

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

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God gave the Sabbath law to man on mount Sinai as the fourth commandment of the law of Moses (Neh 9:14-15). In Exodus 20:8-11, the law stated: “*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*” What does the Bible teach concerning the real purpose of this holy day?

The Sabbath defined

The Hebrew word *shabbath* literally means “intermission.” The true purpose of the Sabbath was for the people to have an “intermission” from doing *their* work and spend the day strictly for doing God’s pleasure. The day was “hallowed” (set apart) for God, for doing His pleasure. The law said the Sabbath belonged to God in contrast to the other six days which were spent on doing “all *thy* (man’s) work.” The Sabbath was not designed as a day to merely sleep or lie around and do nothing. Isaiah 58:13-14 makes it clear that the Sabbath was not an intermission from *all* work, but from *man’s* work. God told the people to turn away their foot from “*doing thy pleasure on my holy day.*” The purpose of the day was to “delight thyself in the Lord” to “*honor Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.*”

Jewish misunderstandings

The Pharisees completely misunderstood this spiritual purpose of the Sabbath. They condemned anyone who did *anything* on that day. For example, they condemned Jesus when his disciples plucked corn on the sabbath day and ate it (Matt 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). They also condemned Jesus and plotted to kill him for healing the man with a withered hand on the sabbath day (Matt 12:9-14;

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

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Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11). They condemned the lame man whom Jesus healed for carrying his bed on the sabbath (John 5:1-10), and then persecuted and sought to kill Jesus for healing him on that day (John 5:11-18; 7:19-24). They condemned Jesus for healing on the sabbath a woman who had been bowed in her back for 18 years (Luke 13:10-17). Jesus silenced them before they even had a chance to oppose him for healing a man with dropsy in the sabbath (Luke 14:1-6). But again they accused him of being a sinner when he healed a man who had been blind from birth on the sabbath day and even cast out the man when he defended Jesus (John 9:1-34). But Jesus exposed the Pharisees' misunderstanding, declaring that it was "lawful to do well on the sabbath days" (Matt 12:12). The ones whom God condemned for violating the Sabbath were guilty of doing their own works (see Num 15:32-36; Neh 13:15-22; Amos 8:4-7). By contrast, the Pharisees condemned Jesus for doing well and serving God on the Sabbath, something which God never condemned because that was the very purpose of the day to begin with.

Not for Christians to follow

A final point to consider concerning the Sabbath is that Christians are not under that law today. The Sabbath law was part of the law of Moses (Neh 9:13-14), and it is no longer in force today. Although the Lord does not change (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8), He has changed His law (Heb 7:12). The "ordinances" of the Old Testament were taken out of the way, including the Sabbath *by name* (Col 2:14-17). To follow the Sabbath today will cause us to fall from grace and be severed from Christ (Gal 5:1-4). Sunday is the day Christ was resurrected (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20), and the day we are to assemble (Lev 23:15-16; Acts 2:1-47; 1 Cor 16:1-2) and take the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7), and it must not be forsaken (Heb 10:25-27).