

The Sabbath *and* Worship



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:15, Isa. 44:15–20, Rom. 6:16–23, Matt. 11:28–30.*

Memory Text: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand” (*Psalms 95:6, 7*).

As we saw in the introduction, Creation and Redemption are central to the first angel's message and the theme of worship. The first angel calls us to the “everlasting gospel,” the good news of salvation in Jesus—a salvation that includes not only forgiveness of sin but power over it. The gospel, then, promises us a new life in Christ, the promise of sanctification, which itself is part of the process of salvation and Redemption (*John 17:17, Acts 20:32, 1 Thess. 5:23*).

And, as we saw, the first angel's message includes a special reminder that the One whom we are to worship is our Creator—the One who made us and the world we live in.

Thus, linked to worship are the themes of Creation, Redemption, and sanctification. Not surprisingly, these three themes are revealed in the Sabbath, a crucial element in the events depicted in Revelation 14 when the question faces all of us: do we worship the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier or the beast and his image? The texts do not leave us any third option.

This week we will take a look at the Sabbath commandment and how these themes are revealed in this day. As we study, ask yourself, how can we make these themes central to our worship experience?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 16.*

Creation and Redemption: The Foundation of Worship

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (*Exod. 20:8*). The words *remember* and *memorial* in Hebrew come from the same Hebrew root, *zkr*. When God said, “Remember,” He was giving the people a memorial of two great events, one being the foundation of the other.

According to the fourth commandment, what are these two events, and how are they related to each other? *Exod. 20:11, Deut. 5:15*.

Christ’s role as Creator is inextricably linked to His role as Redeemer, and every week the Sabbath highlights both of these roles. Not monthly, not yearly, but weekly, and without exception—that is how important it is. The One who designed and made us is the same One who delivered Israel from Egypt and delivers us from the bondage of sin.

Read Colossians 1:13–22. How does Paul clearly link Christ in His role as Creator and Redeemer?

Creation and Redemption are at the foundation of all biblical truth, and they are so important that we have been ordered to keep the Sabbath as a reminder of these truths. From Eden, where the seventh day was first set aside, up until now, there have been people who have worshiped the Lord through keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy.

Think for a moment about how important these two truths must be for the Lord to have given us a weekly reminder of them; so important that He commands us to devote one-seventh of our lives in a special kind of rest in order that we can better focus our attention on these truths. How can your Sabbath-worship experience help to enhance your appreciation of Christ as Creator and Redeemer?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Psalm 95:6, 7*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Explain the relationship between worship and the Sabbath, Creation, Redemption, and sanctification.

Feel: Rejoice in the celebration of Creation, as well as the deliverance and restoration for which the Sabbath provides opportunities.

Do: Remember the Sabbath and all for which it stands throughout the week as a cornerstone of our personal faith and the doctrines by which we live.

▶ **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Creator, Redeemer, Restorer

A How does the Sabbath look both backward and forward to celebrate pivotal acts of God on our behalf? What are these grand acts?

B How is keeping the Sabbath holy a sign and a witness to unbelievers regarding our relationship to God?

II. Feel: Much to Celebrate

A What is it about God's created world that brings us joy? How does the Sabbath give us the opportunity to celebrate Creation and the Creator?

B How does celebrating the Sabbath bring us closer to our Redeemer and deepen our relationship with Him?

C How do we celebrate sanctification on the Sabbath?

III. Do: Critical Cornerstones and Safeguards

A While Sabbath comes once a week, how does its significance shape how we live during the rest of our week?

B What aspects of Creation, Redemption, and sanctification are foundational to our everyday activities and philosophies of life?

▶ **Summary:** Sabbath worship immortalizes God's act of Creation, our deliverance from sin, and our restoration to holiness. It is a witness to unbelievers and the universe at large regarding our identity and our relationship to God.

Remember Your Creator

The Bible begins with the famous line, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The verb “created,” *bara*, refers to actions of God only. Humans can build things, make things, create things, and form things, but God alone can *bara*. Only God can create space, time, matter, and energy—all part of the material world in which we exist. It is all here, only because God *bara*-ed it.

Of course, how He did it remains a mystery. Science barely understands what matter itself is, much less how it was created and why it exists in the form that it does. What is crucial, however, is that we never forget for a moment where it all came from. “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (*Ps. 33:6, 9, NKJV*).

Also, when an important project is finished, people like to celebrate. For example, when we build a church, we dedicate it to God. Similarly, when God finished with the earth, He commemorated the event by setting aside a special day, the Sabbath.

Compare Isaiah 40:25, 26; 45:12, 18; Colossians 1:16, 17; Hebrews 1:2 to Isaiah 44:15–20; 46:5–7. What contrast is being made here?

Ever since the great controversy between Christ and Satan reached the earth, the enemy has tried to lead people to doubt or deny the existence of the true God, the Creator. Through ignorance of His Word or denial of the evidence of His creative power, human intelligence seeks to find ways to explain our origins in ways other than from the Lord. All sorts of theories have been proposed. The most popular today, of course, is evolution, which posits random mutation and natural selection as the means by which all life and intelligence exist. Someone recently presented a theory that we are all just computer projections and that we do not really exist but are merely the computer creations of some super-race of alien beings. In many ways, one could argue that the wooden gods Isaiah wrote about, which were worshiped by their own makers, are as good as many of the other theories of origins often presented as an alternative to the God of the Bible.

If we truly accept the Sabbath for what the Bible says it is—a memorial of God’s six days of Creation—how can we be protected from false ideas about our origins? Also, who would want to worship a God who used the vicious and violent process of evolution to create us, as some teach?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Historically, the Sabbath has always distinguished true worshipers of God. God’s mighty act of Creation, as well as His promised redemption, is contained in the Sabbath, and we show our belief in His power and His promises by observing the Sabbath commandment.

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the importance of Sabbath rest and worship to our physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

We all know that we need to exercise. Reams of New Year’s resolutions testify to this idea. We understand that if we want good health, we have to work for it. The last thing we need is more time resting, isn’t it?

It’s true that many or most people in developed nations are too sedentary and very exercise deprived. But are you aware that they are also sleep deprived? Most of us are aware of the negative results that come from a sedentary lifestyle. Obesity is one; related ills such as type 2 diabetes and coronary or vascular disease also come to mind. But did you know that sleep deprivation contributes to many of the same things? Lack of sleep results in increased levels of a hormone called cortisol. In excess, cortisol tells our bodies to store more belly fat. It also adds stress to the vital organs, making us susceptible to certain degenerative diseases. All of this can be prevented by more restful sleep as a part of a healthy lifestyle that also includes proper exercise and nutrition.

So, nature itself decrees that we must spend a certain amount of time resting or risk death and illness at an early age. But rest doesn’t come naturally to us.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we recognize a spiritual dimension to rest as exemplified in the Sabbath commandment. The Sabbath rest is not just “relaxation,” however beneficial. By keeping it, we acknowledge our utter dependence on God in worship. And we worship Him in the way and time of *His* choosing, not necessarily our own.

Consider This: Why is the Sabbath commandment—a clear mandate from God—so widely misunderstood, ignored, and even mocked by Christians? How can we personally help others to understand and appreciate it?

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Freedom From Slavery

As we have already seen, the Sabbath points not only to Creation, an important theme of worship, but also to Redemption. Deuteronomy 5:15 tells us, “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (*NIV*). These words echo the crucial theme of the first angel’s message, that of Redemption and salvation.

And this Redemption is symbolized by what the Lord did for the children of Israel through the Exodus. No god in Egypt had the power to stop this nation of slaves from escaping their bondage. Only the God of Israel, who revealed Himself in powerful miracles and His presence in majestic and blinding glory, had the ability to deliver them with “a mighty hand” and a “stretched out arm” (*Deut. 5:15*). God wanted them to remember “that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him” (*Deut 4:35, NKJV*). So, He gave them the Sabbath day to be a constant reminder of His great deliverance and as a reminder to us of the bondage from which Christ has freed us.

Read Romans 6:16–23. What promises are offered us there, and how does this relate to what the Lord did for Israel in Egypt?

The New Testament clearly teaches that the slavery of sin demands a powerful Savior, as did the Egyptian bondage of ancient Israel. That is what the children of Israel had in their Lord; and that is what we as Christians today also have, because the God who delivered them from their bondage is the same One who delivers us from ours.

If we ever needed a reason to worship the Lord, would it not be for the deliverance from slavery that He has won for us? The children of Israel sang a great song once they had been delivered. (*See Exodus 15.*) Thus, the Sabbath worship experience should be a celebration of God’s grace in freeing us not only from the legal penalty of sin (which fell upon Jesus on our behalf) but from the power of sin to enslave us.

What does it mean to no longer be slaves to sin? Does it mean we are not sinful, or that we do not at times still sin? Most important, how can you learn to claim and make real the promises of freedom that the gospel offers us?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED▶ **STEP 2—Explore**

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the Sabbath as a sign of our Creation and our Redemption. Also emphasize its importance as a period of time explicitly and specifically dedicated to God.

Bible Commentary

I. You Don't Have to Be Jewish . . . (*Review Exodus 20:8–11 and Deuteronomy 5:12–15 with your class.*)

For many cultures and religions, time is cyclical: what has happened before will happen again. Even if we do not subscribe to a cyclical view of nature and time, as, for example, Mayans did and Hindus still do, it would be fairly easy to believe that “everything has remained the same since the world was first created” (*2 Pet. 3:4, NLT*).

But as Christians and Seventh-day Adventists, we know that the world had a beginning. Occurring at the end of the cyclical seven-day week, the Sabbath is a reminder of our origin as creatures of God, created in His image. With the Sabbath, God marked the beginning of the present age of creation. And it has been observed ever since. Consider other commemorations or festivals. None of them go back to the beginning of the world, with the exception of the Sabbath. This alone suggests that the Sabbath is not a Jewish thing, it's a God thing.

Consider This: We are told to remember the Sabbath. This doesn't just mean that when it occurs we should remember only to stop working, shopping, or watching mindless entertainment (although it does mean that). It also directs us to look at why we do these things, or stop doing them, as the case may be. The Sabbath directs us to the beginning and, therefore, to God.

■ *Many people consider the Sabbath to be an archaic relic of the past, whether of the Old Testament laws or the dreary Sabbaths of their youth, when it was defined by what they couldn't do. Is Sabbath a burden to you,*

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Remember Your Sanctifier

Read Exodus 31:13. What do you understand this to mean? How is it relevant for us today? What does it mean to have God sanctify us? How can we experience this process in our own lives?

Creation, Redemption, sanctification—they all are related. Creation, of course, is the foundation of everything (for without it there would be no one to redeem and sanctify). Yet, in our fallen condition, creation is no longer enough; we needed Redemption, the promise of forgiveness for our sins. Otherwise, we would face eternal destruction, and our creation would be forever over.

Of course, inseparably linked to Redemption is sanctification, the process by which we grow in holiness and in grace in our lives. The word translated as “sanctify” in Exodus 31:13 comes from the same root word used in Exodus 20:8, when the Lord tells the people to keep the Sabbath “holy.” The same root appears in Exodus 20:11, which says that God “hallowed” or “made holy” the Sabbath day (see also Genesis 2:3, where God “sanctified” the seventh day). In all these cases the root, *qds*, means “to be holy,” “to set aside as holy,” to be “dedicated as holy.”

God called Israel and set them apart as His holy people, to be a light to the world. Christ called His disciples to the mission of carrying the gospel to the world. Central to that task is the holiness and character of the ones spreading the message. The gospel is not just about no longer being condemned for our sins. As we saw yesterday, it is about being free from the bondage of our sins. It is about being new people in Christ and having our lives be living witnesses to what God can do for us here and now.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:17. What is Paul saying here, and how can we relate this text to the themes of Creation and Redemption and the Sabbath? How can our Sabbath worship help us to focus on these themes?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

or is it a reminder of God’s awesome creative and redemptive power, and why? If the former, what needs to change for you?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: The Sabbath reminds us of God’s mighty acts on our behalf, His promises, and His sufficiency for all our needs. Use the following questions to emphasize the centrality of the Sabbath to any full experience of the peace and redemption offered to us by God.

Thought Questions:

1 What does the existence of the Sabbath, the same day every week since the beginning of time, tell us about the trustworthiness and stability of God in a world in which so much is changeable and transitory?

2 Describe how all of God’s acts—Creation, sanctification, and Redemption—are mirrored in the celebration of the Sabbath.

Application Questions:

1 The observance of the Sabbath is often posed as a quasi-legal, rules-based question. What criteria would you use—or reject, for that matter—to determine what does or does not honor God as a Sabbath activity? How do you keep the Sabbath holy?

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Resting in Redemption

Creation, Redemption, and sanctification: we have all these in Christ, and they all are symbolized in a special way through the blessings of the Sabbath.

In Matthew 11:28–30 read Jesus’ invitation to rest. How does the Sabbath fit in with what Jesus is telling us here?

The “rest” Jesus offered to people included emotional, psychological, and spiritual rest for those who were burdened with heavy loads, including the load of sin, guilt, and fear. In addition to the basic human need for physical rest, there is an equally important need for the mind and the spirit to have a change of pace—to rest from the burdens and the stress of daily living. God designed the Sabbath for precisely that. Studies have shown that productivity in the work place actually increases with a weekly break. Bringing closure to the usual routine of life enhances mental acuity and physical endurance. Further, the Sabbath provides the needed sense of anticipation that helps prevent boredom and fatigue.

While anyone can say that they are resting in Christ, the Sabbath gives us a concrete and physical manifestation of that rest. The Sabbath stands as a symbol of the rest that we truly have in Him, in the salvation Christ has wrought for us.

The Sabbath also meets us at the level of our emotional life. It gives us a sense of identity: we are created in the image of God, and we belong to Him because He made us.

And just as God gave us the marriage institution in Eden to meet the human need for horizontal intimacy, so He gave us the Sabbath for vertical intimacy between the Creator and His creatures.

The Sabbath promises fulfillment—what we may become through Christ’s work of restoration. It gives us hope for the future—the ultimate eternal Sabbath rest. But most important of all, the Sabbath meets us at the highest of all human needs, the need to worship something or Someone. God in His great wisdom has given us the Sabbath as a day set aside for worship, a day to spend in honor and praise of Him.

What burdens are you carrying from which you need to have rest, and how can you learn to give them to Him? How can your Sabbath worship experience help you to learn truly to rest in Him?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

2 How does the Sabbath help to remind you of God's presence and centrality in all things?

► STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: The gift of the Sabbath is a gift of a sanctified place in time during which we have nothing to do other than to honor God for that which He has done (Creation), that which He is doing (sanctification), and that which He will do (Redemption). Emphasize that, in a way, when we enter the Sabbath rest we are entering a different place, as well as a different time.

Bring a suitcase (or any piece of luggage) and a few objects to class (clothes, toiletries, and so on—anything one could imagine packing for a trip). Start packing these items into the suitcase. Ask your class what they think of bringing when they travel anywhere for a given length of time. Perhaps you will pass around slips of paper so they can make short lists.

Then make the point that we should regard the Sabbath as a distinctly different place, as well as a segment of the week. How might we be better prepared to honor the Sabbath if we thought of it as a place to which we were going? Ask the class how they would prepare if they were to think of the Sabbath in this way.

Alternative: Lead a discussion on what the Sabbath has meant to the individual lives of your members. Have they ever had to sacrifice anything for it, such as jobs or social engagements? Is the Sabbath a relief, and, if so, why? Is it a source of more stress? Explain. How can we improve our experience of the Sabbath and gain the blessing God wants us to derive from it?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “The Creation,” pp. 44–51; “The Literal Week,” pp. 111–116, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*; “The Sabbath,” pp. 281–289, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“God designed that [Sabbath] observance should designate [Israel] as His worshipers. It was to be a token of their separation from idolatry, and their connection with the true God. But in order to keep the Sabbath holy, men must themselves be holy. Through faith they must become partakers of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Only thus could the Sabbath distinguish Israel as the worshipers of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 283.

“When the Lord delivered His people Israel from Egypt and committed to them His law, He taught them that by the observance of the Sabbath they were to be distinguished from idolaters. It was this that made the distinction between those who acknowledged the sovereignty of God and those who refuse to accept Him as their Creator and King.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 349.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Dwell more on the idea of how true Sabbath keeping can protect us from many of the delusions regarding Creation. Think, for instance, about the final events regarding those who worship the beast as opposed to those who worship the Creator (see *Revelation 14*). How would a false understanding of our origins—such as the idea that Jesus used evolution to create us—set people up to be deceived in the final days?
- ② Go back over the question of Sabbath and worship. How does your church worship on Sabbath? Is the service geared toward exalting God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier? If not, what is the emphasis? How can we learn to keep the Lord as the focus of our worship experience?
- ③ Creation is central to all our beliefs. Why does nothing we believe as Seventh-day Adventists make any sense at all apart from God as the Creator? Creation is foundational to all that we believe, and the Sabbath is imbedded in the original Creation account. How do these facts help to reveal just how pivotal and basic the Sabbath is? How does this help us to better understand how, in the last days, when false powers seek to compel the worship that God alone deserves, the Sabbath will be so central to that final drama?