

## **Sabbath Observance**

**Fall Quarter: Covenant with God**

**Unit 1: Signs of God's Covenant**

**Sunday school lesson for the week of September 17, 2017**

**By Rev. Earnestine W. Campbell**

**Lesson Scripture: Exodus 31:12-18**

**Background Scripture: Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 31:12-18; Isaiah 56:1-8**

Purpose: To value God's call to rest and renew our relationships with God and one another

Key Verses: "Be sure to keep my Sabbaths, because the Sabbath is a sign between me and you in every generation so you will know that I am the Lord who makes you holy. Keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you." (Exodus 31:13-14)

### **Hearing the Word**

The *Adult Bible Studies*' writer begins this lesson with defining the meaning of the Sabbath. The following are some of the points the writer makes about the Sabbath:

- It is a Jewish tradition; the seventh day of the week (beginning at sundown on Friday and ending on Saturday evening);
- God's original command is to remember the Sabbath and "treat it as holy" (Exodus 20:8);
- The Sabbath was the day of the week when 12 loaves of flatbread were to be set out on the gold table of the sanctuary by Aaron "on behalf of the Israelites, as a permanent covenant" (Leviticus 24:8);
- It was a day for special sacrifices (Numbers 28:9-10);
- It did not explicitly require a Sabbath liturgy, Leviticus 23:1-4 associated it with "appointed times, holy occasions, which you will celebrate at their appointed times;"
- Later, in the Jewish synagogues, the Sabbath became an important day of teaching and worship;
- The Sabbath is another sign of the covenant, the third we have studied so far. In Genesis 2:2-3, it is simply called the "seventh day."

Teacher: Ask class members to share their meaning of the Sabbath.

**Bible lesson**

**Sabbath Living**

Verses 12-13: The Lord said to Moses: “Tell the Israelites: ‘Be sure to keep my Sabbaths, because the Sabbath is a sign between me and you in every generation so you will know that I am the Lord who makes you holy.’”

The Scriptural text conveys that God cares about and requires that the covenant between Him and the Israelites be observed, with no exception to the ones building the Tabernacle. The writer makes the distinction between the following Sabbath Scriptural text and the Exodus 31 text:

Exodus 16:22-30: “On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much – two omers for each person – And the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. He said to them, ‘This is what the Lord commanded: ‘Tomorrow is to be a day of Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.’ So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. ‘Eat it today,’ Moses said, ‘because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any...’”

In addition to our scripture, Exodus 20:8-11 states the Sabbath command:

Exodus 20:8-11: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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 our animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 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.”

Remembering your Sabbath: Ask class members to reflect and share their practices of observing the Sabbath as Holy. What is their understanding of “works” on the Sabbath? Is it ever acceptable to do works or other things on the Sabbath?

The writer points to the Sabbath texts that there is no distinction in the types of work and that God’s command was for all people. We see in scriptures that the observance is expressed as highly important, as a priority, and eternal to all.

Verses 14-15: “Keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who violates the Sabbath will be put to death. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath that person will be cut off from the people. Do your work for six days. But the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest that is holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day will be put to death.”

The writer says that the Sabbath according to the Scriptural text is a part of Israel's sanctification and God's holiness between His people, and identifies the consequences for individuals that deliberately violate the commandment as being "cut off" and excommunicated. (Numbers 15:32-36)

Verses 16-17: "The Israelites should keep the Sabbath. They should observe the Sabbath in every generation as a covenant for all time. It is a sign forever between me and the Israelites that in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day the Lord rested and was refreshed."

The Sabbath represented God's everlasting covenant made with the Israelites. It was His way of providing the gift of rest, His covenantal liberation, and that He was the creator of all things.

### **Conclusion**

We see in Genesis 2:2-3 that God's creation was completed in six days, but the Sabbath was the completion of God's creation and a time of rest. Just as we sometimes do today, the Israelites struggled initially with the strict requirements of the Sabbath (see Isaiah 1:13, Amos 8:5, Jeremiah 17:21-23, Nehemiah 13:18).

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, as we experience our Sabbath, may we be intentional in resting and giving honor to your covenantal care. Let us also be reminded of the New Testament scriptures that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and that His authority reigns over the law and the Mosaic covenant, and that the Sabbath is made for humanity (Matthew 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5). Amen.

*Rev. Earnestine W. Campbell serves as the Associate Director for Connectional Ministries. Contact her at [earnestine@sgaumc.com](mailto:earnestine@sgaumc.com).*

*The Adult Bible Studies, Series Fall 2017 book is used for the content of this lesson.*