

# ***The Promise: God's Everlasting Covenant***

## ***Covenant Sign***

Lesson #9 for May 29, 2021

Scriptures: Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 16; 20:11; 31:12-17; Hebrews 4:1-4; Deuteronomy 5:14.

1. The seventh-day Sabbath is like a nail that—*Thwack!*—with unbroken regularity returns us each week to the foundation of all that we are or could be. We are so busy, running to and fro, spending money, making money, going here, going there, going everywhere, and then—*Thwack!*—Sabbath comes and reattaches us to our foundation, the starting point of everything that follows, because everything that is anything to us becomes that only because God created it and us to begin with.

With unceasing regularity, and with no exceptions, the Sabbath silently hurls over the horizon and into every crack and cranny of our lives. It reminds us that every crack and cranny belongs to our Maker, the One who put us here, the One who “in the beginning” created the heavens and the earth, an act that remains the irrefutable foundation of all Christian belief and of which the seventh-day Sabbath—*Thwack!*—is the irrefutable, unobtrusive, and unyielding sign.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Sabbath, May 22.<sup>§</sup>

2. When was the Sabbath created? Do we have evidence that the Sabbath was in existence before the days of Israel at Sinai? What is special about the Sabbath that makes it a covenant sign? **Why do you think God chose a moment in time as His sign or seal instead of a place or thing?** Time cannot be set up as an idol or changed as we wish.
3. If one believes the Scriptures, it is very clear that the Sabbath was made at creation.

**Genesis 2:2-3:** <sup>2</sup>God finished what he had been doing and stopped working. <sup>3</sup>**He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a special day, because by that day he had completed his creation and stopped working.**—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation*\* (2nd ed., Genesis 2:2–3). New York: American Bible Society.<sup>†</sup>

**Exodus 20:11:** “In six days I, the LORD, made the earth, the sky, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the LORD, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>  
[However, in the Ten Commandments as recorded in Deuteronomy 5, God said the Sabbath was a memorial of Israel’s delivery from slavery in Egypt.]<sup>‡</sup>

4. In Hebrew the word for *rest*—*shabat*—is closely related to the noun *Sabbath* or Hebrew *Shabbat*. The Sabbath was first identified as the seventh day in Exodus 16:26,29; but, we should have been able to conclude that earlier from Genesis 2:2 which we just read.

**Exodus 16:26,29:** <sup>26</sup> [Moses said to the people:] “You must gather food for six days, but on the seventh day, the day of rest, there will be none.”...

<sup>29</sup> “Remember that I, the LORD, have given you a day of rest, and that is why on the sixth day I will always give you enough food for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day and not leave his home.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*‡</sup> [Were there no religious gatherings on the Sabbath?]<sup>‡</sup>

Again **Genesis 2:2**: By the seventh day God finished what he had been doing and stopped working.—*Good News Bible*.\*

“The word ‘sabbath’ is not employed [in Gen. 2:2, 3], but it is certain that the author meant to assert that God blessed and hallowed the seventh day as the Sabbath.”—G. F. Waterman, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), vol. 5, p. 183.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Sunday, May 23 including the brackets and the content in brackets in the paragraph above].<sup>†§</sup>

5. So, God through Moses claimed that **He created the Sabbath as a memorial of creation**. Does that give Him the right to claim that the Sabbath is His day?

**Mark 2:27-28**:<sup>27</sup> And Jesus concluded, “The Sabbath was made for the good of human beings; they were not made for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup>So the [this] Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

6. Did God get tired by doing what He did on creation week? Is that why He “rested”?

Although some commentators have suggested that God needed physical rest after Creation, the true purpose of God in resting was to provide a divine example for humanity. Humankind also is to work for six days and then to rest on the seventh-day Sabbath. Theologian Karl Barth suggested that God’s resting at the end of Creation was a part of the “covenant of grace,” in which humankind was invited “to rest with Him . . . **to participate in [God’s] rest**.”—*Church Dogmatics*\* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, Ltd., 1958), vol. 3, p. 98.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Sunday, May 23 including the brackets and content in brackets above].<sup>†§</sup>

7. **God sustains the entire universe every day and every minute! He does not get tired! But, He paused to celebrate what He had accomplished**, and we should pause and rest to celebrate with Him. Is that what it means *to participate in God’s rest*?

8. What does the Sabbath mean to you? What special memories are associated with the Sabbath?

9. One of the clearest evidences that the Sabbath was here before the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai is the story recorded in Exodus 16. The children of Israel were given manna, and three clear evidences were given in that connection to support the keeping of the Sabbath:

1. Only a regular portion of manna could be used each day; but on the sixth day a double portion was to be gathered. [Were there never any leftovers?]

2. No manna was given on the Sabbath.

3. The extra portion needed for the Sabbath was preserved from the sixth day unspoiled, while the manna would not keep on any other day.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Monday, May 24.<sup>‡</sup>

10. Even those who are not Seventh-day Adventists have recognized what this teaches us about the Sabbath.

“In fact, the equation of the Sabbath with the seventh day, the statement that the Lord gave the Israelites the Sabbath, and the record that the people, at God’s command, rested on the seventh day, all point unmistakably to the

primeval [at Creation] institution of the Sabbath.”—G. F. Waterman, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), vol. 5, p. 184.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, May 24 including the brackets and the content in brackets in the paragraph above].<sup>†§</sup>

11. What do our Protestant friends say about the Sabbath? Officials of many Protestant churches acknowledge that the Sabbath was on Saturday. But, many of their members do not know that!
12. How many important points should we be able to derive from the story of Exodus 16 regarding the Sabbath?
  1. Which day is the preparation day for the Sabbath?
  2. Which day of the week is the Sabbath?
  3. Where did the Sabbath come from?
  4. What kind of day should the Sabbath be?
  5. Is the Sabbath a day of fasting?
  6. Is the Sabbath a test of loyalty to God?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Monday, May 24.
13. We are calling the Sabbath *a covenant sign*. What is the difference between a *sign* and a *symbol*?

Four times in Scripture the Sabbath is designated as a “sign” (*Exod. 31:13, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20*). A “sign” is not a “symbol” in the sense of a thing that naturally typifies, represents, or recalls something else, because both share similar qualities (for example, a symbol of a fist often denotes “might” or “power”). In the Bible, the Sabbath as a “sign” functioned as an outward mark or object or condition intended to convey a distinctive message. Nothing in the sign *itself* particularly linked it to the covenant. The Sabbath was a covenant sign “ ‘ “between me and you throughout your generations” ’ ” (*Exod. 31:13, RSV*) **only because God said it was.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Tuesday, May 25.<sup>†§</sup> [Does that mean the Sabbath is arbitrary? No!]<sup>‡</sup>

14. What is special about the Sabbath that makes it very appropriate as a sign or symbol of our relationship with God? The three biggest events in the Bible: (1) Creation, (2) the exodus, and (3) the crucifixion are all connected in multiple ways with the Sabbath.
15. The Sabbath is unique as a way of celebrating God. We cannot change it in any way. We “cannot” move it, enlarge it, or diminish it. We can only accept it as God’s gift to us. To try to change it, is to destroy it.
16. Genesis 2:3 teaches us that God blessed the seventh day and set it apart. Thousands of years later in Hebrews 4:1-4, Paul talked about the fact that the children of Israel, despite God’s working with them, did not enter into His rest.

**Hebrews 4:1-4:** Now, God has offered us the promise that we may receive that rest he spoke about. Let us take care, then, that none of you will be found to have failed to receive that promised rest. <sup>2</sup>For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. They heard the message, but it did them no good,

because when they heard it, **they did not accept it with faith.** <sup>3</sup>We who believe, then, do receive that rest which God promised. It is just as he said:

“I was angry and made a solemn promise:

‘They will never enter the land where I would have given them rest!’ ”

He said this even though his work had been finished from the time he created the world. <sup>4</sup>For somewhere in the Scriptures this is said about the seventh day: “God rested on the seventh day from all his work.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

17. In that passage, it states, “They did not accept it with faith.” What does it mean *to accept it [the Sabbath] with faith*? How many times did people go out to collect manna on the Sabbath.
18. How can one’s life demonstrate the truth about our relationship to God by the way we keep the Sabbath? Is the Sabbath rest a time for us to stretch out on our beds and relax? What does God intend for us to do on the Sabbath? What did Jesus do on the Sabbath?
19. God had some very stark words for the children of Israel as recorded in Exodus 31:12-17.

**Exodus 31:12-17:** <sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Moses: <sup>13</sup> You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given **in order that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.** <sup>14</sup> You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; **everyone who profanes it shall be put to death**; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. <sup>15</sup> Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; **whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death.** <sup>16</sup> Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. <sup>17</sup> It is **a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.**”—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.<sup>\*</sup> (1989). (Exodus 31:12–17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.<sup>†</sup>

20. Does this sound like a loving, kind, friendly God? Why would God assign a death penalty to those who “broke” the Sabbath? What did God expect to happen to them? Look at the story of one man who broke the Sabbath. Somewhere in the books of Moses, each of the Ten Commandments had a death sentence connected to the breaking of it except for the tenth.

**Numbers 15:32-36:** <sup>32</sup> Once, while the Israelites were still in the wilderness, a man was found gathering firewood on the Sabbath. <sup>33</sup>He was taken to Moses, Aaron, and the whole community, <sup>34</sup>and was put under guard, because it was not clear what should be done with him. <sup>35</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “The man must be put to death; the whole community is to stone him to death outside the camp.” <sup>36</sup>So the whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD had commanded.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> [See *Patriarchs and Prophets* 407. Why would God ask His people to do that?]<sup>†</sup>

21. If our churches did that to one or two church members when they broke the Sabbath, would the rest of us start taking the Sabbath more seriously? The passage in Exodus 31

suggests a couple of special ideas. The Sabbath is a time for us to know and to be known. It is also time for our sanctification—time for us to be set apart from all others in the world. The Sabbath is a recognition of our special relationship to God.

Consider the sign aspect related to knowledge. The Hebrew understanding of knowledge includes intellectual, relational, and emotional aspects. “To know” did not simply mean to know a fact, particularly when a person was involved. It also meant to have a meaningful relationship with the one known. Thus *to know the Lord* meant to be in a right relationship with Him—to “serve” Him (*1 Chron. 28:9*), to “fear” Him (*Isa. 11:2*), to “believe” Him (*Isa. 43:10*), to “trust” Him and “seek” Him (*Ps. 9:10*), and to “call on” His name (*Jer. 10:25*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide\** for Wednesday, May 26. §

**Genesis 4:1:** Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the LORD.”—*New Revised Standard Version.\**

22. These passages help to round out and expand our understanding of what it means *to know the Lord*? Clearly, the passage in Genesis 4:1 implies a very close and intimate relationship between Adam and Eve.
23. So, what does it mean *to sanctify* someone? The word itself means *to set aside for a special purpose*.

**Leviticus 20:8:** “Obey my laws, because I am the LORD and I make you holy.”—*Good News Bible.\**

**Deuteronomy 7:6:** “Do this because you belong to the LORD your God. **From all the peoples on earth he chose you to be his own special people.**”—*Good News Bible.\*†*

24. So, if we have a right relationship with God and He sanctifies us, what does that accomplish? If you were chosen to be special by God, would that make a difference?
25. Does our way of keeping the Sabbath clearly set us apart from our neighbors and the rest of the world? Or, is our Sabbath just another weekend day?

**Exodus 20:8:** Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.—*New Revised Standard Version.\**

26. What are the implications of the use of the word *remember*? Initially, it suggests that the Sabbath had been given earlier than the Sinai experience. In fact, it was given in connection with creation.
27. But, the word *remember* as a command tells us to observe and keep the Sabbath on a weekly basis. Isaiah 66:23 tells us that we will be keeping the Sabbath for the rest of eternity. Thus, the Sabbath is to remind us of our relationship to the Lord—past, present, and future. Is the Sabbath only as we know it on this earth? What about in heaven?

**Isaiah 66:23:** “On every New Moon Festival and every Sabbath, people of every nation will come to worship me here in Jerusalem,” says the LORD.—*Good News Bible.\**

28. There are many people who call themselves Christians who no longer believe in the creation story. Some call the first 11 chapters of Genesis *a myth*. By this designation, they suggest that these are stories that might be useful for teaching and have important lessons in them, but are stories which are not meant to be factual.

29. **If, however, God did not create the world in that orderly sequence as suggested by those first chapters of Genesis, can we be sure that He is able to re-create us when He comes again? Or, at the time of death, as many Christians believe?**

By keeping His Sabbath holy we are to show that we are His people. His Word declares **the Sabbath to be a sign by which to distinguish the commandment-keeping people**.... Those who keep the law of God will be one with Him in the great controversy commenced in heaven between Satan and God.—Ellen G. White, *Notebook Leaflets from the Elmshaven Library*,\* vol. 1, 22.2; *Selected Messages*,\* Book 2, 160.1.†

30. Does the way we keep the Sabbath today make us a distinct people, decidedly separate from the world? Seventh-day Adventists around the world are known for the fact that they worship on Saturday. **Is that enough to set us apart as God's chosen people?** The keeping of the Sabbath is part of a “package” that includes creation, and it is God's right to ask us to give Him one-seventh of our time.

31. The Sabbath, of course, is enshrined in the center of the Ten Commandments.

**The Ten Commandments define comprehensively and fundamentally the divine-human and human-human relationships. The commandment at the center of the Decalogue is the Sabbath commandment.** It identifies the Lord of the Sabbath in a special way and indicates His sphere of authority and ownership. Note these two aspects: **(1) the identity of the Deity: Yahweh (LORD), who is the Creator (Exod. 20:11, Exod. 31:17) and who thus holds a unique place; (2) the sphere of His ownership and authority—“the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” (Exod. 20:11, NASB; compare Exod. 31:17).** In these two aspects, the Sabbath commandment has the characteristics that are typical of seals of international, ancient Near Eastern treaty documents. **These seals are typically in the center of the treaty documents and also contain (1) the identity of a deity (usually a pagan god) and (2) the sphere of ownership and authority (usually a limited geographical area).**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Friday, May 28.†§

“The sanctification of the Spirit signals the difference between those who have the seal of God and those who keep a spurious rest day.

“When the test comes, it will be clearly shown what the mark of the beast is. It is the keeping of Sunday. . . .

“God has designated the seventh day as His Sabbath.”—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Friday, May 28 [quoting from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, 980.8-981.1].‡

Thus the distinction is drawn between the loyal and the disloyal. Those who desire to have the seal of God in their foreheads must keep the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,\* April 23, 1901, par. 5; Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*,\* vol. 7, 981.2.†

32. When the time of trouble comes, what will distinguish between the true people of God and all others? Is it only that God's people worship on a different day?

**Leviticus 19:30:** “Keep the Sabbath, and honour the place where I am worshipped. I am the LORD.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> [Was God adding something by this request?]<sup>†</sup>

33. In this verse we see God comparing the Sabbath with the place where He is to be worshiped. What is the relationship between the sanctuary and the Sabbath? Both have been especially set aside as sacred places/times.

**The Sabbath goes beyond being a mere allotment of time; it is a promise of a rich and meaningful relationship with God. It is a day we set aside everything in our lives except God and take time to strengthen our relationship with Him.**—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> 119.<sup>†</sup> [What would happen if every Adventist did that?]<sup>†</sup>

The Sabbath can be understood only if we consider its genesis. The term “rest” in Genesis 2:3 derives from the Hebrew verbal form *shabath* (to repose, to celebrate, to cease, to desist from labor, to put to an end, to rest, to be completed, to keep Sabbath, to observe). Interestingly, this verb is linked to observing the weekly *shabbat* (sabbath, sabbath of sabbatic observance). Read Leviticus 25:2. See Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, pp. 991, 992.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> 119].<sup>‡§</sup>

34. So, what does this tell us about *rest*?

Some would suggest that since the Ten Commandments were first given at Mount Sinai, the Sabbath was not kept before that time. We have already suggested that is not true.

The law of God existed before the creation of man or else Adam could not have sinned.—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,<sup>\*</sup> March 14, 1878, par. 3; *FLB*<sup>\*</sup> 80.2; *1SM*<sup>\*</sup> 230.1; *1SDABC*<sup>\*</sup> 1104.5.

35. Jesus Himself claimed that He existed before Abraham and that He was also the Lord of the Sabbath.

**Matthew 12:8:** “For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**Mark 2:28:** “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup>

**John 8:58:** “I am telling you the truth,” Jesus replied. “Before Abraham was born, ‘I Am’.”—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*</sup> [Compare John 8:24,28.]<sup>†</sup>

“Sabbath is the pause that refreshes. The pattern is six days and one day. Six days of work and one day of rest. . . . Yahweh the cosmic symphony conductor orders His composition on 6/7 time. One, two, three, four, five, six, rest!”—Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, p. 58.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*<sup>\*</sup> 119-120].<sup>‡§</sup>

“Missiologists recognize a Hebraic consciousness among the African peoples. . . . W. W. Oliphant, an African church leader in the early years of the twentieth century, says that the ‘Sabbath in Ethiopia [has] been kept from the days of Nimrod, about 2140 B.C. (read Gen. 10:8, 9), that is 700 years before the birth of Moses. . . . Africans or Ethiopians had been Sabbath observers from the days of Nimrod, the son of Cush.’”—Charles E. Bradford,

*Sabbath Roots: The African Connection*, p. 26.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 120 including the brackets and the contents in brackets in the paragraph].<sup>†§</sup>

36. Consider this as we finish our study for today.

The word “remember” was included because we need “to say ‘yes’ to the Lord of the Sabbath by making [ourselves] available to Him. It means to acknowledge God’s doing rather than trusting [our] own achievements. It means to stop worrying about [our] own wants and start thinking about the needs of others. . . . It means forgetting self and selfish interests in order like Mary to honor Christ as the special guest.”—Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: Published by Author, 1988), p. 99.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 121 including the brackets and the content in brackets in the paragraph above].<sup>†§</sup>

God’s law says that the Sabbath is to be kept holy and that on it we are to do no work. The Hebrews took this command rather seriously. The Pharisees and other teachers of the law emphasized that to “carry a burden” was considered work. To avoid misunderstandings, they were very specific about what a burden was. A burden was food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put upon a wound, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 121.

37. When you think of the Sabbath, do you think of a lot of legalistic rules? Is that the main thing that distinguishes our seventh-day Sabbath?
38. In ancient times, some other nations accused Israel of being lazy because they rested on the Sabbath. Was that a correct representation? Do people today recognize that when we keep the Sabbath, it is because of our relationship to God? Or, do they think we are just legalists? Or, lazy? Is the Sabbath a time of intimate relationship with God? Is that a joyful time?
39. Many people believe that setting aside a special day for worshiping God is a good idea. So, why do we consider the Sabbath as being a special time, something unique?
40. Think of all the time and money that is spent by people in our day to relax or to unwind. In many cases, it seems to be a self-centered entertainment and amusement-centered life. Is our Sabbath primarily for the purpose of “unwinding”? What else are we supposed to be doing on the Sabbath?
41. Do our neighbors see our worshiping on Sabbath as a sign of our commitment to God? What do they think of what we do on the Sabbath? Does our way of keeping the Sabbath indicate our relationship with Jesus Christ? Or, just a ritualistic way of observing certain religious beliefs? Compare our way of keeping the Sabbath with the ways we know that Jesus kept the Sabbath? Do we need to make any changes in the way we keep our Sabbath?

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