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# **Sabbath Days and High Sabbaths**

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

# Sabbath Days and High Sabbaths.

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## Topics.

- The Old Testament Sabbath Day.
- The Sabbath Day and servile work.
- Why Israel was to keep the Sabbath Day.
- High Sabbath days.

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## THE OLD TESTAMENT SABBATH DAY

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- **Leviticus: 23:3-8:** Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwelling places. <sup>4</sup> “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. <sup>5</sup> In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover. <sup>6</sup> And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. <sup>7</sup> On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. <sup>8</sup> But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

The Old Testament Sabbath Day was based on God’s creative week in Genesis Chapter One. Six days God created and on the seventh He rested. This is the basis for the understanding of the days of the week. God created on day one through to, day six and rested on day seven, and therefore the Sabbath was held on the seventh day of the week, which was also the last day of the week.

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- **Exodus 20:11:** For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- **Exodus 31:15:** Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.
- **Exodus 31:17:** It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

God commanded that the seventh day be observed as the Sabbath. Saturday is the seventh day of the week, while Sunday is the first day of the week.

The yearly feasts stood out above all other feasts, because of the people’s great attendance at the sanctuary, but they were not to be regarded as being more holy than the seventh day weekly Sabbath. The people must withdraw from all business of the world on the weekly Sabbath Day, for it is a Sabbath of rest from all forms of ordinary work to rest in God and worship Him. This Sabbath was to be religiously observed in every house, by every family throughout the land of Israel.

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## THE SABBATH DAY AND SERVILE WORK

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The Sabbath Day was:

- A holy convocation.

- A day of solemn rest.
- No ordinary work (no servile work in KJV) was to be done.

**Servile (ordinary work in modern Bibles):** comes from the Hebrew word (*`abodah from `abad*) and embraces work and labour of any kind and in any sense, and by implication, to serve, to enslave and to be kept in bondage. The English Dictionary defines servile work as work that is willing done to please others, especially characteristic of slaves, servants and those in menial positions or forced labour. When the Bible forbids servile work, it means that slaves and servants are not to be forced to do any work for no one is to work on a Sabbath Day.

**Work:** comes from the Hebrew word (*m<sup>e</sup>la'kah*) meaning deputyship (i.e., ministry), but generally refers to employment, labor, and work, (never servile), such as business, farming cattle and sheep etc., industrious work, building things and such like labor and work.

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## WHY ISRAEL WAS TO KEEP THE SABBATH DAY

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One of the reasons the punishment for breaking the Sabbath Day was so severe under Jewish law was, that it was to be a sign between Israel and God, that it was their God who sanctified them, and not pagan and foreign gods that the surrounding nations believed in.

- **Exodus 31:13:** You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.

Keeping the LORD'S Sabbath not only distinguished Israel from the idolatrous nations who worshipped the sun, moon, and stars etc., but also separated them from the Gentile nations.

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### The Sabbath Day was a sign between God and Israel.

- **Exodus 31:15-17:** Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall *be put to death*. <sup>16</sup>Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. <sup>17</sup>It is a *sign forever between me and the people of Israel* that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

Some in the Christian faith use these verses (and others like them) to support their belief all Christians should be worshipping on Saturday, but the Sabbath Day was given to the nation Israel, not the Gentiles. When the Lord Jesus Christ came, he destroyed the Old Testament covenant and introduced an entirely new covenant of salvation by grace, and not by the works of the law or by keeping holy days. No-where in the New Testament does Jesus or the apostles command Christians to keep the Sabbath Day, but they do encourage the keeping of the other nine commandments, and fellowshiping together with other brothers and sisters in Christ, but this can be done on any day and in any place. Though most Christians gather on a Sunday it is not a command to do so, which is a good thing for it means, they are gathering to worship God, from their own free will, and not because they are commanded to do so.

### Concerning holy days Paul says:

- **Romans 14:4-6:** Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>The one who observes the day, observes it in honour of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honour of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honour of the Lord, and gives thanks to God.

Now go to verse ten:

- Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10).

The principal Jesus and the apostles teach is to be convinced in your own mind. This means that a brother or sister who is convicted in their own mind to keep the Saturday as the Sabbath, do right before God, but should not judge others who are equally convicted in their own mind that it is right to keep Sunday as the day they set aside for the LORD. Likewise, the brother and sister who are convicted in their own mind to keep Sunday as their Sabbath, do right before God, but should not judge others who are equally convicted in their own mind, that it is right to keep Saturday as the day they set aside for the LORD.

This is because both groups are acting in faith and being true to their own conscience before God. God accepts both groups, providing they are not keeping the day because they believe the law commands them to, and are therefore simply keeping it as a legal requirement rather than as an act of faith, and from a willing heart to gather-together with others before God.

**NOTE:** keeping Saturday or Sunday as a Sabbath Day has nothing to do with Salvation. It is simply a matter of conscience and convenience to the culture and nation one lives in, and in many cases simply tradition. If all Christians around the world decided to gather-together to worship on Wednesday, it would most likely surprise many to find that God would still be in the service.

### **Blessed is the man who keeps the Sabbath.**

- **Isaiah 56:2:** Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

For those who support the law of the Sabbath and make it compulsory for their followers to strictly keep the Saturday Sabbath (the true Sabbath Day), or teach their followers that if they do not strictly adhere to Sunday as their Sabbath, they are breaking God’s Law and stretching what Isaiah is saying far beyond its boundaries and limitations. The following two things should be kept in mind when reading these words of Isaiah:

- 1 At this time Israel was living under the Old Testament Covenant of Law and as such was bound by law to keep the Sabbath.
- 2 The Sabbath was given to the Old Testament nation of Israel and not New Testament Christians.
  - **Exodus 31:12-13:** The LORD said to Moses, "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, 'Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths.
  - **Exodus 31:16:** The people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.

The Lord Jesus Christ has established a New Covenant whereby a sinner is saved by grace and not the works of the Law or self-effort. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus, the apostles or Paul command Christians to keep the Sabbath Day, but they do encourage the keeping of the other

nine commandments because the Spirit underlying these commandments is love. They are all about loving God and protecting the innocent from harm. Jesus summed all the commandments concerning our behavior toward others in the words, "Love your neighbor as yourselves," (Matt. 22:39), since no one deliberately harms themselves, this command means, do good and not harm to others, and treat people with decency and honest justice.

**NOTE:** keeping Saturday or Sunday as a Sabbath Day, today has nothing to do with salvation. It is simply a matter of conscience and convenience to the culture and nation one lives in, and in many cases simply tradition. If all Christians around the world decided to gather to worship on Wednesday, to many people's surprise God would still be in the service.

**The death penalty:** those who do believe that Christians today are breaking God's law if they do not keep the Sabbath, and from this mindset impose it upon their followers should also be teaching them the punishment for not keeping the Sabbath Day, and for working on the Sabbath Day, which the following verses show was death.

- **Exodus 31:14:** You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.
- **Exodus 31:15:** Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death.
- **Exodus 35:2:** On the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death.

Surly the legalists today who believe that they are upholding God's law by strictly adhering to the Sabbath Day should also be keeping the whole law concerning the Sabbath Day. Imagine if Old Testament Israel stood before Moses and said, "We accept part of the law concerning the Sabbath Day, but we will not accept the punishments attached to it. I suspect Moses would say, "You must accept the whole law and not just the parts that suit you." Those who do believe they have to keep the Sabbath Day to be saved are by their actions not only denying what the Lord achieved for them on the bloodstained cross of Calvary, but are also making his death count for nothing.

**The Sabbath Day was to be:**

- A day of joy and rest.
- A day of fellowship with friends and family.
- A day of worship and respect to the LORD.
- A day of instruction, so future generations would know the ways of the LORD.
- A day of i witness to the surrounding nations of Israel's faith and their God.
- A day of bringing sacrificial food offerings to the priesthood, so they would have food for their families and their children for serving the LORD full time.

**NOTE:** the offering to the priesthood was and offering to support their ministry and their families, it was not an offering to give those serving God an excessive lifestyle of excessive material possessions, and an indulgent luxurious lifestyle

**The law and love:** the Spirit behind the Ten Commandments is love, they are all about loving God, and loving our neighbor, for each commandment concerning mankind protects another human from hurt and harm:

- Emotionally.
- Financially.
- Sexually.
- Verbally.
- Physically.

Showing that love is the spirit behind the Ten Commandments.

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## HIGH SABBATH DAYS

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The high Sabbath Days in the Bible did not necessarily fall on the seventh day of the Jewish week (as regular Sabbaths did), but corresponded to special days of observance (i.e., appointed feasts or holy convocations). As with regular Sabbaths, the high Sabbaths were to be days of rest from work on which the people were required to assemble in worship. Following are the two most common thoughts concerning High Sabbath Days amongst commentators.

**Firstly:** The High Sabbaths apply only to the Feast Sabbaths that fall upon a weekly Sabbath Day (i.e., double Sabbaths).

**Secondly:** The Sabbath High days do not necessarily occur on the seven-day weekly Sabbath, but on the following Feast days:

1. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (the day immediately following Passover Day (Pesach) (Lev. 23:4-8) occurs in spring.
2. The seventh day (the last day) of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Leviticus 23:4-8).
3. The day of Pentecost (Shavuot) (Lev. 23:15-21) occurs in summer.
4. The Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah). (Lev. 23:23-25).
5. The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). (Lev. 23:26-32).
6. The first day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth). (Lev. 23:33-36).
7. The eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth). (Lev. 23:33-36).

This gives a total of seven Sabbath High Days in the Old Testament, any High Sabbath Days in the New Testament are not new High Sabbath Days, but High Days that had been previously established in the Old Testament.

**Some add to this list the following two days:** Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, two High Holy Days in the Jewish religion, which has largely overshadowed the feast of trumpets by the new Jewish practices of Rosh Hashanah. The day of Rosh Hashanah (meaning head of the year) is the first day of the Jewish New Year, which is one of Judaism's holiest days. The festival begins on the first day of Tishrei, of the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar, which falls during September or October. It commemorates the creation of the world, and marks the beginning of the Days of Awe, a 10-day period of introspection and repentance which concludes in the Yom Kippur holiday, also known as the Day of Atonement. According to Jewish tradition, God judges all creatures during the ten days of Awe deciding whether they will live or die in the coming year.

The Hebrew calendar begins with the month of Nisan, but Rosh Hashanah occurs at the start of Tishrei (the seventh month), when God is said to have created the world. For this reason, Rosh Hashanah cannot be taken to be the beginning of the New Year, but rather as the birthday of the creation of the world. Work is prohibited on the two High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), on these two days rabbis and their congregations read distinct liturgical texts, from a special prayer book known as the machzor and follow specific customs and traditions. Religious Jews spend much of the ten-day holiday attending synagogue, for prayer services, reading of the Scriptures and for worship.

**The Gospel of John:** says that the Sabbath day following Christ's death, was a High Day (John 19:31-42). That night was the 15th of Nisan immediately following Passover Day; however, this is not a new High Day, but one that had been established in the Old Testament.

Following are some specific instructions for this feast:

- It was to be held on the first day of the seventh month.
- It was to be a holy convocation, a day of rest, no work was to be done.
- Trumpets were blown, most likely to call the people together.
- One young bull, one ram, seven male lambs each a year old, were offered for a burnt offering.
- A grain offering mingled with oil was offered with the burnt offering.
- One male goat as a sin offering was offered to make atonement for their sins.
- There were also additional offerings that were offered daily.

It commemorates the creation of the world and marks the beginning of the Days of Awe, a 10-day period of introspection and repentance that concludes in the Yom Kippur holiday, also known as the Day of Atonement. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the two High Holy Days in the Jewish religion.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*

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