

# Exodus 31:12-17

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*The LORD gives a strong reminder that, in spite of their spiritual duty to build the tabernacle and the furnishings, the craftsmen are required to observe the Sabbath and cease their work. Anyone who did not observe the Sabbath would face dire consequences.*

Once again, *the Lord spoke to Moses* about another important issue. Its importance can be seen in the phrase *But as for you*. Literally, it is “but you”, indicating that what the LORD was about to say to Moses, he most certainly should *speak to the sons of Israel*. Moses must convey this command to the Israelites.

What Moses was to declare to the Israelites was *you shall surely observe My Sabbaths*. God’s reason for them to faithfully keep the Sabbath was that it was *a sign between Me and you throughout your generations*. Every covenant had a sign. The rainbow was the sign of the covenant between Noah and the LORD, and circumcision was the sign of the covenant between Abraham and the LORD. The Sabbath rest was the sign of the covenant between Moses and the LORD. It was also to be a constant reminder to Israel that He was *the Lord who sanctifies you*. In other words, the Sabbath was to be a sign that the LORD set Israel apart to be His people. As Suzerain (or Ruler), the LORD chose the people He wanted to be His vassals ([Exodus 19:4-6](#)). The Israelites enjoyed a special privilege because they were chosen to be in a special relationship with the holy God. So (*therefore*) the Israelites were *to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you*. The observance of the Sabbath would display their obedience to their Suzerain or Ruler.

In light of the crucial significance of observing the Sabbath, The LORD stated that *everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people*.

To *profane* the Sabbath was to defile it, consider it common and not special, or to pollute it by doing work. It was the opposite of treating the Sabbath as *holy*. In this verse, to be *cut off* means to be killed.

The LORD adds more detail to the command. He states that *six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest holy to the Lord*. The phrase *sabbath of complete rest* (Heb. “shabat shabaton”) is

intense. Literally, it means “sabbath of sabbath rest.” It involved not doing any work whatsoever, because *whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death*. In conclusion, the LORD restates the command—*the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant*. There would never be a time when the Israelites would not be required to keep the Sabbath.

The reason was stated again by the LORD in verse 17—that keeping the Sabbath is so important because *it is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever*. As stated earlier, every covenant that the LORD made had a sign. For the covenant given to Moses, it was keeping the Sabbath. It was unique to Israel among all of the peoples of the Ancient Near East. Thus, the Israelites would demonstrate their obedience to the Suzerain God by ceasing work on the Sabbath.

The pattern for this sign was the LORD’s work in His creation in [Genesis 1](#). It was based on the fact that *in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor and was refreshed* ([Genesis 1:1 – 2:3](#)). The meaning of the LORD being *refreshed* is probably an anthropomorphism (a figure of speech that describes a human characteristic to God). The “refreshing” probably speaks of the joy that the Creator had when He completed His creation, not that He needed physical refreshment. In any case, the Israelites always were to honor the LORD and maintain their dedication to obeying the terms of the covenant.

All of God’s “appointed times” or “feasts” as listed in [Leviticus 23](#) have immense meaning and insight into God’s prophetic plans and the work of the Messiah. Each of the feasts point to a future work of Jesus. The Sabbath looks ahead to the 1000 year reign of Christ, also known as The Millennial Kingdom. The Midrash comments in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, “Six thousand years for coming in and going out, for war and for peace. The seventh millennium from Adam is entirely Sabbath and the Days of Messiah.” There is an ancient Jewish tradition that maintains that each of the seven days of the week, which are based upon the seven days of creation, correspond to seven millennia decreed for our world. The tradition teaches that the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath day of rest, corresponds to the seventh millennium, the age of universal ‘rest’—the Messianic Era.

The Apostle Paul in [Hebrews 4](#) establishes this interpretation to his Jewish audience by equating the Messianic Era with the “Rest” pointed to by the Old Testament. The Book of Revelation expounds this thought to reveal that Jesus will reign for 1000 years prior to the “World to Come.” Rabbinic Judaism

today asserts that the seventh millennium begins with the year 6000, and according to tradition, it is the latest time the Messiah can come. The year 2020 is the year 5780 in the Hebrew calendar, which purports to start with the creation of Adam, give or take 300 years (for errors).

### **Biblical Text:**

**<sup>12</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>13</sup> “But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, ‘You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you. <sup>14</sup> Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. <sup>15</sup> For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the Lord; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. <sup>16</sup> So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.’ <sup>17</sup> It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed.”**