

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments

Session 5: Commandment 4: The Sabbath

1) Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, 4) FAQs

1) Abstract:

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's lecture examines the **fourth commandment**, **"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,"** exploring its historical observance and evolving interpretations. The discussion begins with examples of prominent individuals who prioritized Sabbath keeping, such as Eric Liddell, and then moves into the Old Testament origins, noting that the **concept of rest on the seventh day predates the Sinai covenant**. Tomasino highlights the **dual rationale for the Sabbath found in Exodus (creation) and Deuteronomy (deliverance from slavery)**, emphasizing its universal principle of rest for humanity, not just Israel. He further explains how the **Sabbath became a significant identity marker for Jews**, leading to conflicts, and how **Christianity transitioned to Sunday observance due to practical and theological reasons**, ultimately affirming the Sabbath's enduring benefits for physical, ethical, and spiritual well-being.

2) Briefing Document: Here's a detailed briefing document reviewing the main themes and most important ideas or facts about the Sabbath, based on the provided source:

Briefing Document: The Sabbath - Commandment 4

Source: Excerpts from "Tomasino_10Commands_Ses05_English.pdf" by Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino.

1. Core Definition and Etymology of Sabbath

The Fourth Commandment instructs, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." (p. 1) The word "Sabbath" originates from the Hebrew verb "Shabbat," meaning "to cease" or "to stop." (p. 2) Its dual significance refers both to the end of the week and to ceasing from work. (p. 2) The Sabbath is technically described as "weird" in modern American culture, which often values continuous work, making the idea of

setting aside a day for rest and refraining from work seem "strange and foreign." (p. 2)

2. Historical Observance and Uniqueness in the Ancient World

Unlike other practices like circumcision or taboos on pork, there is "no evidence of any of Israel's neighbors observing every seventh day as a day of rest." (p. 2-3) This strongly suggests the Sabbath was unique to Israel. While a theory exists that the Israelite Sabbath might have originated from a Babylonian monthly festival called "Sheputu" or "Sebutu," often linked with the New Moon, this remains "very speculative, not a whole lot of evidence behind it." (p. 3)

The biblical record indicates the Sabbath was observed even before the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, specifically in Exodus 16 with the giving of manna. (p. 3-4) This implies a pre-existing understanding or practice of a day of rest before its formalization in the law.

3. Rationales for Sabbath Observance

Two primary rationales for observing the Sabbath are presented in the Old Testament:

- **Creation-based:** Exodus 20 and 31:17 affirm that "the foundation of the Sabbath is in creation." (p. 4) God worked for six days and "rested on the seventh day," establishing a principle for humanity. (p. 4) This rationale implies a universal applicability of the Sabbath, not just for Israel, as it's "to be binding, in a sense, upon all of nature." (p. 5) This is interpreted figuratively; God doesn't *need* rest, but humanity does. (p. 5)
- **Covenant-based:** Deuteronomy 5 provides a different rationale, linking the Sabbath to Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt: "Remember, you were a slave in the land of Egypt. The Lord your God brought you out of there... Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." (p. 4-5) This highlights compassion and the covenant relationship. These two rationales are seen as "supplementary," not contradictory. (p. 5)

Numbers and Leviticus frequently discuss the Sabbath but do not provide a rationale for its observance. (p. 5)

4. Legal Implications and Penalties

The Old Testament's legal implications for Sabbath observance were not initially well-defined. (p. 2) The Pharisees later introduced numerous rules to clarify what constituted keeping the Sabbath, making it "burdensome." (p. 2)

The penalty for breaking the Sabbath, at least theoretically, was "very, very severe." (p. 6) Numbers 15 describes a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath being stoned to death, highlighting the belief that such actions "endangered by his action" and the community took responsibility for punishment. (p. 6) This extreme punishment underscored the idea that individual transgression could threaten communal adherence and lead to a breakdown of the Sabbath's principle, as seen in the example of a town where one business opening on Sunday led others to follow suit. (p. 6)

However, later historical accounts, such as Nehemiah's enforcement of a commerce ban on the Sabbath, show that violators were not executed, indicating a potential shift in strictness regarding penalties. (p. 8)

5. Sabbath in Old Testament History Beyond the Pentateuch

Outside the Pentateuch, the Sabbath is "rarely seen" in early historical books like Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, leading to questions about its consistent observance. (p. 7)

- **Association with New Moon:** 2 Kings 4:23 and Amos 8:5 link the Sabbath with the New Moon, suggesting it was also viewed as a "day of religious observance" or "special festival day" rather than solely a day of rest. (p. 7-8)
- **Work Exceptions:** 2 Kings 11 implies that having guards on duty at the king's house on the Sabbath was not considered a violation, further suggesting a view of Sabbath as more of a festival than a strict day of no work. (p. 7)
- **Sabbath Sacrifices:** The Chronicler mentions "Sabbath sacrifices a number of times," which were considered an "essential part of Sabbath observance" and not a violation. (p. 7) The Dead Sea Scrolls even describe angels performing Sabbath sacrifices in heaven, emphasizing the universal and heavenly nature of Sabbath. (p. 7-8)
- **Prophetic Condemnation:** Prophets like Jeremiah (17), Ezekiel (20), and Amos (8:5) frequently condemned Israel for profaning the Sabbath through

trade and commerce, indicating it was one of the "least enforced" commandments. (p. 8) Ezekiel specifically highlights the Sabbath as "a sign that Israel has a special relationship with God," which they violated. (p. 8) Isaiah 56 promises rewards for non-Israelites who observe the Sabbath, showing its expanding significance. (p. 8)

6. Sabbath in Second Temple Judaism and the Roman Empire

During the Second Temple period, Sabbath keeping became an even more crucial "identity marker" for Jews, distinguishing them from Gentiles. (p. 8-9) Hellenizing Jews, who sought to assimilate, even attempted to "undo their circumcision" and "profaned the Sabbath." (p. 9)

A major conflict arose during the Antiochian persecution (First Maccabees 1:43) when some pious Jews (Hasidians) refused to fight on the Sabbath and were slaughtered. The Maccabees subsequently adopted a policy of self-defense on the Sabbath, prioritizing "preservation" over strict adherence, a decision that remains debated. (p. 9-10)

The Roman Empire, with its large Jewish population, developed a "fascinated" yet "ambivalent" attitude towards the Sabbath. (p. 10) Some Roman women imitated Jewish Sabbath practices, much to the horror of figures like Cicero. While some Romans considered Jews lazy for observing the Sabbath, others found it intriguing and adopted elements of it. (p. 10-11)

7. Jesus's Approach to the Sabbath

Jesus frequently "clashed with the Pharisees and other religious leaders" over Sabbath observance. (p. 11-12) The Pharisees had developed extensive rules regarding what constituted "work," even prohibiting setting a broken bone. (p. 11-12)

Jesus challenged these burdensome interpretations, emphasizing that "the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath." (p. 12) His "practical approach" aimed to maintain the "benefits of rest, maintain the benefits of worship, but not by a legal adherence to a whole bunch of rules." (p. 12) He demonstrated this by healing on the Sabbath and allowing his disciples to pluck grain, asserting that if keeping the Sabbath "becomes a burden, then you have undermined the very purpose of the Sabbath day." (p. 12)

8. Sabbath in the New Testament and the Shift to Sunday

No New Testament authors explicitly "repudiate the idea of keeping the Sabbath" or say "you need not keep the Sabbath." (p. 13) The book of Acts shows disciples continuing to attend synagogue on the Sabbath. (p. 12) Paul, however, advised non-Jewish Colossians not to let others judge them on how they observed the Sabbath, implying flexibility in observance rather than abandonment. (p. 12) The book of Hebrews spiritualizes the Sabbath, viewing it as a "foreshadowing of the rest that we will have in heaven." (p. 13)

The shift from Saturday to Sunday observance in Christianity was "practical." (p. 13-14) Early Christians gathered on the "first day of the week, Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection." (p. 13) This was partly because Sunday was often a day off in the Roman world for festivals, allowing slaves and common people to gather. As Christianity became more Gentile, it "began to distance itself from the Jews by focusing more on Sunday." (p. 14) Early Church Fathers by 100 AD commonly observed Sunday, and some even repudiated the Jewish Saturday Sabbath. (p. 14) Emperor Constantine formally declared Sunday a day of rest in 313 AD. (p. 14)

9. Contemporary Relevance and Benefits of Sabbath

Dr. Tomasino argues that Christians today *should* observe the Sabbath. While it was a sign of the Sinai covenant, its establishment at creation makes it "universal" and not solely Jewish. (p. 15) The law, like a tutor, teaches principles that remain significant even after its strict adherence may change. (p. 15)

The benefits of the Sabbath are presented as multifaceted:

- **Environmental/Creaturely:** The world, animals, and land need rest, following a "seventh-day cycle" which has proven effective for health and productivity. (p. 15-16) Tyrants attempting to abolish the Sabbath (e.g., French Revolution, Russia) failed because "people need rest. The land needs rest. The animals need rest." (p. 16)
- **Ethical:** The Sabbath promotes compassion by ensuring people and animals are not "worked to the bone." (p. 16) It protects the oppressed from exploitation by providing mandated rest periods. (p. 16-17)

- **Spiritual:** Keeping the Sabbath "set apart for God" provides a dedicated time for "worship, to reflection, to family, and reconnecting in holy ways with our neighbors and with our own loved ones." (p. 17) It allows souls to "catch up with their bodies" in an increasingly "whirling, rushing life." (p. 17-18)

3) Study Guide: The Fourth Commandment: The Sabbath – A Detailed Study Guide

I. Overview of the Fourth Commandment

- **Core Principle:** "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (Exodus 20)
- **Meaning of "Sabbath":** Derived from the Hebrew verb *Shabbat*, meaning "to cease" or "to stop." It signifies ceasing from labor and the end of the week.
- **Dual Significance:** End of the week (seventh day).
- Ceasing from work.
- **Historical Context:** Unique to Israel in the ancient world; no evidence of neighbors observing a weekly seventh-day rest.
- An "identity marker" for Israel, similar to circumcision for the Abrahamic covenant.

II. Origin and Rationale for the Sabbath

- **Biblical Record:** Observed in Israel even before the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 16 – manna story).
- **Rationales in Scripture: Creation (Exodus 20 & 31:17):** God worked six days and rested on the seventh, establishing a universal life rhythm foundational to the universe. This rationale emphasizes that the Sabbath is for humanity's benefit, not because God needs rest.
- **Redemption/Covenant (Deuteronomy 5):** Israel was enslaved in Egypt and brought out by God, thus they are commanded to keep the Sabbath as a reminder of their deliverance and a call to compassion for others.
- **Theological Conundrum:** Does God need to rest?

- Literal interpretation (God resting) was offensive to Jews and Christians.
- Figurative interpretation: God's rest is a lesson for humanity, demonstrating our need for rest and a healthy life rhythm.
- **Universal vs. Specific:** While an identity marker for Israel and part of the Sinai covenant, its foundation in creation suggests a universal principle binding upon all of nature, not just the Jewish people.

III. Observance and Enforcement in the Old Testament

- **Legal Implications:** Not well-defined in the Old Testament until the Pharisees added numerous rules, making it burdensome.
- **Penalty for Breaking:** Very severe, with the community taking responsibility for punishment (e.g., stoning a man gathering sticks in Numbers 15). The severity highlighted the community's endangered status if the Sabbath was ignored.
- **Historical Practice (Outside Pentateuch):** Rarely mentioned in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and 1 Kings, leading to questions about its observance.
- **2 Kings 4:23:** Associates Sabbath with the New Moon, implying a day of religious observance rather than strict rest.
- **2 Kings 11:** Guards worked on the Sabbath at the king's house, suggesting certain duties were not considered violations.
- **Chronicler:** Mentions Sabbath sacrifices, which were always an essential part of observance and not considered a violation.
- **Nehemiah & Jeremiah:** Condemned commerce and carrying burdens on the Sabbath, indicating challenges in enforcement and frequent violations. Penalties for trade bans were not as strict as death for other violations.
- **Amos 8:5:** Implies people wished for the Sabbath to end to resume business.
- **Ezekiel 20:** Israel profaned the Sabbath, violating its role as a sign of their special relationship with God.
- **Isaiah 56:** Promises rewards for foreigners and eunuchs who observe the Sabbath, signifying their inclusion in God's covenant community.

IV. Sabbath in Second Temple Judaism and the Roman Empire

- **Increased Significance:** Became a stronger identity marker for Jews distinguishing themselves from Gentiles, especially during the Antiochian persecution.
- **Conflict and Debate:** Hellenizing Jews profaned the Sabbath (1 Maccabees 1:43).
- **Antiochian Persecution:** Hasidians refused to fight on the Sabbath and were slaughtered. Maccabees decided to fight for preservation, sparking debate about prioritizing life over Sabbath observance.
- **Roman Empire:** Jews were a significant ethnic group.
- Romans showed both fascination and ambivalence:
- Fascination: Some Roman women imitated Sabbath-keeping, viewed as novel or quaint.
- Ambivalence/Criticism: Many Romans considered it an excuse for Jewish laziness.

V. Jesus and the Sabbath

- **Clashes with Pharisees:** Jesus frequently challenged the Pharisaic legalistic interpretations of the Sabbath, which had piled up burdensome rules.
- **What constituted "work":** Pharisees defined activities like healing or plucking grain as work, leading to conflict with Jesus.
- **Jesus's Approach:** Prioritized alleviating human suffering (healing on the Sabbath).
- Emphasized that "the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath."
- Sought to uphold the benefits of rest and worship without burdensome legal adherence.

VI. The Sabbath in the New Testament and Early Christianity

- **Continuing Observance:** Book of Acts depicts disciples going to synagogues on the Sabbath.
- **Paul's Teaching:** Warned Colossians not to let "Judaizers" judge how they kept the Sabbath, suggesting freedom in observance rather than outright abolition. The focus was on personal benefit.
- **Hebrews:** Interprets Sabbath spiritually as a foreshadowing of the eternal rest in heaven.
- **No Repudiation:** No New Testament author explicitly states that Christians should not keep the Sabbath.
- **Shift from Saturday to Sunday ("Lord's Day"):** Early Christians gathered on the "first day of the week" (Acts 20, 1 Corinthians).
- Practical reasons: Sunday was often a day of rest in the Roman world, allowing slaves to attend gatherings.
- Theological reasons: Sunday was the day of Christ's resurrection and the creation of light.
- Identity marker: Distanced Christians from Jewish practices as the church became more Gentile.
- Formalization: Emperor Constantine declared Sunday a day of rest in 313 AD. Later became informally known as the "Christian Sabbath."

VII. Modern Relevance and Benefits of Sabbath

- **Should Christians Observe?:** Some argue it was a Jewish law not binding on Christians, similar to dietary laws.
- The text suggests the law as a "tutor," teaching good principles that remain significant even after "graduation."
- Sabbath, though a Sinai covenant sign, was established at creation and is a universal principle for all humanity.
- Jesus emphasized its benefit for humanity, not just Israel.
- **Benefits of a Day of Rest (from Old and New Testaments):** **Environmental:** World, land, and animals need rest for refreshment. Attempts to remove the

seven-day cycle (e.g., French Revolution, Russia) failed due to natural human and animal needs.

- **Ethical:** Responsibility to ensure others (employees, vulnerable) receive needed rest, protecting them from exploitation. Prevents people from being "worked to the bone."
- **Spiritual:** Keeps a portion of time set apart for God (worship, reflection).
- Opportunity for family and community reconnection.
- Refreshes the spirit for the week ahead, preventing spiritual exhaustion ("let souls catch up with bodies").

Quiz: The Sabbath

1. What is the literal meaning of the Hebrew word *Shabbat*, from which "Sabbath" is derived, and what two aspects does this meaning encompass?
2. Name two prominent athletes mentioned in the text who refused to play on Sunday due to their Sabbath convictions, and briefly explain the consequences they faced.
3. How was the Sabbath unique to Israel in the ancient world, differentiating them from their neighbors regarding daily or weekly rest?
4. The text provides two main rationales for the Sabbath from the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Briefly describe each rationale.
5. Why did ancient Jewish and Christian traditions generally avoid a literal interpretation of God "resting" on the seventh day of creation? What alternative interpretation did they offer?
6. Describe the initial legal status and enforcement of the Sabbath in the Old Testament, particularly before the Pharisees. How severe was the penalty for Sabbath breaking, and why was it considered so serious?
7. During the Second Temple period, how did Sabbath-keeping evolve as an "identity marker" for Jews, especially in the context of the Antiochian persecution?

8. According to the text, what was Jesus's primary approach or philosophy regarding Sabbath observance, particularly in contrast to the Pharisees' views?
9. By the time of the New Testament, what day did early Christians begin to gather for worship and rest, and what were two main reasons (one practical, one theological) for this shift?
10. Beyond being a Jewish identity marker, the text suggests the Sabbath has universal benefits. Name and briefly explain three categories of benefits discussed in the lecture.

Quiz Answer Key

1. The Hebrew word *Shabbat* means "to cease" or "to stop." This encompasses two aspects: the cessation of the week (the end of the week) and ceasing from labor or work.
2. Eric Liddell refused to run his best event, the 100-meter dash, at the 1924 Olympics because the finals were on Sunday; he later won gold in the 400-meter. Michael Jones, a rugby player, refused to play in a 1991 World Cup match on Sunday, leading his team to a third-place finish and him becoming a "pariah" in New Zealand.
3. The Sabbath was unique because there is no evidence of Israel's neighbors observing every seventh day as a day of rest. While some cultures had occasional rest days or specific rites (like circumcision or pork taboos), a regular weekly day of rest was distinct to Israel.
4. Exodus grounds the Sabbath in **creation**, stating that God worked six days and rested on the seventh, establishing a universal principle for humanity. Deuteronomy bases it in **redemption/covenant**, reminding Israel they were slaves in Egypt and God brought them out, thus commanding them to keep the Sabbath as a sign of their freedom and a call to compassion.
5. Ancient Jewish and Christian traditions found the notion of God "needing" to rest offensive, as it implied weakness or finitude. Instead, they interpreted God's rest figuratively, viewing it as a lesson for humanity, demonstrating our inherent need for rest and a healthy life rhythm.

6. Initially, the legal implications of the Sabbath were not well-defined in the Old Testament, becoming clearer and more burdensome with Pharisaic rules. The penalty for breaking it, like gathering sticks, was death by stoning. This severe punishment was understood as protecting the community, as one person's violation could endanger communal observance and lead to widespread non-compliance.
7. In the Second Temple period, Sabbath-keeping became a highly significant identity marker for Jews, distinguishing them from surrounding Gentile cultures, especially as some "Hellenizing Jews" tried to abandon Jewish practices. During the Antiochian persecution, the refusal of Hasidians to fight on the Sabbath led to their slaughter, making the Maccabees' decision to fight for preservation a controversial but crucial re-evaluation of its role as an identity marker.
8. Jesus's primary approach to the Sabbath was practical and focused on its *benefit* for humanity, rather than strict legal adherence to burdensome rules. He taught that "the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath," emphasizing its purpose for rest, worship, and alleviating suffering.
9. Early Christians began to gather on the "first day of the week," Sunday. One practical reason was that Sunday was often a day off in the Roman world, making it feasible for many Christians (including slaves) to meet. A theological reason was that Sunday marked the day of Christ's resurrection and the creation of light, infusing it with new Christian significance.
10. The three categories of benefits are:
 - **Environmental:** The world, land, and animals need rest to refresh themselves, as evidenced by historical failures of societies that tried to abandon the seven-day cycle (e.g., horses dying from exhaustion in the French Revolution).
 - **Ethical:** Sabbath promotes responsibility to ensure others (employees, the oppressed) receive necessary rest, preventing exploitation by those who would "work people to the bone."

- **Spiritual:** Keeping the Sabbath holy sets aside time for worship, reflection, family, and reconnecting with God and loved ones, allowing one's "soul to catch up with their body" and providing spiritual refreshment for the week.

Essay Format Questions

1. Compare and contrast the rationales for the Sabbath provided in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. How do these seemingly different foundations contribute to a holistic understanding of the Sabbath's purpose, both for ancient Israel and potentially for humanity today?
2. Discuss the evolution of Sabbath observance and its significance as an "identity marker" for the Jewish people throughout the Old Testament and into the Second Temple period. How did external pressures and internal debates shape its practice and interpretation?
3. Analyze Jesus's approach to Sabbath observance as depicted in the Gospels. What were the main points of contention between Jesus and the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath, and how did Jesus's teachings redefine its purpose and application?
4. Trace the historical shift from Sabbath observance on Saturday to the "Lord's Day" on Sunday in early Christianity. What practical and theological factors contributed to this change, and how did it affect Christianity's relationship with Judaism and the broader Roman world?
5. Evaluate the contemporary relevance of the Sabbath's principles for individuals and society today. Drawing on the various benefits discussed (environmental, ethical, spiritual), argue for or against the idea that the Sabbath, in its broader sense, remains a crucial practice in the modern world.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Sabbath:** Derived from the Hebrew verb *Shabbat*, meaning "to cease" or "to stop." It refers to the seventh day of the week, observed as a day of rest, cessation from labor, and holiness.
- **Shabbat:** The Hebrew verb meaning "to cease" or "to stop," the root of the word "Sabbath."

- **Yahweh:** The sacred name of God in the Old Testament, often translated as "the Lord."
- **Eric Liddell:** A Scottish sprinter and devout Christian who refused to race on Sunday during the 1924 Olympic Games, famously depicted in the movie *Chariots of Fire*.
- **Eli Herring:** A professional American football player who refused to enter the NFL draft in 1995 due to games being played on Sundays, honoring his Sabbath convictions.
- **Michael Jones:** A star rugby player from New Zealand who refused to play in a 1991 World Cup match scheduled on a Sunday, impacting his team and national perception.
- **Identity Marker:** A practice or symbol that distinguishes a particular group or people, defining their unique character and setting them apart from others. For Israel, the Sabbath served this purpose.
- **Pharisees:** A prominent Jewish sect in Second Temple Judaism known for their strict adherence to the Law, including numerous rules and interpretations regarding Sabbath observance.
- **Sheputu/Sebutu:** A Babylonian term for a monthly festival, which some early 20th-century scholars (like Meinhold) speculated might have been a precursor or influence on the Israelite idea of the Sabbath.
- **New Moon:** A monthly festival or special day often mentioned in connection with the Sabbath in Old Testament passages, leading to theories about their historical relationship.
- **Manna:** The miraculous food provided by God to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 16), which they were instructed not to gather on the Sabbath, indicating pre-Sinai Sabbath observance.
- **Sinai Covenant:** The covenant established between God and Israel at Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments, including the Sabbath commandment, were given.

- **Deuteronomy 5:** The chapter in Deuteronomy that reiterates the Ten Commandments, providing a rationale for the Sabbath rooted in Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt.
- **Numbers 15:** The biblical account where a man is stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath, illustrating the severity of the punishment for Sabbath desecration.
- **Blue City:** A term referring to a town or locality where businesses are closed on Sundays due to religious or traditional observances of the Sabbath.
- **Pentateuch:** The first five books of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), also known as the Torah or the Law.
- **Chronicler:** The presumed author or school responsible for the books of 1 & 2 Chronicles, often noted for their emphasis on Temple worship, including Sabbath sacrifices.
- **Dead Sea Scrolls / Qumran Community:** A collection of ancient Jewish manuscripts discovered near the Dead Sea, including texts like the "Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifices," which reflect Jewish understanding and practice of the Sabbath around the time of Jesus.
- **Pre-exilic Prophets:** Prophets whose ministries occurred before the Babylonian exile (e.g., Amos, Jeremiah).
- **Post-exilic Prophets:** Prophets whose ministries occurred after the Babylonian exile (e.g., Ezekiel, Isaiah 56).
- **Second Temple Judaism:** The period of Jewish history from the rebuilding of the Second Temple (c. 516 BCE) to its destruction by the Romans (70 CE), during which Sabbath keeping became a crucial identity marker.
- **Hellenizing Jews:** Jews who adopted Greek (Hellenistic) culture, often to the extent of abandoning traditional Jewish practices like circumcision and Sabbath observance.
- **Antiochian Persecution:** A period of severe persecution of Jews by the Seleucid Greek ruler Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the 2nd century BCE, during which the observance of Jewish laws, including the Sabbath, became a point of conflict.

- **Hasidians:** A group of pious Jews during the Maccabean Revolt who strictly adhered to the Law, including refusing to fight on the Sabbath.
- **Maccabees:** A family of Jewish priests who led a revolt against the Seleucid Empire during the Antiochian persecution, notably deciding to fight on the Sabbath for self-preservation.
- **Cicero:** A famous Roman orator who, in his speeches, expressed disdain for Jews but also revealed that some Roman women were imitating Jewish Sabbath practices.
- **Mishnah and Talmud:** Collections of Jewish rabbinic laws, traditions, and commentaries that further elaborated on the interpretation and application of Old Testament laws, including those pertaining to the Sabbath.
- **Judaizers:** A group within early Christianity (mentioned in Paul's letters, e.g., to the Colossians) who insisted that Gentile Christians must observe Jewish laws, including circumcision and Sabbath rules, to be true followers of Christ.
- **Alexandrian Exegesis:** A method of biblical interpretation, popular in Alexandria, Egypt, that sought spiritual or allegorical meanings in scripture, often viewing Old Testament practices as foreshadowing New Testament realities.
- **Lord's Day:** The term used by early Christians for the first day of the week (Sunday), designated as a special day for worship and rest, commemorating Christ's resurrection.
- **Constantine:** Roman Emperor who, in 313 AD, declared Sunday a day of rest, formalizing its observance within the Roman Empire.
- **Tutor (Paul's analogy):** Paul's metaphor (e.g., in Galatians) suggesting that the Old Testament Law served as a guide or teacher until the coming of Christ, imparting valuable principles that remain relevant even after one is no longer "under" the law.
- **Lettie Cowman:** A missionary and author who shared a story about African tribesmen who stopped marching to "let their souls catch up with their bodies," used to illustrate the importance of rest and Sabbath.

FAQs:

What is the core meaning of the Sabbath, and how did it originate in ancient Israel?

The word "Sabbath" originates from the Hebrew verb "Shabbat," meaning "to cease" or "to stop." It signifies both the cessation of the week and a cessation from work.

For ancient Israel, the Sabbath was a unique identity marker, signifying their covenant relationship with God and distinguishing them from neighboring peoples.

While there was some speculative theory about its origin in a monthly Babylonian festival called "Sheputu" (Sebutu) due to its frequent mention alongside the New Moon, the biblical record indicates that the Sabbath was observed in Israel even before the Ten Commandments were given at Sinai, as seen in the story of the manna in Exodus 16. The foundation of the Sabbath, according to Exodus 20 and 31:17, is rooted in God's creation, where God rested on the seventh day.

Deuteronomy 5 offers a supplementary rationale, connecting the Sabbath to Israel's liberation from slavery in Egypt, emphasizing compassion and the need for rest after enduring forced labor.

How was the observance of the Sabbath understood and practiced differently throughout the Old Testament period?

The legal implications of Sabbath observance were not clearly defined in the Old Testament until the Pharisees later introduced numerous rules. While the penalty for breaking the Sabbath, such as gathering sticks, was theoretically death (Numbers 15), its enforcement varied. Outside the Pentateuch, the Sabbath is rarely mentioned in early historical books like Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, raising questions about its consistent observance. In 2 Kings, the Sabbath is often associated with the New Moon, suggesting it was seen more as a day of religious observance or festival than strictly a day of rest, especially since guards were permitted to work at the king's house on the Sabbath. The Chronicler frequently mentions Sabbath sacrifices, which were not considered violations. Later, during the time of Nehemiah and the prophets like Jeremiah and Amos, there were condemnations of Israel for engaging in trade and business on the Sabbath, indicating that commerce bans were enforced, though not always with the severe penalty of execution.

How did Second Temple Judaism emphasize Sabbath keeping, and what conflicts arose from it?

During Second Temple Judaism, Sabbath keeping became an even more significant identity marker for Jews, particularly as they interacted more with Gentiles and sought to distinguish themselves. This led to a polarization within Judaism, where some factions, like the Hellenizing Jews mentioned in First Maccabees, attempted to abandon such practices to blend in, even trying to undo their circumcision. The Antiochian persecution brought major conflicts, as the Greeks did not respect the Sabbath. In a famous incident, a group of Hasidians (pious Jews) refused to defend themselves when attacked on the Sabbath and were slaughtered. The Maccabees, however, adopted a policy of fighting on the Sabbath for self-preservation, which was controversial but argued as necessary for the survival of the Jewish people.

What was the Roman perception of the Jewish Sabbath, and how did it influence their society?

The Romans had a complex and often ambivalent attitude towards the Jewish Sabbath. While some, like the orator Cicero, expressed disdain and viewed it as an excuse for laziness, others found it intriguing. The practice of Sabbath keeping was surprisingly imitated by some Roman women, particularly within upper society, as a novel and exotic custom from the East. This suggests that despite being seen by some as a sign of Jewish idleness, the Sabbath also held a certain fascination and began to gain recognition and partial adoption beyond the Jewish community in the Roman Empire.

How did Jesus approach the Sabbath, and what was his primary teaching on its purpose?

Jesus frequently clashed with the Pharisees and other religious leaders regarding Sabbath observance, primarily because their numerous rules had made it a burdensome issue rather than a benefit. The Gospels depict instances where Jesus healed people on the Sabbath and allowed his disciples to pluck grain, actions that the Pharisees considered violations of their strict interpretations of "work." Jesus's core teaching was that "the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath." He emphasized a practical approach: if keeping the Sabbath became a burden, it undermined its very purpose. For Jesus, the Sabbath

was meant to provide benefits like rest and worship, not to be an adherence to a legalistic set of rules.

How did the early Christian church transition from observing the Sabbath on Saturday to Sunday?

No New Testament author explicitly repudiated the idea of keeping the Sabbath, and early disciples continued to attend synagogues on the Sabbath. However, the early Christians began gathering for worship on the "first day of the week," Sunday, which was the day of Christ's resurrection. This shift was largely practical; in the Roman world, Sunday was often a day of rest due to sun festivals, making it a convenient day for Christians, many of whom were slaves, to meet since they often had to work on Saturdays. As the church became increasingly Gentile, it distanced itself from Jewish practices by focusing on Sunday. By 100 AD, Sunday observance as a day of worship and rest was common, and later, Emperor Constantine formalized Sunday as a day of rest in 313 AD. This transition reflected Jesus's practical approach to the Sabbath, adapting its spirit of rest and worship to a new cultural context.

What is the enduring relevance of the Sabbath for Christians today, and what are its key benefits?

While the Sabbath was a sign of the Sinai covenant, its foundation in creation (Exodus) suggests a universal principle, not just a Jewish one. Jesus emphasized that the Sabbath was for "humanity," implying its benefit extends to everyone. The principles of the Sabbath continue to apply, teaching important lessons even if Christians are not bound by every Old Testament law. Key benefits of observing a day of rest include:

- **Environmental Benefit:** The world, land, and animals need rest, promoting ecological balance.
- **Ethical Rationale:** It's a responsibility to ensure others (employees, the oppressed) receive adequate rest, protecting them from exploitation.
- **Spiritual Side:** Setting apart time for God through worship, reflection, family, and community fosters spiritual refreshment and helps align one's soul with their body, especially in today's fast-paced world.

What happens when the principle of Sabbath rest is ignored or undermined?

Historically, attempts by tyrants, such as during the French Revolution or in Russia, to abolish the seven-day rest cycle have failed because people, animals, and even the land itself inherently need rest. When France tried a 10-day work week, horses died from exhaustion, demonstrating the built-in need for this cycle. In societies where the "work is good, rest is not so good" mentality prevails, it leads to drastic consequences, including people dying from exhaustion on the job. The ethical implication is that without a protected day of rest, greedy individuals can exploit workers, and people desperate enough may work themselves to the point of severe harm. Ignoring the Sabbath principle can lead to physical and spiritual burnout, cutting individuals off from vital opportunities for refreshment, spiritual connection, and family time.