

Reasons for the Sabbath

God created everything in six days, and He rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2). This initiated a set time each week called the Sabbath, or *Shabbat* in Hebrew, which means “to rest or lay aside labor.” There are Hebrew words translated *rest* in the English translation of the Torah. They include: *shabath*, which alludes to letting go (Exod. 23:11); *shamat*, alluding to letting alone; and *nuwach*, to settle down (Isa. 23:12). They all carry the same connotation. A *shabbat* was a personal letting go and resting. God commanded that the land and animals rest and be “let alone” in order to fulfill the commandment.

The theme of resting from labor was so important that God hallowed the seventh day each week as a Sabbath of rest. Every seventh year was a Sabbatical rest year (called *Shemittah* in Hebrew). Every seven cycles of seven years—forty-nine years—was designated a Jubilee cycle of complete rest. During these three Sabbatical cycles, people, animals, and the land enjoyed exemption from work (Exod. 23:10–12; Lev. 25:4–55). With each of the seven feasts, God commanded the people to refrain from work. The Sabbath was created for man’s enjoyment: And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

The physical body needs

rest, and the heart rate slows down every seventh day (this may be why people tend to take a *nap* on the Sabbath). During every seventh year, a Sabbatical year, when the land and animals were to rest, no plowing, planting, reaping, or harvesting took place. The practical reason was that this method allowed the fruit to drop to the ground and rot back into the soil, providing minerals back to the topsoil every seven years.

Israel was taken into Babylon captivity for seventy years because they broke the law of the Jubilee cycle (Lev. 25–26), which required the land to rest. God punished the Jews, sending them into Babylon for seventy years so the land could enjoy her Sabbaths (2 Chron. 36:20–21).

The Jewish Sabbath begins at 6:00 p.m. on Friday evening and concludes at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday evening, a period of twenty-four hours. For devout Jews, this is a complete time of rest from work and includes three meals and family time. A normal Jewish Sabbath proceeds as follows:

1. The woman lights two candles to welcome the Sabbath, done, in some communities, together as a family.
2. A blessing is recited over the candles.
3. The family arrives and sits down for the meal, perhaps singing a song, "Peace to You."
4. The father then lays hands on his children and blesses them or embraces them.

5. The husband honors his wife by reading to her of the virtuous woman from Proverbs 31.
6. The blessing over the wine or grape juice, called the *Shabbat Kiddush*, is said (Sabbath sanctification).
7. There is a blessing said over the bread.
8. Once the sun has set, from 6:00 p.m. Friday to 6:00 p.m. Saturday, it is common to greet one another with *Shabbat Shalom*, or Sabbath peace.

When I was a child, there were no stores, gas stations, or restaurants open on Sunday. This gave owners, staff, and workers time to worship in a local church of their choice and spend quality time with family. During the week, our family often ate hamburgers, spaghetti, and sandwiches, but we knew that Sunday was coming, and Mom would cook a *real* Sunday dinner—the best roast beef in the neighborhood always accompanied by mashed potatoes. Throughout the entire day, people spoke about the Lord and the Bible, edifying one another in the faith. Later, at six o'clock in the evening, we went back to church for the evening service.

With today's fast-food restaurants and busy schedules, home cooking is becoming a lost art. Now on the average Sabbath, Mom and Dad exit the front door, the kids head out the back door, and the neighbors pop in to say hello through the side door. In America, the Sabbath day has become just another day of the week to

work, clean house,
shop, and perform routine activities. Perhaps this is why
Americans remain
tired, guzzling energy drinks and experiences stress-related
illnesses—we are
breaking God's commandment to rest on the seventh day. We are
working seven
days a week. The feasts provided special seasons to cease from
work, but the
Sabbath provides one day a week to just *chill out* and enjoy a
word from
the Lord in His house.