

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16

New International Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, December 6, 2015

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The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, December 6, 2015**, is from **Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **[International Bible Lessons Commentary](#)** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **[International Bible Lesson Forum](#)**.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Exodus 20:8-11; 31:12-16

(Exodus 20:8) “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

To make someone or something holy is to set it apart for sacred use, for use according to the will of God as expressed in the Bible. Jesus makes believers holy by cleansing them from sin, and by giving them the indwelling Holy Spirit to help them obey God. Keeping the Sabbath holy involves refusing to practice sin and choosing to follow God. The Sabbath is a day that God set apart and wants people to set apart for sacred use. The Jews celebrated the Sabbath on Saturday. On the Sabbath, the Lord's Day, Jesus and His disciples went to the synagogue or temple for teaching and worship. Jesus would sometimes heal on the Sabbath, even though that was against the traditions of His day. Nonbiblical traditions about the Sabbath can prevent believers from doing what is right. Jesus said, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:5). After Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, Sunday became “the Lord's Day” (Revelation 1:10) and the day Christians celebrate as the Sabbath.

(Exodus 20:9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

The Ten Commandments do not legislate the exact day when a work week must begin, but the work week should not be more than six days out of every seven days, leaving a seventh day as a day of rest. Work or labor is a requirement for people. All who can work

should work – even if it is unpaid volunteer work. Those who cannot work physically can always do the Lord’s work of praying for others. Paul wrote, “For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). The key word is “unwilling,” not “unable,” to work. In some cultures and in some ethical systems, those “unable” to work are not given food to eat, which is not a biblical teaching. Those “unable” to work or potentially unable to work should be exceptionally cared for with compassion because God has commanded us to love our neighbors as ourselves. We should plan our work to be finished within six days of each week so we can rest without worldly cares on the seventh day of the week and worship God.

(Exodus 20:10) but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

As Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus declared, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). Our most important relationship is with God the Father and His Son through the Holy Spirit; therefore, the Sabbath is “to the Lord” to help us develop that relationship through study of the Scriptures, worship, prayer, fellowship with other believers, and rest of mind and body to focus on the Lord and how best to serve the Lord in the days ahead. The Sabbath is for every person without exception, and no one was to work their animals on the Sabbath. Humans and animals need a Sabbath rest, and none are to be taken unjust advantage of by refusing them a day of rest.

(Exodus 20:11) For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

God made people in His image and God has given commands and taught people by example. On earth, Jesus taught by words and example. The Bible teaches by word and example, showing both what to do and what not to do. God did not need to rest because He was exhausted on the seventh day; God does not work himself to exhaustion. Human and animal workers can be exhausted before the seventh day because of their work. God has given laws designed for our well-being, and for our well-being we also need to consecrate and make holy the Sabbath to draw near to the Lord who gives us our strength – mental, physical, and spiritual.

(Exodus 31:12) Then the LORD said to Moses,

As slaves in Egypt, the Jews worked according to the commands of Pharaoh, who was not concerned about them, but who made them labor as long and as hard as he liked. In the Bible, God shows His concern for us by commanding everyone to make certain everyone has a day of rest. God is unlike Pharaoh. God wanted Moses to tell the people that He wanted them to enjoy regular rest, and God wanted them to know that the leaders He appointed would not treat them as slaves, but be concerned about their total well-being and rest. God’s people were not to work and rest as they pleased, because

they did not know how God had designed them physically, mentally, and spiritually. If they obeyed God and kept the Sabbath holy, they would find joy in the Lord, and the Lord would meet all of their needs — such as supplying enough manna on the day before the Sabbath for the Sabbath day so people could rest on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:29-30).

(Exodus 31:13) “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.’

Though this Old Covenant command was for the Israelites, Jesus and Christians keep the Sabbath, though on a different day. They have done so for generations. In their Sabbath worship, they know the Lord and they want to know more of the Lord as they study the Scriptures. The Lord sets His people apart for holy use, and gives empowerment and guidance to His people as they rest on the Sabbath and prepare themselves for holy use during the week ahead. As we observe the Sabbath, the Lord makes us holy and fit for serving Him and others.

(Exodus 31:14) ‘Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it is to be put to death; those who do any work on that day must be cut off from their people.’

Our most important relationship is our relationship with God; therefore, God and His followers consider the Sabbath holy and a time for improving that relationship. Because we can separate ourselves from the world of work one day each week (and God commands us to do so), we can develop further our relationship with God. To desecrate or profane the Sabbath is high-handed rebellion against God. We desecrate the Sabbath when we tell God by our actions: “My plans and my work are more important than Your plans, Your schedule, and Your work. My work is more important than the rest You have commanded me to take. I don’t need rest, even though You think I do. What I can achieve with my work is more important than trusting in You to meet my needs and fulfill my purposes. I want more than just my needs met anyway.” To profane the Sabbath is to tell God, “I do not care about You and Your laws and Your will for my life.” Profaning the Sabbath indicates a person does not care about God; that attitude can mislead others away from (or out of) the most important relationship anyone can ever have; that attitude can lead to spiritual death and an early physical death. The Lord has given us commands to bless us each Sabbath, each workday, and for eternity. This commandment is the fourth commandment, and by obeying it we show our determination to obey the first three commandments; furthermore, we are reminded and taught on the Sabbath how to obey all of the Ten Commandments, the moral law of God, in relation to God and others.

(Exodus 31:15) For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day is to be put to death.

God says the same thing two times in these two verses because of the seriousness of the crime of Sabbath-breaking. Too many today do not realize the eternal consequences

from not knowing and having a relationship with the Lord or of misleading others with respect to having an eternal saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Jesus himself warned, “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!” (Matthew 18:6-7). The death penalty for desecration of the Sabbath shows that desecration of the Sabbath and leading others to do the same is spiritually worse than physical death and has eternal consequences. Today, most do not live in a theocracy with religious law courts that could or would sentence a person to death for violating the command not to work on the Sabbath day. Though the penalty may seem harsh to us today, God gave this command to the Israelites to enforce in their nation through a legal process: God knew how breaking the command could have serious consequences for individuals and the nation. God did not want anyone to force another person to work on the Sabbath, which God knew would bring them lasting harm (the Israelites had been slaves for 400 years). Though not legally enforced by law courts, the principle of obedience remains the same, with physical, mental, and spiritual consequences for disobedience.

(Exodus 31:16) The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.”

Through Moses, God gave this command to and made this covenant (the Old Covenant) with the Israelites. Still, Bible-believing Christians and Jews consider the observance of the Sabbath “as a lasting covenant,” though they do not execute Sabbath-breakers. It is one of the Ten Commandments that those who believe the Bible try to obey. In many places and among many people, regular rest is not taken by a person or given to others. If there are days of rest, a rest-day is not taken as a Sabbath to the Lord. Though Sabbath breakers do not suffer the death penalty in most places today, Sabbath breakers do suffer mental, physical, and spiritual harm (if not an early physical or mental death through natural causes or spiritual death), because they are violating the laws of their own nature as created by God—God made the Sabbath for our benefit and the benefit of others. Sabbath breakers punish and kill themselves over time: they do not need anyone to execute them. The severe penalty for breaking this law of God shows how important and valuable keeping this law is for every person, even though the penalty is not enforced by a court of law today, nor was the penalty included as a part of the Ten Commandments. Everyone truly needs a holy day of rest dedicated to the Lord. The Holy Spirit brings joy and peace into the Christian’s life, and Christians love to worship joyfully and study the Scriptures with one another on the Sabbath.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How might your church be different if everyone obeyed the commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”?

2. How might your town be different if everyone obeyed the commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”?
3. How might your nation be different if everyone obeyed the commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”?
4. Today, do you think churches should teach people the commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”? Give a reason for your answer.
5. Today, what kind of person obeys the commandment: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”? Give a reason for your answer.

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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