

## God's Law and the Gospel

Some argue that the Ten Commandments were abolished at the cross, but Scripture clearly shows they remain binding for Christians under the New Covenant. Jesus Himself said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law... but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17), and warned that "whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments... shall be called least in the kingdom" (v. 19). Paul echoed this, affirming that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12). The New Covenant, far from discarding the law, writes it on the heart (Hebrews 8:10). James calls it "the law of liberty" and tells believers to act as those who will be judged by it (James 2:10–12). The Ten Commandments are not a means of salvation, but they are a mirror of God's character and a guide for holy living. The gospel brings its true followers into harmony with God's character and His law.

## Early Christians & the Seventh-day Sabbath

The New Testament provides strong evidence that early Christians, including the apostles, continued to observe the seventh-day Sabbath—Saturday, not Sunday—as a day of worship and rest. Luke 23:56 records that after Jesus' death, the women "rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment," clearly showing that Sabbath observance remained intact even after the crucifixion. Acts 13:14–44 reveals that Paul preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and both Jews and Gentiles returned the next Sabbath to hear more (v. 42–44). In Acts 16:13, Paul met for worship and prayer on the Sabbath by a riverside. These were not Jewish-only meetings; Gentile converts were present, indicating that the Sabbath was observed by the broader Christian community.

Some argue that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday in honor of the resurrection, but no New Testament verse ever states such a change. Acts 20:7 is often cited, but it describes a special gathering "on the first day of the week" (Saturday night by Jewish reckoning), not a new Sabbath command. Likewise, 1 Corinthians 16:2 refers to setting aside offerings at home, not public worship.

Nowhere does Scripture cancel the fourth commandment. Instead, it portrays faithful Sabbath-keeping among early believers, consistent with Jesus' example and teachings (Luke 4:16; Matthew 24:20). Does it not make sense that Christians ought to still keep the seventh day of the week today?

# ANCIENT WORLDS *of the* BIBLE

Study Guide 8

by Pastor Daniel McFeeters

## Shabbat in Jerusalem

As the sun sets over Jerusalem, a hush falls across the golden city. The marketplace quiets, shutters close, and even the buzz of traffic fades. Soon, there are no cars at all—the Orthodox Jews, honoring halakha, refrain from driving, cooking, or kindling fire. In their stead, footsteps echo on stone, families walk together to synagogue, and a stillness envelops the city like a divine breath. At the Western Wall, worshippers sway in rhythm with ancient prayers, their voices rising and falling like waves. The long blast of the shofar announces the arrival of Shabbat—"*Come, let us go up to the house of the Lord.*"

There is something sacred about this moment, something profoundly peaceful. It's as if time itself pauses. And yet, the rules that bind this peace are many. The restrictions are exacting: no buttons pressed, no pens used, no burdens borne. One can feel the weight of obedience—an earnest attempt to please God through careful abstention.

But then we remember Jesus. He too welcomed the Sabbath—not as a burden, but as a blessing. He healed on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4–5), lifted up the broken, set captives free. He called Himself "*Lord of the Sabbath*" (Matthew 12:8). After his crucifixion, He rested in the tomb on that day, sealing His redemptive work.

The Sabbath, in Christ, is not merely ceasing from toil—it is entering into His rest (Hebrews 4:9–10). It is not about what we avoid, but Who we embrace. True Sabbath is restoration, redemption, and rest in Him (Isaiah 58).

And so we ask—shouldn't Christians long for this holy stillness too? Shouldn't we hunger for the delight Isaiah spoke of? "*If you turn your foot from the Sabbath... then you shall delight yourself in the Lord*" (Isaiah 58:13–14). Perhaps the Shabbat holds a deeper promise than we've dared to explore...

## Questions for Reflection & Discussion

### The Heart of the Sabbath

David Henkin, in his book *The Week*, refers to the seven-day week as “a recalcitrant calendar unit”—a stubborn survivor amid changing human systems of timekeeping. Unlike the solar year or lunar month, the week has no astronomical anchor. Its enduring presence across civilizations suggests a deeper root—perhaps best explained by the Bible’s account of the Sabbath’s origin.

*“And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” (Genesis 2:2-3)*

God completed His creation in six days and “rested on the seventh day,” blessing and sanctifying it. This is no mere rest-stop in time—it is a divine institution, a rhythm of sacred rest built into creation itself.

The Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:8–11) enshrines this pattern in the heart of God’s Law, calling God’s people to “remember the Sabbath day” and imitate their Creator in rest. Later, Exodus 31:13 underscores its covenantal role: “*My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you.*” The Sabbath, then, is not just rest—it is a sign of relationship, of holiness, of divine identity. Isaiah 58:13–14 invites God’s people to call the Sabbath a delight and a joy, not a burden.

Jesus affirmed this divine intent. In Luke 4:16, we find Him faithfully keeping the Sabbath. When challenged in Matthew 12:8–12, He declares Himself “*Lord of the Sabbath*” and shows that Sabbath-keeping must be aligned with mercy and healing, not legalism. His words in Luke 6:5 and healings on the Sabbath reveal not its abolition but its restoration to its true purpose—blessing humanity. In Matthew 24:20, His prophecy about future tribulation assumes that Sabbath observance would still matter decades after the cross.

Some claim the Sabbath law was abolished with Christ, yet Matthew 5:17–18 is unequivocal: Jesus did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it—and not a “*jot or tittle*” will pass until all is accomplished. The Ten Commandments remain the moral law and standard of judgment for Christians. Now under the New Covenant, these commandments are written in the heart (Hebrews 8:10).

The Sabbath is not a “recalcitrant” relic—it’s a weekly revelation of God’s love. A recurring sign of God’s creation, redemption, and continued covenant love. The ancient prophecy of Isaiah envisions the future redemption of God’s people in a renewed earth, where all creation gathers in worship “from one Sabbath to another,” celebrating the eternal rhythm of rest and communion with the Creator.

**SCRIPTURE:** *“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, ... Then you shall delight yourself in the LORD” (Isaiah 58:13-14)*

*“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” (Hebrews 4:9)*

**REFLECTION:** What does it mean to “delight in the Sabbath”? Is Sabbath-keeping portrayed in Scripture more as a duty, a delight, or both?

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How does Jesus’ example reshape our understanding of what the Sabbath is really for?

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**EXPERIENCE:** Have you ever experienced a Sabbath that felt truly restful and spiritually renewing? What made it special?

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What challenges or obstacles prevent people today from embracing the Sabbath as a gift?

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**QUESTION:** If God’s law has not been abolished, and the Sabbath remains in effect under the New Covenant, what does that mean for modern Christians? Does it matter which day of the week we keep?

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How can we guard against both legalism and neglect in our Sabbath observance?

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**RESPONSE:** Will you commit to observing the seventh-day Sabbath on Saturday, as the Bible commands?

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