



[Ezekiel 20:10-13](#)

(10) Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. (11) I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. (12) Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy. (13) " 'Yet the people of Israel rebelled against me in the desert. They did not follow my decrees but rejected my laws—although the man who obeys them will live by them—and they utterly desecrated my Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and destroy them in the desert.

[Ezekiel 20:15-16](#)

(15) Also with uplifted hand I swore to them in the desert that I would not bring them into the land I had given them—a land flowing with milk and honey, most beautiful of all lands- (16) because they rejected my laws and did not follow my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to their idols.

[Ezekiel 20:18-21](#)

(18) I said to their children in the desert, "Do not follow the statutes of your fathers or keep their laws or defile yourselves with their idols. (19) I am the LORD your God; follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (20) Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God." (21) " 'But the children rebelled against me: They did not follow my decrees, they were not careful to keep my laws—although the man who obeys them will live by them—and they desecrated my Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in the desert.

[Ezekiel 20:23-24](#)

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(23) Also with uplifted hand I swore to them in the desert that I would disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries, (24) because they had not obeyed my laws but had rejected my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths, and their eyes lusted after their fathers' idols.

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Verse 24 gives a concluding statement as to why Israel was taken into captivity. There are two possibilities regarding Israel's [Sabbath](#) breaking. 1) Israel completely rejected God's Sabbath for another day. This possibility exists due to the instances of the "My/their" or "Mine/yours" contrast, that is, *My* Sabbath as opposed to *your* Sabbath. 2) They polluted the Sabbath by careless, self-centered observance.

The probability is that they did both—some people completely rejected the Sabbath, while others carelessly observed it. However, it was because of Sabbath-breaking, a type of [idolatry](#), that they went into captivity.

When we look at secular history, even biblical history, and society around us, how to keep this day is a mixed bag. On the surface, what we see in the New Testament is *rigorous legalism* from the Pharisees or *asceticism* from the Gentiles. Today, we might call that an extreme "rightism" or perhaps a reactionary conservatism.

In today's world, though, we are confronted with the other side of the coin. We do not even begin to know how to keep the Sabbath because, from our earliest days, our culture's emphasis has been on *Sunday*, a day that cannot be kept holy because it was never made holy!

The cycle of six workdays and one day of rest and worship is a legacy of the Bible. But in fairly recent history, society has undergone a radical transformation because of scientific, industrial, and technological achievements. A shorter workweek provides us more leisure time. Businesses, however, make every effort to make the best use of time, to maximize production by scheduling work shifts so that the weekly cycle becomes a blur.

We have come to the place where we think that time totally belongs to us, and we can use it as we good and well please. This, in turn, makes a person very conscious of his free time. What does almost every individual do? He does the same thing that a business does. Every bit of time in a person's life is booked up because he wants to get the most out of life.

Even among those who are reasonably religious, the result has been that Sunday has become the *hour* of worship. The older among us can probably remember that, in the

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community, Sunday was once set aside very seriously. People did not work. They usually spent the day at home. Maybe the most secular thing they allowed themselves to do was to read the Sunday newspaper. Some, perhaps, did not even listen to the radio on Sunday because, to them, the day was holy.

But over the years, Sunday worship—which used to be kept somewhat as [God](#) expects us to keep the Sabbath—has now become, even among religious folks, an hour rather than a day of worship. People go to church for that one hour then perhaps return home. Or, maybe they go to a Sunday brunch at a restaurant. They spend the rest of the time on that day either making money or seeking their own pleasure.

All the while, the real Sabbath is ridiculed or ignored. This is what confronts us when we begin trying to keep it. A similar environment even affects those who continue to keep it. When we look in the Bible, we find that God does not give us many specifics as to *how* to keep it. God does, however, give us a number of broad principles, and He expects us to extrapolate from those principles in applying them.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Fourth Commandment \(Part 2\)](#)



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