

CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS

SEPTEMBER 26 2026

the imprisonment of truth

Scripture Story: Matthew 5:17-22.
Commentary: *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 25, 26.
Key Text: Matthew 5:18.

PREPARING TO TEACH

I. SYNOPSIS

Today the Sabbath is in the middle of controversy. There are those who say it's necessary and biblically correct to keep it. And then there are those who insist that when Christ died, the law (especially the Sabbath) was done away with. But before it was controversial, it was a gift given to us by God. Perhaps the synopsis should begin in Genesis 2. God instituted the Sabbath as a memorial of His creative power. With each Sabbath we see that He, who created humanity, still sustains them, and is able to re-create them when needed. Keep in mind, that the fourth commandment does not start with a "do not." It starts with the word "remember." This is because the Sabbath went all the way back to the beginning.

If you are a Sabbathkeeper, then sometime in your life you're bound to have your belief of this commandment challenged. Thus, it is important to know what you believe—and why. But the best defense of the Sabbath is a Christian in love with God who delights in showing that love through obedience. Keeping God's laws is an act of love, a sign of a healthy spiritual relationship. We don't keep it to prove points, though we should be able to give the reason as to why we do; we keep it because we love God and He has asked it of us.

This week's lesson covers mainly the topics of the Sabbath and the law. However, if you want to get into the prophetical side of this story, you will find studying the two Ellen White chapters to be helpful.

II. TARGET

The students will:

- Understand the importance of the Sabbath and realize how many people deny its validity. *(Know)*
- Have a strong sense of confidence and understanding of their beliefs. *(Feel)*
- Embrace the Sabbath as their own, and share it with others. *(Respond)*

III. EXPLORE

The Sabbath, Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, No. 20

"The gracious Creator, after the six days of Creation, rested on the seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of Creation. The fourth commandment of God's unchangeable law requires the observance of this seventh-day Sabbath as the day of rest, worship, and ministry in harmony with the teaching and practice of Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is a day of delightful communion with God and one another. It is a symbol of our redemption in Christ, a sign of our sanctification, a token of our allegiance, and a foretaste of our eternal future in God's kingdom. The Sabbath is God's perpetual sign of His eternal covenant between Him and His people. Joyful observance of this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, is a celebration of God's creative and redemptive acts" (Gen. 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Lev. 23:32; Deut. 5:12-15; Isa. 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Ezek. 20:12, 20; Matt. 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; Heb. 4:1-11).

TEACHING

I. GETTING STARTED

Activity

Refer the students to the What Do You Think? *section of their lesson. After they have completed it, discuss their responses.*

List the responses on a whiteboard. Then have the students list their reasons they think Sabbath is important. Have them see if any of their reasons would be a good response to those who don't think it's important. Say: When people say, for example, that they have no time to keep the Sabbath, you can share from your experience how resting on God's day makes your time on the other six days more productive.

Illustration

Share this illustration in your own words:

In a brutal Thailand prison a man sat with humble dignity. With no heat or air-conditioning, and minimal amounts of food and water, he suffered from dehydration and malnutrition. However, it was in those dark times of this individual's imprisonment that the Lord convicted him about the Sabbath. Even after experiencing that brutal prison environment, the man felt convicted by God about the truth. Though he wasn't a believer when he entered those cold cells, he clung to Jesus in faith. As a result of that faith he wanted to keep the commandments, and that included the Sabbath.

II. TEACHING THE STORY

Bridge to the Story

Share the following in your own words:

If this man found a way to keep the Sabbath amid all the oppression and prison brutality, how can we say it's too difficult to keep it? When Paul speaks about how we should not be in bondage to the law, he simply was referring to the people who thought that keeping the law was the way to be saved. The Bible clearly says that works do not save us, but that it is faith. However, the Bible also says that faith without works is dead. We need both to have a solid relationship with Christ.

Out of the Story for Teachers

After you read the Into the Story *section with your students, use the following in your own words to process it with them.*

- *Underline* the areas in which you think people could possibly misinterpret these words.
- What would you say to someone who believes that Sabbathkeeping has been nullified and how would you share this verse?
- *Circle* the key words in these passages that prove the main points.

Use the following as more teachable passages that relate to today's story: James 2:10, 11; 1 John 2:4; Exodus 20:8-11.

Sharing Context and Background

Use the following information to shed more light on the story for your students. Share it in your own words.

1. Different laws. What are the ceremonial laws? Define them from Scripture. What is the moral law? How are the two different? What was the background to Jesus' strong pronouncement about the moral law in Matthew 5? What were the prevailing attitudes about the laws? For instance, the Pharisees had established more than 100 additional laws surrounding the Sabbath alone. The people of Jesus' day were burdened with a legalistic faith with no emphasis on love for God as motivation for living. The Pharisees had literally sucked the life out of the faith. They had replaced heart religion for "hand" religion—doing instead of being. The people hungered for a new way.

2. Purpose of law. Why not explore the significance of the law as a marker of truth (Isaiah 8:16-20). It is one of the means by which we are to be sealed, and it separates truth from error.

Ellen White notes: "The seal of God's law is found in the fourth commandment. This only, of all the ten, brings to view both the name and the title of the Lawgiver. It declares Him to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and thus shows His claim to reverence and worship above all others. Aside from this precept, there is nothing in the Decalogue to show by whose authority the law is given. When the Sabbath was changed by the papal power, the seal was taken from the law. The disciples of Jesus are called upon to restore it by exalting the Sabbath of the fourth commandment to its rightful position as the Creator's memorial and the sign of His authority. 'To the law

Tips for Top-Notch Teaching

RABBI 101

Think-Pair-Share

In order to make the classroom feel more at ease, create an environment of good communication. Ask questions but don't direct them to any individual student. This takes the pressure off of them. Let the students answer the questions on their own without being volunteered. Let the students ask questions as well. This will also create an environment which lets the conversation flow and generates different ideas and viewpoints on the topic being discussed. Make the lesson less about your reading to them, and more about the conversation and input the students have on this topic.

and to the testimony.' While conflicting doctrines and theories abound, the law of God is the one unerring rule by which all opinions, doctrines, and theories are to be tested. Says the prophet: 'If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' Verse 20."[1]

3. Purpose of Sabbath. The Hebrew word for rest, *shabbat,* literally means "to cease" from labor or activity. To the Jews, rest meant not doing anything related to the building of the Temple. And to "place a hedge" around a day that they valued, they mistakingly went to the extreme of creating a tedious list of rules and regulations. Before we shake our finger too much at the Jewish people, however, know that we Christians throughout the centuries have created our own. Listen to the list from the eighth-century Christian church in Ireland:

"There shall be no dispute, or lawsuit, . . . or horse-driving, or sweeping the floor of the house, or shaving, or washing, or bathing, . . . or adultery . . . or boiling food or swimming . . . or splitting wood . . . or going on a boat . . . or anything involving wrong.[2] Quite an interesting list, wouldn't you say!

In the Jewish tradition, the question is asked, "After the six days of creation—what did the universe lack? *Menuha*. Came the Sabbath, came *menuha*, and the universe was complete."[3]

The Hebrew word *menuha*, which is usually rendered *rest*, is translated in many more ways than just withdrawal from labor and exertion. It connotes a place of *tranquility, serenity, peace, and repose*.[4] In Isaiah 66:1, *menuha* is translated *God's abode.*

While the physical element of the Sabbath—the cessation of work after a week of labor—is beneficial to anyone, believer and nonbeliever alike, the true Sabbath experience is not something that can be objectively looked at and entered into, independent of a relationship with the Creator. It is time made holy, and only those who enter it by faith can experience the true *menuha* that it offers. One of the purposes of the Sabbath is to remind us at least once every seven days of our creatureliness, and of the fact that apart from God

Teaching From the Lesson

Refer your students to the other sections of their lesson.

- **Key Text**
  Invite students to share the Key Text *with the class if they have committed it to memory.*
- **Flashlight**
  Read the Flashlight *statement, pointing out that most of the time it is from the commentary on this week's story found in the book* The Great Controversy. *Ask what relationship they see between the statement and what they have just discussed from* Out of the Story.
- **Punch Lines**
  Point out to your students the verses listed in their lesson that relate to this week's story. Have them share the verse that spoke most directly to them and allow them to explain why they chose it.
- **Further Insight**
  Ask them how the quotes in Further Insight *convey the point of the story in this lesson.*

we are unable to understand ourselves or find the right relation to our work.[5]

III. CLOSING

Activity

Close with an activity and debrief it in your own words.

Even with all the important theology of the Sabbath, it's easy to forget just how practical it is. Have you ever been forced to do something, perhaps go on a long walk, and not be given time to rest? When you finally had that rest, how great did it feel?

Have the class share a time that they were very tired but had to keep going, for whatever reason. Then ask them to share how great it felt to have the opportunity to rest. Isn't that, in a sense, another reason God gave us the Sabbath?

Summary

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

From the Garden of Eden onward God's Sabbath remains a weekly reminder that He is the Creator. When we look at the flowers, the trees, the birds, everything created, it all points us to God. Yet sometimes it's so easy to forget. We get so caught up day by day in doing all the things that we do. Once a week, however, God gives us the Sabbath day, a day to remember Him as our Creator. This is so important, in fact, that He commands us to keep it, just as He commands us not to steal or kill or lie. That alone should tell us how important it is.

Many sincere Christians don't understand this truth; hence they miss out on the special blessing of the Sabbath. How important that we not only enjoy the Sabbath ourselves, but allow the Lord to use us to show others how the Sabbath is a joy, and a special way of showing our love for the Lord, who has done so much for us.

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[1] Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 452.

[2] Daniel Augsburger, in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History, ed.* Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1982), p. 201.

[3] Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), p. 22.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Raoul Dederen, in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, p. 298.



Remind the students about the reading plan that will take them through the inspired commentary of the Bible, the Conflict of the Ages Series. The reading that goes with this lesson is *The Great Controversy* (or *Love Under Fire),* chapters 25, 26.

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STUDENT LESSON

Scripture Story: Matthew 5:17-22.
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the imprisonment of truth



Photo by Colleen Cahill

keytext

"For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

(Matthew 5:18, NIV)

flashlight

"It was to keep this truth ever before the minds of men, that God instituted the Sabbath in Eden; and so long as the fact that He is our Creator continues to be a reason why we should worship Him, so long the Sabbath will continue as its sign and memorial. Had the Sabbath been universally kept, man's thoughts and affections would have been led to the Creator as the object of reverence and worship, and there would never have been an idolater, an atheist, or an infidel" (*The Great Controversy,* p. 438).

what do you think?

Write down the top seven reasons that you think people use to justify not keeping the Sabbath. Then, in your personal notebook jot down some of the main reasons you love the Sabbath.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

did you know?

A Roman Catholic catechism states that the Bible never does away with the Sabbath and that, in fact, the Catholic Church itself changed the day from Saturday to Sunday in honor of Christ's resurrection.

"You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctified," says James Cardinal Gibbons (*The Faith of Our Fathers,* 1917 edition, pp. 72, 73). He is also quoted as saying, *"The Catholic Church . . . by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday"* (*The Catholic Mirror,* official organ of Cardinal Gibbons, Sept. 23, 1893).

No power has been given any church to modify the law of God (see Matthew 5:18).

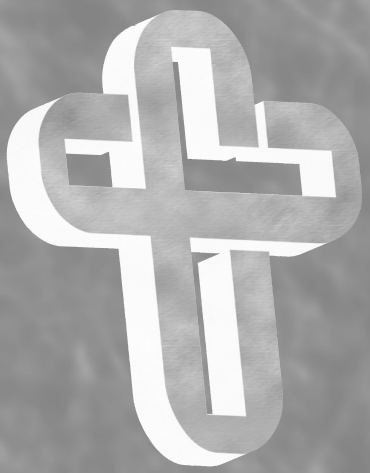
INTO THE STORY

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.

"For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

(Matthew 5:17-22, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

Examine the first few verses of Matthew 5. To whom was Jesus speaking when He talked about the importance of God's laws?

_____
_____
_____

Why do you think Jesus spoke so strongly about keeping God's laws?

_____
_____
_____

What's the difference between "abolish" and "fulfill"?

_____
_____
_____

What does this passage tell us about the seriousness of our example?

_____
_____
_____

In Isaiah 58:13 the Bible refers to the Sabbath as something that we should *delight* in. What does it mean to *delight* in the Sabbath? If you're having a tough time coming up with an answer, look up the definition of *delight* in a dictionary.

_____
_____
_____

Jesus makes the point that those who practice obeying God's laws and teach others to do so will be called great in heaven. Can we effectively share the Sabbath truth if we ourselves do not practice it, or find no joy in it? Explain your answer.

_____
_____
_____

If you were ever put into a situation in which you had the opportunity to defend God's law and the fourth commandment, how would you do so?

_____
_____
_____

punch lines

"If ye love me, keep my commandments" **(John 14:15, KJV).**

"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" **(James 2:10, KJV).**

"But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" **(James 2:20-24, KJV).**

"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" **(Colossians 2:8, KJV).**

further insight

"The confession of faith made by saints and martyrs was recorded for the benefit of succeeding generations."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 459

"We should choose the right because it is right, and leave consequences with God."

—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy,* p. 460

Sabbath

Read Leviticus 23:3.

Complete the *What Do You Think?* section. What are some of the reasons that people give for claiming that they no longer have to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy? Two passages referenced from Scripture are found in Galatians 4:10 and Colossians 2:16.

Notice the distinction between the ceremonial special days and sabbaths, and God's Sabbath that is part of the moral law. The law that Jesus said would never pass away was the moral law, the Ten Commandments. The ceremonial laws would be fulfilled in Him.

Sunday

Read Luke 4:16-21.

Read the *Into the Story* section and respond to the *Out of the Story* questions. Jesus specifically told us that no part of His law will ever be taken out of effect until all be fulfilled. Many people think Jesus is saying that this means when He died on the cross all was fulfilled, and thus we are no longer under the Ten Commandments. Rather, they say, we are "liberated" to a higher and more spiritual law of Christ. But how does keeping the Sabbath reveal Christ? How does it remind us of our liberation from sin?

Monday

Read Matthew 5:18.

The *Key Text* tells us that "not the least stroke of a pen" will disappear from the law until all is fulfilled. In the original language of the New Testament the word "iota" is used. This is the ninth letter of the Greek alphabet, and is equivalent to the "yod," the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Jesus apparently wanted us to know that even the smallest letter of the law was important and, thus, how much more so is the Sabbath.

Read Matthew 12:10-12, Mark 3:1-6, and John 9:13-16. Notice that Jesus observed the Sabbath. It was His custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, just as we might go to church on Sabbath. If Jesus was planning to change the Sabbath day, why then did He keep it during His lifetime? What does Luke 4:16 tell you about how special the Sabbath was to Jesus?

Tuesday

Read Genesis 2:1-3.

Read the *Flashlight* quotation. According to Ellen G. White, what impact does keeping the Sabbath have on those who observe it? Why is this the case?

What did God do after He finished six days of "work"?

Every time we come aside to rest, we honor God as our Creator and Sustainer. According to Romans 1:18-23, what happens to people who reject the laws of God, who remove God from their lives?

Wednesday

Read John 14:15.

Read through the *Punch Lines*. Why is God linking obedience with love? How does one prove their love to another person? Do they prove it by doing what they think will make the other person feel loved, or do they pay close attention to what pleases the other person and then do that?

God's law was so unbreakable that Jesus had to die to meet its demands. Yet, this "keeping" the law through death was motivated by Jesus' love for us. What does John 10:11 tell you about Jesus' love?

Thursday

Read Philippians 2:13-15.

What is it about the Sabbath that you think causes people to be so opposed to it? Is it a matter of wanting to do our own thing and not have anyone, including God, telling us what we should or shouldn't do? Is it a matter of people honestly believing the Bible did away with the Sabbath? Or a bit of both? What do you think?

Friday

Read Isaiah 58:13.

Do you ever find yourself seeing the Sabbath as an unwanted inconvenience? Have you ever caught yourself wishing that the sun would set so you can get on with doing your plans without feeling guilty? These thoughts have crossed many people's minds.

In what ways can we truly come to appreciate and look forward to the Sabbath?

this week's reading*

The Great Controversy (or *Love Under Fire*), chapters 25, 26.

**Love Under Fire* is a special adaptation of *The Great Controversy*, created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at http://www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.