

Exodus 23:10-13

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The LORD expands on the concept of the Sabbath to include a Sabbath year. The Israelites were to be very diligent in keeping the Sabbath day as well as the Sabbath year, and they were strongly warned to completely eliminate any conversation about other gods.

In the fourth commandment, the LORD commanded the Israelites to observe the Sabbath day. In verses 10 – 11, He added the keeping of the Sabbath year. Following the pattern of the Sabbath day, the Israelites were to *sow your land for six years and gather in its yield* (v. 10). Then, on the *seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow* (v. 11). Just as the people were to rest on the Sabbath day, they were to allow the land to rest in the seventh year. Not only would it allow the soil to replenish nutrients, it would also set aside a time to allow *the needy of your people to eat*.

This provision also stipulated that *whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat*. Thus, the poor and the beasts that performed the work of the harvest were given provision to eat from the fallow ground. This law was designed not only to cause the people to reflect on His creation but also to graciously provide rest and refreshment to the poor and needy of society, as well as caring for animals. The people were to apply this law to their *vineyard and their olive grove*. This Sabbath year law is discussed in more detail in [Leviticus 25](#).

It is worth noting that God does not explain the benefit of letting land lie fallow by teaching soil science, such as the importance of nitrogen. Just as He did not explain the benefits of sanitation by explaining germs. God's ways are higher than our ways ([Romans 11:33-35](#)). Some things He explains, and other things He asks us to trust. When Israel was exiled to Babylon, the land "enjoyed its Sabbaths" ([2 Chronicles 36:21](#)). Apparently for 490 years, Israel failed to keep this statute, so God set the time of the exile at seventy years, in part to enforce this neglected statute.

Verses 12 – 13 restate the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath day. It states that *six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor*. Once again, the reason given here was *so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your*

stranger, may refresh themselves (v. 12). It is significant that so much consideration was given to the ones who did hard work for their masters, the beasts who work the fields and the servants who toiled in various ways in the household. Plus, the *stranger* or unassimilated immigrant was given this same consideration.

This statute came with a warning in the next verse. The verse says, *Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let them be heard from your mouth* (v. 13). This verse speaks of not associating any other god with the keeping of the Sabbath day or year. It is the LORD's alone, the Suzerain (Ruler) God who redeemed Israel out of bondage in Egypt. For someone to *mention* other gods implies that they were thinking about them, and likely participating in their perverse activities (such as child sacrifice) when they should be concentrating on the LORD and what He has commanded for His people. No other god should be part of the people's thoughts because they are in a covenant relationship with the true God, the Suzerain Yahweh. One of the offenses which led Israel into eventual exile included profaning God's Sabbaths ([Ezekiel 20:24](#)).

The LORD graciously gave His covenant people these things, and they were to serve Him in gratitude. If they live in this self-governing fashion, serving one another, and providing justice without partiality, they will be immensely blessed. This is always the pattern of conditional covenants. Each party has obligations that must be met or kept, and there are consequences for breaking the agreement. Israel was granted unconditional acceptance as God's people by His grace. The Promised Land was granted to Abraham's descendants as a reward for Abraham's obedience ([Genesis 15](#)). But in order to remain and prosper in the land, Israel had to keep their covenant with their Suzerain God by following His commands.

This concept can be applied to the New Testament Christian as well. New Testament believers are given a free gift of everlasting life simply through faith. Enough faith to look at Jesus, hoping for healing, according to [John 3:14-16](#). [Ephesians 2:8-9](#) says salvation from separation from God comes by grace through faith. But [Ephesians 2:10](#) states that we are saved from sin and delivered to good deeds. New Testament believers are saved by faith from condemnation, but in order to experience the great benefits of that gift, they must walk in faith ([Ephesians 2:10](#); [Galatians 6:7-8](#); [1 Corinthians 3:11-17](#)).

Biblical Text:

¹⁰ “You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield,¹¹ but *on* the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard *and* your olive grove.

¹² “Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease *from labor* so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.¹³ Now concerning everything which I have said to you, be on your guard; and do not mention the name of other gods, nor let *them* be heard from your mouth.