."

Paul consistently used the Sabbath synagogue as his primary evangelistic platform. Whether this represents personal Sabbath observance or strategic use of existing Sabbath gatherings is disputed among the three theological positions. But the pattern is undeniable: the apostle to the Gentiles spent his Sabbaths among Sabbath-observers.

## SECTION 10: PAULINE THEOLOGY OF THE SABBATH

### Romans 14:5-6 — Days and Conscience

**Romans 14:5-6** — *"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it."*

Context: Romans 14 addresses the "strong" and "weak" in faith — those who are scrupulous about days and foods vs. those who are not. Paul's pastoral verdict is remarkable: he does not command Sabbath observance and does not condemn non-observance. Both the day-observer and the day-non-observer are accepted by the Lord, if they act "to the Lord."

The hermeneutical question divides the three positions: Does this include the Fourth Commandment Sabbath in the category of "disputable matters"?

- **Reformed interpretation:** Paul refers to Jewish ceremonial days (feast days, fast days, new moons) carried over from the Mosaic calendar — not the weekly seventh-day Sabbath per se. The Sabbath, on this view, is a moral law not reducible to the ceremonial sphere.
- **New Covenant/fulfilled interpretation:** Paul deliberately includes all day-distinctions. The Sabbath is among the things that are now matters of conscience under the New Covenant. Whatever the referent, Paul refuses to mandate Sabbath observance, which would be impossible if it were a binding creation ordinance.

### Galatians 4:8-11 — Days, Months, Seasons, Years

**Galatians 4:8-10** — *"Formerly... you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods... how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world... You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."*

The crucial question: what are the "days, months, seasons, years" Paul condemns? Two main interpretations:

- **Standard interpretation:** Paul refers to the Mosaic/Jewish calendar — the weekly Sabbath (days), new moons (months), festival seasons, and sabbatical years. Observance of the biblical calendar represents a return to "slavery" incompatible with New Covenant freedom.

- **Alternative interpretation:** Paul's Galatian audience is largely former pagans (v. 8: "formerly... you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods"). They cannot "return" to the Mosaic calendar — they never observed it. They are returning to pagan observances: the imperial cult's festival calendar, astrological observances, Greco-Roman religious days. The "weak and worthless stoicheia" (elementary principles of the world) are never used elsewhere to describe the Mosaic calendar — only pagan religious bondage.

The interpretive stakes are high. If interpretation 1 is correct, Galatians 4:10 is one of the strongest NT arguments against Sabbath observance. If interpretation 2 is correct, the passage says nothing about the biblical Sabbath at all.

## Colossians 2:16–17 — Shadow and Substance

**Colossians 2:16–17** — *""Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.""*

This is the most explicit NT reference to the Sabbath in a doctrinal context. Several critical observations:

- **"Shadow" (skia) vs. "Substance/Body" (sōma):** Shadow (skia, σκιά) is the same language used in Hebrews 10:1 for the whole Mosaic Law. OT institutions pointed to and anticipated the realities that arrived in Christ. The Sabbath, feast days, and food laws are shadows whose substance (sōma, σῶμα) is Christ. Note the unusual word: normally one expects alētheia (truth) or pragma (reality) as the antonym of shadow, but Paul uses sōma (body/substance) — suggesting the embodied reality of Christ himself is the fulfillment.
- **"Let no one pass judgment on you":** Whether Paul is defending the Colossians' right to observe these things or their freedom from being judged for not observing them is debated. The majority reading: freedom from those who would require observance.
- **"A Sabbath" (sabbaton):** The singular sabbaton alongside festival (heortē, annual) and new moon (neomēnia, monthly) may complete a trio of annual-monthly-weekly observances — suggesting the weekly Sabbath is in view. If so, Paul places the weekly Sabbath in the category of fulfilled/shadow institutions.

Adventist response: the "Sabbaths" in Colossians 2:16 refer to the ceremonial Sabbaths of the feast days (Passover Sabbath, Tabernacles Sabbath, etc.) — not the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, which is a creation ordinance in a different category.

## Hebrews 3–4 — The Sabbath-Rest That Remains

This is the most theologically developed NT treatment of Sabbath, spanning two chapters. The argument structure:

- **Step 1 — Psalm 95:** Psalm 95:7–11 is quoted: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts... I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter my rest (katapausis)." God's rest is a real destination that can be entered or forfeited.
- **Step 2 — Genesis 2:** Genesis 2:2 is quoted: God's rest was established from creation — long before Canaan. And David (in Psalm 95) says "today" centuries after Joshua brought Israel into Canaan, meaning Canaan was not the final rest.
- **Step 3 — The Conclusion:** "So then, there remains a Sabbath-rest (sabbatismos, σαββατισμός) for the people of God." (Hebrews 4:9)

**Hebrews 4:9-10** — *""So then, there remains a Sabbath-rest (sabbatismos) for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.""*

The word sabbatismos deserves special attention:

- **Sabbatismos:** This is the only use of sabbatismos in the NT. In Plutarch and four post-canonical Christian writings, the word means "Sabbath observance" or "seventh-day Sabbath celebration." The author deliberately switches from katapausis (used throughout Heb. 3-4) to sabbatismos at verse 9 — an intentional and emphatic emphasis.
- **Sabbatarian interpretation:** Sabbatarian/Adventist: The use of sabbatismos refers to literal, ongoing seventh-day Sabbath-keeping as a sign of the believer's faith-rest in God's grace. The "remains" (present tense: apoleipetai) is the weekly Sabbath, which now embodies the deeper rest of faith.
- **Lord's Day interpretation:** Lord's Day view: The sabbatismos is the eschatological rest entered partially now through faith and fully in the new creation, expressed weekly on the Lord's Day (Sunday).
- **Fulfilled interpretation:** Fulfilled/spiritual view: The sabbatismos is purely the spiritual rest of salvation — ceasing from works-righteousness and resting in Christ's completed work. No specific day is intended. "Anyone who has entered God's rest has also rested from his own works, just as God did from his" (Hebrews 4:10).

Hebrews 4:10 and the Sabbath Grammar: "For whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his." The parallel is explicit: the believer's rest mirrors God's creation rest. God ceased from his works of creation; the believer ceases from works of self-justification. The Sabbath provides the theological grammar for salvation by faith alone — rest in the finished work of Another.

## SECTION 11: THE LORD'S DAY — SUNDAY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### Acts 20:7 — Breaking Bread on the First Day

**Acts 20:7** — *""On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.""*

The gathering occurs on the first day of the week (tē de mia tōn sabbatōn — Sunday). The purpose is "to break bread" — widely understood as a eucharistic (Lord's Supper) gathering. Paul's willingness to delay his journey until after this Sunday gathering (Acts 20:6 notes they stayed in Troas seven days) suggests the first-day gathering was a scheduled, regular event. This is the clearest NT evidence of a regular Sunday worship gathering.

### 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 — The First-Day Collection

**1 Corinthians 16:2** — *""On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.""*

Paul instructs a regular weekly financial discipline tied to the first day. The selection of the first day is deliberate — it is the day of regular assembly. This instruction is given to multiple churches (the same direction was given to Galatia), suggesting a trans-local practice.

## Revelation 1:10 — The Lord's Day

**Revelation 1:10** — *"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (tē kuriakē hēmera), and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet."*

The phrase tē kuriakē hēmera uses the adjective kuriakos ("belonging to the Lord") — the same form as kuriakon deipnon ("the Lord's Supper," 1 Corinthians 11:20). The dominant scholarly consensus identifies this as Sunday — the day of resurrection, on which the early church gathered.

Early Christian witness to Sunday worship:

- **Didache:** "On the Lord's own day of the Lord, gather together, break bread and give thanks" (c. 100 AD).
- **Ignatius of Antioch:** "No longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him" (c. 107 AD).
- **Justin Martyr:** "Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God formed the world, and Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead" (c. 150 AD).

## The Theological Significance of the Resurrection Day

Sunday (the first day of the week) was the day of resurrection (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1) and of multiple resurrection appearances (John 20:19, 26 — "eight days later" = the following Sunday). The early church's assembly on Sunday was not a rejection of the Sabbath but a celebration of the new creation inaugurated by Christ's resurrection.

The Patristic "Eighth Day" theology:

- **Sunday as first day:** The first act of creation — Genesis 1:1, Day 1 of the old creation.
- **Sunday as resurrection day:** The resurrection — Matthew 28:1, Day 1 of the new creation.
- **Sunday as eighth day (Barnabas, Justin Martyr):** Seven days complete the old creation; the eighth day begins the new. Sunday is simultaneously the first day (new beginning) and the eighth day (beyond the old cycle — the beginning of eternity).

Note the contrast with Sabbath observance: Justin Martyr's description of Sunday worship (c. 150 AD) includes Scripture readings, a sermon, communal prayer, and Communion — activities of joyful assembly rather than strict rest. The Lord's Day was not primarily a day of rest (most early Christians were slaves or laborers who could not rest on Sunday) but a day of worship centered on the resurrection. The Saturday rest became Sunday assembly.

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# SECTION 12: THREE MAJOR THEOLOGICAL POSITIONS

## Overview Table

| Position                                | Sabbath Day                        | Key Texts                                     | Key Theologians                             |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| (A) 7th-Day Sabbatarianism              | Saturday (7th day)                 | Ex. 20:8–11; Rev. 14:12; Heb. 4:9; Isa. 66:23 | Bacchiocchi, Ellen G. White, J.N. Andrews   |
| (B) Lord's Day / 1st-Day Sabbatarianism | Sunday (1st day)                   | WCF 21.7–8; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10; 1 Cor. 16:2 | Calvin, Edwards, Dabney, Ryle, DeYoung      |
| (C) Fulfilled / New Covenant            | No day required; rest is in Christ | Col. 2:16–17; Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10; Heb. 4:10 | D.A. Carson, MacArthur, Grudem, N.T. Wright |

## (A) Seventh-Day Sabbatarianism

The seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath is a creation ordinance — established before the fall, before Israel, before Moses — and therefore binding upon all humanity in all ages. The Fourth Commandment remains fully in force under the New Covenant.

### Key Arguments

- **Creation ordinance:** God blessed and sanctified the seventh day at creation (Genesis 2:1–3). This pre-dates Moses, the Law, and Israel. What God blessed at creation is not abrogated by the New Covenant.
- **"Remember" implies pre-Sinai knowledge:** The word "Remember" in Exodus 20:8 implies prior knowledge — the Sabbath was known before Sinai (proven by Exodus 16). A command to "remember" what never existed would be incoherent.
- **Moral law, not ceremonial:** The Ten Commandments form the moral law — written by God's own finger on stone, placed inside the ark (Deuteronomy 10:5), whereas ceremonial laws were written by Moses and placed beside the ark. The Fourth Commandment cannot be categorized with Levitical rituals.
- **Eschatological persistence:** Isaiah 66:22–23: the Sabbath persists in the new creation. If abolished, how does it reappear in eternity?
- **Hebrews 4:9:** Hebrews 4:9 sabbatismos literally means "Sabbath-keeping" — the author affirms ongoing Sabbath observance as the sign of faith-rest.

### Response to Colossians 2:16

Adventist scholars argue that the "Sabbaths" in Colossians 2:16 refer to the ceremonial Sabbaths of the annual feast days (Passover Sabbath, Tabernacles Sabbath, etc.) — not the weekly seventh-day Sabbath, which, as a creation ordinance, belongs to a different category.

## (B) Lord's Day View — Sabbath Principle Transferred to Sunday

The Sabbath is a moral and creation-based institution (one day in seven for rest and worship). It was observed on the seventh day from creation to the resurrection of Christ, then transferred to the first day of the week by apostolic authority. Sunday is the "Christian Sabbath," carrying the same obligations as the OT Sabbath.

## Key Arguments

- **Westminster Confession:** Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), Chapter XXI.7–8: "As it is of the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God, so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath... which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day."
- **Apostolic example:** Christ appeared to his disciples on Sunday evenings (John 20:19, 26); the Spirit was poured out on Sunday (Pentecost); the church gathered on Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10). Apostolic example establishes Sunday as the new Sabbath.
- **One day in seven (moral law):** The "one day in seven" principle is moral and permanent; only the specific day changed in light of the New Covenant and the resurrection.
- **The new creation:** The resurrection inaugurates a new creation — the first day of the new creation deserves the same Sabbath dignity as the first day of the old creation.

## Key Theologians

- Calvin, Jonathan Edwards (The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath), R.L. Dabney, J.C. Ryle, Kevin DeYoung.

## (C) Fulfilled / New Covenant View — Sabbath Rest Is in Christ

The Sabbath was a typological/shadow institution pointing to the rest that Christ provides. Christ is the fulfillment of the Sabbath. Under the New Covenant, the Sabbath's substance is Christ himself; the shadow (the specific day) has passed. Believers enter Sabbath rest daily through faith. No specific day is required by the New Covenant, though gathered worship remains important.

## Key Arguments

- **Colossians 2:16–17:** Colossians 2:16–17: Sabbaths are a "shadow of things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ." The shadow has been replaced by the reality.
- **Hebrews 4 — present tense entrance:** Hebrews 4:3, 10: "We who have believed enter that rest" — present tense. The Sabbath rest is entered now through faith, not through weekly observance of a day.
- **Romans 14:5 — Paul's neutrality:** Romans 14:5: Paul refuses to adjudicate between day-observers and non-observers. If Sabbath were a binding moral law, Paul could not remain neutral.
- **Sabbath as Israel's covenant sign:** Exodus 31:16–17: "It is a sign between me and the people of Israel forever." The sign was given to Israel as a specific covenant marker. Gentiles were never commanded to keep it, and the Mosaic Covenant itself has been superseded (Hebrews 8:13: "What is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away").
- **Christ as Sabbath:** Matthew 11:28–29: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest... you will find rest for your souls." Jesus offers the substance of Sabbath — rest for the soul — directly in himself.

## Key Theologians

- D.A. Carson (From Sabbath to Lord's Day), John MacArthur ("Jesus is the Sabbath"), Wayne Grudem (Systematic Theology), Thomas Schreiner, N.T. Wright.

## SECTION 13: SYNTHESIS AND STUDY CONCLUSIONS

### What Is Not Disputed

Across all three positions, the following are widely affirmed by evangelical and Reformed scholars:

- God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2) — this is the theological foundation of all Sabbath theology.
- The Sabbath was given to Israel at Sinai as a covenantal sign (Exodus 31:13–17).
- Jesus observed the Sabbath and is "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8; Luke 4:16).
- The Sabbath points to eschatological rest — the ultimate rest awaiting God's people (Hebrews 4:9).
- The church gathered on the first day (Sunday) from very early times (Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10).
- The Sabbath is not a mechanism of salvation — its violation did not damn; its keeping did not save. It was a sign of the covenant, not the covenant itself.

### The Central Exegetical Tension

The deepest tension in Sabbath theology is between three passages that pull in different directions:

- **Colossians 2:16–17:** Sabbath as shadow, fulfilled in Christ — pointing away from ongoing Sabbath obligation.
- **Hebrews 4:9:** Sabbatismos "remains" for the people of God — pointing toward ongoing Sabbath significance.
- **Isaiah 66:22–23:** Sabbath in the new creation — pointing toward eternal Sabbath observance.

These three passages, taken together, resist easy systematization. The most responsible position holds them in tension and acknowledges that the Sabbath is simultaneously: theologically foundational (creation), covenantally significant (Israel-specific sign), Christologically fulfilled (rest in Christ), and eschatologically anticipated (eternal rest). Which of these dimensions should govern present Christian practice is the ongoing debate.

### Master Cross-Reference Table

| Theme                       | Key Texts                                           |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Creation foundation         | Genesis 2:1–3; Exodus 20:11; Hebrews 4:4            |
| Covenantal sign             | Exodus 31:13–17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20                  |
| Pre-Sinai existence         | Exodus 16:23–30; Exodus 16:28                       |
| Death penalty for violation | Exodus 31:14–15; 35:2; Numbers 15:35                |
| Sabbath as delight          | Isaiah 58:13–14; Psalm 92                           |
| Eschatological Sabbath      | Isaiah 66:22–23; Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 21–22      |
| Jesus and Sabbath           | Matthew 12:1–14; Mark 2:27–28; Luke 4:16; John 5:17 |

|                                   |                                                   |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Paul and Sabbath                  | Romans 14:5–6; Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16–17 |
| Lord's Day / Sunday               | Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10    |
| Sabbath for all nations           | Isaiah 56:6–7; Isaiah 66:23                       |
| Sabbath year / Jubilee            | Leviticus 25:1–55; Luke 4:18–19                   |
| "In it" (bo) language             | Exodus 20:10; Genesis 2:3; Hebrews 4:3, 10        |
| Sabbath as sign of sanctification | Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12, 20                   |

## A Final Word

*"The Sabbath is a day on which we learn the art of surpassing civilization. — Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath (1951)"*

However one resolves the doctrinal debate, the Sabbath stands as one of Scripture's richest theological institutions — simultaneously pointing to creation, to the covenant, to Christ, and to eternity. It is the place where time becomes sacred, where the creature imitates the Creator's rest, and where faith is expressed not by doing but by ceasing. In the words of Hebrews 4:11: "Let us therefore strive to enter that rest."

## KEY SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Primary Hebrew/Greek Lexical Resources:

- Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (H7673, H7676, H7677) — BibleHub.com
- Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew Lexicon (BDB)
- Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon (BDAG)
- Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)

Major Works Cited:

- Bacchiocchi, Samuele. *From Sabbath to Sunday* (1977). Andrews University Press.
- Carson, D.A. (ed.). *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (1982). Zondervan.
- Dabney, R.L. *The Christian Sabbath: Its Nature, Design, and Proper Observance*. Reformed.org.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath*.
- DeYoung, Kevin. *The Ten Commandments: What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them*. Crossway.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology*. Zondervan.
- Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath* (1951). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- MacArthur, John. *Sermons on Colossians 2:16–17 and Hebrews 4*.
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), Chapter XXI.7–8.
- Wright, N.T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Fortress Press.