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# Appendix 5b: How to Keep the Sabbath in Modern Times

This page is part of the series on the 4th commandment: The Sabbath:

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## Deciding to Keep the Sabbath

In the previous article we established that the Sabbath commandment still applies to Christians today and that keeping it is far more than simply choosing a day to attend church. Now we turn to the practical side: how to actually keep the fourth commandment once you've decided to obey it. Many readers come to this point from a non-Sabbath-keeping background—perhaps a Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, or another denomination—and they want to honor the seventh day while remaining where they are. This appendix is for you. It aims to help you understand what God requires, separate biblical truth from man-made tradition, and give you practical

principles for observing the Sabbath in a way that's faithful, joyful, and possible in modern life. Yet it is crucial to remember that the fourth commandment is not an isolated duty but **part of the holy and eternal Law of God**. Keeping the Sabbath does not replace the rest of God's commandments; rather, it flows naturally from a life devoted to His entire Law.

## The Core of Sabbath Keeping: Holiness and Rest

### Sabbath and Holiness

Holiness means separation for God's use. Just as the tabernacle was set apart from common use, so the Sabbath is set apart from the other days of the week. God modeled this at creation when He ceased from His work on the seventh day and sanctified it (Genesis 2:2-3), setting the pattern for His people. Exodus 20:8-11 calls us to "remember the Sabbath" and "keep it holy," showing that **holiness is not an optional add-on but the very essence of the fourth commandment.** In practice, holiness means shaping the Sabbath hours so they point toward God—turning away from activities that drag us back into ordinary routines, and filling the time with things that deepen our awareness of Him.

### Sabbath and Rest

Alongside holiness, the Sabbath is also a day of rest. In Hebrew, שָׁבַת (shavat) means "to cease" or "to stop." God ceased from His creative work, not because He was tired, but to model the rhythm of rest for His people. This rest is about more than taking a break from physical labor; **it is about stepping out of the normal cycle of work and consumption to experience God's presence, refreshment, and order.** It is a deliberate pause to acknowledge God as Creator and Sustainer, trusting Him to care for us while we cease from our efforts. By embracing this rhythm, believers begin to see the Sabbath not as an interruption but as a weekly gift—a sacred time to realign our priorities and renew our relationship with the One who made us.

## The Uniqueness of the Sabbath

The Sabbath is unique among God's commandments. It's rooted in creation itself, sanctified before there was a nation of Israel, and focuses on time rather than behavior alone. Unlike other commandments, the Sabbath requires a conscious act of setting aside our normal routines every seven days. For those who have never practiced it before, this can feel both exciting and overwhelming. Yet it is precisely this rhythm—stepping out of the ordinary and into God's appointed rest—that becomes a weekly test of faith and a powerful sign of our trust in His provision.

## The Sabbath as a Weekly Test of Faith

This makes the Sabbath not only a weekly observance but also a **recurring test of faith.** Every seven days, believers are called to step away from their own work and from the pressures of the world to trust that God will provide for them. In ancient Israel, this meant gathering twice as much manna on the sixth day and trusting that it would last through the seventh (Exodus 16:22); in modern times, it often means arranging work schedules, finances, and responsibilities so that nothing intrudes on the sacred hours. Keeping the Sabbath in this way teaches **reliance on God's provision**, courage to resist external pressures, and a willingness to be different in a culture that prizes constant productivity. Over time, this rhythm forms a spiritual backbone of obedience—one that trains the heart to trust God not only one day a week but every day and in every area of life.

## When the Sabbath Begins and Ends

The first and most basic element of Sabbath keeping is knowing when it starts and ends. From the Torah itself, we see that God set the Sabbath as a twenty-four-hour period from evening to evening, not from sunrise to sunrise or midnight to midnight. In Leviticus 23:32, concerning the Day of Atonement (which follows the same timing principle), God says, "from evening to evening you shall keep your Sabbath." This

principle applies to the weekly Sabbath as well: **the day begins at sunset on the sixth day (Friday) and ends at sunset on the seventh day (Saturday).** In Hebrew, this is expressed as מֵעֶרֶב עַד־עֶרֶב (me'erev 'ad-'erev) — "from evening to evening." Understanding this timing is foundational to honoring the Sabbath correctly in any era.

## Historical Practice and the Hebrew Day

This evening-to-evening reckoning is deeply rooted in the Hebrew concept of time. In Genesis 1, every day of creation is described as "and there was evening, and there was morning," showing that in God's calendar, a new day begins with sunset. This is why Jews worldwide light candles and welcome the Sabbath at sundown on Friday night, a tradition that reflects the biblical pattern. While rabbinic Judaism later developed additional customs, the basic biblical boundary of "sunset to sunset" remains clear and unchanged. Even in the time of Jesus, we see this pattern acknowledged; for example, Luke 23:54-56 describes the women resting "on the Sabbath" after preparing spices before sundown.

## Practical Application Today

For Christians seeking to honor the Sabbath today, the simplest way to begin is to mark sunset on Friday as the start of your Sabbath rest. This can be as straightforward as setting an alarm or reminder, or following a local sunset chart. In Hebrew, Friday is called יוֹם שִׁשִּׁי (yom shishi) — "the sixth day" — and Saturday is שַׁבָּת (Shabbat) — "Sabbath." When the sun sets on yom shishi, Shabbat begins. By preparing ahead of time—finishing work, household chores, or shopping before sundown—you create a peaceful transition into the sacred hours. This rhythm helps build consistency and signals to family, friends, and even employers that this time is set apart for God.

## Rest: Avoiding the Two Extremes

In practice, Christians often fall into one of two extremes when trying to “rest” on the Sabbath. One extreme treats the Sabbath as complete inactivity: twenty-four hours of doing nothing but sleeping, eating, and reading religious material. While this reflects a desire to avoid breaking the commandment, it can miss the joy and relational dimension of the day. The other extreme treats the Sabbath as freedom from work and permission for self-centered entertainment—restaurants, sports, binge-watching shows, or turning the day into a mini-vacation. While this may feel like rest, it can easily replace the holiness of the day with distractions.

## True Sabbath Rest

The biblical vision of Sabbath rest lies between these two extremes. It is ceasing from ordinary work so that you can give your time, heart, and attention to God (**holiness = set aside for God**). This may include worship, fellowship with family and other believers, acts of mercy, prayer, study, and quiet walks in nature—activities that refresh the soul without dragging it back into the normal grind or turning it toward secular entertainment. Isaiah 58:13-14 gives the principle: turning your foot from doing your own pleasure on God’s holy day and **calling the Sabbath a delight**. In Hebrew, the word for delight here is עֹנֶג (oneg)—a positive joy rooted in God. This is the kind of rest that nourishes both body and spirit and honors the Lord of the Sabbath.