

Exodus 20:8-11

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/exod/exod-20/exodus-208-11/>

The 4th commandment is to keep the sabbath day holy. Keeping the sabbath was introduced earlier in the book of Exodus (16:23 – 29) and is established here. It is the only commandment that was given to the Israelites before it was established in the Ten Commandments. It is also mentioned more in the Mosaic Law than any other commandment.

The requirement of the fourth commandment is to *remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*. To *remember* something was to pay attention to what was to be done. The Israelites were to *remember* the Sabbath in order to memorialize the LORD as Creator of all things. When God “remembered” His covenant ([Exodus 2:24](#)), He took action to deliver His people Israel. In some places, remembering can be related to meditation and prayer to the LORD ([Psalms 143:5 – 6](#)). In this case, remembering God as the Creator should lead to reflection and action consistent with the covenant Israel had entered with their Creator.

The word *sabbath* (Heb. “shabbat”) means “rest.” It is related to the Hebrew verb meaning “to cease.” Though not specified here, what constituted work is spelled out in other passages, such as leaving home ([Exodus 16:29f](#)), plowing and harvesting ([Exodus 34:21](#)), building the tabernacle ([Exodus 35:2ff](#)), lighting a fire ([Exodus 35:3](#)), and gathering wood ([Numbers 15:32 – 36](#)). It was to be a day where a person was to cease from all kinds of normal work and remember that the LORD created all things in *six days* then *rested* from, or finished, His creation activity.

The word for *holy* (Heb. “qadash”) suggests something that is to be treated as special and set aside. To keep something *holy* is to consider it special, to separate it from the mundane. The sabbath was to be different from the other six days of the week.

The specific requirements are found in vv. 9 – 10. Like the LORD did in the creation, they were told that *six days you shall labor and do all your work*. This is in line with the *six days* of creation in [Genesis 1](#). Following that, He declared that *the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God*. They were *not do any work*, and this applied to all living beings in Israel, whether it be *you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your*

cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. Every person and all the *cattle* were required to cease from all work on the Sabbath day. This applied also to a foreign worker, a *sojourner*.

The reason for the *sabbath* is described in v. 11. It was based on the fact that *in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.* Because of this historical fact, *the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.* It was to be a memorial for what the LORD did in the creation of the world ([Genesis 2:2-3](#)) and to remind the Israelites that they were in a covenant with One who was their Creator.

After prohibiting Israel from fashioning false gods, God reminds them that He created all things. Clearly, Israel's Suzerain (ruler) has the power and authority to keep His part in the covenant. And He also has the power and authority to enforce the covenant. No man or false god is going to be able to intervene. These first four commandments make clear that God is God, man is not. God created the world as well as the rules by which it operates. There is no competing authority that can undermine that of God's; not man, not anything made by man, nor any other principality.

This is the only commandment that is not repeated to the New Testament Church. However, Jesus added an important observation about the sabbath. He said that "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" ([Mark 2:27](#)). It is clear that God intended a benefit to man and beast in setting aside one out of seven days to rest and recreate. Later, God will also command one in seven years rest for the land ([Exodus 23:10-11](#)). We now know from studies that resting the land increases its productivity over time, and humans do more and better work with adequate rest, so we have direct experience with some of the intended blessings that would flow from adhering to God's commands.

Biblical Text:

⁸“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.